

## THE IMMIGRATION-TO-NATURALIZATION PROJECT: INCEPTION, GUIDELINES, ANALYSES, AND POSSIBILITIES

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The numbers of naturalization applications were unprecedented in the 1990s, with more than five million approvals (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) 1999a, 2000a). Yet the occurrence and timing of naturalization in America have been studied very little for immigrants over four significant decades of sustained increase and heightening heterogeneity of lawful immigration. This article describes a new approach for studying naturalization outcomes for immigrants admitted over fiscal years 1978-1991 using linked administrative records. Although a panel of immigration scholars had anticipated such linked data would become routinely produced within INS as a consequence of developments in automated data processing (Levine, Hill, and Warren 1985, p. 49), naturalization data for recent immigrants were meager when this project began in 1998. This paper describes the background, purpose, structure, and future of this undertaking to establish the Immigration-to-Naturalization Project (INP) as a major resource about naturalization outcomes for immigrants.

### **PRIOR RESEARCH**

The major study about immigrants to America is *The New Chosen People*, by Guillermina Jasso and Mark Rosenzweig (1990). The key data sources are 1980 census data on foreign-born and the INS 1971 Immigrant Cohort Sample, a unique one-percent sample (3,758 cases) of persons admitted to permanent resident alien status between July 1970 and June 1971 and their naturalization status as occurred by February 1981. Among 1971 immigrants, Jasso and Rosenzweig (1990:107-110) reported thirty percent had naturalized in the first decade, noting comparability with earlier immigrants (U.S. Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy 1981).

Jasso and Rosenzweig (1990) sought to identify individual-level and country-level determinants of naturalization. Labor-certified immigrants and certain categories of family-sponsored immigrants, presumably persons having fewer resident family members, were more likely to naturalize during the first decade. They analyzed Eastern vs. Western Hemisphere origins and country-of-origin characteristics, finding Eastern Hemisphere immigrants naturalized at higher levels and those from countries in which English is the official language were more likely to naturalize. A similar resource is the U.S. INS Alien Address Report Program (AARP) 1979 Indochina-born Sample, matched with naturalization records for fiscal years 1979-1985 (Jasso and Rosenzweig

1990). Among refugees of 1971, 1975, and 1978, men naturalized more than women, and Cuban and Vietnamese naturalized at higher levels than Cambodians and Laotians.

Pursuant to recommendations, INS Statistics released two linked records files, the INS 1977 Immigrant-Naturalization Cohort and the INS 1982 Immigrant-Naturalization Cohort, and these have been regularly updated on naturalization outcomes. A third cohort, those admitted in 1989, has been traced for the first eight years of residence by Rytina (2000) who also reported on tracking naturalization for the 1990 and 1991 cohorts, which included even higher numbers of amnestied immigrants than the 1989 cohort. Beginning in 1993, the official INS annual publication, *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, included analyses for the 1977 and 1982 cohorts as to completed naturalization rates by country of birth. More detailed tabulations for completed naturalization rates by class of admission and occupation appeared in the 1996 and 1997 editions of the *Statistical Yearbooks*. The 1971 cohort differed greatly from the 1977 and 1982 cohorts and each of these three cohorts was subject to varying influences in origin countries and within the United States over 1970-2000. Compositional differences between the 1977 and 1982 cohorts could explain earlier and more rapid naturalization among those who entered in 1982, including many more from refugee-sending countries of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia than among 1977 entrants.

Later INS cohort datasets have been utilized for analyses of naturalization for duration intervals (Rytina 1998) and of immigrants' occupational change by naturalization (Jasso and Rosenzweig 1995). The focus of the latter study was contrasting male immigrants from the Eastern Hemisphere, who were employment immigrants or nonimmigrant adjustments and spouses of U.S. citizens. Taking into account selectivity on post-immigration occupational status, those who were more successful were more likely to naturalize eventually than less successful immigrants, regardless of any initial advantage of having employment sponsorship backgrounds. Considering 1977 and 1982 immigrants' naturalization across duration of residence categories, gender, marital status, and origin had little effect (Rytina 1998). However, origin country as English speaking, refugee status, younger, Asian origin, and employment sponsorship, especially professional categories, were more associated with the probability of naturalizing.

These analyses highlight contemporary patterns of naturalization among different origin groups, among class

of admission categories, and among occupational categories based on self-reported occupation and actual occupations in the United States. The complexities are not yet fully portrayed for immigrants' transitions to naturalized citizenship. Certain characteristics at admission appear associated with naturalization because younger immigrants naturalize sooner than older immigrants, refugees and asylees naturalize sooner than others, employment immigrants naturalize sooner than family-sponsored or immediate relatives, and Asian and African immigrants and immigrants from refugee-sending countries show higher naturalization than immigrants from Western Europe, Canada, and Mexico. However, very little research has explored these relationships with multivariate or multicohort strategies. From Jasso and Rosenzweig (1990), the possibilities for "wave effects" are known. Differences in timing of naturalization point to the value of examining intercohort and intracohort variation by origin, demographic characteristics, and admission criteria.

#### **AN EXPANDING RESEARCH FRONTIER ON IMMIGRANTS AND IMMIGRATION**

The poor state of data for studying international migration and, specifically, migration within North America, bears the consequences that assessing the state of knowledge and advancing theoretical frameworks are challenges (Massey et al. 1998). Despite the United States' status as a major receiver of immigrants, data sources for studying immigration are few other than censuses and administrative statistics. However, several promising developments transpired in the past two decades.

Since the Mexican Migration Project (MMP) began in the early 1980s, several analyses have examined Mexico-U.S. migration from some forty communities. The many studies emanating from retrospective surveys about migration between the U.S. and Mexico have delineated migration prevalence across time and communities and increasing demographic diversity of migrants and U.S. settlers (Massey, Goldring and Durand 1994). This approach is being extended to other Latin American countries (LAMP). Major longitudinal surveys now include Latino or Hispanic samples, e.g., the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), or include migration or immigration modules, e.g., the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS), Health and Retirement Survey (HRS), and the Survey of Program Dynamics (SPD). Over 2001-2002, the New Immigrant Survey (NIS) begins amid signs for promising analyses of immigrants' early years as settlers (Jasso, Massey, Rosenzweig, and Smith 1997a, b; 2000a, b). Two other surveys are more specialized—the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey (CILS) in

Miami, Ft. Lauderdale, and San Diego and the New York City Immigrant Study.

Sociological studies have long explored patterns of naturalization as a consequence of human capital, social capital, and origin country characteristics by distance, English-speaking, and political structures (Liang 1994a, b; Yang 1994a, b). Traditional censuses ascertain citizenship status rather than date of naturalization, and the universe is too inclusive of those ineligible to have naturalized. Immigrants are highly heterogeneous on individual characteristics, and contexts of sending countries vary temporally on internal and external dimensions. Any research focusing on a single cohort or two cohorts of lawful immigrants is of limited value if these cohorts' composition or propensity is not representative across cohort and period contexts.

Following naturalization outcomes of all immigrants admitted between 1978 and 1991 may advance understanding of the transition to naturalized citizenship. Advances in such behavioral outcomes as educational attainment, marital formation, marital dissolution, labor force participation, and fertility became possible with the advent of longitudinal surveys and sophisticated statistical methodologies with which to disentangle duration or aging, cohort, and period influences (Crimmins 1993). The advent of methods for dealing with change over time means we may study the process of demographic change rather than merely changes in demographic status and, analogously, study the process of immigrants' naturalizing rather than merely changes in citizenship status.

#### **DATA ISSUES, GUIDELINES, AND INITIAL ANALYSES**

The typical statistical agency has certain concerns: (1) assuring respondent willingness to be interviewed or to complete interviews; (2) assuring respondent cooperation with surveys or censuses; (3) maximizing accuracy in responses; (4) assuring respondent cooperation for longitudinal surveys; and (5) protecting respondent identity by avoiding disclosure of sensitive information. The INS forms contain information about immigrants and naturalizing persons as necessary for granting the specific benefit, but INS does not collect such highly sensitive or invasive items as race or current behavioral, health, or socioeconomic characteristics. The information relates primarily to pre-U.S. experiences. As an enforcement agency, INS may require individuals to show proof of immigration and naturalization status to certain authorities. Although the informational items may be less sensitive, combinations of items may lead to uniqueness that is, combining items such as age, sex, country of birth, and geographic place of residence might yield small numbers or a single case.

The major concerns of the INS pertain to: (1) maximizing accuracy of responses and data entry for providing the immigration or naturalization benefit on an

appropriate basis; (2) maximizing accuracy of responses and timeliness of data entry for agency performance analysis; (3) maximizing accuracy of responses and data entry for future verification; (4) safeguarding information against fraudulent use for benefits. For this project, confidential identifiers were necessary for linking immigrant and naturalization records. Following review by the INS General Counsel, the principal investigator obtained access to the immigrants and naturalizations microdata, each including encrypted alien numbers as identifiers for record linkage, as a sworn INS employee expert without compensation. Other team members, citizens and lawful permanent residents after five years, could work with confidential data only with security clearance.

A "statistical data enclave" was established for the Immigration-to-Naturalization Project in the Social Science Research Center (SSRC) at Mississippi State University. In most ways, the facility was very similar to such facilities through the National Institute on Aging, various Census Research Data Centers, and the NCHS Research Data Center. Guidelines for research site security issues and maintaining confidentiality were devised and followed throughout the project. The INP was maintained over 1998-2001 on two desktop computers, adequate for data management and initial analyses. A culture of confidentiality was emphasized with high physical and electronic security during "secure" phases. In the current phase not involving use of confidential microdata, these data are locked away, and network and Internet access only recently became available at the research site. The various phases were designated as: Early or Initiation-of-Operations, Initial or Pre-Security, Main Secure Operations Main Analysis /Modeling Operations, Archived and Secured, and a contingency phase for Resumption of Secure Operations.

There are two issues as to immigrants and others as to naturalizations. First, the data exclude immigrants legalized under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) because records with identifiers are not releasable for external research. IRCA legislation carried specific provisions to encourage participation in protecting applicants' identities and separating the legalization program from enforcement and deportation functions of the agency. Indeed, amendments to these restrictive provisions were required for data collection in the Legalized Population Surveys to meet IRCA reporting requirements (Smith, Lowell, and Singer 1996; U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service 1992) and for release of the administrative records-based Legalization Applicants Processing System files (Borjas and Tienda 1993; Neuman and Tienda 1994). Second, the INP analyses exclude persons under 21 years at admission simply because multiperson linkages are not possible for imputing a child's derivative citizenship at a parent's naturalization and naturalization levels for children would

be underestimated. For naturalizations, some applicants in 1995 and 1996 might have naturalized in 1996 except for processing delays that arose then.

In the provisional database, the final number of immigrant records over 1978-1992 was 8,926,246, excluding 279 records with missing data and 159,420 duplicate records. In the naturalizations data, 5,475,988 records were accepted as original records, excluding 788 records with missing data and 62,987 duplicate records. Of naturalization records, 2,805,599 were matched with an immigrant record and the rest were for immigrants admitted before 1978, IRCA beneficiaries, children at admission, or, possibly, erroneous non-matches. After excluding persons aged under 21 years at admission, the number of records for analyses was 5.5 million.

Analyses have focused on gender and admission criteria for explaining propensity in naturalizing. Studies include, first, hazards models on naturalization among immigrant cohorts 1978-1987 from the major regions of origin, from the ten leading sending countries (China, India, Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam, Jamaica, Mexico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Colombia), and from Canada and selected European countries, second, hazards models on naturalization among male immigrant cohorts 1983-1991 from Mexico, China, and India, adding occupational variables; and, third, hazards models with and without correction for unobserved heterogeneity and employing different hazard function forms by Mexican, Cuban, Salvadoran, Chinese, Indian, and Filipino origins.

To summarize, these data are potentially valuable for naturalization research on dimensions of heterogeneity among immigrants. The major gaps relate to immigrants who were either minors when admitted or amnesty beneficiaries under IRCA. Idiosyncrasies inherent with administrative records from evolving statistical systems, decentralized processing, legislative changes, and data loss mandate care and consideration. More complete identifiers would permit assignment of missing gender and duplicate status.

## RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES

Naturalization by legalized immigrants has been eagerly anticipated (Woodrow-Lafield 1995; Durand, Massey and Parrado 1999) since the visa waiting list under second preference increased in 1992, emphasizing IRCA beneficiaries' potential sponsorship of family members. The first had reached eligibility in November 1993 and all were eligible by September 1995. As of May 1994, 7.7 percent (17,939) of eligible IRCA beneficiaries (232,770) had applied to naturalize (Smith, Lowell, and Singer 1996). In 1997, 1998, and 1999, the numbers of IRCA beneficiaries naturalized were 136,482, 85,517, and 152,319, respectively (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service 1999b, 2000b, 2001). The number naturalized has gradually grown to a substantial fraction (25 percent) with the number of IRCA beneficiaries

naturalized by the end of 1999 at 669,157 (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service 2001). More than one-half of Mexicans naturalizing in 1996-1999 were IRCA beneficiaries.

Special studies of *legalized immigrants' naturalization* are valuable for understanding the consequences of amnesty programs. These might continue either within the INS (Rytina 2000) or by augmenting the INP with linked legalized immigrant-naturalization records through an appropriate data sharing mechanism for legalized immigrants microdata with identifiers. Another 898,315 persons naturalized in 2000, and the number of naturalized IRCA beneficiaries will continue to increase. Two other possibilities are that INS Statistics might update the Legalized Applicants Processing System files and the Legalized Population Surveys of 1988 and 1992 with naturalization variables, if possible.

In addition to continuing analyses and improving the INP database, an important step is to *update 1978-1991 cohort experiences with 1997-2001 naturalizations*. With a decade or more observed for immigrants admitted in 1987-1991, their naturalization experiences could be compared with earlier immigrants as to whether an acceleration effect of period-specific influences, e.g., self-protection in naturalizing to avoid loss of public benefits after passage of California's Proposition 187, to assure the right to remain in the United States, or to vote in national, state, and local elections, amid generally anti-immigrant public debates. Augmentation of the database with naturalizations for the past five years is also critical because the numbers were considerable during the most significant wave of naturalization in American history. As noted earlier, many immigrant records in the data (6,120,647) were not yet linked with naturalizations, but many may have naturalized after 1996, because there were 1,577,648 naturalizations for pre-1992 entering immigrants according to the 1997, 1998, and 1999 editions of the *Statistical Yearbook*.

The INP should be expanded to *explore early naturalization of immigrants admitted in 1992-1996* under the Immigration Act of 1990, the first major reform since the 1965 revisions. In pursuing these two avenues, duration to naturalization may be overestimated because applicants in the mid-1990s faced long waiting times that varied by geographic location, application workload, and other agency factors. Beginning in 1998, the naturalization record included date of initial application, but duration to naturalization would tend to be biased upward for applicants over 1995-1997.

Four priority areas are essential for improving the INP data and developing plans for broader data access. First, the quality of the INP data, and immigrants microdata in general, would be enhanced with greater accuracy in identifying and excluding duplicate records. Encrypted alien numbers were not sufficient for

definitively excluding erroneous records. Although a "working rule" was adopted that may adequately distinguish original from duplicate records, these data quality issues on immigrants and naturalization would be best resolved through verification of duplicate records with reference to Central Index System. Results on changing immigrant skill levels (Jasso, Rosenzweig, and Smith 1998) and composition of immigrants (Greenwood and McDowell 1999) are not influenced by the presence of duplicates because refugees were excluded. Second, the INP universe does not completely correspond with the universe of immigrants for 1978-1991 in that naturalization is known for children at admission and immigrant records for IRCA beneficiaries are missing. Data for tracking IRCA beneficiaries' naturalization exist within INS statistical systems, but the same may not be true for tracking naturalization outcomes for children at admission. New approaches are mandatory.

Third, there is a considerable policy-relevant role in continuing the INP as a foundation for understanding naturalization experiences of immigrants before and after the revisions enacted in the Immigration Act of 1990. Fourth, a major priority is developing plans and strategies for INP data dissemination and these tasks must be coordinated with the INS given data access as an "employee expert." Although INS has neither a microdata review panel nor frequent microdata releases, agency statisticians have frequently consulted with the U.S. Census Bureau on releases such as the INS linked cohorts and annual immigrants microdata files. Much work has been accomplished in statistical policy on confidentiality and data access (Duncan, Jabine, and de Wolf 1994; Mackie and Bradburn 2000; U.S. General Accounting Office 2001). To minimize discrepancies in descriptive statistics, uniformity might be adopted as to observation intervals before releasing linked data. INS first created the 1977 cohort with the first fifteen years observed on naturalization outcomes and the cohort file was updated through 1997 in published tabulations and microdata releases. Users obtaining the file at different dates might reach different conclusions. One option is to release Immigration-to-Naturalization public-use microdata on a cohort basis after two decades of observation or an "IN2D" rule.

Making the INP data available more broadly could usefully be coordinated with plans for broadening INS data access and promoting uses for social science and governmental research. Many social scientists are not as familiar with using immigration and naturalization data as with typical social science datasets, and the barriers deter many potential users. Major users of INS data include several organizations and researchers, e.g., Jasso, Rosenzweig, and Smith (1998), Greenwood and McDowell (2000), Ronningen (2000), Singer, Friedman, Cheung, and Price (2001), Lobo and Salvo (2000), and Woodrow-Lafield (1995). Options for data access

modalities include a secure research data center, a statistical data enclave within INS, “formalized archiving” with procedures to create an informed user community, publication of general tabulations, or creating an online query system. These possibilities must be weighed as to building infrastructure for data release, data dissemination, and data accessibility. A specialized secure research data center would be a facility for which researchers would obtain necessary approvals and individual funding to conduct research at site workstations with appropriate technical and statistical resources. An advisory board with interdisciplinary experience on US immigration and naturalization would be a first step. Such a facility might be located physically within the INS or housed at a major research university, with multiple funding sources. An excellent model is the formalized archive of the Health Retirement Survey (HRS)-Ahead as a consolidated approach for establishing a user-friendly and accessible resource.

### CONCLUDING POINTS

The INP offers promise as a key data source for greater understanding of the macro-linkages and micro-linkages leading immigrants to become permanent settlers in the United States. Analytic research is illuminating the highly heterogeneous patterns of immigrants’ transitions to American citizenship. The goal is to continue the Immigration-to-Naturalization Project because the data provide a substantial longitudinal framework and to facilitate other linkages within and external to INS as feasible.

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