# For Love or Money?
# Welfare Reform and Immigrant Naturalization

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*The Welfare Reform Act of 1996 generally restricted immigrants' eligibility for welfare to those who had naturalized. By increasing the salience of naturalization, the law provides a unique opportunity to examine how social and economic contexts of reception influence immigrants' pursuit of citizenship. This paper summarizes instrumental-legal (IL) and social-contextual (SC) theoretical perspectives on the foundations of citizenship and develops hypotheses on how social and economic contexts of immigrant reception after welfare reform influence naturalization behavior. Using General Social Survey (GSS) data and longitudinal data from the Survey of Program Dynamics (SPD) for 1988-2002, the research finds that hypotheses about the influence of the social context of reception, as reflected in state-level favorability of attitudes toward immigrants, are most consistently supported in the data. The results hold important implications for both theories of immigrant incorporation and ideas about what constitutes the most effective policy instruments to enhance the social and economic status of immigrants.*

In 1996, the U.S. Congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), more widely known as the Welfare Reform Act (Blank and Haskins 2001; Espenshade, Baraka and Huber 1997; Weil and Finegold 2002). Among its critical features was the introduction of citizenship as a criterion for receipt of welfare. By citizenship, we mean the legal (i.e., *de jure*) specification of rights, privileges and obligations associated with nation-state membership (Aleinikoff 1990). Such rights and duties are often defined in *political* terms, but also may be extended (or delimited) to include (or exclude) *social* rights and obligations (Bendix 1977; Feldblum 2000; Marshall 1950; Ueda

2001). Because the Welfare Reform Act required most persons who became legal permanent residents after Aug. 22, 1996, to naturalize to become eligible for welfare (Fix and Passel 2002), it severely limited social citizenship, eliminating in most cases and substantially reducing in others, what had been nearly universal immigrant access in the United States to federal means-tested cash and non-cash social services. State governments were allowed to modify these restrictions. Nonetheless, the original legislation strongly signaled that political citizenship – not just legal residency – would henceforth be mandatory for inclusion in social welfare programs, at least at the level of federal funding.

This action significantly narrowed the country's definition of which members of the population could count on certain membership rights, in this case certain social rights (Aleinikoff 2001). Arguably, the last similarly important delimitation occurred in 1928, when legal permanent residents first were barred from voting in presidential elections (Raskin 1993). In addition, administrative wartime restrictions were directed primarily at Japanese-Americans, both legal permanent residents and citizens (Jensen 1988; Reimers 1992 [1985]; Takaki 1989). In the decades after World War II, however, both the geo-strategic aspects of the Cold War and the ever more compelling appeals of the spreading Civil Rights movement to end legal racial discrimination fostered expansion rather than restriction of rights for immigrants (Bean and Bell-Rose 1999; Morris 1985). These tendencies eventually found further expression in the judicial system. In 1971, for example, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that "alienage" was a "suspect classification," that is, "that statutes disadvantaging aliens as a class are held invalid unless justified by some compelling state interest." (Rosberg 1977) This led to other judicial decisions declaring that states may not deny to legal permanent residents welfare benefits [Graham v. Richardson, 403 U.S. 365 (1971)], civil service employment [Sugarman v. Dougall, 413 U.S. 634 (1973)], access to the bar [in re: Griffiths, 413 U.S. 717 (1973)], financial assistance for higher education [Nyquist v. Mauclet, 97 S. Ct. 2120 (1977)] or licenses to practice civil engineering [Examining Bd. v. Flores de Otero, 426 U.S. 572 (1976)].

Such decisions illustrate that naturalization often increases access to tangible and intangible resources. While this is self-evident in the case of economic resources (e.g., naturalization entails eligibility for many kinds of employment unavailable to non-citizens [Bratsberg, Ragan and Nasir 2002]), it is also true for social resources (e.g., naturalization may generate new social networks, as well as increase access to old ones). Wider social contacts not only foster greater familiarity with employment opportunities, they also strengthen social integration more broadly (Bloemraad 2002; Granovetter 1973). However, immigrants' motivations to seek naturalization for social benefits also seem likely to depend on how warmly immigrants are welcomed at new destinations. If immigrants face unfavorable social receptions, the social benefits of naturalization are likely to seem remote, or even non-existent. By contrast, if immigrants experience warm, favorable receptions, social benefits are likely to appear attractive and attainable. Thus, just as destination contexts of reception that offer greater tangible economic benefits may increase the possibility of naturalization, so too

may social contexts of reception that consist of more positive and supportive attitudes toward immigrants influence the pursuit of naturalization.

The benefits from naturalization in turn facilitate economic and social incorporation among immigrants (Gerstle and Mollenkopf 2001; Morawska 2003). Such possibilities further underscore naturalization's importance. In the case of the Welfare Reform Act, passage drew attention to the significance of naturalization by making welfare eligibility conditional on political citizenship. The law's implementation also introduced elements of uncertainty and ambiguity that heightened naturalization's salience even further. After 1996, state governments were allowed to extend immigrant benefits at their own expense; some did, to varying degrees. Also, Congress itself subsequently restored some benefits to certain legal permanent residents (Fix and Zimmermann 2001). While many non-citizen immigrants thus faced the withdrawal of benefits, others became confused and uncertain about which benefits were being restored and which were not (Gilbertson and Singer 2003), outcomes likely to have underscored the importance of naturalization. The 1996 Welfare Reform Act thus provides a propitious opportunity to examine how state-level contextual aspects of immigrant reception influence the tendency to naturalize. The present research investigates how the legislation by itself and in combination with state-level differences, both in attitudes toward immigrants and in welfare benefit levels, affected the probability of naturalization among immigrants after 1996.

## Theories About the Pursuit of Naturalization

In the United States, to be eligible to become a naturalized citizen, a migrant must be at least 18 years old, a legal permanent resident and a resident of the country for at least five years (Woodrow-Lafield et al. 2001). Immigrants must also demonstrate the ability to speak, read and write English, pass a test on U.S. government and history, and be of good moral character (for example, not have been convicted of a felony). A few legal permanent residents are exempt from some of these requirements. For example, the spouses of U.S. citizens, children of naturalized citizens face only a three-year residency requirement and military personnel may naturalize after only one year of active duty. In addition, minor children of legal permanent residents may become citizens when their parents naturalize (Woodrow-Lafield 2004). Independent of such legal restrictions, naturalization rates vary considerably across groups and over time. For example, Mexicans and Canadians have been less likely to naturalize (Jasso and Rosenzweig 1990), although naturalization rates among Mexicans appear to have increased somewhat during the 1990s (Balistreri and Van Hook 2002). Those who naturalize also tend to possess characteristics that suggest they may be more invested in the United States economy (e.g., homeowners, self-employed workers) and less likely to emigrate (e.g., they come from countries that they may be less likely to return to because of distance, low GNP per capita and low literacy rates) (Barken and Khokhlov 1980; Beijbom 1971; Bernard 1936; Jasso and Rosenzweig 1986; Yang 1994). Family status is important in that those with children are more likely to naturalize (Liang 1994b;

Yang 1994). Finally, naturalization varies with age at immigration (Yang [1994] finds a convex curvilinear relationship) and gender in that women are more likely to naturalize (Jasso and Rosenzweig 1986; Yang 1994).

Theoretically we may distinguish two major, complementary views about the foundations of citizenship and the factors that may influence the pursuit of naturalization. One perspective tends to see citizenship as involving distinctly political-economic rights (Ong 1999), with the most prominent political right being the right to vote and the major economic right being access to certain employment opportunities (Aleinikoff 2001). Those who become citizens will be able to vote and to pursue new job possibilities; in turn, they are expected to embrace largely uniform national identifications (Aleinikoff 2003; Schuck 1998). This perspective on U.S. citizenship, which we term the instrumental-legalistic (IL) view, envisions immigrants individually and quite explicitly naturalizing for political and economic reasons. From this vantage point, variations in naturalization across groups and over time are explained predominately within the framework of rational-choice models (DeVoretz and Pivnenko 2004; 2005; Jasso and Rosenzweig 1990), with such models assuming that the decision to naturalize derives from weighing the benefits vs. the costs of becoming a citizen.

What are some of the major costs? One is the loss of citizenship in the country of origin (when dual citizenship is not permitted). Loss of citizenship in the country of origin can reduce or eliminate access to public benefits (such as retirement funds, public health care or welfare), restrict travel and close off employment options in the country of origin. Therefore, those coming from high-income countries that (1) do not permit dual citizenship and (2) offer generous public benefits or lucrative employment opportunities only to citizens are less likely to naturalize than those from other countries. Other costs include those incurred in the process of acquiring citizenship (such as bureaucratic hassles, fees and time spent improving language skills, and knowledge to pass English and civics tests), so those with low income and from non-English speaking countries are less likely to naturalize. The major benefits of naturalization include access to more jobs (because many government, defense and other jobs require U.S. citizenship), public assistance (although access to public assistance by non-citizens varies by state), the ability to sponsor relatives for immigration, and the right to vote. Overall, immigrants are more likely to naturalize if they meet the legal criteria (age and residency) and if the benefits of naturalization outweigh the costs of doing so. In short, immigrants are more likely to naturalize if they perceive greater benefits from doing so.

Other ideas suggest different bases for citizenship and reasons for the pursuit of naturalization (Bloemraad 2006; Feldblum 2000). Some of these, including those that focus on the operation of post-nationalist and transnationalist forces, imply a diminishing relevance of national citizenship altogether (Bauböck 1994; Carens 1987; Jacobson 1996; Soysal 1994). However, because it is difficult to imagine any sort of industrial or post-industrial welfare state without markers of state membership (Galloway 2000), we focus not on the irrelevance of citizenship but rather on definitions involving less restrictive criteria for membership (Levitt 2003). Such approaches note the existence of multiple kinds of citizenship and

often the prevalence of transnational, including dual, citizenship (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994; Gilbertson and Singer 2003; Ong 1999; Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt 1999). Because such perspectives see the pursuit of naturalization as depending on social contextual factors that provide material and symbolic benefits of naturalization (Bloemraad 2002, 2006; Liang 1994b; Morawska 2001, 2003), we term this view the social-contextual approach.

Bloemraad (2004, 2006) has developed particularly insightful theories about how state-level institutional supports for immigrant settlement might influence the likelihood of naturalization. Her primary idea is that the tangible support provided to newcomers from institutional and state sources helps to shape immigrant contexts of reception (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Reitz 2003). The availability of such institutional and state programs influences how welcome immigrants feel at arrival, how much settlement help they receive, and how much assistance they can draw upon when learning the skills required for naturalization (e.g., knowledge of civics and English) (Bloemraad 2003). Such factors foster the motivation to apply for citizenship by making immigrants feel welcome and by providing assistance with naturalization. We extend her approach to suggest that the overall favorability of social contexts of reception will positively influence the likelihood of naturalization. Just as the availability of tangible assistance may increase the likelihood of naturalization, so, too, may favorable but intangible attitudes toward immigrants encourage naturalization by signaling that immigrant contributions to new locales are welcomed and valued.

The positive effect of favorability may also depend on immigrants' social and structural integration, which in turn may influence newcomers' incentives to naturalize and their needs to demonstrate commitment to integration through naturalization. Diehl and Blohm (2003), drawing on social psychological theories of social integration (Hechter 1971; Tajfel and Turner 1979), note that peripheral (subordinate) immigrants are more likely to accept the legitimacy of the core (superordinate) group and pursue social and legal integration if they perceive the host society's system of status attainment as open and social mobility possible. In general, then, more favorable attitudes (views more supportive of immigrants) are likely to increase naturalization, although the overall relationship may be curvilinear. So long as support is at least moderate, naturalization offers a way of formalizing (and demonstrating commitment to) membership in the society that is providing expected or ongoing opportunities for economic mobility. It also announces the intention to seek even further opportunities for economic mobility. But immigrants who face the most unfavorable attitudes (e.g., because many members of their group tend to be unauthorized) may perceive themselves as ineligible for mobility and as lacking incentives to embrace membership, so their naturalization tendencies may remain low. Similarly, immigrants who live in states with the most favorable receptions may be the most upwardly mobile and the most easily incorporated economically, thus diminishing any *need* to demonstrate membership. Applying such ideas to naturalization in the United States, we would expect a curvilinear pattern whereby rates of naturalization among immigrants increase as state-level public support of immigrants increases, but then decline in states with the highest levels of support.

In this study, we focus empirical attention on two contextual factors that may affect immigrant naturalization. One involves a key aspect of economic context (the size of the welfare benefit in the state where the immigrant lives) and the other a key aspect of social context (the favorability of attitudes toward immigrants in the state). Based on the above theoretical considerations, we hypothesize that both welfare benefits and favorability of attitudes will positively affect the likelihood of naturalization. Because of the greater salience of naturalization after welfare reform, we further hypothesize that these tendencies will be more pronounced during the post-reform compared to the pre-reform period, especially in states that restored benefits for non-citizens. We also expect the influence on naturalization of favorability of attitudes toward immigrants to diminish as such attitudes become even more favorable because the warmth of immigrant reception may also encourage upward mobility, which in turn may reduce the need to seek membership as a demonstration of worthiness (i.e., thus generating a ceiling effect). Similarly, the positive influence of favorable attitudes on naturalization may reverse in states providing the very highest levels of welfare benefits because the strongest economic safety nets *in combination with favorable attitudes* may be sufficient to eliminate the need to demonstrate worthiness and commitment through naturalization (i.e., such conditions may generate an interaction effect between state welfare benefit level and attitudes).

Some immigrants may be less responsive to their social contexts of reception than others. One such group is refugees fleeing political persecution in their countries of origin. Their settlement in the United States is given high priority and special economic support by the U.S. government (Bloemraad 2006). Because they receive extra governmental settlement assistance at the onset of their time in the country, they are less likely to be affected by vagaries in contexts of reception. Given the nature of the hypotheses we are testing, we thus exclude refugees from our analyses. Another group is migrants from Mexico, who consist mainly of low-education persons who come to the country primarily to work, many intending to return to Mexico after relatively short periods of time (Bean and Stevens 2003). We hypothesize that such labor migrants will be less sensitive to their contexts of reception because they do not have strong expectations of mobility given their low levels of education, their widespread unauthorized status at entry, and their frequent intentions of returning to their countries of origin (Bean, Brown and Rumbaut 2006; Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

## Data and Measures

### Data and Samples

To assess the relationship between changing contexts of immigrant reception and naturalization, we rely on data from the Survey of Program Dynamics (SPD). The SPD is a relatively new data source that was designed and implemented by the U.S. Census Bureau to study the short- and medium-term effects of welfare reform. It offers unique advantages over other data sets for the purposes of this study because it includes information on immigration, welfare and naturalization histories. Perhaps most significant is that the SPD includes data on the year naturalization occurred (Liang 1994a) and thus permits the examination of

naturalization both before and after welfare reform. The study follows a sub-sample of the original respondents of the 1992 and 1993 panels of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) (with oversamples of poor and minority families), first in 1997 with the SPD Bridge Survey (a modified version of the March 1997 CPS), and then annually from 1998 through 2002 with the SPD survey. We exclude children from the analysis because they are not eligible for naturalization apart from their parents. Non-citizens who entered the country or reached age 18 later than 1988 enter the sample in the year they arrived in the country or reached age 18.

We also exclude those originating from countries that have predominantly sent refugees to the United States in the 1970s and 1980s. Even prior to welfare reform, U.S. immigration policy established different eligibility rules for receiving public assistance in the case of persons entering as refugees vs. the case of persons entering as permanent resident aliens. Refugees were (and still are) immediately eligible whereas regular immigrants are not (Gordon 1987; Vialet 1993). We identify as refugees those coming from 11 nations, almost all of whose immigrants to the United States during the 1980s were refugees.[1] Because we estimate non-parametric discrete-time event history models of naturalization, the data are organized into person-year observations, with each individual contributing a person-year for each year they remain at risk of naturalizing, including the year they naturalized. The final analytic sample (excluding Mexicans, refugees and cases with missing values on key variables) includes 969 non-citizen adults age 18+ as of 1988. These individuals contributed 5,957 person years, 4,409 during the pre-reform period (1988-1996), and 1,548 during the post-reform period (1997-2002).

The available data permit the tracking of individuals in the sub-sample for nine to 10 years from 1992/93 to 2002. In addition, because retrospective information was collected, individuals may be tracked starting as early as 1988. Thus, the data enable the examination of naturalization patterns before welfare reform (1988-1996) and after (1997-2002). Even though the SPD offers such unique advantages, it suffers the disadvantage of relatively high attrition rates. However, even large amounts of attrition will not bias results unless cases fall out of the sample in a non-random manner such that attrition is significantly associated with the error term (i.e., associated with both the dependent and key independent variables) (Fitzgerald, Gottschalk and Moffitt 1998). In extensive analyses to detect the presence of attrition bias, we found that attrition in the SPD, while high, is not significantly associated with citizenship status among immigrants. Moreover, because the key independent variables in our analyses – state welfare benefit level and state immigrant receptivity – also do not appear to be associated with attrition, we think it reasonable to conclude that attrition is unlikely to distort our findings significantly.

### *Statistical Models*

We estimate discrete-time hazard models (Allison 1995) to model the probability of naturalization among non-citizens. We use discrete- rather than continuous-time models (such as Cox proportional hazards) because our data lack precise information about the timing of moves into citizenship; we know only whether

a change occurred between interviews (usually conducted at one-year intervals). Also, discrete-time hazard models can easily handle time-varying covariates, right-censorship and left-truncated cases (if start times are known) (Allison 1995; Guo 1993). One potential problem associated with event history methods is left-truncation bias. Our sample is left-truncated because it includes non-citizens who had been living in the United States for many years and thus had been exposed to the "risk" of naturalization prior to their inclusion in the sample. This introduces sample selection bias because ongoing "non-citizen" spells are likely to be of longer duration (shorter non-citizen spells had already ended before the beginning of the observation period because these people had naturalized earlier). To handle this problem, we control for approximate duration of ongoing non-citizen spells (based on the first time the respondent came to the United States to stay), thereby estimating conditional likelihood discrete-time hazard models that condition the likelihood function on the length of the spell. Conditional likelihood models are identical to the standard discrete-time hazard models except that spell duration is measured starting from the beginning of the spell, not from the time the case first enters the sample (Guo 1993).

The naturalization model we estimate is:

$$L_n \left[ P\left(N_{ijt}\right) / \left(1 - P\left(N_{ijt}\right)\right) \right] = \alpha_1 T_{ijt} + \alpha_2 R_t + \alpha_3 A_j + \alpha_4 B_j + \alpha_5 C_j + \alpha_6 X_{ij} + \alpha_7 Z_{ij(t-1)} \quad (1)$$

where $P(N_{ijt})$ indicates the probability of naturalization (1 = naturalized, 0 = non-citizen) for respondent i in state j at year t conditional on being a non-citizen in year t-1. T is the number of years the respondent has lived in the United States and has thus been exposed to the risk of naturalization; R indicates the time period for year t (1 = post-reform, 0 = pre-reform); A is a non-time varying measure of attitudes toward immigrants after welfare reform for non-citizens living in state j; B is the 1997 value of welfare benefits provided to natives living in state j; C is the level of access to benefits that states provided to non-citizens after 1996; X is a vector of non-time-varying control variables (race, ethnicity, gender and country-of-origin grouping); and Z is a vector of time-varying control variables taken from the prior year t-1 (marital status, educational attainment, home ownership and income-to-poverty ratio). The model is estimated on a sample of person-year observations for all non-citizens during the years they report as non-citizen until and including the year they report as naturalized or are censored.

To test whether naturalization probabilities changed differentially by state benefit level or state's attitudes toward immigrants, we add and test the significance of two-way interaction terms:

$$L_n \left[ P\left(N_{ijt}\right) / \left(1 - P\left(N_{ijt}\right)\right) \right] = \alpha_1 T_{ijt} + \alpha_2 R_t + \alpha_3 A_j + \alpha_4 B_j + \alpha_5 C_j +$$
$$\alpha_6 X_{ij} + \alpha_7 Z_{ij(t-1)} + \beta_1 \left(R_t \times A_j\right) + \beta_2 \left(R_t \times B_j\right) + \beta_3 \left(R_t \times C_j\right) \quad (2)$$

Thus, $\alpha_3$ is the effect of living in a favorable-attitude state prior to welfare reform, $\alpha_3 + \beta_1$ is the effect after welfare reform, and $\beta_1$ is the change for those living in favorable attitude states. Similarly, $\alpha_4$ is the effect of state welfare benefit level prior to welfare reform, $\alpha_4 + \beta_2$ is the effect after welfare reform, and $\beta_2$ is the

change. Also $\alpha_5 + \beta_3$ is the effect of living in a state with high access to benefits after reform and $\beta_3$ is the change. Finally, to test whether and how the effect of state attitudes toward immigrants on changes in the probability of naturalization varies by state benefit level, we add and test the significance of a three-way interaction term (while including all underlying two-way terms):

$$L_n \left[ P\left(N_{ijt}\right) / \left(1 - P\left(N_{ijt}\right)\right) \right] = \alpha_1 T_{ijt} + \alpha_2 R_t + \alpha_3 A_j + \alpha_4 B_j + \alpha_5 C_j + \alpha_6 X_{ij} +$$

$$\alpha_7 Z_{ij(t-1)} + \beta_1 \left(R_t \times A_j\right) + \beta_2 \left(R_t \times B_j\right) + \beta_3 \left(R_t \times C_j\right) + \beta_4 \left(R_t \times A_j \times B_j\right) \tag{3}$$

$\beta_4$ is the additional effect of living in a high-benefit, favorable state on post-reform differences in the likelihood of naturalization. Because of the clustered, highly stratified sampling design of the SIPP/SPD (Chakrabarty 1989), we adjust all standard errors and other test statistics to take into account design effects. Because our key independent variables are state-level measures, not individual-level measures, the standard errors for these variables have been adjusted accordingly.

### *Measures*

#### *Nativity/Citizenship*
The SIPP collects information on naturalization status and migration history at the second SIPP interview (four months after the first SIPP interview), and the SPD again collects these data in the Bridge and annual surveys. In addition, the 2001 and 2002 SPD include year of naturalization for those who naturalized. We classify as immigrants those who were born outside the United States and U.S. areas (such as Puerto Rico), and were not born abroad of American parents. Some respondents reported citizenship status in one interview but not in others. For these cases, we make the assumption that citizenship status did not change over time. Other foreign-born respondents reported as naturalized citizens even though they had not been living in the United States long enough to qualify for naturalization (five years in most cases, three years for those with U.S.-born spouses). Following Passel and Clark (1997, 1998), we recode these individuals as non-citizens. We infer the year of naturalization based on the year their citizenship status was observed in the data to have changed from non-citizen to citizen (this is possible because naturalization status is asked at each interview). For those who naturalized prior to the first interview in 1992/1993, we use reported year of naturalization to estimate the timing of changes in citizenship status. Thirty percent of this group did not report year of naturalization. For this group, year of naturalization was approximated as the mid-point between 1992 and the year the respondent had been in the United States for at least five years. Because the year of naturalization was imputed to be earlier than 1988 for most members of this latter group (81 percent), the vast majority of those with imputed year of naturalization were eventually dropped from the analytical sample for the naturalization models, which was restricted to non-citizens who naturalized in 1988 or later and those who never naturalized.

**Table 1: Descriptives for Analytic Sample**

|  | Mean or Percentage | SD[1] |
|---|---|---|
| Naturalized in Year t (%) | 5.8 | — |
| Immigrant Receptivity (z-score form: -1.7, 4.9) | .17 | 1.03 |
| State Welfare Benefit Level (z-score form: -1.7, 1.9) | .08 | .90 |
| Non-citizen Welfare Access (0,1) | .73 | .30 |
| Pre-Reform: 1987-1996 (%) | 73.3 | — |
| Post-Reform: 1997-2001 (%) | 26.7 | — |
| Proportion of Naturalization Applications Completed in 1 year (.4, .7) | .52 | .10 |
| Years in U.S. (0, 90) | 14.60 | 11.12 |
| Age 18-29 (%) | 18.4 | — |
| Age 30-44 (%) | 44.2 | — |
| Age 45-64 (%) | 29.5 | — |
| Age 65+ (%) | 7.9 | — |
| Non-Hispanic White (%) | 28.2 | — |
| Asian (%) | 31.6 | — |
| Hispanic (%) | 32.0 | — |
| Black (%) | 8.2 | — |
| U.S.-born Spouse (%) | 25.3 | — |
| Naturalized Spouse (%) | 12.3 | — |
| Non-citizen Spouse (%) | 31.8 | — |
| Not Married (%) | 30.6 | — |
| Number of Children Age 0-14 in Household (0, 9) | 1.00 | 1.25 |
| Disabled (%) | 4.6 | — |
| Homeowner (%) | 50.8 | — |
| Poor English (%) | 19.6 | — |
| Welfare Recipient Any Time Before 1997 (%) | 32.4 | — |
| 0-8 Years Schooling (%) | 17.3 | — |
| 9-11 Years Schooling (%) | 9.3 | — |
| HS Graduate (%) | 30.5 | — |
| More than HS (%) | 42.9 | — |
| Person-years | 5,957 |  |

Source: 1992-2002 SPD Longitudinal File.
Sample: Person-years from 1988 to 2002 contributed by immigrants who were non-citizens in the prior year. Refugees and those born in Mexico and Central America are excluded (see text for explanation). Range of continuous variables given in parentheses.
[1]Standard deviations provided only for continuous variables.

*State Welfare Policy*

We also examine the influence of state welfare benefit level on naturalization. State-level information on welfare benefits was obtained from the New Federalism state database available from the Urban Institute. We developed a standardized measure of state benefit level based on both the 1997 SSI state supplement available to couples living independently with no other income other than federal SSI, and the 1997 AFDC/TANF benefit paid to a single, non-working parent with two children. Since the SSI and TANF benefits run on different scales, we first created standardized scores for state SSI and TANF benefit levels. We then averaged the two z-scores, yielding a score ranging approximately from -1.7 to 1.7, with average states falling close to zero. We treat state benefit level as non-time varying, because the amounts states paid to welfare recipients rarely changed during the 1990s.

To measure the extent to which states make their safety nets available to immigrants during the post-reform period, we use the "Safety Net" scale created by Zimmermann and Tumlin (1999), which we refer to here as "access." The scale takes into account 12 separate categories of immigrant eligibility decisions, such as whether the state provides Medicaid or TANF to immigrants entering the United States after August 1996, or whether the state created a food program for immigrants no longer covered by Food Stamps. Points are awarded to states for having programs in each category and deducted for the introduction of certain restrictions to immigrants. The scale ranges from one to four, with states that made their safety nets the most available to immigrants in category 1 and those that placed the most restrictions on immigrants in category 4. A full description of the scale is included in Zimmermann and Tumlin (1999, Appendix B). To aid interpretation of coefficients in the multivariate models, we recoded the variable so that it varies from 0 to 1 (with categories 1, 2, 3 and 4 recoded respectively to 0.00, 0.33, 0.66 and 1.00), and then reverse-coded the scale with higher values indicating greater access to welfare programs for non-citizens following welfare reform.

*Other State Characteristics*

To measure the extent to which state-level attitudes are favorable toward immigrants and immigration, we used a scale developed by De Jong and Tran (2001) and De Jong and Steinmetz (2004) from individual responses of natives to questions about immigrants and immigration in the General Social Survey in the years 1995 through 1997. Because of space constraints, we omit details about the use of the scale in this study but invite inquiries from interested readers. We also control for other state-level factors that could influence the likelihood of naturalization among non-citizens. Some states, as a part of their welfare reform policy, encouraged non-citizen welfare recipients to apply for naturalization so that they then would become eligible for federal public assistance programs. We construct a variable that indicates whether the respondent was living in a state that adopted a naturalization program linked to welfare receipt. State-level information about post-reform naturalization programs was obtained from a state-level database compiled by researchers at the Urban Institute (Zimmerman

1999). Because this variable was highly correlated with the welfare access measure (r = .80), we estimated models with the naturalization program variable both included and excluded. The results were essentially similar in both cases (available from the authors by request), and we include only the latter here. The time between filing an application and taking the oath of citizenship also varies across INS district offices (U.S. General Accounting Office 1997). To control for this variation, we included a measure of the probability that an application for naturalization would be completed in one year. To calculate this probability, for each INS district office we divided the number of applications completed in a given year by the sum of the number completed in that year plus the number of applications that were pending from the previous year. We then averaged the 1996, 1997 and 1998 estimates.

*Other Factors*
We include in our multivariate models controls for socioeconomic status, family composition and other demographic characteristics, most of which are allowed to vary from year to year. Indicators of socioeconomic status and human capital (educational attainment, English proficiency and homeownership) are likely to have direct effects on naturalization (Choi 1992; Coe 1985a, 1985b; Menefee 1981; Moffitt 1992; McGarry 1996; Warlick 1980).

Educational attainment is treated as time-varying and thus may change from year to year. We classify respondents as attaining 0-8 years of education, 9-11 years, a high school diploma, and attending college or more. The SPD 1997 Bridge Survey collected data on English language proficiency. Respondents are asked how well they speak English: Not very well/not at all, Not well, Well, and Very well. Finally, homeownership is important because others have found it to be a significant predictor of naturalization (Yang 1994), and is an indicator of wealth that may be tapped as a substitute for governmental support in times of economic need (Choi 1992; McGarry 1996; Soldo 1988; Tienda 1986). Like educational attainment, homeownership is a time-varying measure that may change from year to year. In addition to socioeconomic status, we include in our models controls for certain socio-demographic factors that are likely to be associated with naturalization and welfare receipt. These include years in the United States (plus a squared term), current spouse's citizenship status, age (18-29, 30-49, 50-64, 65+), gender, disability status, number of children under age 15, and race/ethnicity (Asian, Hispanic, black vs. non-Hispanic white). All except gender and race/ethnicity are treated as time-varying.

## Results

After the passage of welfare reform in 1996, the average annual probability of naturalization for the immigrants included in our analytical sample from the SPD went up by a factor of about five (see Table 2). In interpreting this increase, it must be remembered that although the study follows cohorts of non-citizens over time, it examines annual probabilities of naturalization. Naturalization occurs only once (citizens do not "de-naturalize") and depends

in part on the accumulation of U.S. experience. Thus, some increase in the cumulative *number* of naturalizations over time would be expected on account of these dynamics alone. However, no increase would be expected in the *probability* simply because of the passage of time. Thus, the increase that occurs in the likelihood of naturalization is not caused by duration, and welfare reform appears likely to remain a plausible cause. In other words, the higher probabilities of naturalization in the post-reform period are consistent with the idea that the salience of naturalization increased substantially as a result of the federal legislation that made legal citizenship a condition for obtaining social citizenship (namely eligibility for receipt of social services).

**Table 2: Average Annual Probability of Naturalizing**

| | Pre-reform | Post-reform | Change |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Pre-reform Welfare Receipt** | | | |
| Non-recipient | .030 | .142 | .112* |
| Recipient | .022 | .140 | .118* |
| **Immigrant Receptivity** | | | |
| Unfavorable ($<$ -1.0) | .023 | .082 | .059* |
| Average (-1.0 – 1.0) | .027 | .178 | .151* |
| Favorable ($>$ 1.0) | .034 | .158 | .124* |
| **State Welfare Benefit Level** | | | |
| Low Benefit ($<$ 0) | .035 | .140 | .105* |
| High Benefit ($\leqslant$ 0) | .022 | .143 | .121* |
| **State Welfare Access to Non-citizens** | | | |
| Low Access ($<$ .5) | .051 | .112 | .061* |
| High Access ($\leqslant$ .5) | .023 | .147 | .124* |

Source and Sample: See Table 1.
* change is statistically significant ($p < .05$)

To what extent does this mean that the rise appears to derive from legal permanent residents seeking to become citizens in order to gain eligibility for welfare, as IL theory would predict? A clue in this regard may be obtained by examining the increase in the probability of naturalization among non-welfare recipients compared to recipients (with welfare recipiency measured prior to welfare reform). If the pursuit of naturalization were occurring primarily to obtain welfare, we would expect to see higher increases among welfare recipients after welfare reform than among non-recipients. However, we do not. Instead the increase is the same for both recipients and non-recipients (.117 in the case of recipients vs. .112 in the case of non-recipients, a difference that is not statistically significant, $p = .76$). Rather, the predictions of SC theory are more accurate. For

example, for immigrants living in states with more favorable social contexts of reception toward newcomers (states with attitudinal receptivity scores of 1.0 or higher), the average post-reform annual probability of naturalizing is about .158, as compared to .082 for immigrants living in more unfavorable reception states (with receptivity scores less than -1.0). Moreover, the increase from the pre-reform period is greater for immigrants in favorable (about .125) than unfavorable (0.059) states, suggesting an important role for social context in affecting naturalization. That *social* context may matter is reinforced by the probability of naturalizing actually *not* being greater in high as compared with low benefit states .143 vs. .140), and by the *increases* in the probabilities of naturalizing after welfare reform in high and low benefit states being about the same (and also not significantly different from each other ). Finally, as predicted by SC theory, immigrants are more likely to naturalize in high than low access states (.147 vs. .112 in the post-reform period), and the change over time is significantly greater in high access states (.124 vs. .061).

Such unadjusted figures, however, do not control for the influence of other factors that also affect naturalization, so it is premature at this point to embrace conclusions about the influence of social contextual factors on the explanation of post-reform naturalization tendencies. More definitive evidence requires multivariate models that control for differences in other factors affecting naturalization. To obtain such results, we estimate event history models as described above, and then we evaluate their outcomes by calculating predicted probabilities of naturalization for combinations of values on key independent variables. Odds ratios showing the effects of the control and independent variables are shown in Table 3 for various additive models containing combinations of key independent variables. In the case of the control variables, the direction and magnitude of their influence on naturalization is largely consistent with expectations. Having a naturalized spouse, for example, increases the likelihood of naturalization substantially, as does having more than a high school education. In the case of state welfare benefit level, however, we note that this variable is positively related to the odds of naturalization among immigrants, but the odds ratios are not statistically significant. In the case of social contextual receptivity, however, immigrant attitudinal receptivity is strongly positively related to the likelihood of naturalizing among immigrants, although in a less positive way the higher the level of receptivity, as indicated by the significance of the squared term. Thus, the effects of our measure of social context on the annual probability of naturalizing conform to theoretical expectations, whereas that of the measure of economic context does not, indicating that SC theoretical predictions about socio-cultural factors affecting the pursuit of citizenship seem more accurate than IL predictions.

We also find, as predicted, that the influence of the contextual variables is stronger in the post-reform period than before. Table 4 presents results of tests for the statistical significance of the interaction between time-period and each of the contextual factors. As shown in the last four rows of the table, the interaction effect for the attitudinal receptivity terms is strong. The interaction term involving access determines the effect of states restoring benefits after welfare reform;

**Table 3: Discrete-time Event History Models of Naturalization (Odds Ratios)**

|  | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Immigrant Receptivity | 1.53** | 1.48** | 1.50** |
| Squared | .87** | .89* | .89* |
| State Welfare Benefit Level | 1.01 | — | 1.10 |
| Non-citizen Welfare Access | — | 1.23 | 1.50 |
| Post-Reform Period: 1997-2001 | 7.23*** | 7.24*** | 7.27*** |
| Naturalization Processing Time | .55 | .51 | .55 |
| Years in United States | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Squared | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Age 18-29 | .81 | .82 | .82 |
| Age 30-44 | .75 | .76 | .75 |
| Age 45-64 | .87 | .88 | .88 |
| (Age 65+) | — | — | — |
| Asian | 1.32 | 1.32 | 1.32 |
| Hispanic | 1.06 | 1.08 | 1.09 |
| Black | 1.45 | 1.47 | 1.48 |
| (NH-White) | — | — | — |
| U.S.Born Spouse | .80 | .79 | .80 |
| Naturalized Spouse | 1.65* | 1.64* | 1.65* |
| Non-citizen Spouse | .53** | .53** | .53** |
| (Not Married) | — | — | — |
| N Children Age 0-14 | 1.09 | 1.09 | 1.09 |
| Disabled | 1.23 | 1.23 | 1.22 |
| Homeowner | 1.37* | 1.37* | 1.37* |
| Poor English | .93 | .94 | .94 |
| Welfare Recipient (pre-reform) | 1.12 | 1.13 | 1.13 |
| 0-8 Years of Schooling | .38*** | .38*** | .38*** |
| 9-11 Years of Schooling | .96 | .96 | .96 |
| HS Graduate | .65* | .65* | .65* |
| (More than HS) | — | — | — |
| Person-years | 5,957 | 5,957 | 5,957 |
| Pseudo R-squared | .138 | .139 | .139 |

***p < .001    **p < .01    *p < .05
Source and Sample: See Table 1.

the term involving benefit level determines the effect of variation in state-level benefits after reform. Including both in the equation enables assessment of whether benefit levels add to the explanation of the probability of naturalization beyond simply restoring benefits. As can be seen from the first two models, which include benefit level and state restoration of access separately, each factor positively influences naturalization. Because higher benefits tend to characterize states that restored access (r = .69), however, we are particularly interested in the effect of benefit level when the access term is also included in the model (Model 3). In this case, neither of the interactions is significant. Thus, state variation

**Table 4: Interaction Effects of Time Period**

|  | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Immigrant Receptivity | .97 | .97 | .96 |
| Squared | 1.01 | 1.04 | 1.04 |
| State Welfare Benefit Level | .74* | — | .91 |
| Non-citizen Welfare Access | — | 2.61** | 2.15 |
| Post-Reform Period: 1997-2001 | 7.57*** | 3.08** | 4.50*** |
| x Immigrant Receptivity | 2.15*** | 2.06*** | 2.17*** |
| x Receptivity Squared | .78*** | .75*** | .76*** |
| x State Welfare Benefit Level | 1.68** | — | 1.36 |
| x Non-citizen Welfare Access | — | 4.00** | 2.20 |

***p < .001    **p < .01    *p < .05
Source and Sample: See Table 1.
All models control for socioeconomic and demographic factors (see Table 3 for list of co-variates)

in benefit levels following welfare reform does *not* add to the explanation of the probability of naturalization beyond the influence of states having restored benefits, contrary to the expectations of IL theory.

We evaluate the form of the statistically significant effects by calculating predicted probabilities from models that include the interaction terms and all of the control variables. The results are shown in Figure 1 for the pre-reform and post-reform periods separately and illustrate in graphic form the importance of the social context of attitudinal receptivity in affecting naturalization. That such effects may become less positive as "warmth" increases is hinted at in the downturn of the effect at higher receptivity levels. We also test explicitly for the presence of the interaction between attitudinal receptivity and benefit level after welfare reform by examining the three-way interaction term between time-period, benefit level and receptivity (the latter broken down into low, medium and high categories). Such an effect is not only highly significant as hypothesized, but it also follows the predicted pattern (Figure 2). That is, the highest annual probability of naturalizing occurs in those states with score *combinations* of benefits (scaled 1 and 0 for high and low) *and* attitudinal receptivity (scaled 2, 1 and 0 for high, medium and low) that are moderate (have combined scores that sum to 2 rather than 3, 1 or 0).

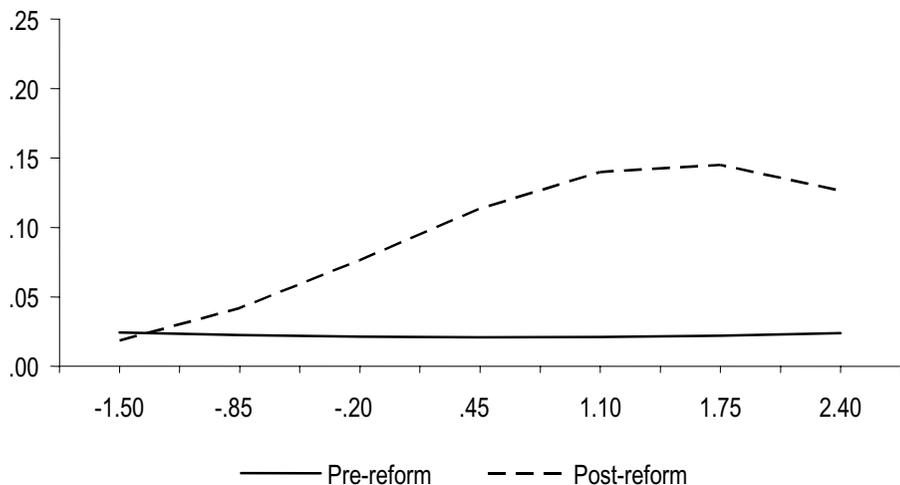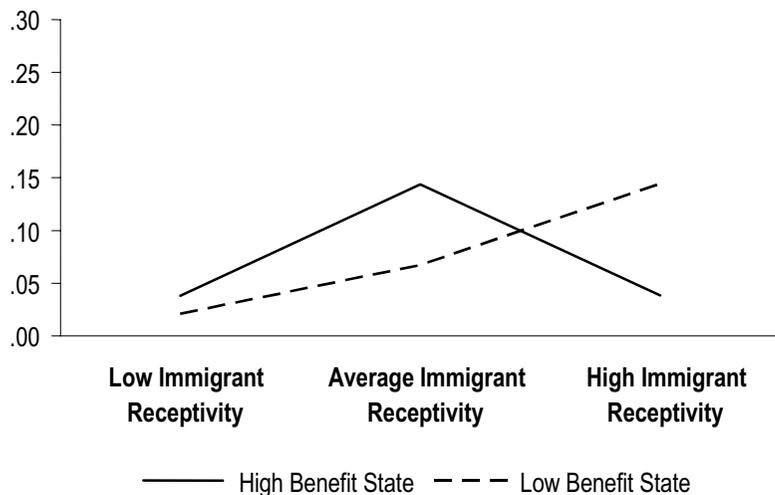**Figure 1. Predicted Probability of Naturalizing by Time Period and State Immigrant Receptivity**



**Figure 2. Predicted Annual Probability of Naturalizing, by Time Period, State Welfare Benefit Level and State Immigrant Receptivity**



Such combinations occur when states have high benefits but moderate receptivity (Connecticut, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York and Rhode Island), or low benefits but high receptivity (Arizona, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Washington). These states have contexts of social and economic reception most likely to foster circumstances favoring naturalization as predicted above by SC theory. Conversely, the lowest probability of naturalization occurs in states with either very low levels of support (low receptivity and low public assistance

benefits: Arkansas, Colorado, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Carolina, South Carolina, Utah, Maine/Vermont, North Dakota and South Dakota), or in states with the greatest levels of support (high receptivity and high public assistance benefits: Illinois and Wisconsin), states where immigrants either possess the fewest incentives to naturalize or the least need to do so to demonstrate worthiness and commitment to their new destinations.

## Summary and Discussion

The present research seeks to take advantage of the changes in citizenship criteria and welfare availability resulting from the 1996 Welfare Reform Act to assess the nature and relative influence of social and economic contexts of immigrant reception on naturalization behavior. The research accomplishes this by deriving predictions about the effects of these contexts on naturalization from two general frameworks about the foundations and nature of citizenship and thus the attendant reasons they imply for the pursuit of naturalization. The findings support the idea that social-contextual factors matter at least as much for naturalization as instrumental-legal ones, in that more support appears in the data for SC than IL theory. That warmer attitudinal contexts of reception most increase naturalization, that naturalization probabilities increase after welfare reform as much among welfare non-recipients as recipients, that benefit levels do not add to the explanation of naturalization beyond what access explains, and that high benefits reduce the need for naturalization only under the condition of warm receptions are all findings that would not be predicted by IL theory. The results of the research thus fall into substantial agreement with ideas that argue the social contexts of immigrant reception are important influences on naturalization behavior (Bloemraad 2006). By extension, such contexts are also likely to increase successful immigrant incorporation, because citizenship makes a considerable difference for full social and economic participation in the society.

In terms of implications for immigration and immigrant policy, the results indicate that decisions such as migration, seeking naturalization and even participating in welfare, can be – and often are – largely motivated by socially based considerations. This involves a different image of immigrants than a view that depicts them as primarily motivated by desires for individual utlilitarian gain. The latter often tends to assume that migration and naturalization result from the possibility of obtaining welfare in the United States. The recommended policy focus that follows from this assumption is one that typically targets immigration rather than settlement policy, suggesting the limitation or curtailment of immigration to keep out immigrants who are thought to be drawn to the country for welfare. The results of the present research, however, imply that naturalization decisions are motivated more by hospitable welcomes than by the possibility of welfare receipt. They thus reinforce the idea that favorable contexts of reception facilitate immigrant naturalization rather than encouraging welfare dependency, thus pointing to the need for policies that facilitate immigrant naturalization. Such policies would seem more likely to constitute effective instruments for boosting immigrant economic status and incorporation than those that simply curtail immigration as a way to deter the admission of persons with lower economic statuses.

## Note

1. These countries are the former Soviet Union, Cuba, Vietnam, Laos, Romania, Iran, Ethiopia, Cambodia, Poland, Afghanistan and Nicaragua. In the case of persons coming during the 1990s, countries from the Balkans are added to this list. This classification strategy is viable because refugees have tended to come from only a relatively small number of countries (Fix and Passel 1994). In addition, countries that send refugees usually do not send large numbers of other legal immigrants. The 11 refugee-sending countries sent almost 90 percent of all refugee arrivals to the United States during the 1980s, and more than 91 percent of those who came were classified refugees (Bean and Stevens 2003).

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