

Citizenship and Naturalization Patterns of Immigrants in the Southeastern United States And Their Political Consequences

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ABSTRACT

This study examines naturalization rates in the southeastern United States and compares them to other regions while investigating some political consequences of naturalization. In terms of the number of naturalized citizens and naturalization rates, the Southeast lags behind states with long immigration histories. In all U.S. southeastern states, Asians comprise the largest group of naturalized citizens, but rates vary. Mexicans and Central Americans are the least likely to obtain citizenship in all southeastern states. The authors also find and discuss a small immigrant presence in the U.S. House of Representatives and a significant positive correlation between states' naturalization rates and the percentage of the state that voted for Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential election.

Key words: citizenship, naturalization, immigrants, politics

RESUMEN

El presente estudio examina las tasas de naturalización en el sureste de Estados Unidos y las compara con las de otras regiones, mientras investiga algunas de sus consecuencias políticas. En términos del número de ciudadanos naturalizados y de las tasas de naturalización, el sureste se mantiene atrás de estados que tienen largas historias de inmigración. En todos los estados del sureste estadounidense, los asiáticos tienen los mayores números de ciudadanos naturalizados, aunque las tasas varían. Los mexicanos y los centroamericanos son quienes tienen menos probabilidades de obtener la ciudadanía en los estados del sureste. Los autores también encuentran y discuten la escasa presencia de inmigrantes en la Cámara de Representantes de Estados Unidos y una correlación positiva significativa entre la tasa de naturalización de un estado y el porcentaje que votó por Barack Obama en la elección presidencial de 2008.

Palabras clave: ciudadanía, naturalización, inmigrantes, política

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INTRODUCTION

The process through which immigrants become citizens of their new homelands, the extent to which they do so, and their roles in political life have become increasingly important in sociological research and public debate recently. In 2010, the theme of the American Sociological Association's annual meeting was "Toward a Sociology of Citizenship," featuring panels exploring topics such as dual citizenship and immigrant inclusion, how immigrants become citizens in different countries, and migration and asylum-seeking as challenges to citizenship regimes. Earlier, important work appeared on the social and political incorporation of immigrants, comparative studies of naturalization, and the role of immigrants as citizens (or non-citizens) in the political life of their new countries (Bloemraad, 2006a and 2006b; Castles and Davidson, 2000; Joppke, 1999; Koopmans, Statham, et al., 2005; Plotke, 1999; Schuck, 1998).

Outside academia, when the U.S. federal government revises policies affecting immigrants (e.g., changes eligibility for receiving welfare,¹ or constructs a wall along the Mexican border) or if it hints at revising policies (e.g., calls for "comprehensive immigration reform," ponders ending "birthright" citizenship, or considers the Dream Act),² political activity by immigrants increases (e.g., lobbying legislators, op-ed newspaper columns, and protest demonstrations), and naturalization rates usually rise. At state and local levels, too, controversial attempts to deal with real or alleged problems associated with foreign-born newcomers, such as recent laws aimed at illegal immigrants in Arizona, Pennsylvania, Utah, and Georgia, or the 2009 referendum in Nashville on English as the official language, trigger political responses and advocacy by immigrants, their children or descendants, and allies.

As the South, particularly the Southeast, has increasingly become an area of settlement for recent immigrants, researchers have produced a growing body of literature on immigrants in this region (Ansley and Shefner, eds., 2009; Bankston, 2003; Lippard and Gallagher, eds., 2010; Massey, ed., 2008; Mohl, 2003; Odem and Lacy, eds., 2009; Zúñiga and Hernández-León, eds., 2005). However, this work rarely deals with citizenship, naturalization, or political aspects of immigrants' presence. Therefore, we have two purposes in this article. The first is to compare the attainment of U.S. citizenship by immigrants in southeastern states (and selected states in other

¹ As in the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 (see Van Hook, Brown, and Bean, 2006).

² The full name of this proposed law is the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act. If passed, it would enable certain immigrants who entered the U.S. illegally as children and who graduate from a U.S. high school to change their status to conditional permanent resident if they complete certain requirements in either college or the military.

regions of the country), and the second is to uncover some political implications or consequences of immigrant naturalization.

Regarding the first purpose, the data described below allow comparisons to be made on the citizenship status of foreign-born Mexicans, Caribbeans, Central Americans, South Americans, Asians, Europeans, and a residual “Other” category. Separate comparisons of these groups are done by decade of entry into the United States. In this part of the article, we address two questions: 1) Which southeastern states have the highest and lowest numbers and percentages of naturalized U.S. citizens, and how do they compare with the U.S. as a whole and selected northern and western states?; and 2) In the Southeast, do immigrants from different parts of the world differ in their numbers and naturalization rates, and are the same patterns found in other states?

Secondly, we want to help shift analysis of immigrant naturalization in a different direction. Many researchers investigating immigrant naturalization focus on factors that encourage or discourage it (see literature review). Other scholars interested in the political inclusion or exclusion of immigrants pay relatively little attention to naturalization, perhaps thinking that “issues about the naturalization process, including rates of naturalization among immigrants from various countries, are analytically distinct from the question of how new citizens are incorporated into politics” (Plotke, 1999: 297). So, rather than asking why some states or foreign-born nationalities have high or low rates of naturalization, and rather than assuming that naturalization numbers or rates have little bearing on immigrant political incorporation, our second goal is to contribute to the search to discover what –if any– consequences the number or rate of naturalized citizens have in U.S. politics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on citizenship and naturalization has concentrated on three main areas. First, studies explore socioeconomic and demographic predictors of immigrants’ propensity to naturalize (Bloemraad, 2006a and 2006b; Bueker, 2006; Clark, 2003; DeSipio, 1987; Gilbertson and Singer, 2000; Liang, 1994; Portes and Curtis, 1987; Portes and Rumbaut, 2006; Van Hook, Brown, and Bean, 2006; Yang, 1994). Second, research has examined how structural factors, the context of reception, and host country policies affect naturalization, sometimes comparing these factors across countries (Bloemraad, 2006a and 2006b; Bueker, 2006; Castaneda, 2006; Fujiwara, 2008; Portes and Rumbaut, 2006; Van Hook, Brown, and Bean, 2006; Yang, 1994). Third, several studies analyze the political incorporation and participation of immigrants (Bass

and Casper, 2001; Castaneda, 2006; Cho, 1999; Clark, 2003; Leal, 2002; Lien, 1994; Lien, Collet, et al., 2001).

Examining socioeconomic and demographic predictors of naturalization has been a major line of citizenship research. Previous research has found that a higher education, a professional occupation, higher income, speaking English fluently, being middle-aged, being married, having children, being a homeowner, having a homeland that is far away, and rarely visiting the homeland boost immigrants' propensity to naturalize (Bass and Casper, 2001; Bloemraad, 2006a and 2006b; Bueker, 2006; Clark, 2003; DeSipio, 1987; Gilbertson and Singer, 2000; Liang, 1994; Portes and Curtis, 1987; Portes and Rumbaut, 2006; Van Hook, Brown, and Bean, 2006; Yang, 1994). These factors have been used to explain why Mexicans are the least prone to naturalize, and Asians and Europeans are more inclined to do so.

The country of origin matters in several ways. A homeland fraught with economic battles, curtailed freedoms, or religious or political persecution raises the incentives for immigrants and refugees to seek citizenship in the host country. Furthermore, whether or not the country of origin allows dual citizenship is a crucial consideration for immigrants (Bloemraad, 2006a and 2006b; Clark, 2003; Gilbertson and Singer, 2000; Portes and Rumbaut, 2006; Yang, 1994). The possibility of dual citizenship illustrates the many factors immigrants weigh as they assess the costs and benefits of naturalization. In the United States naturalization tends to be a long and costly process, and for some immigrants the benefits of citizenship do not surpass these costs (Doodoo and Pinon, 1994).

Structural factors and social policies in a host country also affect immigrants' propensity to naturalize. For instance, the Welfare Reform Act of 1996, which limited numerous public benefits to citizens and excluded permanent resident aliens, escalated naturalization rates in the United States (Bueker, 2006; Castaneda, 2006; Fujiwara, 2008; Gilbertson and Singer, 2000; Van Hook, Brown, and Bean, 2006). Other countries, such as Canada, have higher naturalization rates than the U.S., which Bloemraad (2006a and 2006b) attributes to their different policies. Canada has a shorter residency requirement and an easier, faster naturalization process than the United States; moreover, it has implemented policies and programs that prepare immigrants for naturalization.

Research exploring the political participation of naturalized immigrants finds they have lower rates of political activity than native-born citizens, although there are some exceptions. Immigrants from Asia and Latin America are not homogenous in their political participation; naturalized citizens from some of these countries show higher political activity than others. Naturalized immigrants with high educational levels or income, professional occupations, long residence at their current

U.S. address, and are older and fluent in English (e.g., Europeans, Asians of several nations, such as Japan and Korea, as well as Cubans) are more likely to vote than those without these characteristics (e.g., Mexicans or Dominicans [Bass and Casper, 2001; Castaneda, 2006; Cho, 1999; Clark, 2003; Leal, 2002; Lien, 1994; Lien, Collet, et al., 2001]). However, socioeconomic and demographic characteristics alone do not determine rates of political participation; they also depend on the level of political socialization (Cho, 1999). In addition, it is important to understand that naturalization does not necessarily result in political participation; being naturalized and registered, together with the other aforementioned factors is a better predictor of voting patterns and other forms of political involvement (Bass and Casper, 2001; Castaneda, 2006; Cho, 1999; Clark, 2003; Lien, 1994; Lien, Collet, et al., 2001).

As is apparent from the review of previous research, prior studies have focused on the United States as a whole, and up to now research on citizenship has not explored naturalization trends in different areas *within* the United States. Our study helps fill this gap in the literature by comparing naturalization rates in southeastern states to other states and regions of the U.S. Given recent political debates on immigration and the growing number of immigrants who become potential voters upon naturalization, it is useful to examine naturalization patterns in various parts of the country, since over time naturalized immigrants may have the capacity to alter the U.S. political landscape.

Based on findings in prior literature, we formulated three main hypotheses. First, we expect Florida to have higher naturalization rates than Georgia, Tennessee, and North and South Carolina, because Florida's immigrants have been in the United States longer and because many of Florida's immigrants, especially Cubans, are at least middle-aged and have relatively high educational levels and income. Since recent immigrants in Georgia, North and South Carolina, and Tennessee are less likely to possess the same characteristics, we expect them to have lower naturalization rates. Similarly, we hypothesize that the Southeast as a whole has lower naturalization rates than the West and Northeast.

Second, since, on average, Asian and European immigrants have higher educational levels, income, and rates of homeownership, and their homelands are far from the U.S., we expect them to have the highest naturalization rates. We also hypothesize that Mexicans and Central Americans have the lowest naturalization rates because of their nearby homelands and relative lack of the characteristics mentioned above. We expect South Americans, Caribbeans, and the category "Other" to be in the middle in terms of naturalization rates, both in the Southeast and elsewhere.

Third, we hypothesize that the percentage of naturalized citizens in a state does affect politics, and that states with a sizable (and actively voting) naturalized immi-

grant population might move in a direction that favors Democratic candidates more than Republicans.

DATA AND RESEARCH METHOD

Data for this article are from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2006-2008 American Community Survey (ACS). Specifically, Table B05007 (accessed on the Census Bureau's website), shows the citizenship status (naturalized U.S. citizen or non-U.S. citizen) of the foreign-born population residing in each state of the U.S., subdivided by entry year cohort of people born in six different regions of the world. The four entry year cohorts designated in the ACS data are: "entered 2000 or later," "entered 1990 to 1999," "entered 1980 to 1989," and "entered before 1980" (this refers to the year they entered the United States, not the year they entered their state of residence at the time of the 2006-2008 ACS). Since a substantial percentage of people in the most recent entry cohort has not lived in the U.S. long enough to meet the residency requirement or complete the naturalization process, the post-2000 cohort has the lowest percentage of naturalized citizens, and the percentage of naturalized citizens increases steadily among entry cohorts with longer tenure in the country. In addition, the ACS shows the citizenship status for people in each entry cohort from six separate areas of the world (people born in Europe, Asia, the Caribbean, Mexico, Central America, South America, and a residual "Other" category). Thus, while we would prefer to compare and report naturalization rates for immigrants from specific countries (e.g., Korea, Vietnam, Jamaica, Haiti, etc.), it is not possible due to the way the Census Bureau has aggregated the data and presents it in the ACS table.

The central variable in this study is the percentage of the foreign-born population that has become naturalized U.S. citizens. We refer to this percentage as the "percent naturalized" or as the "naturalization rate," interchangeably. We have computed the percent naturalized for the U.S. as a whole, for individual states, and for subsets of states, and done so for the foreign-born populations from the different parts of the world and the four entry cohorts.

To assist and clarify interpretation of different states' or different groups' naturalization rates, we also utilize "standardization" (based on U.S. entry cohorts). This is a statistical technique that enables a researcher to take into account (control for) compositional differences between two or more groups being compared. In this case, we standardize to control for differences between Europeans, Asians, Caribbeans, Mexicans, etc. in terms of their percentages in the four U.S. entry cohorts (arrived since 2000; arrived 1990-1999; arrived 1980-1989; arrived pre-1980). Obviously, a

group or a state that has a very large percentage of immigrants that entered in the post-2000 cohort will have a lower percent naturalized (other things being equal) than a group or state with many immigrants who entered in the 1980s or earlier. The standardization procedure used here eliminates the differences in group's and state's entry cohort composition by taking each group's actual naturalization rate in each entry cohort and multiplying those rates by a standard set of percentages in each entry cohort. Specifically, we chose to use the Georgia Asian percentages of foreign-born residents in the four entry cohorts as the standard, and applied each states' / groups' own entry cohort naturalization rates to that standard.³ These cohort entry percentages and the naturalization rates for each entry cohort are shown, for selected states, in Table 2. The results of the standardization procedure appear in Table 3; they indicate what the naturalization rate would be for each state's immigrant groups from different parts of the world *if* they had the *same* distribution across entry cohorts as Georgia's foreign-born Asians have. They reflect the effect of real differences in naturalization rates (i.e., proclivity and ability to successfully naturalize) among immigrant groups after taking away differences in the timing of their entry into the U.S. Disparities between these hypothetical naturalization percentages (in Table 3) and the actual naturalization percentages in Table 1 also allow us to see how large an impact groups' or states' differences in entry cohorts makes on naturalization rates. For example, Table 1 shows that for the whole U.S., the Caribbean percent naturalized is 54.0, but after entry cohort standardization, its percent naturalized declines to 44.7. This means a substantial part of Caribbeans' actual naturalization rate (nearly as high as Asians') is due to their being in the U.S., on average, longer than Georgia's Asians; if, hypothetically, they had the same entry cohort percentages as Georgia's Asians and retained the Caribbean naturalization rates in each entry cohort, then their naturalization rate would be 10 percentage points lower than it actually is (well below that of Asians). In contrast, Mexicans' actual and standardized naturalization rates for the U.S. as a whole (Tables 1 and 3) hardly differ, implying that their relatively low naturalization rate cannot be attributed to them being more recent immigrants than Georgia's Asians.

We use least squares multiple regression analysis to investigate the relationship between states' naturalization rates and the percentage of voters who cast their

³ Selecting which group to use as the standard is an arbitrary choice. We chose Georgia Asians because they are average in terms of their distribution in entry cohort categories (neither the most recent nor the "oldest" immigrant group) and because in size they are neither the largest nor the smallest immigrant group in the Southeast. As a check, we also compared these results to those obtained using other standards (e.g., percents in entry cohorts of all Europeans in the U.S., all Mexicans in the U.S., and Caribbeans in Florida). The agreement of these alternative standardized naturalization rates is extremely high, with correlations among them of .95 or higher.

ballots for Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential election. Since there are only 50 states (plus Washington, D.C.), only a few other variables can be used in the regression equation to see and control for their effect. In addition to the state's naturalization rate, we chose to use the percentage of blacks in the state population, whether the state is in the South or not (South coded 1, non-South coded 0), the state median household income, and the percentage of the state's population that is foreign-born. All data come from the American Community Survey, except the percentage voting for Obama, which came from the *Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections* (Leip, 2008).

We note three limitations relevant for understanding the meaning of the naturalization data. First, except for people in the "entered 2000 or later" cohort, we cannot tell from this ACS data set when (i.e., which decade) people became naturalized citizens. Since the ACS tables do not specify the year of naturalization, we cannot determine, for example, the percentages of people in the 1980-1989 entry cohort who naturalized in the 1980s, 1990s, or the 2000s, and, therefore, we cannot link changes in naturalization rates to specific political or economic events (e.g., IRCA, California's Proposition 187, or other anti-immigrant laws).

Second, although the ACS data are organized by state of residence, this does not mean that all the naturalized citizens residing in a given state when they were surveyed by the ACS did their naturalization while living in that state. Some (an unknown percentage) were naturalized in other states and subsequently moved to the state where they were surveyed in the 2006-2008 ACS. This means, for example, that although a higher percentage of Asians in Florida (57.8 percent) are naturalized citizens than of Asians living in Georgia (48.7 percent) and North Carolina (48.0 percent), we should be cautious about assuming that conditions in Florida are especially conducive to encouraging Asians living there to naturalize, since we do not have evidence about how many Asians actually lived in Florida when they decided to start the naturalization process or when they actually completed it.

Third, these data are based on the ACS's sampling design, and for some of the smaller foreign-born regional categories and entry cohorts the standard errors—"margin of error" in ACS terminology—are rather large; so some estimates of the percentage naturalized provided by the ACS are rough and not very accurate.⁴ Therefore, in this

⁴ For example, South Carolina's number of Central Americans who entered the U.S. between 1990 and 1999 and are naturalized U.S. citizens is relatively small (estimated at 668 in the ACS), and these naturalized Central Americans comprise 17.6 percent of South Carolina's Central Americans in that entry cohort. But after taking sampling errors into account by applying the ACS's "margin of error," we see the lack of precision: 90 percent confident that the percent naturalized among Central Americans in South Carolina who entered between 1990 and 1999 is a number between 9.3 percent and 25.8 percent. In contrast, Florida has a much larger population of Central Americans of that same entry cohort (estimated at 87 669). The ACS sample based on them shows 20.9 percent are naturalized U.S. citizens, and a much narrower "margin of error"

article, we emphasize naturalization percentages for foreign-born regional categories and entry cohorts large enough to serve as the basis of relatively more accurate estimates.

Despite these limitations, these ACS data are valuable and appropriate for our research goals. They provide useful estimates of the numbers and percentages of naturalized U.S. citizens in the southeastern states and enable comparisons with other states as well as comparisons of the differences in naturalization rates among groups from different parts of the world. The ability to analyze naturalization rates by entry cohort, which this data source allows, is very valuable since the states and the foreign-born groups studied here vary greatly on this important factor.

We define the Southeast narrowly in this study, limiting it to Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Florida, obviously, is geographically in the Southeast, but its immigration history differs so greatly from other southeastern states that including it with the other four states would distort the picture more than clarify it. Similarly, we found that the northern edge of the South Atlantic census division (Virginia, D.C., Maryland, and Delaware) has a pattern distinct enough that it makes sense to keep it separate in our analysis. As for Alabama and Mississippi, we drop them from the analysis because their numbers of immigrants from most world regions and entry cohorts are small, which generates large standard errors and estimates of dubious value.

FINDINGS

Our findings are presented in the following order: 1) Which southeastern states have the highest and lowest numbers and percentages of naturalized US citizens, and how do they compare with the U.S. as a whole and selected northern and western states?; 2) How do immigrants in the Southeast from different parts of the world compare in numbers and rates of naturalization, and are the same patterns found in other states?; and 3) Is there evidence suggesting that the number or percentage of naturalized citizens affects U.S. politics in an important way?

indicates we can be more confident of it: 90 percent sure that the naturalization rate of Central Americans living in Florida from the 1990-1999 entry cohort is a number between 18.7 percent and 23.1 percent.

NATURALIZATION NUMBERS AND RATES IN SOUTHEASTERN STATES

First, we examined which southeastern states have the highest and lowest numbers and percentages of immigrant U.S. citizens (see Table 1). In terms of numbers of naturalized citizens in the four southeastern states, Georgia has by far the highest number of immigrants who have obtained citizenship (288 180). North Carolina also has a relatively high number (175 751). The number of naturalized citizens, however, is much lower in Tennessee and South Carolina (78 633 and 63 226, respectively). In recent years, Georgia and North Carolina have become popular destinations for immigrants and now have many immigrants who have attained or are seeking U.S. citizenship.

The number of naturalized immigrants in Georgia and North Carolina, however, is dwarfed by the number observed in Florida (1 564 911). Florida, a state with a rich and long immigration history, has more than five times the number of naturalized immigrants than Georgia and more than eight times that of than North Carolina. Also, states on the northern tip of the South Atlantic division, such as Virginia and Maryland, have higher numbers of naturalized citizens than the four southeastern states. The number of naturalized citizens is higher in almost all comparison states in the West, Northeast, and Midwest than in the Southeast. For example, (in descending order) California, New York, Texas, New Jersey, and Illinois all have much higher numbers of naturalized citizens than the Southeast; and while Arizona, Michigan, and Nevada do not surpass Georgia, they do exceed the other three southeastern states.

In terms of the *percentage* of foreign-born residents who have become naturalized citizens, there is less difference among southeastern states than in terms of the number of naturalized immigrants. In the Southeast, the highest naturalization rate for foreign-born residents is in South Carolina and Georgia (33.9 percent and 33.0 percent, respectively). Tennessee has a naturalization rate of 32 percent and North Carolina, 28.2 percent. North Carolina has the lowest percentage of naturalized citizens not only in the Southeast, but among all states we observed. Again, southern states with a longer and different immigration history, such as Florida, Maryland, and Virginia have higher naturalization rates than Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee (46 percent; 45.2 percent; and 43.7 percent, respectively).

A comparison of the Southeast in terms of naturalization rates with states in the West, Northeast, and Midwest yields a slightly more complicated picture than comparing the numbers of immigrants who have obtained citizenship. States with a long history of hosting European and Asian immigrants, such as New York, New

Table 1
NUMBER OF NATURALIZED U.S. CITIZENS AND PERCENTAGES
OF FOREIGN-BORN WHO ARE NATURALIZED U.S. CITIZENS (NATURALIZATION RATES)
FOR SELECTED GROUPS IN THE SOUTHEAST AND OTHER STATES (2006-2008)

	Total	Asian	European	Caribbean	Mexican	Central Am.	South Am.	Other
U.S. Total								
#	16 028 758	5 781 156	2 999 702	1 822 960	2 509 324	810 282	1 072 537	1 032 797
Rate (percent)	42.5	57.1	60.2	54.0	21.9	30.0	42.0	42.0
Georgia	288 180	104 856	43 516	43 088	26 466	13 209	20,028	37 017
	33.0	48.9	48.2	58.6	9.7	18.0	34.5	40.7
North Carolina	175 751	61 892	37 947	12 038	18 382	12 904	12 830	19 758
	28.2	48.0	52.0	50.2	7.5	20.4	37.4	36.9
South Carolina	63 226	21 296	19 379	4 100	5 203	2 718	4 844	5 686
	33.9	52.5	51.0	57.4	8.9	19.3	35.3	39.3
Tennessee	78 633	33 438	18 448	3 739	6 884	3 850	2 725	9 549
	32.0	48.0	54.9	52.0	8.9	17.8	33.7	33.4
Florida	1 564 911	191 522	222,494	704 283	42,470	101 629	226 900	75 613
	46.0	57.8	58.3	53.6	14.6	32.1	38.5	42.2
Virginia	342 919	180 305	50 967	14 849	8 481	26 760	26 558	34 999
	43.7	57.3	51.9	55.5	14.9	21.5	35.5	39.8
Maryland	312 449	129 142	54 248	31 546	4 967	24 172	21 868	46 476
	45.2	56.8	60.2	54.5	15.0	22.2	41.8	38.2
New York	2 187 819	585 897	552 809	562 516	26 123	83 196	286 051	91 227
	51.9	54.2	66.3	54.6	11.2	35.0	49.3	41.3
New Jersey	853 898	285 416	214 885	145 572	12 276	31 242	117 384	47 123
	49.8	54.9	66.6	56.3	10.4	26.8	41.3	49.2
Illinois	780 703	254 932	246 383	17 851	188 237	20 153	25 218	27 929
	44.3	58.3	60.0	66.9	26.3	40.6	45.9	40.3
Michigan	284 808	131 122	90 890	5 447	16 800	3 494	5 715	31 340
	47.9	51.9	60.2	48.6	19.7	26.9	50.4	44.5
California	4 317 495	2 123 054	411 665	46 492	1 138 693	290 801	125 799	180 991
	43.8	63.0	60.7	67.9	26.3	35.7	51.1	51.3
Arizona	284 472	67 074	54 292	4 012	121 673	8 343	8 947	20 131
	30.1	54.2	60.2	45.2	19.7	28.3	52.7	34.5
Nevada	180 151	71 910	24 298	7 386	47 487	11 462	6 354	11 254
	37.2	60.3	55.8	50.8	20.6	30.4	47.1	43.5
Texas	1 173 139	340,753	85 919	28 510	540 753	71 670	39 709	65 825
	31.0	54.3	51.0	54.0	22.9	23.8	36.8	39.3

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey (ACS), table B05007.

Jersey, Illinois, Michigan, and California have much higher naturalization rates than the Southeast (with naturalization rates ranging from 43.8 percent in California to 51.9 percent in New York). Arizona and Texas, however, have total naturalization rates similar to those in the Southeast (around 30-31 percent). These relatively low naturalization rates might partly be due to the proximity of Texas and Arizona to the Mexican border, the easy reversibility of migration, and possibly a larger percentage of undocumented migrants in the Southwest who are not eligible for citizenship. However, the similar total naturalization rates of southwestern and southeastern states conceal remarkable differences in the naturalization rates of different groups within these regions. For example, Mexicans and Central Americans have higher rates of naturalization in Texas and Arizona, as do South Americans in Arizona, than in the four southeastern states; this is most likely because these groups have been present for a longer period of time in the Southwest than the Southeast.

The naturalization rates (i.e., percentage of foreign-born that have become naturalized U.S. citizens) mentioned here should not be confused with the percentage of a state's total population made up of naturalized citizens. In Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee naturalized foreign-born U.S. citizens are still a tiny fraction of the state's total population: 3.0 percent, 1.9 percent, 1.4 percent, and 1.3 percent, respectively. In contrast, they comprise 8.7 percent of Florida's total population, 5.6 percent in Maryland, 4.5 percent in Virginia, and larger percentages in many northern and western states (e.g., 11.9 percent in California, 11.3 percent in New York, 9.9 percent in New Jersey, and 9.5 percent in Hawaii).

NATURALIZATION NUMBERS AND RATES FOR DIFFERENT IMMIGRANT GROUPS IN THE SOUTHEAST

Naturalization Numbers

Given the greater attention the media and many researchers place on Mexican rather than Asian immigrants, our results may surprise people. As table 1 shows, in Georgia, Asians have by far the largest number of naturalized U.S. citizens (104 856), even though considerably more foreign-born Mexicans than Asians live in the state. In fact, Asian naturalized citizens in Georgia are more than twice as numerous as each of Georgia's next largest groups of naturalized citizens (Europeans, Caribbeans, and Others). Mexicans, South Americans, and Central Americans make up Georgia's smallest number of naturalized citizens, and even when added together, they are much fewer in number than Georgia's naturalized Asian immigrants. A

slightly different rank order exists in North Carolina and Tennessee (Asians, Europeans, Others, and Mexicans); while in South Carolina, Asians and Europeans are about equal in number and together comprise almost 65 percent of South Carolina's naturalized citizens, with the remainder split equally among the remaining regional categories.

These four southeastern states contrast much more sharply with Florida, home to more than 700 000 naturalized immigrants from Caribbean countries, more than triple the number of the next two largest groups: South Americans (226 900) and Europeans (222 494). Whereas in Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee, Asians were the largest set of naturalized citizens, in Florida, Asians are fourth largest, followed by Central Americans, Others, and Mexicans.

Asian naturalized citizens also numerically predominate by a wide margin in the upper southern states of Virginia (180 305) and Maryland (129 142). European naturalized citizens are a distant second in these states, but what is perhaps most distinctive about Virginia and Maryland is that the "Others" are the third largest number of naturalized citizens, probably due to the large, well-established African immigrant communities in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. The lower numbers of naturalized Mexican and Caribbean immigrants also distinguishes Virginia and Maryland from Georgia.

In numbers of naturalized U.S. citizens from different parts of the world, northern and western states differ from southeastern states mainly in that Asians are not as predominant numerically. As Table 1 shows, in New York, New Jersey, and Illinois, naturalized Europeans are almost as numerous as Asians; in Texas and Arizona naturalized Mexicans outnumber naturalized Asians.

Naturalization Rates

How do immigrants from different parts of the world and currently residing in southeastern states compare in their rates of naturalization? In Georgia, we find a surprising answer to this question (Table 1, bold numbers): foreign-born residents from Caribbean countries have Georgia's highest naturalization rate (58.6 percent). Georgia's immigrants from Asia (48.9 percent) and Europe (48.2 percent) are next highest, while immigrants from South America (34.5 percent), Central America (18.0 percent), and Mexico (9.7 percent) have the lowest naturalization rates. In Georgia, foreign-born from "Other" countries are in the middle of the distribution, with a naturalization rate of 40.7 percent. The relative uniqueness of Caribbeans in Georgia is evident in Table 1, which shows that among Caribbeans, the percentage

naturalized in Georgia is higher than the U.S. as a whole and almost all other states in the table. In South Carolina, like Georgia, Caribbean immigrants have the highest naturalization rate, followed by Asians and Europeans; but North Carolina, Tennessee, Florida, Maryland, and Virginia all differ, with either immigrants from Europe or Asia having the highest naturalization rates.

As expected, Mexican immigrants have very low naturalization rates in Georgia (9.7 percent) and other states in the Southeast (all under 10 percent). All other states in Table 1 (and the U.S. as a whole) show Mexicans with the lowest naturalization rates, albeit their rates do run higher in states outside the Southeast (especially California, Illinois, and Texas). Central Americans have the next lowest naturalization rates (ranging from about 18 percent to 20 percent in the Southeast), while South Americans and “Other” immigrants’ rates are typically close to each other, but well above those of Mexicans and Central Americans.

In sum, we find Georgia and the other southeastern states have relatively low rates of naturalization for most immigrant groups, except for Caribbean immigrants (especially in Georgia and South Carolina, where they are above average) and “Other” immigrants. This result is not unexpected, given that immigrants in the South tend to have entered the U.S. more recently than those in other regions, and since little or no tradition exists of recruiting immigrants into, or mobilizing them for, political processes.

Of course, the percentage of an immigrant group that naturalizes is strongly affected by how long the group’s members have lived in the U.S. One reason Mexicans’ and Central Americans’ naturalization rates are so low is that relatively large percentages of them have entered the country since 2000. For example, in Georgia 47.9 percent of Mexicans and 44.8 percent of Central Americans came to the U.S. in 2000 or more recently, compared to 17.7 percent of Caribbeans and 26.2 percent of Europeans (see Table 2), and this most recent entry cohort has by far the lowest rate of naturalization for all groups (shown in Table 2, italicized numbers). By using the statistical standardization procedure described above, we compare groups’ naturalization rates controlling for their differences in percentages in each entry cohort.

Results of the standardization procedure, shown in Table 3, lead to reinterpretation of some Table 1 findings described above. For instance, after standardization, North Carolina no longer has the lowest naturalization rate; Arizona and Texas do. Also, the northern states, as well as border states like Maryland and Virginia, still have higher naturalization rates than the southeastern states, but results in Table 3 show that this differential is not as large after controlling for differences in size of entry cohorts. Taking the nation as a whole, entry cohort standardization reveals that Europeans rank highest on percent naturalized in Table 1 because they have more

Table 2
PERCENTAGES OF IMMIGRANTS IN EACH ENTRY COHORT (UPPER NUMBER)
AND PERCENTAGE OF IMMIGRANTS IN ENTRY COHORTS WHO ARE NATURALIZED
U.S. CITIZENS (LOWER NUMBER, IN ITALICS) (BY STATE)
Cohorts of Entry into the U.S.

Region of Birth	Since 2000	1990-1999	1980-1989	Before 1980
Georgia				
Asia	29.9 <i>11.7</i>	34.0 <i>49.0</i>	21.5 <i>74.0</i>	14.6 <i>88.4</i>
Europe	26.2 <i>14.2</i>	32.0 <i>45.0</i>	12.6 <i>58.8</i>	29.2 <i>77.7</i>
Caribbean	17.7 <i>14.4</i>	28.5 <i>47.6</i>	26.2 <i>72.5</i>	27.6 <i>84.9</i>
South America	41.6 <i>8.0</i>	29.8 <i>31.7</i>	16.8 <i>71.9</i>	11.9 <i>81.2</i>
Central America	44.8 <i>4.2</i>	31.8 <i>15.0</i>	16.3 <i>37.6</i>	7.1 <i>73.8</i>
Mexico	47.9 <i>3.1</i>	36.7 <i>9.2</i>	11.8 <i>28.8</i>	3.7 <i>39.0</i>
Other countries	38.2 <i>13.1</i>	35.5 <i>50.1</i>	15.0 <i>66.6</i>	11.3 <i>69.6</i>
Florida				
Asia	27.9 <i>12.7</i>	27.6 <i>57.7</i>	21.5 <i>80.6</i>	23.0 <i>91.5</i>
Europe	19.8 <i>11.1</i>	20.8 <i>44.0</i>	12.1 <i>58.6</i>	47.3 <i>84.1</i>
Caribbean	22.1 <i>10.5</i>	25.8 <i>40.0</i>	20.4 <i>64.5</i>	31.7 <i>87.8</i>
South America	37.8 <i>6.9</i>	28.8 <i>35.3</i>	17.9 <i>70.8</i>	15.5 <i>84.2</i>
Central America	30.0 <i>5.0</i>	27.7 <i>20.9</i>	31.3 <i>50.8</i>	11.1 <i>80.2</i>
Mexico	45.7 <i>3.4</i>	2.7 <i>12.9</i>	14.8 <i>35.1</i>	6.8 <i>53.8</i>
Other countries	26.6 <i>7.5</i>	25.9 <i>37.1</i>	15.0 <i>54.0</i>	32.6 <i>69.3</i>
New York				
Asia	26.4 <i>12.0</i>	31.9 <i>52.2</i>	24.7 <i>77.9</i>	16.8 <i>90.4</i>
Europe	15.1 <i>12.1</i>	27.9 <i>62.5</i>	12.5 <i>69.4</i>	44.6 <i>86.3</i>
Caribbean	17.9 <i>16.5</i>	28.1 <i>43.1</i>	26.6 <i>65.2</i>	27.4 <i>81.1</i>
South America	25.7 <i>11.3</i>	29.6 <i>40.5</i>	24.7 <i>71.4</i>	20.1 <i>83.5</i>
Central America	27.1 <i>7.62</i>	29.0 <i>20.7</i>	26.1 <i>49.1</i>	17.9 <i>78.8</i>
Mexico	40.7 <i>2.1</i>	38.0 <i>8.7</i>	16.2 <i>27.4</i>	5.2 <i>50.8</i>
Other countries	34.0 <i>10.8</i>	30.0 <i>41.3</i>	15.3 <i>60.9</i>	20.8 <i>76.7</i>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey (ACS), Table B05007.

Table 3
 STANDARDIZED RATES OF NATURALIZATION IN THE SOUTHEAST AND SELECTED STATES
 TO CONTROL FOR GROUP DIFFERENCES IN LENGTH OF RESIDENCE IN THE U.S.*

	Total	Asian	European	Caribbean	Mexican	Central American	South American	Other
U.S. total	38.7	53.6	48.2	44.7	21.0	29.3	42.1	42.3
Georgia	36.9	48.9	43.6	48.5	16.0	25.2	40.5	45.4
North Carolina	33.2	50.1	42.2	40.0	15.2	28.8	40.9	40.1
South Carolina	35.8	48.8	39.7	51.2	17.1	27.6	41.9	38.4
Tennessee	36.6	48.2	47.3	44.8	17.3	25.4	38.7	39.9
Florida	40.6	54.1	43.2	43.4	20.8	31.2	41.6	36.6
Virginia	44.2	54.4	44.3	49.7	22.5	26.8	38.9	46.8
Maryland	45.2	54.7	50.7	46.4	25.1	27.0	42.3	45.2
New York	45.5	51.3	52.4	45.4	16.9	31.4	44.7	41.5
New Jersey	45.1	53.0	48.8	47.0	17.8	29.1	40.7	49.5
Illinois	40.0	55.5	52.6	52.4	23.8	34.4	43.5	43.7
Michigan	45.6	54.1	48.7	44.2	23.9	31.0	44.8	37.7
California	36.9	55.7	48.0	44.3	21.8	28.8	43.4	44.6
Arizona	29.0	52.7	46.0	37.2	20.9	26.7	48.3	34.2
Nevada	34.3	53.2	43.1	43.6	22.3	29.5	45.2	39.8
Texas	29.2	53.0	42.1	42.4	20.7	26.3	41.1	44.3

* The calculation uses Georgia Asians' percentage distribution in entry cohorts as the standard.

Source: Authors' computations based on U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey (ACS), Table B05007.

people in the pre-1980 entry cohort (43.3 percent, compared to only 19.6 percent of Asians) and fewer in the post-2000 entry cohort (19.2 percent, compared to 27.4 percent for Asians). However, by controlling for differences in entry cohort, the standardization procedure shows that in the U.S. as a whole (and in most states) Asians become naturalized U.S. citizens at a higher rate than Europeans, or than any other group studied here –exceptions include New York, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania, where Asians' and Europeans' naturalization rates are equal after entry cohort standardization. Georgia represents a slight exception to that pattern, in that after taking entry cohort sizes into account, Asians and Caribbeans are tied for the highest naturalization rate (both have standardized naturalization rates of just under 50 percent). In other words, the actual higher percent of naturalized Caribbeans in Georgia (58.6 percent in Table 1) is due to the fact that Georgia's Caribbeans are more concentrated in earlier entry cohorts than Georgia's Asians, not because of a higher proclivity to naturalize.

In contrast, entry cohort standardization does not change the findings for Mexican, Central American, South American, and Other naturalization levels, except to reduce by a small amount the gap between them and Europeans. For the U.S. as a whole, the southeastern states, and most other states, too, the rank order of their percent naturalized is the same, with Mexicans consistently having the lowest rates, usually by 6 to 12 percentage points.

DO NATURALIZED IMMIGRANTS AND/OR NATURALIZATION RATES AFFECT U.S. POLITICS?

The prominence of immigration, especially “illegal immigrants,” as a hot current political issue is obvious at local, state, and national levels. However, the place and roles of immigrant U.S. citizens is a murkier matter, often passed over in public debates or neglected by researchers. In earlier eras people spoke of “the immigrant vote” and linked it to the success of the big urban political machines of bygone days. But today, even as the percentage of immigrants in the U.S. population is almost as high as it was in the heyday of machine politics, does it make sense to speak of “the immigrant vote,” or for that matter, immigrants as a bloc of campaign donors, supporters, or activists? Writing about southern and eastern European immigrants decades ago, Banfield and Wilson (1963: 43) spoke of immigrant and second generation voters not wanting candidates who were “too” Jewish, Polish, or Italian; instead they preferred “candidates who represent the ethnic group but at the same time display the attributes . . . the speech, dress, manner, and public virtues . . . of the upper-class Anglo-Saxon.” Do similar preferences exist currently? Is an “Anglo-Saxon model” still held in high regard, and, if so, does it doom foreign-born U.S. citizens running for office if they too closely resemble the “immigrant/just-off-the-boat” stereotype? Today, is it more analytically astute, or politically practical, to view naturalized immigrants as a subset of larger pan-ethnic or ancestry groups (i.e., Mexican immigrants merge into a larger Latino bloc or Mexican American bloc; immigrant Jews fall into the Jewish American bloc or even larger “white” bloc), or is a view with more nuance needed? What “model” of citizenship involvement (Plotke, 1999; Van Hook, Brown, and Bean, 2006) is appropriate for immigrants (or most frequently chosen by them), and does it differ from that of native-born citizens? These are broad questions about immigrants and U.S. politics that we think ought to be addressed by scholars. However, staying within the bounds of our data in this study, we focus on a narrower but basic question: Do naturalized citizens and/or naturalization rates affect U.S. politics? In this section we present some evidence on that issue,

suggesting that immigrant naturalization rates and naturalized U.S. citizens *do matter*, sometimes in ways that are not obvious.

Immigrants in the U.S. Congress

To what extent have immigrant U.S. citizens made it into the halls of power? Are there any in the U.S. Congress? Everyone knows that Congress has a Black Caucus and a Hispanic Caucus, but is there an Immigrant Caucus? No, there is not; but if one existed, how many people would be eligible for membership? After considerable digging we learned that in the 2008-2010 (111st) Congress, no senators but eight members of the House of Representatives are immigrants.⁵ They are Mazie Hirono (Hawaii; from Japan), Ciro Rodriguez (Texas; from Mexico), Albio Sires (New Jersey; from Cuba), David Wu (Oregon; from Taiwan), Anh “Joseph” Cao (Louisiana; from Vietnam), Lincoln Díaz-Balart (Florida; from Cuba), Peter Hoekstra (Michigan; from the Netherlands), and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (Florida; from Cuba).⁶ Except for the two from Florida none represents a southeastern state. Interestingly, they are evenly split across the two major political parties: the first four are Democrats and the last four are Republicans.

These legislators represent Congressional districts with wide demographic variations. Only Díaz-Balart and Ros-Lehtinen are from majority immigrant districts. Rodriguez represents a majority Mexican-American district, but only 15 percent is immigrant. Sires’s district in New Jersey is about 40 percent immigrant, mainly from several Latin American countries. Cao’s district is over 60 percent black; Hoekstra’s is almost 90 percent white and less than 4 percent foreign-born; while Wu’s district is 80 percent white and 14 percent foreign-born. Hirono’s district in Hawaii is the most diverse: a mix of white, multi-racial, and Filipino or Japanese backgrounds, none of which comprises more than one-third of the district’s population.

As a result of the most recent election (November 2010), the next Congress (for 2011-2012) will have fewer immigrants in the House of Representatives. Cao and Rodriguez were defeated and Hoekstra did not run for re-election in his House dis-

⁵ Many would be considered “1.5 generation” since they were young when they came to the U.S.

⁶ Two voting members of the House, both Democrats representing New York, were born in Puerto Rico (Jose Serrano and Nydia Velazquez), but technically they are not immigrants since people born in Puerto Rico are U.S. citizens by birth (though those living in Puerto Rico lack the full set of rights and privileges people born on the U.S. mainland have). Also, several members of Congress were born “overseas,” but are not immigrants since they were U.S. citizens at birth because one or more of their parents were U.S. citizens living abroad. Finally, a few people born abroad are non-voting members of Congress who represent Puerto Rico or other U.S. overseas territories.

trict (instead he ran as a candidate for Governor of Michigan, but lost in the Republican primary). In addition, in August 2011, Representative Wu resigned from his seat in Congress due to a scandal involving alleged sexual impropriety.

Almost all the foreign-born members of Congress have espoused issues related to immigration. For example, *Ciro Rodriguez* is the vice-chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security, and he has co-sponsored legislation to increase funding for border security (e.g., Operation Stonegarden and H.R. 6080). *Lincoln Díaz-Balart* has played a major role in reintroducing the Dream Act. He has also sponsored the Immigrant Children's Health Act, which calls for health care coverage for immigrant children and pregnant women. Moreover, he has received medals for working on the behalf of Nicaraguan and Colombian immigrants. *Anh Joseph Cao* is a member of the Committee on Homeland Security and an advocate of refugees and affairs of his homeland (Vietnam). *David Wu* worked on legislation for improved status for H-1B visa holders with advanced degrees. *Peter Hoekstra* is a member of the Immigrant Reform Caucus and advocates secure borders, the enforcement of existing law, accountability for breaking immigration laws, and economic justice for hardworking Americans. Most recently, on December 8, 2010, the House of Representatives voted on the Dream Act and it passed by a 216-to-198 vote. In general, Democrats supported this bill and Republicans were against it, but it is interesting to see that three out of four immigrant Republicans in the House (*Cao*, *Ros-Lehtinen*, and *Díaz-Balart*) voted in favor of it (*Hoekstra* voted against). Three out of four immigrant Democrats in the House voted for the Dream Act (*Hirono*, *Rodriguez*, *Sires*), while one (*Wu*) did not cast a vote on it.

Electing Obama

There is good reason to be skeptical about the existence of "the immigrant vote," especially if it is thought of as a monolithic voting bloc aligned with a particular candidate or party. *Plotke* (1999: 295) characterizes naturalized citizens as "centrist and mildly pro-Democratic" and says they do not vote at high rates and are not united by common political views. The even split between Democratic and Republican immigrant members of Congress and *Portes and Rumbaut's* (2006) discussion of the very different political leanings of Mexican and Cuban immigrants show that immigrant political orientations vary along dimensions of region, socioeconomic level, degree of assimilation, and other factors. We also realize that naturalized foreign-born U.S. citizens comprise a small percentage of the U.S. population (5.3 percent, and less than that in the Southeast), and the percentage that is registered to

Table 4
 MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF PERCENTAGE OF STATE VOTERS CHOOSING
 BARACK OBAMA IN THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL RACE

Correlations	Percent for Obama	Naturalization rate	Percent black	South or non-South	State median household income
Percent voting for Obama					
Naturalization rate ¹	.412**				
Percent black in state	.244*	-.203			
South or non-South ²	-.177	-.350**	.700**		
Median household income	.508**	.420**	-.080	-.352**	
Percent foreign-born in state	.491**	.150	.054	-.140	.611**

1-tailed significance tests: * < .05 level; ** < .01 level

¹ Naturalization rate = Percent of foreign-born residents in each state who are naturalized U.S. citizens.

² Southern states are coded 1; all other states are coded 0.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey (ACS) and Leip (2008).

MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS FOR PERCENT
 IN EACH STATE THAT VOTED FOR BARACK OBAMA

Variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	b (unstandardized) coefficient	B (standardized) coefficient	b (unstandardized) coefficient	B (standardized) coefficient
Naturalization rate	.382*	.268	.433*	.303
Percent black	.590**	.599	.563**	.573
South	-9.213*	-.395	-9.134*	-.392
Household income	.403*	.304	.142	.107
Percent foreign-born			.544*	.296
Constant	11.473		18.584	
Adjusted R ²	.435		.481	

Note: Variables defined as above, except median household income is scaled in thousands of dollars.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey (ACS) and Leip (2008).

vote or actually votes is even smaller. Nevertheless, we were curious to see whether a state's percentage of naturalized immigrants was related in any way to the outcome of the 2008 presidential election. We expected to find, at best, a weak relationship—probably statistically insignificant—and therefore were surprised by the results, presented in Table 4 and described below.

The percentage of the foreign-born population in a state who are naturalized U.S. citizens has a significant positive correlation with the overall percentage of votes cast for Barack Obama in the state (Pearson's $r = .41$, probability = .003). In other words, the higher the naturalization rate, the more the state leaned toward President Obama. One must be cautious in interpreting ecological correlations of this type (Robinson, 1950); it does not necessarily mean that immigrants voted disproportionately for Obama, since another variable might be the underlying cause of this statistical result, thereby rendering the observed correlation spurious. An obvious variable to consider is the size of a state's black population. Since blacks voted overwhelmingly for Obama, if they comprise a large portion of a state's population and if naturalized immigrants tend to live in greater numbers in states with large black populations, this might explain away our observed positive correlation between the naturalization rate and the overall percent voting for Obama. We tested this by controlling for states' percentage of blacks; however, even with percent black controlled, the correlation between states' naturalization rate and states' voters preferring Obama remains significant, in fact it gets stronger (partial $r = .49$, $p < .000$).

Multiple regression analysis is a more efficient method of determining whether the naturalization rate's relationship with the percentage voting for Obama remains significant after taking into account the influence of other variables. The results shown in Table 4 indicate that the general trend of higher levels of support for Obama persist even after controlling for percent black, for whether the state is located in the South, and for the household income level in the state (model 1). The regression analysis indicates that all four independent variables are significant and that states' percent black has the strongest effect on the size of the vote for Obama. In addition, being located in the South is associated with having a lower vote for Obama, while both the percentage of foreign-born who have been naturalized and the median household income in the state are related to higher percentages of votes for Obama. Together these variables explain 43.5 percent of the variation in states' percentage voting for Obama.

Model 2, in Table 4, takes it one step further, by adding an additional variable: percentage of each state that is foreign-born. Doing this tests whether it is actually the size of the foreign-born population in a state, rather than the percentage of the foreign-born that has been naturalized, that affected the percentage of votes cast for

Obama. The results show that percent foreign-born and the naturalization rate each have significant independent effects on the size of the Obama vote: the higher the percent foreign-born and the higher the naturalization rate, the larger the vote for Obama. Interestingly, adding the percent foreign-born to the multiple regression analysis causes the median household income to become an insignificant variable (due to the fact that the correlation between percent foreign-born and states' median household income is strong [$r = .61$]). Thus, the data suggest that Barack Obama did better in states with higher percentages of naturalized immigrants, and this outcome is not due to chance nor is it a spurious result produced by one of the other variables included in the regression analysis.

The intriguing question is how to explain this relationship. What political and sociological reasons or processes account for Obama doing better in 2008 in states that have higher rates of naturalization?⁷ Since this outcome is unlikely to be due solely to the voting patterns of naturalized immigrants, a broader explanation is needed. Our explanation suggests a larger significance of immigrant citizens' role in U.S. politics.

As we explored the relationship between states' naturalization rates and percentage voting for Obama, two aspects of it became apparent. First, in states with very low pro-Obama results (e.g., Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, Texas, Utah, or Idaho), not only was the percent naturalized low, but the foreign-born in these states were largely from Mexico. In many people's minds, this puts these immigrants in a racially subordinate or suspect category and contributes to a climate in which a rhetoric regarding "bad immigrants" (i.e., who enter illegally, engage in crime, use too many public services, or do not want to adopt "American culture") runs high in these states.

Second –and in sharp contrast– states with high pro-Obama results fell into two categories. One consists of generally liberal states in which the naturalization rate is high, but immigrants are only a tiny portion of the state population and *not* predominantly Mexican (e.g., Vermont, Maine, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin). In this case, current immigration does not represent to most people a serious social or economic threat, and the relatively small numbers of immigrants in these states (most of whom have naturalized) probably represent, or are perceived in the public's mind as, "good immigrants" (those who successfully assimilated and became incorporated into the civic culture and political community). The other set of states with high pro-Obama results are those with large immigrant populations and a

⁷ It will be interesting to see if there is any relationship between states' naturalization rates and voting results for candidates in the recent 2010 mid-term elections, in which Republicans were more successful than Democrats.

high percentage of naturalized foreign-born residents (e.g., Hawaii, New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Illinois, and California). These are states with strong Democratic Parties and a history of intense political competition among immigrant groups coupled with a tradition of reaching out to diminish inter-group conflict and bringing immigrant voters into a coalition, if only to compete successfully with the opposing political party. In both cases, these experiences of naturalized immigrants contribute to a liberal pluralist narrative regarding immigration (i.e., the United States as a nation of immigrants; immigrants perceived as fitting in and making positive contributions), and a broader mindset emphasizing tolerance and faith in change and diversity. Clearly, Barack Obama, in his 2008 presidential campaign, was able to tap into and expand sentiments of this sort, and he became a very appealing candidate to many people in these states with high naturalization rates. Thus, we suggest that aside from which candidate naturalized immigrants vote for, who they are (i.e., race/ethnicity/nationality), and the degree to which they have moved through the naturalization process contributes something to the general political culture in a state.

Some Anecdotal Evidence

Are the positions that an elected official takes on political issues affected by having a growing number of naturalized foreign-born citizens living in the area he/she represents? Although it is outside the Southeast, the case of Senator Harry Reid (D-Nevada), the current Senate majority leader, suggests that it does. Back in 1993, Senator Reid introduced the Immigration Stabilization Act (which subsequently would not be enacted into law). This bill proposed to reduce legal immigration from 800 000 to 300 000 per year, make it harder to obtain political asylum in the U.S., speed up the deportation process, and end the policy of granting U.S. citizenship to babies of women who were in the U.S. illegally at the time they give birth. Senator Reid stated that illegal aliens were receiving welfare, food stamps, and medical care without paying taxes and said, "Safeguards like welfare and free medical care are in place to boost Americans in need of short-term assistance ... These programs were not meant to entice freeloaders and scam artists from around the world" (Ungar, 1998: 358-359). At that time, Senator Reid certainly did not seem like a political leader sympathetic to immigrants, especially those who entered the U.S. illegally. Today, his stance is much more sympathetic to this constituency. Senator Reid has been a visible supporter of the Dream Act, and in September 2010, as majority leader, he attached the Dream Act as an amendment to a major Department of Defense appropriations bill –though it was defeated.

Some observers see Senator Reid's policy change as an attempt to curry favor among Latinos, who make up about 25 percent of Nevada's population, whereas back in 1990 it was 10.4 percent. Our research indicates that in 1990, foreign-born people constituted just 9.6 percent of Nevada's total population, and naturalized foreign-born U.S. citizens only 3.6 percent. Data from the 2009 ACS show the growth of these numbers: now 19.2 percent of Nevadans are foreign-born, and 7.6 percent of the state's population is naturalized U.S. citizens. Beyond the growing size of the naturalized citizen constituency in his own state, in order to become a national leader in the Democratic Party, Senator Reid probably had to shift his position to accommodate and gain support from other leading Democratic politicians who have taken a more liberal stance on immigration issues to gain immigrant electoral support, or in hopes of attracting them to the Democratic Party in the future.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In summarizing our findings, we note that Georgia has many more naturalized immigrants than North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee; however, both the naturalization rate and the absolute number of naturalized citizens in these four southeastern states are lower than other southern states with large immigrant populations (e.g., Florida, Virginia, and Maryland), as well as states in the North and West that are home to many immigrants. Naturalized immigrants in the Southeast also comprise a very small portion of their respective states' total populations (3 percent in Georgia and less than 2 percent in the other southeastern states). One political implication of these facts may be that naturalized immigrants will have a small impact on political processes and outcomes in the Southeast, and perhaps that immigrants in the Southeast are likely to be people talked about as objects to be "dealt with" rather than active agents making or influencing decisions that affect their own fate. However, we believe that some evidence from our research tells a different story and hints at naturalized immigrants having more than the minimal role implied in the preceding sentence.

For one thing, our findings suggest that the potential political strength of naturalized Asian citizens in the Southeast (and the country as a whole) has been unrecognized or under-estimated by researchers and media observers. For the most part, the "face" of "the immigrant vote," at least in the popular media, has been presented as Mexican or Latino. Yet, in the four Southeastern states we examined, there are 221 482 naturalized Asians compared to only 56 935 naturalized Mexicans, and 130 043 naturalized people from Mexico plus Central and South America. Thus, in

the Southeast, the number of U.S. citizens who are Asian immigrants and registered or eligible to register to vote greatly outnumbers that of Latinos. Perhaps more importantly, the same is true for the United States as a whole: there are almost 1.4 million more naturalized Asian citizens than naturalized citizens from Mexico, Central and South America. Moreover, the rate at which Asians naturalize after being in the U.S. more than ten years is well above that of groups from other parts of the world. Thus, we expect their numbers to increase markedly in the next ten years.

In addition, the internal diversity of Asian immigrants puts them in a somewhat unique position in the U.S. social structure, and generates two kinds of political opportunities. Some immigrant Asian subgroups rank relatively high in socioeconomic status, are residentially dispersed and integrated with other racial/ethnic groups, and fairly well accepted by others, especially whites. These naturalized Asians may have good chances of success in political activities (e.g., elections) since they can appeal to a broad constituency beyond an immigrant base (as Congresspersons Cao, Wu, and Hirono have done). In other places, research (Logan, Stults, and Farley, 2004) shows that Asian residential segregation has increased over the past 20 years (e.g., Gwinnett County in suburban Atlanta and growing “Little Saigons” in California and Boston). In these areas, depending upon how electoral district boundaries are redrawn after reapportionment in 2011, it is likely that one or more districts will have enough voters of Asian background, counting immigrants and second generation, to enable a naturalized Asian candidate to win. With regard to the impact of reapportionment, we also note that naturalized Asians are well represented in states with large population increases since 2000 (e.g., Texas, California, Georgia, and North Carolina) that will receive an additional seat in the House of Representatives and an additional electoral vote in presidential elections, which could perhaps amplify the political voice of naturalized Asian U.S. citizens.

Of course, it would be a mistake to assume that naturalized Asians will form a unified bloc speaking with a single political voice. The interests and concerns of Asian Indian immigrants are likely to be different from those of the Hmong or Vietnamese, to cite one example. Beyond that, the concerns and needs of Asian immigrants may often diverge from those of immigrants of other nationalities, so it is probably unrealistic to predict broad long-term coalitions among them. For instance, Zolniski (2006) shows the conflict of interest between Korean immigrant owners of office-cleaning companies and the Mexican immigrant janitors they employ. Even on immigration-related matters, some Asian groups will differ among themselves and with non-Asians. For instance, some Asians (e.g., from India, Taiwan, or Malaysia) are much more concerned about decisions related to H-1B visas than the wall being constructed on the U.S.-Mexico border, or with ICE arrests at construction sites or day-

labor waiting areas. Some Asian immigrants do not favor the proposed Dream Act or the idea of amnesty for immigrants in the U.S. illegally, viewing it as unfair to those who immigrated legally.⁸ Our point is that a meaningful political role for naturalized Asian U.S. citizens does not necessarily depend solely on being part of a large mass immigrant voting bloc. Their potential political influence can be generated through their growing numbers, particularly in several key large or growing states, but it also rests on the fact that many naturalized Asian immigrants are in economic and educational categories associated with higher levels of political knowledge, efficacy, and participation, and their support and input may be especially valuable in close elections.

In conclusion, in this article we have shown and discussed important differences in naturalization rates among states and regions of the U.S. and among immigrant groups arriving from different parts of the world. Beyond that, we have suggested several ways that naturalized citizens and naturalization rates are affecting U.S. politics: showing the immigrant presence in Congress, analyzing the correlation between states' naturalization rates and the percentage that voted for Barack Obama in 2008, and suggesting the potential political influence naturalized Asian immigrants may have. We believe it is worth examining the 2010 mid-term elections, as well as the 2012 presidential elections and political activity in the years beyond to see whether naturalization rates in a state continue to affect voting patterns, and how the role of immigrants in U.S. politics continues to unfold.

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⁸ As Lou put it, "My [Korean immigrant] mom is trying to sponsor my uncle to come here, and the whole process will take seven years and cost thousands of dollars. I know many immigrants from Asia and Europe who came here . . . and are going through hell trying to become citizens. How is it fair that people who circumvented the system are being put in line in front of people who do it the right way?" (*Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 2010: A17).

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