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**BORDERS Awards in Immigration Research:
New Immigrant Survey Final Report**

*An Exploration of Immigrant Political Participation: Placing a Life Course
Perspective in Context*

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Abstract

This research explores the influence of political context, individual resources, forms of political awareness and networks of 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 utilizes the 2003 New Immigrant Survey (NIS) dataset, incorporating survey responses from 2,570 people. This restricted NIS data sub-set contains information on the visa type and state of residence for new immigrants in our study, thus allowing us to study the effects of factors not available in the NIS public dataset. Utilizing logistic regression analysis, we aim to better understand how individual resources, capabilities, social ties, political engagement and broader political context shape attachment to the U.S. Our findings highlight four crucial factors predictive of whether a new immigrant intends to permanently stay in the U.S. and three factors that predict a higher probability that he/she may intend to leave. First, for state-level factors, we find that both a higher level of anti-immigrant legislation and a higher level of voter turnout predict a desire to permanently reside in the US. Looking at social networks and recruitment, we find that membership in a religious organization enhances the likelihood that a new immigrant intends to permanently reside in the US, as do two types of visa categories: diversity and legalization. Turning to resources, we report a “human capital” finding that indicates that new immigrants with the highest educational achievements are least likely to want to stay; not coincidentally, those who are in the U.S. on an employment visa report similar desires to *not* remain in the U.S. Finally, we report that those who voted in a home country election while living in the US were less likely to plan to stay, a key finding related to political engagement. Because deciding to permanently reside in the U.S. is a crucial first step on the path toward full citizenship, our research contributes to existing social science research on immigrant voting patterns while also suggesting key policy interventions that may assist new immigrants to fully adopt their new country and to enjoy broad civic and 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 concerning voter turnout. More recently, a plethora of explanations that pay closer attention to variation within the U.S. electorate – in terms of

race/ethnicity, nationality, experiences of discrimination, etc. – and an increasing interest in how state-level policy context affects turnout has supplemented our understanding of this fundamental form of political participation (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 four new dimensions now found within the voting literature.

First, while the broader voting literature finds that men are both more likely to vote and 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 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. There is considerable divergence in voter turnout among immigrants, and some scholars link this to 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).

The third dimension of voting research that owes its place in the canon due to the inclusion of immigrants has re-conceptualized voting more as a process than a singular act. Whereas traditional voting research has focused on the incidence of voting – conceptualized as something 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.

Finally, research on immigrant political participation has underscored the importance of local context on political engagement. 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 immigration (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. As Table 1 illustrates below, between 1997 and 2011, we have seen a low of 56 immigrant-related bills proposed across the country, to a high of 1,592 bills proposed in 2011. This reflects an exponential increase in state legislation around immigration issues (National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) 2005-2011).

Table 1: State-level Immigrant Bills Proposed in the U.S., 2005-2011

Year	Total Immigrant Bills Proposed
2005	300
2006	570
2007	1,562
2008	1,305
2009	1,500
2010	1,400
2011	1,607

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.

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 changing, as policy analysts and scholars are grasping the important role that immigrants now play and will play in American politics. Our research intersects with this innovative body of research on political integration by building on the four 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. Third, 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. Finally, we add a fourth dimension: state-level context. We explore the effect of a range of state-level factors, including immigrant legislation, economic indicators, factors linked to race, ethnicity and nationality, density of immigrant organizations and past political participation.

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, recruitment and context in explaining and predicting a new immigrant's decision to permanently reside in the U.S.?*

Results/Findings

Description of Data Sources

Our first research paper drew exclusively from the 2003 New Immigrant Survey (NIS). 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?

Sample restrictions

In the first phase of our study, we found that approximately half of all respondents were dropped when this question was asked in the survey. Accordingly, the first paper drew from 4,050 respondents. In the second phase of this study, since we are primarily concerned with state contexts, we restrict our sample to those respondents with a state identifier. Based on regulations to access the NIS restricted data base, we explore state-level variation in responses for states with more than 100 respondents. We identified the respondent’s state of residence based on where their green card was sent. We used this to pair the respondents with their state-level legislative context. We eliminated other locational data, such as city of residence and zip code, as part of the de-identification process. Matching LPRs to resident state allowed us to see if where people are living when they achieve lawful permanent residence matters. Accordingly, we pooled our respondents into 13 states, including five traditional and eight new destination states. This provides us with a total of 2657 respondents in 13 states. This includes: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia and Washington.

Dependent Variable

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 and those who replied either “No” or that they “Didn’t Know” as 0. Overall, 2570 of the 2,882 respondents, for a weighted average of 89%, stated that they intend to stay. Table 2 lists the number of respondents by state and the proportion intending to stay, with the lowest reported percentage in North Carolina and the highest in Pennsylvania.

Table 2: Intend to Live in US Rest of Life by State

State	Count	% Stay in US
North Carolina	40	.78
Arizona	61	.84
Illinois	179	.85
Washington	77	.86
Colorado	48	.87
Ohio	62	.87
Texas	274	.88
Georgia	58	.89
Virginia	115	.89
Florida	249	.90
New York	478	.91
California	952	.91
Pennsylvania	64	.92

Independent Variables

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 was available only in the restricted data set, which we received permission to access on January 15, 2013, after a seven-month-long process. 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 based on family ties, employment needs, humanitarian issues, diversity qualifications or legalization - shapes future integration, let alone political participation.

For the restricted data set, the NIS creators included a 19-category visa variable; this variable indicated the type of visa the respondent used to enter the United States. The authors recoded this into a 5-category variable. Ten of the original categories reflected visas obtained due to the individual’s familial relationship to a U.S. citizen. We recoded all ten as “Family” visas. The authors grouped two categories of employment related visas together in a second category. Likewise, we combined two categories of diversity visas into the third category. Visas coded “Humanitarian” indicates immigrants or spouses entering on a refugee, asylee or parolee visa. Finally, the authors coded respondents who received a status adjustment or were legalized through the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 as “Legalization” visas. Of the 6,926 respondents in the 13 target states, 51.34 percent, or 3,556 people, entered on a family visa. 1,217 people (17.57 percent) entered via an employment visa and 1,115 people (16.93 percent) entered on a diversity visa. Only 601 people (8.68 percent), received a legalization visa, while the humanitarian visa permitted the smallest number of immigrants, one 437 people (6.31 percent) to legally enter the U.S. and become a legal permanent resident.

Within this broader subset of immigrants with state identifiers, 2, 658 respondents answered the question regarding intention to permanently stay in the U.S. In Table 3, we provide the numbers and percentages of this population according to their visa category. We note that the broad distribution of visa categories between the entire restricted data set and those who answered the “intent to stay” question is the same, with the only exception that in the broader sample, slightly more respondents entered on an employment visa, whereas in the restricted sample, slightly more entered on a diversity visa.

Table 3: Distribution of Visa Category from Restricted Data Set

Visa Category	Count	Percent
Family	1,375	51.73
Diversity	418	15.73
Employment	398	14.97
Legalization	278	10.46
Humanitarian	189	7.11
Total	2,658	100.00

To further explore the meaning and influence of place on early immigrant political integration, we collected five types of state-level data: immigrant legislation, economic indicators, factors linked to race, ethnicity and nationality, density of immigrant organizations and past political participation.

To measure the effect of state-level legislation on immigrant intention to permanently stay in the U.S., we compiled a list of bills related to immigration via an exhaustive search of the LexisNexis Legislative and Regulatory database. After searching all legislative data from 2000-2004 for immigration-related bills, the authors categorized these bills according to their intended effects on immigrants (positive, negative or neutral). Where possible, we cross-referenced the results of the LexisNexis searches with the records available on official state websites as a means of ensuring accuracy and comprehensiveness. We demonstrate the results of this research in Table 4.

Table 4: State-level immigrant-related legislation, 2000-2004

State-level Bills	Total 2000	Positive 2000	Negative 2000	Neutral 2000	Total 2001	Positive 2001	Negative 2001	Neutral 2001	Total 2002	Positive 2002	Negative 2002	Neutral 2002	Total 2003	Positive 2003	Negative 2003	Neutral 2003	Total 2004	Positive 2004	Negative 2004	Neutral 2004
Arizona	3	1	1	1	4	3	1	0	5	2	1	2	6	1	2	3	6	2	3	1
California	19	17	2	0	2	2	0	0	10	8	2	0	7	7	0	0	7	5	2	0
Colorado	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	1	3	2	0	0	0	0
Florida	4	2	1	1	2	0	1	1	7	1	4	2	7	4	3	0	5	3	1	1
Georgia	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	10	1	5	4	6	1	4	1
Illinois	0	0	0	0		2	1	1	0	0	0	0	14	10	0	4	0	0	0	0
New York	20	4	8	8	16	3	9	4	0	0	0	0	25	11	6	8	0	0	0	0
N. Carolina	1	1	0	0	3	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	4	0	3	1	0	0	0	0
Ohio	2	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Pennsylvania	4	3	1	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	3	1	0	0	0	0	0
Texas	3	1	1	1	10	8	0	2	0	0	0	0	11	7	3	1	0	0	0	0
Virginia	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	10	2	4	4	0	0	0	0	10	2	6	2
Washington	4	2	0	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	5	6	0	0	0	0	0

We obtained additional state-level contextual data via a combination of publicly available and restricted sources. Following the example of Hung (2007), the authors obtained a comprehensive list of state-level immigration organizations from www.guidestar.org, a website that tracks nonprofit organizations via their submitting Form 990s (an annual return that certain federally tax-exempt organizations must file with the Internal Revenue Service; it

provides information on the filing organization's mission, programs, and finances) to the IRS. The website allows for searching by both organization focus (i.e. immigration, social justice, etc.) and state. We generated a list of immigration-related organizations for each state and subsequently double-checked each list for duplicates and/or erroneously categorized groups. Data on each state's Unemployment Rate, Percent Below Poverty Line, Median Household Income, Percent Foreign Born, Percent Who Speak a Foreign Language at Home and Percent Non-White all come from the 2000 census, and data on voter turnout comes from the U.S. Elections Project, a venture of Michael P. McDonald at George Mason University. We illustrate the descriptive findings of these research efforts below, in Table 5.

Table 5: State-level Contextual Indicators

State	Unemployment Rate	Percent Below Poverty Line	Median Household Income	Percent Foreign-Born	Percent Speaking Foreign Language at Home	Percent Non-White	Percent Registered to Vote	VEP Highest Office Turnout Rate 2000
Arizona	3.4	13.9	40,558	12.8	25.9	24.5	65.2	45.6%
California	4.3	14.2	47,493	26.2	39.5	40.5	76.4	55.7%
Colorado	3	8.6	47,203	8.6	15.1	17.2	76.8	57.5%
Florida	3.2	12.5	38,819	16.7	23.1	22	77.6	55.9%
Georgia	3.6	13	42,433	7.1	9.9	34.9	76.5	45.8%
Illinois	3.9	10.7	46,590	12.3	19.2	26.5	82.2	56.2%
New York	4.3	14.6	43,393	20.4	28	32.1	78.9	55.1%
N. Carolina	3.4	12.3	39,184	5.3	8	27.9	77.4	50.7%
Ohio	3.2	10.6	40,956	3	3	15	74.9	56.7%
Pennsylvania	3.5	11	40,106	4.1	8.4	14.6	74.2	54.1%
Texas	3.8	15.4	39,927	13.9	31.2	29	78	49.2%
Virginia	4.2	9.6	46,677	8.1	11.1	27.7	76.5	54.0%
Washington	4.1	10.6	45,776	10.4	14	18.2	78.8	60.7%

In addition to these new, state-level contextual variables, we assess a broader spectrum of factors that we derive from Verba et al's (1995) civic volunteerism model, including:

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 is 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."

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. is 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 is 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 is 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?"

Finally, in all models we include an indicator variable for country of origin. These coefficients are not shown but are available upon request.

Combining the publically available NIS data, the restricted data set and the state-level measures we collected, we provide a comprehensive, descriptive table of all of the variables we utilize in this analysis, including weighted means, in Table 6.

Table 6: Descriptive statistics for variables used in the analysis

	mean	sd	min	max
Intend to Live in US Rest of Life	0.895	0.307	0	1
Male	0.445	0.497	0	1
Age	38.68	13.49	18	95
<i>Years of schooling</i>				
<12 years	0.386	0.487	0	1
13-15 years	0.197	0.398	0	1
16 years	0.0966	0.295	0	1
>16 years	0.143	0.350	0	1
<i>Marital status</i>				
Married	0.747	0.435	0	1
Divorced/separated	0.215	0.411	0	1
Widowed	1.115	1.050	0	3
<i>Household size</i>				
2 people	0.215	0.411	0	1
3 or more people	0.705	0.456	0	1
Speaks English well	0.462	0.499	0	1
Own home	0.165	0.371	0	1
<i>Political engagement</i>				
Political actions scale	-0.0584	0.154	-1	0
Political knowledge scale	0.465	0.295	0	1
Voted outside US	0.0365	0.188	0	1
Member of Religious Organization	0.217	0.412	0	1
Union member	0.0349	0.184	0	1
Member of RCA	0.004	0.066	1	2
<i>Visa category</i>				
Family	.677	.423	0	1
Employment	0.0710	0.257	0	1
Diversity	0.0792	0.270	0	1
Humanitarian	0.0713	0.257	0	1
Legalization	0.109	0.311	0	1
<i>State Level</i>				
Voter turnout, 2000	0.187	0.0717	0.0300	0.262
Percent foreign born	0.545	0.0312	0.456	0.607
Anti-immigrant laws	8.375	6.489	1	23

Research Methodology and Findings

We now report our methodology and findings around these four axes of inquiry exploring the key influences on immigrant political integration. This will provide a fuller understanding of the origins of this process – and the contexts in which it takes place – at the turn of the century in the United States.

Method

We employ 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. Because several of our measures are at the state level, we employ cluster robust standard errors, relaxing the usual requirement that the observations be independent within a given state. Of the total sample of respondents with state identifiers who were asked the question used to construct the dependent variable, 225 were missing values on other variables. This group of cases did not differ significantly from included cases on any of the dependent or independent variables. This set of cases is excluded from the analysis.

Analysis

Table 7 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 just the state-level factors and country of origin.

Table 7: Logistic regression model of likelihood of intending to live in the US for the rest of respondents life

	(2)	(3)
	Intend to Live in US Rest of Life	Intend to Live in US Rest of Life
Intend to Live in US Rest of Life		
State level		
Percent foreign born	1.141 (1.50)	0.950 (1.21)
Voter turnout	3.170 (1.67)	3.687* (2.18)
Anti-immigrant laws	0.0224*** (3.82)	0.0164* (2.50)
Individual level		
Male		0.160 (1.46)
Age		0.00836 (1.17)
Education (12 years omitted)		
<12 years		-0.440 (-1.72)

13-15 years		-0.0873 (-0.27)
16 years		-0.479 (-1.18)
>16 years		-0.624** (-2.98)
Marital status (single omitted)		
Married		-0.0262 (-0.08)
Divorced/separated		0.463 (1.17)
Widowed		-0.822 (-1.59)
Household size (1 omitted)		
2 people		-0.0706 (-0.18)
3 or more people		0.304 (0.77)
Speaks English well		-0.0129 (-0.12)
Own home		-0.336 (-1.21)
Political actions scale		0.524 (1.15)
Political knowledge scale		0.520 (1.76)
Voted outside US		-0.982* (-2.43)
Member of Religious Organization		0.697*** (3.99)

Union member		-0.252 (-0.87)
Member of RCA		-1.122 (-1.42)
Visa category (Employment omitted)		
Family		0.359 (1.88)
Diversity		0.906* (2.05)
Humanitarian		0.761 (1.48)
Legalization		0.821* (2.45)
Constant	-0.981 (-0.76)	-1.269 (-0.78)
Observations	2432	2432

t statistics in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Findings

Of the three state level measures, only the volume of anti-immigration legislation is statistically significant. The effect size is quite small, however. Based on this model, an immigrant in a state with no anti-immigrant legislation would have a .88 predicted probability of expressing an interest in living in the US, compared to a .90 in a state with approximately 10 anti-immigrant laws, a relatively high number of laws.

Model 2 adds individual control variables. The coefficient for anti-immigrant legislation remains significant, although the effect size is slightly diminished. Additionally, voter participation is significant. Immigrants living in states with high levels of voting are more likely to intend to stay in the US. With all other variables unchanged, this model predicts that an individual in a low participation state would have a .88 probability of stating they intended to stay, while an individual in a high-voting state would have a .91 probability of intending to stay.

Among the individual variables, only a handful are correlated with the outcome measure. Individuals with more than sixteen years of education – for most respondents a college degree – are less likely to intend to stay than those with lower formal educational attainment. Among the political variables, those who voted in another country are less likely to wish to permanently reside in the U.S. While union and RCA membership are not

significantly correlated with staying intention, members of religious organizations are more likely to intend to stay. Finally, visa category is a significant predictor. Those with an employment visa are the least likely to stay, with a predicted probability of .85 with all other variables unchanged, while those with a diversity or legalization visa both have a .93 predicted probability of intending to stay.

Limitations/challenges

This paper has provided a series of explanations for why some new immigrants indicate they wish to permanently reside in the U.S., while others do not. We examine both context – particularly state-level influences – and factors linked to an individual’s resources, level of engagement and his/her recruitment networks.

For state-level factors, we found that anti-immigrant legislation made new immigrants slightly more likely to want to stay in the U.S. We speculate that this is because when people feel threatened, they do what they can to protect themselves and their families. Becoming a legal permanent resident is one step toward the greater security that eventually accompanies being a citizen. We found that the other state-level measure – level of voter turnout – positively affects a new immigrant’s desire to permanently reside in the U.S. For a whole series of reasons, linked to networks, information exchange, opportunity structure, and more – if a mass of people are voting, it is more probable that individuals will join them in that activity.

Looking more closely at Verba et al’s (1995) civic volunteerism model, we found that more highly educated new immigrants – those typically with a college degree – are less likely to want to stay in the U.S. than their counterparts with less formal education. In this case, a key resource linked to upward mobility and the “American Dream” is at odds with the desire to plant more permanent roots here.

As a measure of political engagement, again we found that those who had voted in another country – and likely are more politically aware – were less likely to want to stay in the U.S. permanently. Again, ideally we would like to see this type of engaged and politically aware new immigrant interested in staying in the U.S. and beginning the long path toward citizenship and full political incorporation. But perhaps being politically engaged in one’s country of origin indicates a stronger attachment to one’s native country; thus the challenge remains to better understand how this immigrant sub-set might be encouraged to build alliances and allegiances in their adoptive country.

Looking at recruitment measures, not surprisingly, we found that members of religious organizations were more likely to want to stay in the U.S. This is logical because even though we are seeing a decline in formal religious participation in the U.S., existing religious congregations provide people with a sense of community, support, information of all sorts and even financial aid.

Finally, visa category is an excellent indicator of social ties and potential recruitment. We expected that new immigrants with family-based visas would be the most likely to indicate desire to stay, but this variable was not statistically significant. In terms of significance, we found that those with an employment visa are the least likely to want to stay. The literature on immigrant employment contains some contradictions, with some arguing that employers and the workplace provide new immigrants with a social world, while others identify those with employment-based visas as those least likely to plant permanent roots. Following this line of thinking, these are “global employees” who are seeking the best return on their education, skills and experience. Indeed, our findings support this hypothesis. In contrast, those with a diversity or legalization visa both have a high and significant probability of intending to stay. We would speculate that for the former, perhaps this is because diversity visas are so numerically limited and rare that a new immigrant would feel that he or she had “hit the jackpot” so to speak and would not easily give up the opportunity to permanently live in the U.S. In contrast, legalization visas typically go to people who have already been in the U.S. for some time – and now need to seek legalization due to over-staying their visa or not having all proper documentation in place – so they likely have social and familial ties that would encourage them to want to permanently stay in the U.S.

There are two main limitations to our present conclusions. First, while we found a series of significant factors that help *predict the probability* that some new immigrants are more likely to profess a desire to permanently reside in the U.S., our *explanations* are speculative. To better understand how visa category, religious membership, past voting behavior, education and state context affect this key decision, we would ideally employ a mixed-methods approach that included in-depth interviews and targeted focus groups. Getting more in-depth information would allow us to develop a better sense of the mechanisms that link these factors together. That is to say, while the methods we use here are excellent at mapping the terrain of immigrant political integration, we are still left wondering about the precise motivations behind the relationships we uncovered.

Second, the time period in which the NIS study was conducted was much more moderate than later years in terms of national mood, attitudes around immigration and immigrant legislation. Beginning around 2007, the U.S. experienced an explosion in state-level, immigrant-related legislation and a decisive trend toward anti-immigrant bills. Accordingly, the full impact of anti-immigrant legislation may be suppressed in the current study. However, with this baseline study now complete, we are perfectly poised to conduct a similar study with the second wave of NIS data, a series of follow-up interviews conducted from June 2007 to December 2009.

Policy recommendations

1. Policy Recommendations on State Context & Policies

The research finding that new immigrants are more likely to vote in states with high levels of anti-immigration legislation will probably become even more significant over time, as these findings pre-date the latest wave of anti-immigrant public opinion and legislation (Chavez 2008). Many social scientists have documented that people become both more aware of

politics and more likely to be involved when they feel under threat (Jaspar 2006). The elusive question then becomes, how can public policy support new immigrants to feel empowered by this political climate? How can policy makers craft practices and legislation that will make it more likely for new immigrants to contribute to change that allows them to fully incorporate into society rather than act in a mode that is defensive or even hostile?

Although there are numerous policy options, we highlight three. First, without falling prey to stereotypes, it is well documented that immigrant women are more involved in local politics and civic affairs than immigrant men (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003). Similarly, immigrant women are more likely to participate in educational, social, religious, ethnic and political organizations (Hardy-Fanta 1993; Hardy-Fanta and Gerson 2002). Accordingly, we would encourage local policies and practices that connect with immigrant women in these natural locations of “social brokerage” to both inform them of local legislation and provide them with opportunities to become involved, from speaking at public hearings to supporting legislators in crafting more immigrant-friendly bills. Second, social science research generally indicates that first- or second-generation immigrant political candidates are a major incentive for immigrant voting blocs to develop (Kaufmann 2003). Policy makers could devote resources to supporting immigrant candidates as positive motivation to vote (hope/aspiration versus fear/desperation). Finally, under-represented groups tend to respond affirmatively to personalized “get out the vote” (GOTV) strategies (Ramírez, Ricardo 2005). Again, if policy makers provided resources for personalized GOTV campaigns, new immigrants could feel more educated, empowered and positive about their voting experiences. The actors who could carry out these suggestions include state-level legislators, city offices of diversity and equity and non-profits connected to immigrants.

2. Policy Recommendations on High Human Capital (Education and Employment)

Given that both highly educated new immigrants and new immigrants here with employment-based visas 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). Given that the bipartisan immigration bill currently under debate in the U.S. Senate is examining this issue, we hope that eventually the U.S. Congress finds consensus around this uncontroversial issues. It is important to note that 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 work for the benefactor for a pre-established amount of time following graduation. Innovations in communications technology could also easily permit the establishment of a 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 authors of this research will present our findings at the upcoming annual conference of the American Sociological Association, the most prestigious conference in the field of sociology. It will be held this year in New York City in August, 2013.
- Following feedback from the conference, we will draft and submit an article to a prestigious, refereed journal, highlighting our most important findings on the influences of recruitment, engagement, resources and context on immigrant political incorporation.
- Two of the graduate students on this project will also pursue more specialized articles (one on the role of religion, the other on the role of social networks) that they will submit to an appropriate, refereed journal.
- Once the more recent wave of NIS data is available, we plan to utilize it, update our state-level contextual factors and conduct longitudinal analysis. We expect that given the time lapse between the first wave of data collection and the second – combined with the



dramatic changes in immigrant legislation of recent years – that we should uncover some very interesting and publishable findings.

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