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An Exploration of Immigrant Political Participation: Towards a Life Course Perspective

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Abstract

This research explores the resources, forms of political awareness and recruitment that shape immigrant political participation, beginning with the first step that immigrants take in their journey toward full integration: the decision to permanently stay in the U.S. Our analysis draws from the 2003 New Immigrant Survey (NIS) dataset, incorporating survey responses from 8,473 people. Relying principally on logistic regression analysis, our research aim is to understand how individual resources, capabilities, social ties and political engagement shape attachment to the U.S. Our findings highlight four crucial factors predictive of whether a new immigrant intends to stay in the U.S. forever. First, we find that men are more likely than women to indicate intent to permanently reside in the US. Our second finding revolves around education, indicating that new immigrants with low levels of formal educational attainment are most likely to want to stay, while those with the highest educational achievements are least likely to want to stay. Our third finding examines the role of religious affiliation and demonstrates that membership in a religions organization greatly enhances the likelihood that a new immigrant intends to permanently reside in the US. Our final finding revolves around political engagement and reports that new immigrants who participated in a range of informal political activities in their home country express a greater desire to stay in the US permanently, whereas those who voted in a home country election while living in the US were much less likely to plan to stay. As a crucial – but often overlooked step – in the path toward full citizenship, our research contributes to existing social science research on immigrant voting patterns while also suggesting key policy interventions. These interventions may assist new immigrants to fully adopt their new country and to engage in all modes of formal political participation.

Introduction

Project Description & Background

The inclusion of immigrants as a growing constituency has infused the scholarship on voting with new life. Past voting research identified a triad of individual characteristics – education, age and residential stability – most predictive of voter turnout (e.g., Wolfinger & Rosenstone 1980). "The more of each, the higher the probability of voting" (Wolfinger & Wolfinger 2008: 1513) was the conventional wisdom guiding our understanding of this fundamental form of political participation. More recently, this traditional pluralist model has been supplemented by a plethora of explanations that pay closer attention to the many sources of variation within the U.S. electorate – in terms of race/ethnicity, nationality, experiences of discrimination, etc. – and the multiple ways that different political contexts affect turnout (Bloemraad 2006).

This diversification of perspectives on voting is partially due to renewed interest in the voting habits of immigrants, those new citizens who – despite differing on nearly every conceivable social axis – share some identification with the United States and a desire to live here, often permanently. A focus on immigrant voters has illuminated three new dimensions now found within the voting literature.

First, the broader voting literature finds that men are more likely to vote than women. While men are more likely to express interest in national politics, women are more likely to be knowledgeable about local politics (Verba, Burns & Schlozman 1995). Research on immigrants finds some continuity with these findings, and some considerable divergences. Immigrant women are more likely to naturalize – the first formal step of political engagement – than immigrant men. Accordingly, female immigrants have a higher propensity to become politically active and vote, relative to their male counterparts (Bass & Casper 2001; Bueker 2005). We have built on these findings in our study of the intersection of political threats and gender to show that immigrant women – more so than immigrant men – exercise their political voice disproportionately in times of trouble (Stewart *et al*, U.R.). This discovery of gender divergence in voting habits is just one example of how the inclusion of immigrants has challenged this already prestigious body of scholarship.

Second, whereas much of the traditional voting literature frequently identified traits and resources linked to individuals – such as age, education, income, home ownership and marital status – as most important in predicting voter turnout (Fuchs 1999), newer research on immigrants has reinforced the importance of past voting behavior and previous political participation (Pantoja & Segura 2003). In particular, some theorists argue that net of the many individual resources and traits that an individual may possess, past political behavior can be a powerful predictor of future voter participation for immigrants. Of particular importance is country of origin, with wide differences noted between, for example, immigrants from Cuba versus immigrants from Mexico (Bueker 2005). Part of the explanation for the difference of birth country effects on voter turnout revolve around home country civic traditions, regime type and motivation for emigrating to the U.S. In particular, emigrating due to political reasons versus economic motivation strongly affects eventual immigrant political participation, with those who left their home countries due to poverty and greater economic opportunities less likely to vote than those whose decision to leave was more motivated by political factors (Pantoja & Gershon 2006).

Finally, there is a third dimension of voting research that owes its place in the canon due to the inclusion of immigrants. Whereas traditional voting research has focused on the incidence of voting – seen in so many ways like a snapshot – seeking to understand the meaningful factors contributing to a specific behavior at a specific time, the literature on immigrant voting sees this more as a process, even a path. Voting is the endpoint – the destination, as it were – but must be preceded by the decision to naturalize and then to register, which are both political behaviors shaped by myriad factors and circumstances (Bueker 2005; Logan, Oh & Darrah 2009; Pantoja & Gershon 2006). While undoubtedly important to understanding immigrant voting behavior, this reconceptualization of voting is suggestive for the entire voting populace, given that all citizens must begin a journey that may end with full political integration.

Research Questions

Whereas there is a rich and storied literature on other dimensions of immigrant integration – focusing on socioeconomic status, residential concentration, language acquisition, health outcomes and intermarriage – there is relatively less literature on immigrant political integration (DeSipio 2011; Marrow 2011). This is beginning to change, however, as policy analysts and scholars alike are grasping the important role that immigrants now play and will play in the future of American politics. Our research intersects with this innovative body of research on political integration by building on the three dimensions outlined above.

Starting with the third dimension, our research argues that we must delve deeper into the histories of immigrants – exploring their early aspirations, experiences and resources – to understand their lengthy political journeys. Far before immigrants decide to naturalize, register and vote, they must decide whether they want to live here permanently. Accordingly, this was the starting point of our study. We seek to better understand the factors that lead immigrants to intend to stay in the United States for their entire lives, undoubtedly a fundamental – yet so far overlooked – decision bearing on their future political integration. Incorporating this life course perspective leads to a broad research question: *Which factors best explain and predict a new immigrant's decision to permanently reside in the U.S.?*

To identify the relevant factors that may help explain immigrant intentions to stay permanently in the US – and thus begin a path toward full political integration – our study builds on the traditional SES factors outlined in the beginning of this paper and utilized by Massey and Akresh (2006) to analyze the NIS pilot study. But it adds to these variables by incorporating them into a prominent theory of political behavior: the civic volunteerism model developed by Verba, Scholzman and Brady (1995). In essence, Verba *et al* argue that political behavior is the result of a constellation of three factors. These factors encompass an individual's resources, their level of engagement and whether they are recruited to participate. Examples of resources include time, money and civic skills, all measures that are easily operationalized in this study. In contrast, engagement measures are slightly less straight-forward, but include an individual's interest in politics, sense of political efficacy and civic values, amongst other factors. Finally, recruitment measures – whether an individual has been encouraged to participate in politics – are deeply bound up in social networks that could include church membership, work-related relationships, union membership and networks of friends and/or relatives.

In this way, our research weds the best of the political science literature on voting to the immigrant political integration literature by applying a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of political participation to this very first of political decisions. Accordingly, a more nuanced research question that grew out of our original research question is: *What is the relative role played by resources, engagement and recruitment in explaining and predicting a new immigrant's decision to permanently reside in the U.S.?*

Research Methodology/Use of NIS Data

The 2003 New Immigrant Survey (NIS) is at the heart of our analysis. The NIS grew out of a baseline survey that sampled the records of legal US immigrants admitted May through November of 2003. The final sample includes 8,473 adults, with an impressive survey response rate of 68.6 % (Jasso 2011; Massey 2011a). These data allow a rich examination of all dimensions of immigrant social stratification and integration, including race, gender, class, religion, origin country, language and more (Jasso 2011). As Massey highlights, “the NIS constitutes the most comprehensive survey of immigrants ever conducted among immigrants to the United States” (2011: 1288).

To study immigrant political integration, ideally we would have data on naturalization, registration and voting. Unfortunately, the NIS data does not contain answers to these questions, as the survey was conducted with new immigrants, well before they would be able to complete the arduous process of becoming a US citizen. But, there is an untapped goldmine of data on the first steps of political integration, including questions on intentions to stay in the U.S., home country civic participation and familiarity of US politics. Accordingly, our dependent variable was based on the following question:

- Do you intend to live in the United States for the rest of your life?

Upon closer examination of this dependent variable, we found that approximately half of all respondents were dropped when this question was asked. Accordingly, our sample draws from 4,050 respondents. To better understand their decision to permanently stay in the US, civic involvement here and knowledge of national politics, we drew from a range of independent variables contained within the NIS dataset. Following Verba’s civic volunteerism model, we explored the role of resources and tested the effects of demographic factors, education and income. Because civic skills are an important feature of resources, we also included the range of questions asking about pre-emigration experiences donating money, time and goods to a spectrum of organizations.

To test how engagement shapes US political integration, we explored the relationship between pre-emigration political behavior – ranging from discussing politics to working for a political candidate – and our political integration measures. Finally, we explored the effects of recruitment. Our measures of social networks included union membership, involvement in informal rotating credit associations, church membership and visa category. The latter variable is only available in the restricted data set, which we are still awaiting permission to access. While prominent theorists have explored how religion shapes immigrant experiences utilizing the NIS data (Akresh 2011; Connor 2009), there is less research exploring how visa category – whether one’s visa is employment-based, diversity-based or family-based – shapes future integration, let alone political integration.

With the data currently at our disposal – in addition to the new measures we will have once we receive access to the NIS’s restricted data set – we believe these three axes of inquiry will provide a plethora of new findings on key influences in immigrant political integration.

For the larger project, we will employ a variety of model estimation techniques, including logistic regression, ordinal regression, and multi-level modeling, For this part of the study, given how the dependent variable is measured, we used binary logistic regression models to test the theoretical outcomes identified in the literature review above (e.g., Long and Freese 2006).

Results/Findings

Measurement and method

In our analysis, the dependent variable is based on whether the respondent reported that he or she intended to live in the United States the rest of his or her life. In our binary measure, we coded all those who reported “Yes” as 1. We coded those who replied either “No” or “Don’t Know” as 0. We report the response frequencies and percentages of the sub-sample of the NIS data set who responded to this question in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of the dependent variable

Do you intend to live in the US for the rest of your life?

	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Don't Know	511	12.62	12.62
Refused	15	0.37	12.99
No	407	10.05	23.04
Yes	3,117	76.96	100.00
Total	4,050	100.00	

In Table 2, we provide summary information for all variables utilized in this stage of our analysis, highlighting demographic factors, resources, measures of political knowledge and engagement and recruitment factors.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for variables used in the analysis

	mean	sd	min	max
Intend to Live in US Rest of Life	0.779	0.415	0	1
Male	0.480	0.500	0	1
Age	38.76	12.99	18	95
<12 years	0.321	0.467	0	1
13-15 years	0.205	0.404	0	1
16 years	0.119	0.324	0	1
>16 years	0.197	0.398	0	1

Married	0.733	0.442	0	1
Divorced/separated	0.0371	0.189	0	1
Widowed	0.0269	0.162	0	1
2 people	0.230	0.421	0	1
3 or more people	1.210	1.061	0	3
Speaks English well	0.508	0.500	0	1
Household benefits, ln	0.373	1.647	0	10.32
Own home	0.160	0.367	0	1
Political actions scale	-0.0646	0.153	-1	0
Political knowledge scale	0.478	0.292	0	1
Voted outside US	0.0424	0.201	0	1
Member of Religious Organization	0.213	0.410	0	1
Union member	0.0319	0.176	0	1
Member of RCA	1.992	0.0885	1	2
Constant				
Observations	3422			

Demographic Variables

Sex: The respondent's sex was treated dichotomously and was determined by his or her answer to the question, "Are you male or female?"

Age: The age variable reflects the respondent's age at the time of the survey and was calculated from the respondent's exact birth date (day, year and month).

Place of Residence: The respondent's place of residence represents the state in which he or she was living at the time of the survey. Everyone in the analytic sample was living in the United States at the time of the survey.

Birthplace: The respondent's place of birth was determined by his or her response to the question, "In what country were you born?"

Education: The respondent's educational attainment is a continuous variable and was assessed via the total years of schooling he or she had completed at the time of the interview. Reported values ranged from 0 to 36 years of schooling with a mean of 12.64 and a standard deviation of 5.21.

Marital Status: The respondent's marital status reflects his or her relationship status at the time of the interview. Possible responses include married; living together in a marriage-like relationship; separated; divorced; widowed; never married and not living in a marriage-like relationship; refused; don't know.

Household Size: The variable representing the respondent's household size was measured continuously and reflects the number of people living in his or her household at the time of the interview.

English Fluency: The measure designed to capture the respondent's level of proficiency with the English language was based on his or her answer to the question, "How well would you say you speak English?" The respondent's responses were recorded on a four-point scale ranging from "Very well" to "Not at all." For the purposes of this analysis, responses were recoded into a dichotomous variable that effectively separated those who spoke English either "Very well" or "Well" from those who claimed to speak English "Not well" or "Not at all." Approximately 50.52 percent of the sample reported speaking English well, compared to 49.48 percent who did not.

Material Resources

Income: The respondent's income was measured continuously and represents the sum of all reported income for the respondent and their spouse from self-employment, salary, wages, professional practice, tips, etc. for the past 12 months. Unfortunately, only approximately 40% of the respondents (N=2,089) in this sub-sample of the NIS data set responded to this question.

Benefits: The dollar amount pertaining to the respondent's benefits was measured continuously and represents the sum of all income from benefits (unemployment, workers' comp, social security, pensions, SSI, disability, welfare, veteran's benefits, etc.) in the past 12 months.

Home Ownership: The respondent's status as a homeowner was determined by his or her answer to the question, "Do you and your husband/wife/partner/spouse or partner own this home/apartment, rent it, or what?"

Engagement

Political Participation: The respondent's level of political participation prior to moving to the U.S. was assessed via a seven-item scale composed of such questions as, "While living outside the United States, did you ever go to any meetings, rallies, speeches, or dinners in support of a political candidate?" Tests for internal consistency yielded an alpha level of .75.

Political Knowledge: The respondent's level of political knowledge was assessed via his or her ability to correctly identify the President of the United States, the Secretary of State, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and the Speaker of the House. Tests for internal consistency yielded an alpha level of .43.

Voting Behavior (country of origin): The respondent's voting behavior regarding his or her country of origin was assessed by his or her answer to the question, "While living in the United States, have you voted in any election held in your country of origin?"

Recruitment

Union Membership: Our first measure of recruitment relates to employment and whether the respondent is a current member of a union through his or her employment. Historically, unions have been crucial vehicles for political participation. Accordingly, after being asked if his/her job is covered by a union contract, the relevant question is, "Do you belong to that labor union?" The menu of responses includes "yes," "no," "don't know," or "refused to answer." Approximately three percent of respondents in our sample indicated union membership.

Member of Rotating Credit Association (RCA): Our second measure of recruitment relates to informal involvement in RCAs. Globally, RCAs have been credited with bringing people together and facilitating collective action simply not possible without the institutional and organizational benefits afforded to people by this associational form. Over time, people have formed their own RCAs, even without formal or institutional support. The survey question that approximates this type of network relationship is, “Are you a member of any informal group of people who pool their money so that members of the group can borrow sums of money from that pool at some future date?” Again, the menu of responses includes “yes,” “no,” “don’t know,” or “refused to answer.” In our sample, only 34 respondents indicated involvement in some type of informal RCA.

Member of Religious Organization: The respondent’s membership in a religious organization is determined by his or her answer to the question, “Do you presently consider yourself to be a member of a specific church, parish, temple, synagogue, or mosque in the United States?” There were 8,250 valid responses with only 88 of them being "Don't Know" or "Refused." Of those who responded, 20.98 percent answered in the affirmative, 77.95 percent said “no,” and 1.06 percent refused to answer or didn’t know.

Method

We employed a logistic regression model because the outcome variable is dichotomous. Additionally, we include the NIS sample weights in order to produce more accurate coefficient estimates and standard errors. The final analysis included 3,453 cases for which we had data on all the measures.

Analysis

***Table 3.* Logistic regression model of likelihood of intending to live in the US for the rest of respondents’ life**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Intend to Live in US Rest of Life	Intend to Live in US Rest of Life	Intend to Live in US Rest of Life	Intend to Live in US Rest of Life
Intend to Live in US Rest of Life				
Male	0.254^{*}	0.253^{*}	0.241^{*}	0.249
	(2.44)	(2.38)	(2.25)	(1.75)
Age	0.00389	0.00708	0.00615	0.0230^{**}
	(0.85)	(1.49)	(1.29)	(2.93)
Education (12				

years omitted)				
<12 years	-0.276	-0.310	-0.293	-0.180
	(-1.60)	(-1.74)	(-1.64)	(-0.77)
13-15 years	-0.415*	-0.216	-0.194	0.169
	(-2.30)	(-1.18)	(-1.06)	(0.73)
16 years	-0.533**	-0.403	-0.400	-0.114
	(-2.67)	(-1.95)	(-1.95)	(-0.44)
>16 years	-0.799***	-0.642***	-0.633***	-0.414
	(-4.40)	(-3.43)	(-3.37)	(-1.76)
Marital status (single omitted)				
Married	-0.0813	-0.0314	0.00489	0.0289
	(-0.64)	(-0.23)	(0.04)	(0.17)
Divorced/separated	0.190	0.144	0.182	0.546
	(0.60)	(0.45)	(0.56)	(1.27)
Widowed	-0.718*	-0.608	-0.545	-0.600
	(-2.23)	(-1.85)	(-1.63)	(-0.70)
Household size (1 omitted)				
2 people	-0.200	-0.217	-0.214	-0.142
	(-1.31)	(-1.37)	(-1.33)	(-0.68)
3 or more people	-0.0413	-0.0478	-0.0478	-0.0848
	(-0.67)	(-0.74)	(-0.74)	(-1.02)
Speaks English well	-0.189	0.0725	0.101	0.0810
	(-1.64)	(0.58)	(0.79)	(0.48)
Household benefits, ln	0.00719	0.000353	0.00155	0.0328

	(0.24)	(0.01)	(0.05)	(0.84)
Own home	-0.0304	-0.169	-0.150	-0.120
	(-0.22)	(-1.15)	(-1.00)	(-0.70)
Political actions scale	0.953^{**}	0.674^{*}	0.603	0.415
	(3.07)	(2.07)	(1.86)	(1.01)
Political knowledge scale	0.0738	0.0364	-0.0167	0.0345
	(0.42)	(0.20)	(-0.09)	(0.14)
Voted outside US	-0.651^{**}	-0.647^{**}	-0.654^{**}	-0.603
	(-2.81)	(-2.86)	(-2.89)	(-1.95)
Member of Religious Organization	0.502^{***}	0.531^{***}	0.531^{***}	0.607^{**}
	(3.89)	(3.94)	(3.95)	(3.28)
Union member	0.191	0.109	0.0853	0.124
	(0.66)	(0.36)	(0.28)	(0.32)
Member of RCA	0.870	0.770	0.727	0.864
	(1.81)	(1.70)	(1.61)	(1.35)
Household income, ln				-0.0278
				(-1.41)
Constant	-0.0292	-1.238	-0.975	-1.774
	(-0.03)	(-1.17)	(-0.91)	(-1.22)
Observations	3422	3422	3415	2062
Country Controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
State Controls	No	No	Yes	Yes

t statistics in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 3 reports the results of our regression model for intending to live in the US as a function of personal demographics, resources, political engagement and geography. Model 1 includes measures the demographics, resources, political engagement and recruitment variables. Controlling for other factors, male respondents were significantly more likely to want to stay compared to female respondents. With other variables at their means, we would expect that a .77 probability that a woman would express an interest in staying compared to .81 for a man. Educational attainment also has a significant effect. Controlling for other factors, there is a .84 probability that a person with 12 years of schooling would intend to stay compared to .77 for someone with a 16 years of schooling and just .71 for someone with 17 or more years of school.

While marital status is largely unrelated to a return migration decision, widows are significantly less likely to stay, even controlling for age. Household size, receiving state benefits, and being proficient in English are all uncorrelated with migration intentions.

Two of the three political measures are significant. First, immigrants who have engaged in a high degree of political participation are more likely to intend to stay than others. Based on this model, we would expect that someone with no political engagement outside of the US would have a .61 probability of intending to live in the US, compared to .79 for someone more heavily involved (1 standard deviation above the mean). Holding other variables constant, those who voted outside the US while living in the US had a predicted probability of .67 in declaring their intent to stay in the US, compared to .79 for those who had not voted. The third measure, political knowledge, is not significantly related to the outcome.

Finally, as we discuss below, the affirmative response rates for two of our measures of recruitment (RCA and Union membership) were so small that they were not statistically significant. However, our third measure, religious affiliation, proved important. We found that members of religious organizations are significantly more likely to intend to stay in the US than those who are not. Adjusting for the other factors, being a member increases the probability of intending to stay from .77 to .84.

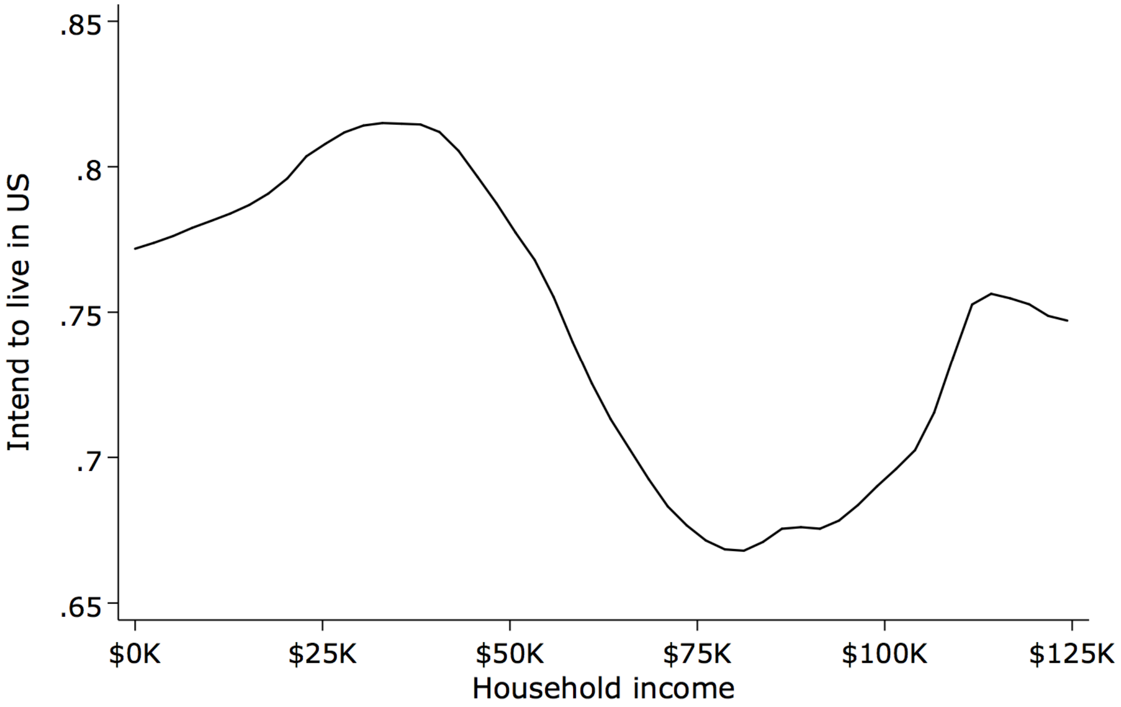
Model 2 adds 29 dummy variables based on country of origin to control for any unmeasured country of origin specific effects. This includes 28 indicators for specific countries and one additional “other” category for countries where there were less than 10 survey respondents. Adding this set of controls only slightly changes the findings from the baseline model. The effect size for education is smaller but still significant for those with graduate school degrees (or their equivalent), suggesting that part of the education effect may be because immigrants with high levels of education feel that their opportunities may be greater in their home countries than in the US. This speaks to the reverse “brain drain” that Massey and Akresh (2006) have previously documented. That is to say, immigrants with a high level of human capital (including specialized skills and education) may be more interested in being global citizens and seeking our jobs and new places of residence that provide the highest financial returns. Being a widow no longer has a statistically significant effect. While the effect size for political actions is smaller, both political measures still have a significant impact.

Model 3 includes an additional control for which set of states the respondent currently lives in. This model is largely consistent with the prior models, and the same set of predictors that were significant in Model 2 remain significant; no new variables demonstrate a statistically significant impact.

Model 4 adds a measure of household income. Since data was only available for 40% of our respondents (n=2,089), we are hesitant to draw strong conclusion about its impact, and are especially wary of interpreting the non-income coefficients in this model. Here, we find that income has a no impact on the likelihood of staying in the US.

In order to explore the income data more closely, we graphed the likelihood of intending to stay in the US as a function of income using kernel-weighted local polynomial regression smoothing. The results are shown in Figure 1, below:

Figure 1. Likelihood of intending to stay in the US as a function of income



There appears to be a non-linear relationship between household income and intent to stay in the US, with those having a household income of around $25,000 a year expressing the greatest intention to stay, while those with incomes around $80,000 expressing the greatest intention to leave. Those with incomes above that level are increasingly likely to express a desire to stay.

In summary, our analysis point to four major findings connected to existing theories of political integration. The first relates to gender, finding that men are more likely than women to indicate their desire to permanently stay in the US. Secondly, we find the low educational attainment correlates with intent to stay, while higher educational attainment has the opposite effect. Third, we find that religious affiliation predicts a higher likelihood of intending to stay in the U.S. Finally, we report somewhat contradictory findings relevant to political engagement. While those who engaged in political processes in their home countries indicated a greater willingness to stay, those who voted outside of the US while living here were less likely to want to reside here permanently.

To comment further on each of these four findings, we find a deep contradiction between the stated preferences of male and female immigrants to permanently reside in the US and the abundant literature highlighting that in most cases, immigrant women are more likely to naturalize than immigrant men. Perhaps in their first year of life in the US, immigrant women are still more deeply connected to their home country, but eventually are more likely to adapt and desire full US integration, relative to their male counterparts. Perhaps – as many who study immigrant women know – they more quickly learn about local politics and get involved in local organizations. So even if their initial preference does not lend itself to full political integration, eventually, they seem more likely to start on that path than their male counterparts.

Second, the general voting literature finds that high education and regular voting habits are highly correlated. This is true for some immigrant groups, but not for all. Probably most notable is the literature on Latino immigrants, which may be captured in these findings. Latino immigrants have lower-than-average educational levels and typically feature lower-than-average voter turnout. So even though immigrants with low educational attainment profess a desire to permanently stay in the US, these early steps in their life course may not lead to full political integration, absent social interventions. Conversely, immigrants with high educational attainment levels have a lower probability of desiring to permanently stay in the US, perhaps because they have greater opportunities on a global scale. Again, this finding seems ripe for social intervention.

Third, there is an abundant literature on the relationship between religion and political engagement, with churches and congregations having been historically central to “get out the vote” drives, the election of particular political candidates, and the passage (or defeat) of important laws. We need to further explore the denominational distinctions within our data to predict whether the relationship between religion and intent to stay in the US is likely to translate into later political integration.

Finally, in the voting literature, there is abundant evidence that engaging in political practices – outside of voting – is highly predictive of individual voter turnout. Thus we would interpret that the home country political experiences that immigrants engage in would help explain their desire to permanently stay in the US and to eventually resume those same activities here, culminating with the acts of naturalization, registration and voting. Conversely, the voting literature generally indicates that people who voted in the past will vote in the future. In the case of the NIS sample, we find that the act of home country voting while living in the US probably indicates an incomplete affiliation with the US and an enduring attachment to home country politics. Again, the social and policy implications of this finding should be fully explored.

Limitations/challenges

This research is a work in progress. Once we gain access to the NIS Restricted Data Version Two, we will be able to more fully explore the effects of recruitment by visa category. Whether an immigrant comes here due to employment reasons, family connections or having won the “diversity” lottery has huge implications for a given immigrant’s social networks and will undoubtedly shape their desire to permanently reside in the US.

Further, as explored in the literature review, with access to the NIS Restricted Data Version Two, we will be able to explore the effects of political context. We will be able to test whether a state is relatively “welcoming” or “hostile” to immigrants helps shape this key decision in the political life course of immigrants.

Our final limitations relate to income, union membership and informal RCA affiliation.

Income: First, as we noted in our Measurement and Method section, only approximately 40% of the respondents (N=2,089) in this sub-sample of the NIS data set responded to this question. Accordingly, we are hesitant to draw strong conclusions about its impact, and are especially wary of interpreting the non-income coefficients in this model. In Model 4 of Table 3, we find that income has no impact on the likelihood of staying in the US. However, in Figure 1 we demonstrate a non-linear relationship between household income and intent to stay in the US, with those having a household income of around $25,000 a year expressing the greatest intention to stay, while those with incomes around $80,000 expressing the greatest intention to leave. Those with incomes above that level are increasingly likely to express a desire to stay. If these findings – based on a sub-sample that may suffer from a number of self-selection effects and other sources of bias – are correct, we would interpret them to indicate that the first group probably emigrated due to extreme home country poverty and so an annual household income of approximately $25,000 would be a strong improvement over earning potential elsewhere. The second group – those with annual household incomes hovering around $80,000 – probably represents the global elite, those with high human capital who probably have many opportunities for transnational mobility and the possibility of acquiring higher status occupations. Finally, those who report higher than $80,000 annual household salaries are probably quite satisfied to stay here, as they represent between the upper fourth and top fifth income quintiles (based on 2000 census data). Undoubtedly, these new immigrants would find being on top of the income pyramid to be a strong incentive to stay in the US.

Union Membership & Member of Rotating Credit Association (RCA): As we reported in our Measurement and Method section, the response rates for both of these categories were very low. For this reason, even though strong theoretical connections between these measures of social networks and social integration exist, there simply were not sufficient responses to produce a statistically significant effect.

Policy recommendations

1. *Policy Recommendations on Gender*

While immigrant women seem initially reluctant to permanently stay in the US, they are much more likely to get involved in local politics and to vote (at least for many immigrant groups) than their male counterparts. Conversely, immigrant men are more likely to want to settle here, but later do not complete the process of full political integration. To address this gender divergence, we suggest two policy innovations. First, we know that immigrant men (particularly those coming from societies more patriarchal than our own) eventually become disillusioned with life in the US, perhaps because of the loss of family status and the private privileges they used to enjoy in their home countries. To counter this, they often seek solace in escapist activities and are more likely to join “social clubs” than organizations or groups with a clear political purpose (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003). We suggest the creation of a type of “ambassador” program, in which the USCIS identifies local male leaders from various national and ethnic groups and seeks their participation in bringing the “political” to the “social.” If immigrant men are already gathering in ethnic social clubs to play cards, listen to music and forge social ties, it could be a natural next step to utilize these social spaces to provide immigrant men with information on naturalization, becoming a US citizen, how to register to vote and current voting laws. Of course, the USCIS would have to be cautious in selecting these sponsors. They would be well advised to seek out people known in the social science literature is known as “embedded brokers,” people with deep ties to an existing group (Stewart 2012).

Our policy recommendation to address the seemingly lower willingness of immigrant women to permanently stay is two-fold. First, it could be important for USCIC officials to help immigrant women stay connected with home country family and friends. If they provided them with phone cards, introduced them to “skyping” technology and engaged in other measures that allowed women to stay connected to home, they might feel less isolated initially. Second, the USCIC could set up a “testimony” program, whereby immigrant women who forged the path of political participation become sponsors of new immigrant women and thus served as role models, or living testaments to the kind of satisfaction that can be achieved with full political participation and integration in the US.

2. *Policy Recommendations on Education*

Given that highly educated new immigrants are much less likely to desire to permanently stay in the US, we recommend that a central goal in revamping US immigration policy should be to, first, streamline the H-1B visa approval process. The USCIS should increase the number of H-1B visas granted annually and simplify the application process, thereby making it easier for foreign-born scientists and engineers to work in several of the high technology sectors of the economy for which there are insufficient American workers (West 2011). Currently, the so-called STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields in higher education are disproportionately populated by non-native students. Even though they have acquired significant skills and training here, developed English proficiency (in most cases) and have some familiarity with the idiosyncrasies of US culture and politics, most of these students are sent home upon completing their studies. This results in the so-called "brain drain." We can replace this social problem with a "brain gain," by streamlining the H-1B visas process.

Second, it could be important to create strategic partnerships between universities and employers – those working in high technology and science-related fields – so that foreign-born students can more easily apply for the jobs that are currently going unfilled. Perhaps these partnerships could create an incentive program – such as employers funding the graduate work of highly accomplished foreign-born students – with the proviso that they come work for the benefactor for a pre-established amount of time. Short of this, innovations in communications technology could easily permit the establishment of web-based clearinghouse to link universities, students and employers, in which each partner would post their respective needs (from the perspective of employers) or their respective offerings (new graduates in higher education seeking employment). These steps could create a synergy that would meaningfully solve two pressing problems: unfilled jobs in high technology areas and the early departure of highly skilled foreign-born students.

3. *Policy Recommendations on Political Engagement*

Based on our finding that those who voted in a home country election while living in the US had a lower probability of indicating a desire to permanently reside in the US, we would encourage the USCIS – in partnership with other relevant US agencies such as the State Department – to seek out diplomatic opportunities to work with other nations to allow dual citizenship and dual voting rights. This would allow new immigrants to maintain homeland ties at the same times as they begin the path toward full US political integration. Case study evidence indicates that for countries that permit dual citizenship (such as the Dominican Republic), being able to vote there does not serve as an obstacle for US voter participation (Pantoja 2005).

Currently, approximately 62 countries permit their citizens to achieve dual citizenship. However, approximately 66 countries – including India and China – do not permit dual citizenship. In light of our second set of policy suggestions relating to highly educated foreign students – and the fact that they disproportionately come from India and China – it seems imperative that diplomatic efforts be strengthened to encourage these countries to permit their émigrés to become US citizens.

Next steps in research

The next steps in our research explore another new and innovative predictor of voter turnout that has emerged out of studies of immigrant political participation: political context. In addition to SES predictors of voting behavior and Verba et al's RER model of voter turnout, newer research on immigrants has rediscovered the importance of context (Pantoja & Segura 2003). In particular, some theorists argue that the political context can overpower individual attributes in shaping voting patterns (Anderson 2000; Powell & Whitten 1993) and that threatening political climates can compel otherwise improbable voters on to the electoral stage. In their studies of immigrant voting behavior in California during a time of increasing hostility towards immigrants – as measured in anti-immigrant legislation proposed and anti-immigrant public rhetoric – a body of scholarship has found that the threatening political climate induced immigrants to first, seek out more information about politics, second, to naturalize, third to register, and finally, to vote, even at higher rates than many native-born constituencies (Barreto 2005; Barreto & Woods 2005; Pantoja, Ramirez & Segura 2001; Pantoja & Segura 2003; Ramakrishnan & Espenshade (2001). Accordingly, the next stage of our research will seek to better understand how context shapes immigrant political behavior. As most who study immigration trends know, during the 1990s and into the early years of the twenty-first century, the United States witnessed both a surge of immigration flows and the dispersal of immigrants to new immigration areas. Immigration accounted for one-third of the U.S. population increase during the 1990s, as foreign born residents increased from 20 million to over 31 million (Martin and Midgley 2006; Passel and Suro 2005). And while in the past, immigrants mostly settled in six states – California, New York, New Jersey, Illinois, Texas, and Florida – newer migrants have dispersed much more widely, moving to states with little recent experience of foreign in-migration (Massey and Capoferro 2008; Massey 2011b; Singer 2004).

One prominent response to these new migration flows was the increase – and eventual explosion – of state-level, immigration-related legislation. Between 1997 and 2011, for example, we have seen a low of 56 immigrant-related bills proposed across the country to a high of 1,592 bills proposed this year, reflecting an exponential increase in state legislation around immigration issues (National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) 2005-2011). Unfortunately for immigrants, the legislative trend has been moving away from integrative policies in favor of restrictive and even punitive policies (Wides-Munoz 2008). Three examples of this trend are the 2008 passage of Utah's Senate Bill 81, Arizona's 2010 passage of Senate Bill 1070 and Alabama's recent upholding of House Bill 56, which was passed in 2011. While they vary in degree of severity, they represent different variations on an anti-immigrant theme.

Although currently states are legislatively moving in a punitive direction toward immigrants, in an earlier period states were experimenting with more welcoming policies that would help immigrants integrate into US society. Two prominent examples of this type of policy are tuition equity laws – legislation providing in-state tuition benefits to the children of undocumented residents, provided they meet certain criteria – and laws permitting undocumented residents to acquire documentation allowing them to legally drive and obtain car insurance. Between 2001 and 2011, twelve states passed tuition equity laws, while at its height in 2008, eleven states permitted unauthorized residents to use alternative identification to obtain either a legal driver license or driver privilege card (National Immigration Law Center 2008). This variation in political context for immigrants is relevant across states and over time, thus presenting a perfect setting to explore its effect on immigrant political integration, beginning with the decision of whether to permanently stay in the US.

Dr. Stewart has just received official notification that she has been granted access to a restricted version of the NIS data, which contains information on both visa status and state of immigrant residence for immigrants living in states with more than 100 respondents. While prominent theorists have explored how religion shapes immigrant experiences utilizing the NIS data (Akresh 2011; Connor 2009), there is less research exploring how visa category – whether one's visa is employment-based, diversity-based or family-based – shapes future integration, let alone political integration. The inclusion of visa status will allow us to expand on Verba et al's RER model, as visa category is a clear indicator of social connections, and hence recruitment.

As for the state-of-residence data, this will allow us to see if where people are living when they achieve lawful permanent residence matters. Accordingly, we will pool our respondents into 13 states and divide them between the five traditional and eight new destination states. To further explore the meaning and influence of place on early immigrant political integration, we collected three types of state-level data: legislative, racial/ethnic and organizational. For the first measure, we collected legislative histories of all immigrant-related legislation proposed in each of these states between 1995 and 2011. We will highlight the legislative status of each state between 2000 and 2003, those years being more directly relevant to the respondents in this data set and will create a five-point index capturing how immigrant-friendly or hostile each state is. We will also include measures of each state's relevant racial/ethnic composition in 2000 by utilizing census data on percentages of non-white populations for each state. Finally, we collected data on each state's levels of immigration-related organizations and will express them both as raw numbers and as a ratio of the population, following the method developed in Martinez's (2008) work. This will allow us to directly measure the effects of political threats on early immigrant political integration and to approximate the influence of immigrant networks on that same set of behaviors.

We will employ a variety of model estimation techniques for the second stage of this project, including multi-level modeling techniques, where state-level measures described above will serve as level-two predictors (e.g., Raudenbush and Bryk 2002; Raudenbush et al. 2004). Of particular relevance for this stage of the study, we highlight recent high-caliber sociological and demographic research on various topics that include multi-level model designs where level two consists of less than twenty cases (e.g. Brady and Burroway forthcoming; Brady, Fullerton, and Moren-Cross 2009, 2010). Given that the majority of our data set is cleaned and operational, we expect that once we receive access to the additional variables in the restricted data set, we will be able to quickly create models to test the influence of visa category and state-level political context on new immigrants' decisions to permanently stay in the U.S.

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