

**“Today We March, Tomorrow We
Vote”?**

**Immigration Reform & Immigrant
Electoral Incorporation**



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From Immigrant Marchers to Voters

1. [For unauthorized] Legalization (and maybe “guest worker” period)
 2. [For permanent residents and the newly legalized] Naturalization
 3. [For U.S. citizens disengaged from electoral politics, young adults, and the naturalized] Voter registration
 4. [For registered voters] Electoral mobilization and get-out-the-vote
- Each step difficult, let alone putting all together



Based on IRCA (1986 Legalization) Experience

- If Congress were to agree on a legalization program soon and post-IRCA pattern were to repeat (two big ifs)
 - By 2028, 25 percent of the legalized *may* be voting
 - Example – If 10 million legalize,
 - 2.5 million would be voting in 2028
 - Equal to slightly more than 1/3 of the 7 million naturalized citizen voters in the 2004 election



A Pessimistic Story, but Counters Popular Rhetoric

- Trajectories of mobilization
 1. *Short term* – Mobilization of naturalized citizen non-voters in 2006, 2008
 - Focus of bulk of scholarship on immigrant politics
 2. *Medium term* – *New waves of naturalization among eligible permanent residents*
 - Some scholarship, mostly dated at this point
 3. *Long term* – *New opportunities for political socialization of the 1.5 and 2nd generation*
 - New area of scholarship: intergenerational transmission of civic and electoral values



Short-Term: Demographics & Institutions Slow Mobilization

- Barriers to voting
 - Non-U.S. citizenship
 - Composition—age, income, education
 - Rules for participation – particularly registration
 - Low competition for seats
- No reliable *turnout* data for 2006 yet
 - My suspicion – some increase in turnout share among naturalized and young adults, but not a dramatic increase
 - Why?
 - Registration efforts weak
 - Immigrant areas didn't see competitive elections



2008 – Institutional Incentives Greater

- National institutions
 - Competitive presidential primaries in both parties
 - Nevada early in the mix
 - Competitive party primaries in Congressional seats where immigration will be a central point of debate
- Immigrant/ethnic institutions
 - Promised resources for naturalization
 - Need to build on Spring 2006 rallies

But, Paths to Voting Shaped by Similar Limits as U.S. Born

2004 CPS	All Adults	Latinos
U.S.-born		
Registered	72.9%	57.1%
Voted	64.5%	45.5%
Naturalized		
Registered	61.2%	60.0%
Voted	53.7%	52.1%

CPS data self-reported; misreporting may vary between native-born and naturalized



Medium Term – Naturalization of the Eligible

- Naturalization of eligible permanent residents
 - Pool
 - 4.2 million Latino immigrants
 - 3.5 million non-Latino immigrants
 - ? Newly legalized immigrants
- Why so large?
 - Not disinterest – most want to pursue U.S. citizenship
 - Administrative impediments
 - Cost
 - New rights may not overcome bureaucratic costs in the short term for many



Do Immigration Debates Increase Participation Among Naturalized Citizens?

- Naturalized citizens *less* likely to vote
 - Confirms previous scholarship
- Among the Latino naturalized
 - Longer period of naturalized citizenship increases likelihood of voting
 - IRCA legalization and post-1994 – statistically significant *negative* predictors of naturalization
 - Naturalizing for “political” reasons a significant positive predictor
 - Naturalizing to receive benefits not significant
 - Duration no longer significant when reasons for naturalizing added to model



Incorporative Mechanisms Failing Naturalizees

Not a new finding, just new evidence

- Naturalized less likely to have demographic characteristics predicting participation
- Few institutions to politically socialize new immigrants
- Naturalization rewards bureaucratically competent rather than behaviorally engaged



So, in the Medium Term

- Structural barriers to naturalization remain
 - Many eligible and interested immigrants unable to overcome administrative impediments
 - Promised immigrant community resources slow to appear
- Naturalized citizens don't automatically become voters
 - Again, immigrant community investment needed
 - Research needed on costs of barriers to voting



Long-term – Legalization and the 1.5 and 2nd Generation

- Is parental unauthorized status a scarlet letter for their children reducing the likelihood of civic and electoral engagement?
 - Political underclass
- Does parental naturalization see a positive effect on their children's political engagement?
 - Political payoff in the 2nd generation



Findings

Parental immigration status/parental naturalization have an inconsistent impact

1. No effect on community organizational membership
2. Children of unauthorized Mexican immigrant parents *more* likely to be civically engaged
3. Children of naturalized Salvadoran/Guatemalan parents *more* likely to register to vote



Significance

- Unauthorized migration is not a political scarlet letter for the 2nd generation – may increase political engagement
- Immigrant political adaptation potentially pays off in 1.5 and 2nd generation
- Caution – today's unauthorized immigrants (and their children) may be different than those of the 1980s/early 1990s



A “Path to Citizenship” (and Beyond)?

- Naturalization takes time and many eligible immigrants never naturalize
 - Investment needed to increase naturalization rates
 - Research needed on gap between immigrant interest and successful naturalization
- Political motivation matters to ensure connection between naturalization and voting
- Benefit extends into second generation
 - Unauthorized status as an intergenerational resource
 - Importance of participation of teens/young adults in the rallies