

# Becoming a U.S. Citizen: The Role of Immigrant Enclaves

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## Abstract

*The United States provides a path to citizenship for its newcomers. Unlike other immigration countries, however, the United States does not have policies that ease assimilation or directly promote naturalization, such as easily accessible and widely advertised language and civic instruction courses. Immigrants are by and large left on their own when facing legal and financial barriers or seeking instruction to pass the citizenship test. Not surprisingly, we find that immigrants' attributes, such as educational attainment, English language proficiency, and income, affect naturalization rates. This article analyzes whether naturalization rates are also affected by neighborhood characteristics and informal networks for assistance and information. We estimate a binary model of immigrants' citizenship status, specifying the size of the immigrant enclave and its level of assimilation as key explanatory variables. The study uses 2005 American Community Survey data and focuses on immigrants from the Caribbean islands now living in the New York area. The results suggest that who they are and where they live substantially affect immigrants' propensities to have acquired U.S. citizenship. Citizenship is unlikely for recent arrivals and for people who speak English poorly or not at all, are poorly educated, and have a low income. Living in a neighborhood with a well-assimilated immigrant enclave enhances the chance of acquiring U.S. citizenship. This effect is stronger for highly educated immigrants than it is for poorly educated immigrants and, thus, misses the more vulnerable segments of the immigrant population. In poorly assimilated enclaves, enclave size has a positive effect on immigrants' propensities to become U.S. citizens, whereas we find the opposite effect in neighborhoods with well-assimilated enclaves.*

## Introduction

The United States' immigration system is one of paradoxes: It is relatively welcoming to immigrants, yet it is *laissez-faire* toward immigrant integration. Of the world's immigrant-receiving countries, the United States stands out for being the most popular destination but also for having one of the most immigrant-friendly immigration policies (Fix, 2007). Among other advanced industrialized countries, the United States is one of the few governments that permit high-immigrant intake numbers and opportunities for permanent settlement (Joppke, 1999). After immigrants arrive and settle, however, the generous host does not provide assistance on the path to citizenship. Settlement (integration) resources are not widely available to all categories of immigrants; rather, government-funded resources are limited to refugees.<sup>1</sup> Immigrants admitted in all other categories must rely on their personal skills or turn to resources provided by their neighborhoods or communities.

The lack of public assistance can be attributed to the imbalance in the priorities of policymakers and the public.<sup>2</sup> In the United States, the national discourse surrounding immigration is steeped unevenly in policymaking to curb and punish irregular immigration, often at the expense of other pressing immigration concerns, namely integration. Fix (2007) described immigrant integration as “an afterthought in immigration policy discussions; in fact, integration remains one of the most overlooked issues in American governance” (Fix, 2007: iii). This oversight is somewhat reflected in the low rates of naturalization, although the process for obtaining citizenship is relatively simple but costly.

Bearing in mind that the U.S. government does not give financial or institutional support to newcomers, the onus of doing so is on the immigrant<sup>3</sup> to integrate himself or herself and eventually to choose whether to become a U.S. citizen. Naturalization is a traditional indicator of integration<sup>4</sup> (Calavita, 2004; Fix, Zimmerman, and Passel, 2001; Garcia, 1981) and, accordingly, this article investigates factors that influence immigrants' naturalization rates. Although previous research (for

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<sup>1</sup> Refugee resettlement is the closest program to an immigrant integration resource provided by the U.S. government. With the decrease in refugee intake, the funding associated with federally funded refugee resettlement programs also has been declining (Bloemraad, 2006; Fix et al., 2008).

<sup>2</sup> The Migration Policy Institute has researched the importance of emphasizing government-funded and government-led integration programs, not only for the sake of the socioeconomic well-being of the immigrant, but more so for the national interest. For a good evaluation and discussion of the necessity for prioritizing integration, see Fix et al., 2008; Papademetriou, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> The term “immigrant” is used in the context of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's definition of the group, referring strictly to legal permanent residents (immigrants with a green card).

<sup>4</sup> As DeSipio and De la Garza (1998: 64) discussed, “Naturalization also involves an individual decision made by all immigrants, specifically to pledge loyalty or attachment to the sending country or to the United States. Throughout U.S. history, most immigrants have developed loyalty to the United States and many have thereupon sought citizenship, a pattern that continues today.” In this article, we use this conventional view of the relationship between assimilation and naturalization as the development of new affinities to the host country and, thus, the desire to complete membership through naturalization. We do, however, recognize that naturalization may be acquired for practical purposes rather than to signify one's level of integration. In fact, with the adoption of policies that, among other things, exclude permanent residents from benefits or increase their risk of deportation, naturalization as a marker of integration is weakening (Fix, 2007).

example, Bloemraad, 2006) has convincingly shown that personal attributes, such as educational attainment, English proficiency, and sojourn length, are key drivers of naturalization, this article focuses on the role of immigrant enclaves in facilitating immigrant assimilation and, ultimately, their acquisition of citizenship. Specifically, we address three hypotheses. First, it is hypothesized that the immigrant's propensity to have acquired U.S. citizenship is related to the immigrant enclave size in the immigrant's neighborhood. A large enclave size provides the immigrant with support and opportunities within the community and, thus, lowers the need to take advantage of the benefits associated with citizenship; yet, a large enclave size may also foster naturalization because assimilation aid is plentiful. Second, we hypothesize that the maturity of the immigrant enclave, or the degree to which the immigrant enclave as a whole is integrated into the host society, increases the immigrant's propensity to choose citizenship. A mature and highly integrated ethnic enclave provides the know-how and support for immigrants seeking to naturalize and advocates the beneficial effects of naturalization. In particular, a mature enclave is prone to provide well-functioning immigrant networks with individuals, groups, and civic organizations dedicated to serving the immigrant community. Third, we are interested in the hypothesis that assimilation aid provided by the neighborhood benefits immigrants unevenly; therefore, we test whether the effects of enclave size and maturity vary across salient personal characteristics, namely immigrants' educational attainment levels.

The empirical analysis uses 2005 American Community Survey (ACS) data and focuses on immigrants from four Caribbean countries living in the New York area: (1) the Dominican Republic, (2) Haiti, (3) Jamaica, and (4) Trinidad and Tobago. We chose the four countries because they represent the linguistic diversity in the region. The people of the Dominican Republic speak Spanish; the population of Haiti speaks French or French Creole; and the people of Jamaica and of Trinidad and Tobago speak English. We estimate a series of logit models of immigrants' citizenship status, where the key explanatory variables are neighborhood characteristics referring to enclave size and enclave maturity.

This article is divided into four parts. Following this introduction, the second section provides the study background drawing on the literature on naturalization and integration and on information about Caribbean immigrants in the New York area. The third section presents the empirical analysis, with subsections on data, methods, and results. The article concludes with a discussion of findings and suggestions for future research.

## **Background**

Many immigrants make the decision to give up loyalties to their countries of origin and become citizens of the United States. The literature suggests that the journey to citizenship, however, largely depends on the immigrant's personal characteristics or community support. The government's role in promoting naturalization is apparent with its provision of integration resources and with public policies that remove previously held benefits from noncitizens. The case of Caribbean immigrants in the New York area highlights the importance of these factors for the naturalization process.

## Assimilation and Naturalization

The integration of immigrants is a necessary step in maintaining a cohesive nation. Otherwise, countries are confronted with marginalized groups, potential security threats, or social unrest. High rates of cross-border movements by migrants from the south to the north are increasing the salience of integration across developed countries. For many countries, integration is a new and continual challenge that they must confront with the appropriate policies to incorporate newcomers (legal and undocumented migrants) into the broader host society (Jacoby, 2007; Meissner, 2007). The process is best facilitated through the host society's government policies that encourage and help newly arrived immigrants incorporate themselves into the larger society's socioeconomic and political institutions. Integration is not a one-way process done only by newcomers; rather, it is a mutual responsibility with the host and the immigrants playing their roles of negotiation and accommodation (Fix, 2007; Papademetriou, 2003).

Current global migration trends make the issue of integration acute. About 3 percent of the world population lives outside its country of birth (Poot, Waldorf, and van Wissen, 2008). The number of international migrants is growing (GCIM, 2005), and we witness an increasing diversity in the ethnic composition of immigration flows. For example, the number of foreign-born people in the United States has been increasing; the total reached approximately 13 percent of the U.S. population in 2005 (OECD, 2008). In 2000, the foreign-born population in the United States was 10 percent, up from 8 percent in 1990 and 5 percent in 1970 (Aleinikoff, 2000; Lapham et al., 1993). At the same time, however, overall naturalization rates in the United States have been declining during the past 50 years. U.S. naturalization rates have dropped from 80 percent of the foreign-born population in 1950 to less than 40 percent in 2004 (Bloemraad, 2006)<sup>5</sup>. Over that same period, the native composition of immigrants in the United States has shifted. The 1965 Hart-Cellar Act made U.S. shores more accessible to people from non-European countries, and now most immigrants originate from Latin America, the Caribbean islands, and Asia. Immigrant groups from Europe naturalized at a higher rate, whereas the demographic shift in the native composition of immigrant flows was accompanied by lower naturalization rates.

Assimilation, although a politically charged concept, defines the American naturalization experience. Assimilation is not explicitly required for naturalization; however, by implication, it is expected that immigrants adopt the American way. Although the self-description of the United States as "a melting pot" suggests that immigrants add their individual cultural ingredients, the reality is that, ultimately, immigrants become Americans, leaving behind their former identities or traditions (Bloemraad, 2006). The expectation to assimilate is also deeply entrenched and epitomized in the oath of citizenship. Immigrants must "absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty of whom or which [they] have heretofore been a subject or citizen" (USCIS, 2009). Essentially, the decision of whether to naturalize implies that immigrants in the United States must make a choice to maintain allegiance with their countries of origin or give up those ties and declare loyalty to the

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<sup>5</sup> In comparison with the United States, Canada has experienced higher naturalization rates. Between 1980 and 2001, naturalization in Canada was 70 percent and higher (Bloemraad, 2006).

United States. Compared with the two other traditional countries of immigration—Canada and Australia—the United States follows a more assimilationist model.<sup>6</sup>

Naturalization is a conventional marker of integration and assimilation. As Benhabib (2004) aptly put it, “political boundaries define some as members, others as aliens. Membership, in turn, is meaningful only when accompanied by rituals of entry, access, belonging, and privilege” (Benhabib, 2004: 1). Naturalization is a rite of passage through which immigrants and natives become indistinguishable under the law, and immigrants receive full membership in the state (Aleinikoff, 2000; Aleinikoff and Klusmeyer, 2002). It follows, then, that both the host country and the immigrant have an interest in encouraging and acquiring citizenship, respectively. Immigrants acquire citizenship and, thereby, become fully integrated, politically empowered members of the host society for one or two reasons or a combination of the reasons: self-interest or a genuine emotional tie with the host country. Host states permit naturalization as part of the process of nation building to form a cohesive nation in which members share a common identity that is distinct from the identity of other nations and whose members have a loyalty to the nation. Taken together, these motivations for the immigrant and the host country shape the outcome of naturalization.

In the United States, the path to citizenship is less restrictive than it is in other host societies. U.S. citizenship is acquired in one of three ways: (1) birthright, (2) blood, or (3) naturalization. For citizenship by birthright, U.S. policy is based on *jus soli* (a right of soil), which confers citizenship at birth on the country’s territory. For citizenship through blood, U.S. policy is based on *jus sanguinis*, which holds that a child’s country of citizenship is the same as that of his or her biological or adoptive parent. For citizenship through naturalization, which is the only channel through which immigrants can acquire citizenship, the process requires an immigrant to reside (permanent residence permit) on U.S. territory for 5 years (3 for spouses of U.S. citizens), after which he or she must pay a sizeable application fee and pass a civics and language test. The process also requires that an immigrant be of good moral character and have no criminal record. The final stage of naturalization involves taking the oath of loyalty and renouncing the country of origin.

In general, the task of naturalization rests on three actors: the host country’s government, immigrant networks, and the newcomer. The host country’s government defines the context in which the immigrant is received. By providing social services, civic education, and language classes, the host country’s government chooses to proactively promote naturalization. In the United States, however, the sole emphasis is on testing for knowledge of U.S. civics and history and the English language on the naturalization examination. The government’s role also comes into play when it enacts policies that restrict access to public goods and services for noncitizens and, thus, the state indirectly influences immigrants’ decisions to naturalize. California’s passage of Proposition 187 denying access to social and medical services for noncitizens spurred a rush to naturalize in that state and in many other states, including New York (Rumbaut, 1999). Similarly, in 1996, welfare

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<sup>6</sup> Immigrants naturalizing in Canada pledge to be “faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, Queen of Canada, Her Heirs and Successors, and that I will faithfully observe the laws of Canada and fulfill my duties as a Canadian citizen” (CIC, 2008). Newly minted Australian citizens pledge their “loyalty to Australia and its people, whose democratic beliefs I share, whose rights and liberties I respect, and whose laws I will uphold and obey” (DIAC, 2008). Neither Canada nor Australia requires immigrants to “abjure all allegiance and fidelity” to their former home countries.

reforms under the Clinton administration denied noncitizens access to federally funded social benefits—benefits that were previously equally available to immigrants and citizens. Thus, the enactment of laws that significantly distinguish between immigrants and citizens makes naturalization the only channel to secure benefits and often produces a surge in naturalization rates (Fix, 2007).

An immigrant's personal attributes and self-interest<sup>7</sup> influence the decision to naturalize. Studies show that immigrants tend to be young, motivated, and skilled (Feliciano, 2005; Woodrow-Lafield, 2008). These attributes help immigrants integrate into the host society. Qualities including education, income, proficiency in the host language, gender, age, homeownership, and duration of stay are often cited as correlates of naturalization rates (Bloemraad, 2006; Rogers, 2006; Fix et al., 2008; Woodrow-Lafield, 2008). Education, a facilitator of social upward mobility, provides opportunities for higher paying employment, familiarity with host state civics, and language acquisition. Women see naturalization as a path to empowerment and as an opportunity to petition for the legal entry of relatives, particularly children, left behind. The older an immigrant is at the point of admission, the less likely it is that he or she will seek to naturalize. The socioeconomic benefits of naturalization lose their appeal with age because, as Woodrow-Lafield (2008: 68) explained, “younger immigrants . . . are more likely to be working and interested in seeking citizenship in order to obtain advantages in the labor market, such as governmental jobs [and] to have relatives abroad for whom they are seeking immigrant visas.” The large financial investment that goes into owning a home suggests intent of long-term residence or the establishment of new roots in the adopted home country (Jacoby, 2007). Finally, although many years of residency in the host country diminish social and emotional ties to the home country, the duration increases these bonds to the newly chosen country of residence (Waldorf, 1994). As such, duration of stay is a popular predictor of naturalization.

Although sojourn length is considered the strongest predictor of naturalization, education has particular significance. As previously noted, education is a vehicle for social mobility and opportunities for higher paying jobs. For naturalization, education improves the likelihood of immigrants acquiring citizenship, because it eliminates some barriers associated with the naturalization process. Educated immigrants can draw on their own personal resources. First, the application costs of naturalization have increased continually in the United States over the years, and educated immigrants can better afford these high fees. Second, education prepares immigrants for the civics and language tests, making the naturalization examination less daunting. Third, educated immigrants might be more aware of political changes that affect their noncitizen status.

When the state plays a small or no active role in integration and individuals' personal attributes are not conducive to assimilation, immigrant networks and civic organizations take up the mantle. In the context of the United States, “immigrant integration has historically occurred at the local level, primarily through the efforts of families, employers, schools, churches, and communities”

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<sup>7</sup> Citizenship provides more opportunities and rights than permanent residency does. Beyond access to public goods and services mentioned previously, being able to apply for and sponsor the entry of family members into the United States is particularly important for many immigrants. Citizens may sponsor more categories of relatives, namely brothers and sisters, than noncitizens are permitted to sponsor.

(Meissner, 2007: i). The centrality of immigration networks in chain migration is widely noted (Massey, 1988; Waldorf, 1996; Waldorf, Esparza, and Huff, 1990). In addition to functioning in the migration decisionmaking process, these groups play a salient role in the settlement of newcomers. The role of immigration networks is ambivalent, however, because immigrant enclaves can act as promoters or as inhibitors of naturalization. As promoters of naturalization, these groups serve as vital resources of information and encouragement to acquire citizenship. Immigration networks reduce the costs of naturalization and doubts about the process by providing information and legal advice on naturalization; informing immigrant communities about changes in laws that may adversely affect noncitizens; preparing immigrants for the citizenship test by giving classes in U.S. civics and the English language; promoting the benefits of naturalization, such as the right to vote; and serving as a reference point of naturalized U.S. citizens. Rogers (2006) wrote about the mobilization of these groups in promoting naturalization to the Caribbean immigrant community in 1996, when laws were enacted to restrict permanent residents' access to social services and welfare benefits.

In contrast, acting as inhibitors of naturalization, immigrant enclaves decrease noncitizens' incentives to assimilate by precluding the acquisition of "host country skill accumulation" (Edin, Fredricksson, and Aslund, 2004: 134); that is, immigrant networks enable newcomers to operate relatively successfully in the host country without having to adjust culturally or linguistically. Immigrant enclaves also allow for the maintenance of allegiance to the country of origin and the fostering of subcultures, which at times can become threatening to natives (Verbon and Meijdam, 2008). Borjas' (1998) assessment of ethnic enclaves seems quite fitting here: The externalities from immigrant groups are either good or bad, depending on the quality<sup>8</sup> of the enclave, or, as we describe it in this article, the so-called "maturity" of the group.

## **Caribbean Immigrants in the United States**

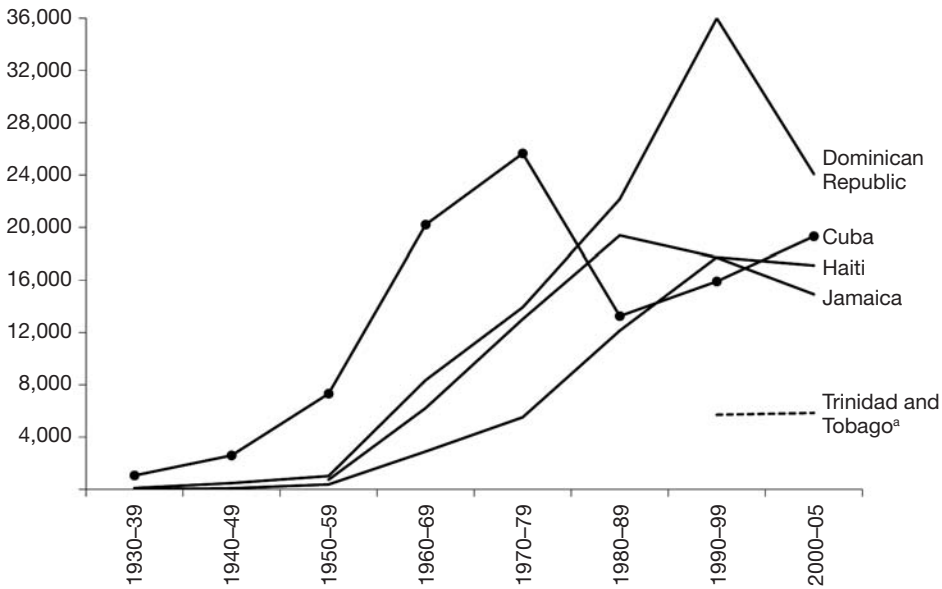
Over the past 75 years, the number of immigrants from the Caribbean islands has been increasing significantly. As illustrated in exhibit 1, during the interwar years until the end of World War II, the number of immigrants originating from Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic that obtained legal, permanent status was quite low, less than 4,000 a year. After the enactment of the Hart-Cellar Act in 1965, the number of immigrants from most Caribbean countries began to increase significantly, increasing continually until the 1990s. The peak of Caribbean immigration in the 1990s corresponds to the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act in 1986, which regularized large numbers of undocumented migrants. In more recent years, especially following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the number of immigrants who obtained permanent residence tapered off. Immigrants from Trinidad and Tobago accounted for less than 10 percent of all immigrants from the Caribbean islands. Immigrants from Cuba constitute a special case, and their immigration status is different from requirements for immigrants from other Caribbean states. Most Cubans entered the United States as refugees, and the temporal trend for Cuban immigrants shown in exhibit 1 reflects the strained political relations that have existed between the United States and Cuba since the 1960s.

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<sup>8</sup> Quality relates to the average skill level of the enclave. Skill level is measured by individuals' educational attainment.

**Exhibit 1**

**Average Annual Number of People Obtaining Legal Permanent Resident Status by Selected Country of Last Residence, 1930 to 2005**



<sup>a</sup> The 1990–99 value for Trinidad and Tobago is estimated using information for 1996 to 1999.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2006)

Caribbean immigrants settle primarily in two traditional immigrant hubs—in Florida and in and around New York City. Florida has more than 1 million immigrants from the Caribbean, many of whom originate from Cuba, accounting for nearly 40 percent of all foreign-born people in the state. In the tristate area that includes the New York metropolitan area, New Jersey, and Connecticut (NY-NJ-CT tristate area), the absolute size of the Caribbean enclave is as big as in Florida, but the Caribbean immigrants in the tristate area account for only 20 percent of all foreign-born people in that area. In other traditional immigration hubs, such as California and Illinois, Caribbean immigrants account for a surprisingly low share (0.7 and 1.6 percent, respectively) of the foreign-born population. Although Florida has the strongest representation of Caribbean immigrants among its foreign-born population, it also is a special case because of the large number of Cuban refugees. In the remainder of this section, we focus exclusively on the NY-NJ-CT tristate area.

In New York, Kings County has the largest concentration of Caribbean immigrants, 312,075, followed by Bronx County, with 204,104, and Queens County, with 182,004. Counties in New Jersey and Connecticut host substantially smaller numbers of Caribbean immigrants; Hudson County, New Jersey, has the largest share, at 59,406. Looking at countries of origin individually, a slightly different picture emerges, because more than one-fourth of the immigrants from the Dominican Republic settle in New York County, New York, where they account for 82 percent of all Caribbean immigrants. In fact, the unusual concentration of Dominicans in New York County accounts for most dissimilarity in the location patterns of the four groups—immigrants from the Dominican



Republic, Jamaica, Haiti, and Trinidad and Tobago—across the 19 counties listed in exhibit 2. The dissimilarity index is highest for Dominicans and Haitians (DI = 0.6). Overall, however, collocation among immigrants from the various Caribbean islands is the norm, and the settlement patterns of immigrants from Haiti and Trinidad and Tobago are the most similar (DI = 0.19).

The literature indicates that Caribbean immigrants have low naturalization rates.<sup>9</sup> In particular, Rogers (2006) found that Afro-Caribbean noncitizens tend to have low to moderate, at best, naturalization rates, despite good education and high incomes that are traditionally associated with a higher likelihood of naturalization. Duration of stay remains positively associated with naturalization in the Caribbean immigrant experience, but only after extended periods of stay of 20 or more years. Furthermore, he found considerable variation among immigrant groups from different Caribbean countries of origin. It is obvious that, with the Caribbean immigrants, certain individual

**Exhibit 2**

**Caribbean-Born Population, by Selected Countries of Birth, Rates of Naturalization, and Time of Entry**

State and County	Number of Immigrants Born in—					Percent Naturalized Caribbean Immigrants by Time of Entry		
	Caribbean	Dominican Republic	Haiti	Jamaica	Trinidad and Tobago	1990–2000	1980–1989	Before 1980
<b>New York</b>								
Bronx	204,104	124,032	1,643	51,120	6,145	17.3	46.1	71.1
Kings	312,075	59,362	61,267	73,580	52,256	20.2	53.3	76.9
Nassau	42,649	8,844	11,793	12,861	3,507	21.4	58.0	79.5
New York	152,122	125,063	5,083	5,886	2,852	15.7	38.9	67.3
Putnam	434	51	50	133	51	20.0	46.4	83.6
Queens	182,004	59,444	27,212	47,145	26,255	21.0	52.3	77.9
Richmond	5,924	1,285	375	1,191	1,286	23.4	51.7	78.8
Rockland	14,931	3,587	8,217	2,130	184	21.2	50.6	70.8
Suffolk	23,891	8,041	4,716	5,371	2,437	20.9	50.0	74.1
Westchester	37,522	11,134	2,739	15,998	1,607	19.0	49.1	76.4
<b>New Jersey</b>								
Bergen	19,890	6,669	669	4,420	1,675	20.2	55.6	84.2
Hudson	59,406	25,631	1,703	1,146	1,711	14.7	48.8	83.8
Middlesex	20,392	12,037	882	2,349	1,465	12.5	46.4	78.5
Monmouth	6,144	549	2,143	1,375	532	19.5	46.2	80.7
Ocean	2,188	449	66	615	228	41.3	53.7	80.8
Passaic	33,140	25,128	301	4,902	349	15.3	40.5	72.2
Somerset	3,554	798	222	1,359	204	14.0	55.6	88.1
<b>Connecticut</b>								
Fairfield	22,252	3,671	6,138	9,093	710	20.1	49.4	76.4
New Haven	7,591	2,276	407	3,186	431	20.5	50.8	74.8

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 census

<sup>9</sup> The Caribbean immigration rates are higher than the Mexican (Fix, Zimmerman, and Passel, 2001) and Canadian rates (Rumbaut, 1999), but they are lower than the Asian immigrant rates (Aleinikoff, 2000).

characteristics are necessary conditions for naturalization,<sup>10</sup> but they may not be sufficient conditions for acquiring citizenship.

In this article, we examine the role of neighborhood characteristics and network effects as they affect naturalization rates of immigrants from the Caribbean.<sup>11</sup> As shown in the right panel of exhibit 2, Caribbean migrants demonstrate wide variation in the naturalization rates across different locations in the NY-NJ-CT tristate area, even when controlling for time of entry. Not surprisingly, the data indicate that the longer the sojourn, the higher the rate of naturalization among Caribbean immigrants. Naturalization rates vary significantly across counties; for recent immigrants (year of entry between 1990 and 2000), the rates range from a low of 12.5 percent in Middlesex County, New Jersey, to a high of 41.3 percent in Passaic County, New Jersey. Naturalization rates increase for immigrants who entered the United States during the 1980s and the cross-county variation diminishes to a range of 15 percentage points. For immigrants who have been in the United States for more than 20 years (entry before 1980), citizenship is almost the norm, exceeding 70 percent. New York County is an exception; only 63 percent of long-term Caribbean immigrants have acquired citizenship. A moderate relationship ( $r = +0.39$ ) exists between the naturalization rates of recent immigrants and immigrants who entered during the 1980s, but no connection exists between the naturalization rates of recent immigrants and immigrants who entered before 1980 ( $r = +0.08$ ).

Comparing settlement patterns with naturalization rates highlights some interesting linkages. In general, a negative relationship exists between the counties' number of Caribbean immigrants and the naturalization rate. The data also indicate that the counties with a dominant Dominican presence have low naturalization rates. For example, consider New York and Passaic Counties, where Dominicans account for more than 75 percent of the Caribbean immigrant enclave. Naturalization rates in those counties are the lowest among all other counties for all categories of entry, except for immigrants entering Passaic County in the 1990s. These data tentatively suggest that Dominicans naturalize at a lower rate than do other Caribbean immigrants, perhaps because of the large size of their immigrant enclaves, the maturity of the enclaves, or even the difference in native and host languages.

## Empirical Analysis

The preliminary evidence from the analysis discussed previously hints at the size and maturity of immigrant enclaves as factors playing a role in the rates of naturalization among Caribbean immigrant groups. We now rigorously test our hypothesis that the immigrant's propensity to naturalize is related to neighborhood characteristics and networks for assistance and information; that is, related to the size and maturity of the immigrant enclave in the immigrant's neighborhood.

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<sup>10</sup> To qualify for naturalization, an immigrant must be a resident of the United States for at least 5 years, be economically endowed to pay the application fee, and be knowledgeable about U.S. civics and English to pass the examination.

<sup>11</sup> The effects of neighborhoods have been studied in various contexts, such as problem behaviors and health-related outcomes, violence, and poverty. For a detailed literature review on the topic, see Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley (2002).

## Data

We used a sample of foreign-born people from the 2005 ACS, extracted from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) database of the Minnesota Population Center, and applied several selection criteria. The sample includes only people who were born in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, or Trinidad and Tobago and who were residing near New York City as of 2005. The sample area covers all of New Jersey and Connecticut as well as New York Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs)<sup>12</sup> that belong to the New York metropolitan area. For this analysis, our criteria required the survey data to apply to people who had resided in the United States for at least 7 years. This constraint ensures that immigrants included are indeed eligible for citizenship. Seven years is a somewhat arbitrary cutoff, because no universal minimum sojourn length exists for citizenship eligibility.<sup>13</sup> Our criteria required that, at the time of immigration, the selected people were at least 18 years of age, which ensured that the respondents experienced most of their upbringing outside the United States and could not have obtained citizenship as dependents of their parents. In total, the data set includes  $n = 4,517$  observations.

Exhibit 3 shows the definitions and summary statistics of the variables in this study. The variable of interest is the person's citizenship status, categorized as a binary variable with "1" indicating that the respondent is naturalized. Overall, 62 percent of the sampled immigrants are naturalized. Exhibit 3 also shows means and standard deviations of the explanatory variables for the entire sample, as well as for the two subsamples defined by immigrants' citizenship status.

The pivotal explanatory variables are the immigrant enclave's size and maturity. The size of the ethnic enclave is defined as the number of immigrants of the same nationality as the respondent living in the respondent's neighborhood. The neighborhood is defined at the PUMA level.<sup>14</sup> The enclave's maturity is its aggregate level of assimilation as proxied by the percentage of immigrants living in the same neighborhood (PUMA) who are already naturalized. On average, immigrants live in neighborhoods where their ethnic enclave comprises 11,192 immigrants and where 53 percent of their ethnic community has taken on U.S. citizenship. People in the subsample of naturalized immigrants, however, tend to live in smaller but more mature ethnic enclaves than do immigrants who are not naturalized.

We also controlled for a battery of additional variables. The variables can be assigned to four types. First, we accounted for information that specifically affects an immigrant population, namely the immigrant's place of birth, the immigrant's length of stay in the United States, English language proficiency, and whether the respondent speaks English at home. Comparing the averages for the

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<sup>12</sup> PUMAs, as defined by the Census Bureau, are areas with at least 100,000 residents. A county with a population of more than 200,000 is divided into more than one PUMA. For smaller counties, a PUMA may be a whole county or groups of counties in the same state. For a delineation of PUMAs, see <http://www.census.gov/geo/www/maps/puma5pct.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> Migrants who entered on temporary visas or who were undocumented for some time of their sojourn may need to stay in the United States for many years before becoming eligible for naturalization. The required 5-year sojourn before naturalization takes into account only those years during which the immigrant had a permanent residence permit (green card).

<sup>14</sup> We recognize that the PUMA is not an ideal operationalization of the category "neighborhood," because its delineation is void of any social and behavioral components that are relevant in neighborhood formation; however, published information for georeferencing census respondents is very limited, and the PUMA is the smallest spatial scale available.

**Exhibit 3**

**Variable Definitions and Descriptive Statistics**

Variable	Definition	Full Sample (n=4,517)			Subsample: Noncitizens		Subsample: Citizens		
		Minimum	Maximum	Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation
<b>Dependent variable</b>									
citizen	Citizen: 1 = yes, 0 = no	0	1	0.624	0.484				
<b>Immigration-related variables</b>									
tn <sup>e</sup>	From Trinidad and Tobago: 1 = yes, 0 = no	0	1	0.107	0.309	0.109	0.312	0.106	0.307
haiti <sup>a</sup>	From Haiti: 1 = yes, 0 = no	0	1	0.154	0.361	0.115	0.320	0.177	0.382
jam <sup>a</sup>	From Jamaica: 1 = yes, 0 = no	0	1	0.369	0.483	0.298	0.458	0.412	0.492
sojourn	Number of years in the United States	7	78	22.058	10.405	17.675	8.723	24.695	10.448
engl	Speaks English at home: 1 = yes, 0 = no	0	1	0.472	0.499	0.407	0.491	0.511	0.500
poorengl	Speaks English poorly or not at all: 1 = yes, 0 = no	0	1	0.251	0.434	0.374	0.484	0.177	0.382
<b>Other personal attributes</b>									
age	Age (years)	18	92	50.450	14.169	47.336	13.721	52.324	14.107
female	Female: 1 = yes, 0 = no	0	1	0.593	0.491	0.570	0.495	0.606	0.489
married	Married: 1 = yes, 0 = no	0	1	0.516	0.500	0.466	0.499	0.546	0.498
white	White: 1 = yes, 0 = no	0	1	0.102	0.303	0.128	0.335	0.086	0.281
lths <sup>b</sup>	Less than high school diploma: 1 = yes, 0 = no	0	1	0.276	0.447	0.361	0.480	0.226	0.418
bsplus <sup>b</sup>	Bachelor's degree: 1 = yes, 0 = no	0	1	0.158	0.365	0.100	0.300	0.193	0.395
<b>Family attribute</b>									
income	Family income as % of poverty threshold	0	501	282.831	158.594	245.934	149.416	305.035	159.841
<b>Neighborhood characteristics</b>									
size	Size of enclave: number of same origin residents at PUMA level	40	67,492	11,192	14,421	12,473	15,651	10,422	13,573
mature	Enclave maturity: % of enclave naturalized	0	1	0.533	0.180	0.464	0.161	0.575	0.178
highdens	> 5 families in structure: 1 = yes, 0 = no	0	1	0.436	0.496	0.513	0.500	0.390	0.488

PUMA = Public Use Microdata Area.

<sup>a</sup> Reference group: Dominican Republic.

<sup>b</sup> Reference group: high school diploma or some college education.

two subsamples suggests that naturalized immigrants have been in the United States about 7 years longer than immigrants without citizenship and that they are more likely to speak English at home (the difference amounts to about 10 percentage points, which is statistically significant). More than one-third (37 percent) of the noncitizens speak English poorly or not at all, compared with about 17 percent of people who have obtained U.S. citizenship. Both percentages are remarkably high considering that all sampled immigrants have lived in the United States for at least 7 years and, in the case of naturalized immigrants, have passed the English language test for the naturalization examination.

Second, we accounted for traditional personal characteristics, namely age, sex, marital status, race, and educational attainment. It is worth noting that naturalized immigrants are significantly more likely to have a college degree than are immigrants without citizenship, and naturalized immigrants are about 5 years older, on average, than are immigrants who are not naturalized. In both subsamples, women outnumber men, but the percentage of women among the naturalized immigrants is slightly higher than it is among women without U.S. citizenship. Married immigrants form the majority among naturalized immigrants but not among people who have not acquired U.S. citizenship. The difference in proportions amounts to a statistically significant 8 percentage points.

Third, we added a family variable, income, that indicates the economic power of the respondent's family. The income variable is expressed as a percentage of the poverty threshold. Although the average family income in both subsamples far exceeds the poverty threshold, the average family income of naturalized citizens is 24 percent higher than is the average family income of people who are not naturalized.

Fourth, in addition to the enclave's size and maturity, we added another neighborhood variable that measures the neighborhood's density, proxied by a dummy variable that indicates whether the respondent lives in a building with more than five families. Overall, 44 percent of the respondents live in high-density neighborhoods. The percentage, however, is substantially higher for immigrants without U.S. citizenship than it is for naturalized immigrants.

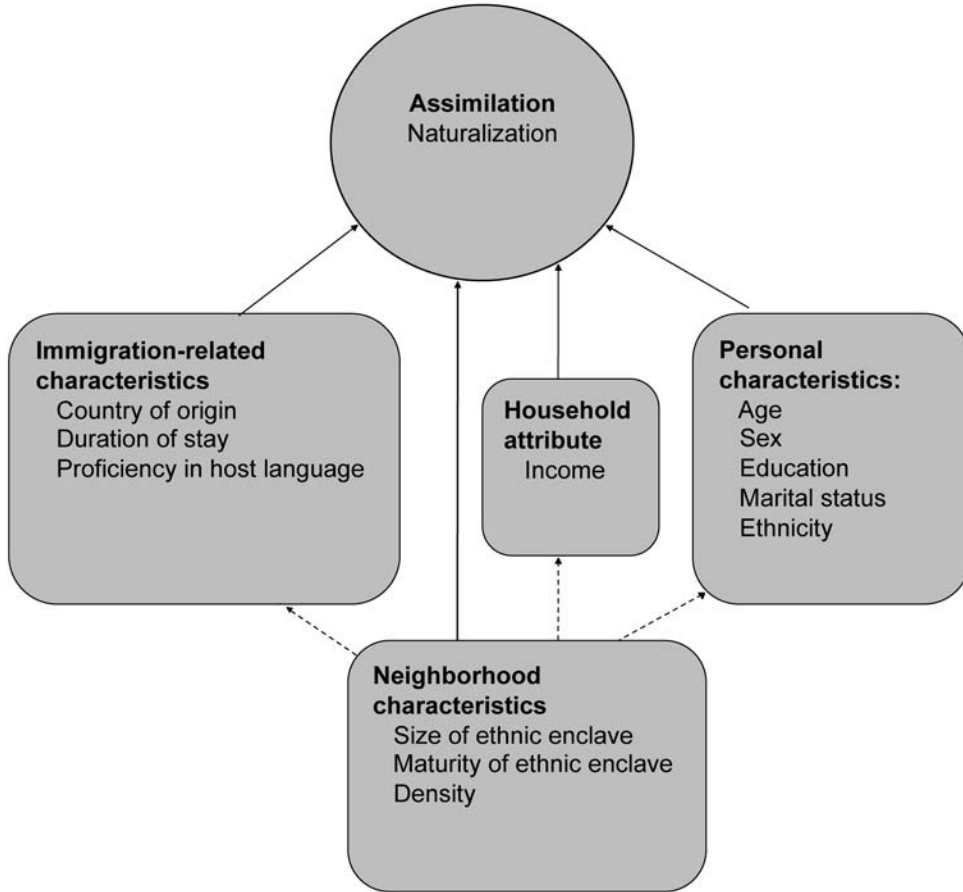
## **Methodology**

The conceptual linkages underlying the citizenship model are summarized in exhibit 4. Naturalization, taken as an indicator of an immigrant's assimilation into the host society, is portrayed as a function of immigration-related characteristics, personal and household attributes, and, most important, neighborhood characteristics. We hypothesize that the influence of neighborhood characteristics, in particular the enclave's size and maturity, has a direct influence on assimilation. In addition, the influence of neighborhood characteristics may be mediated by other variables.

We use a series of binary choice models, in which the dependent variable indicates whether the immigrant is naturalized, for our estimates. The first model is a base model that expresses citizenship status as a function of the immigrant enclave size and maturity while controlling for the effects of all immigration-specific variables, other personal attributes, and family income. Note that the effect of sojourn length is allowed to be nonlinear. The subsequent models also include important interaction terms. Model 2 includes the interaction between enclave size and enclave maturity; model 3 accounts for possible joint effects of neighborhood characteristics and educational

**Exhibit 4**

**Determinants of Immigrants' Assimilation**



attainment; and model 4, the most comprehensive model, accounts for interactions between the two enclave characteristics and the interaction between enclave characteristics and educational attainment. All models are estimated as logit models, with observations weighted by *person weights*, as provided by the ACS.

**Results**

The results of the estimations, summarized in exhibit 5, show that, overall, the models perform well and support the notion that neighborhood characteristics affect immigrants' propensity to naturalize. Before discussing the effect of neighborhood characteristics in detail, we first focus on the influence of personal characteristics and begin with a few general observations that provide a consistent profile of immigrants' choice to acquire citizenship. Surprisingly, immigrants' national origin is only a weak predictor of naturalization rates. No significant difference exists between the

**Exhibit 5**

Estimation Results<sup>a</sup> (1 of 2)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	b	Standard Error	b	Standard Error	b	Standard Error	b	Standard Error
constant	-5.052	0.444 ***	-7.323	0.857 ***	-4.746	0.540 ***	-6.797	0.920 ***
<b>Immigration-related variables</b>								
tnt	-0.167	0.248	-0.130	0.252	-0.151	0.248	-0.120	0.251
haiti	-0.317	0.164	-0.233	0.168	-0.308	0.162 *	-0.233	0.165
jam	-0.190	0.239	-0.116	0.244	-0.178	0.239	-0.112	0.244
sojourn	0.138	0.017 ***	0.137	0.017 ***	0.139	0.017 ***	0.138	0.017 ***
sojourn-sq	-0.001	0.000 ***	-0.001	0.000 ***	-0.001	0.000 ***	-0.001	0.000 ***
engl	-0.207	0.214	-0.215	0.217	-0.224	0.214	-0.232	0.217
poorengl	-0.800	0.132 ***	-0.811	0.131 ***	-0.810	0.131 ***	-0.820	0.130 ***
<b>Other personal attributes</b>								
age	0.011	0.004 ***	0.011	0.004 ***	0.012	0.004 ***	0.012	0.004 ***
female	0.505	0.089 ***	0.505	0.090 ***	0.499	0.089 ***	0.501	0.090 ***
married	0.371	0.089 ***	0.376	0.090 ***	0.371	0.090 ***	0.374	0.090 ***
white	-0.088	0.139	-0.070	0.138	-0.082	0.138	-0.066	0.138
lths	-0.429	0.106 ***	-0.434	0.106 ***	-0.584	0.770	-0.590	0.799
bsplus	0.374	0.141 ***	0.365	0.142 ***	-1.397	1.014	-1.367	1.063
<b>Family attribute</b>								
income	0.001	0.000 ***	0.001	0.000 ***	0.001	0.000 *	0.001	0.000 ***
<b>Neighborhood characteristics</b>								
size	0.061	0.034 *	0.343	0.100 ***	0.043	0.046	0.299	0.106 ***
mature	3.990	0.278 ***	8.386	1.383 ***	3.700	0.343 ***	7.633	1.405 ***
highdens	0.071	0.095	0.045	0.096	0.065	0.096	0.044	0.097

**Exhibit 5**

Estimation Results<sup>a</sup> (2 of 2)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	b	Standard Error	b	Standard Error	b	Standard Error	b	Standard Error
<b>Interaction terms</b>								
size*mature			- 0.557	0.183 ***			- 0.502	0.186 ***
lths*size					0.033	0.072	0.025	0.075
bsplus*size					0.032	0.099	0.027	0.103
lths*mature					- 0.298	0.595	- 0.165	0.623
bsplus*mature					2.966	0.924 ***	2.977	0.988 ***
Wald	655.980		682.430		641.980		661.690	
Log pseudo-likelihood	- 2422		- 2417		- 2413		- 2409	
Pseudo-R2	0.205		0.206		0.208		0.209	

<sup>a</sup> The dependent variable is citizen.

The asterisks identify significance at the 0.01, 0.05, and 0.10 levels using \*\*\*, \*\*, and \*, respectively (based on robust standard errors). The number of observations is (n=4,517).



naturalization rates of immigrants from the Dominican Republic and immigrants from Jamaica or Trinidad and Tobago. For Haitians, model 3 suggests that naturalization rates are significantly lower than they are for immigrants from the Dominican Republic, but the magnitude of the effect is small. What is of pivotal importance, however, is the effect of immigrants' sojourn length on naturalization rates. The propensity to be naturalized increases with increasing length of stay in the United States, but the propensity is at a decreasing rate. Whether an immigrant speaks English at home is not a significant predictor of citizenship. English proficiency, however, is salient for naturalization. In fact, the models predict that the odds of having acquired U.S. citizenship are more than twice as high for people who are proficient in English ( $\text{poorengl}=0$ ) than they are for immigrants who speak English poorly or not at all.

The key demographic predictors of assimilation—sex, marital status, and education—strongly influence immigrants' propensity to be naturalized. Specifically, the odds of having adopted U.S. citizenship are estimated to be about 1.6 times higher for women than they are for men and 1.4 times higher for married immigrants than they are for their unmarried counterparts. Both estimates are surprisingly stable across the four model specifications. Models 1 through 4 also suggest that immigrants with less education (less than a high school diploma) have significantly lower naturalization rates than do more educated immigrants. In contrast to the finding by Rogers (2006), race does not influence naturalization rates.<sup>15</sup> Finally, the income variable is significant, and the propensity to be naturalized increases with increasing income.

Regarding the effects of neighborhood characteristics, we find that the ethnic enclave maturity is a powerful predictor of naturalization rates. Based on model 1, the estimated marginal effect suggests that a 1-percent increase in the maturity level raises the propensity of being naturalized by more than 0.9 percent. After inclusion of the interaction between the two enclave characteristics in model 2, enclave maturity remains a powerful predictor. Exhibit 6 shows the effect of enclave maturity on naturalization propensities for Dominican immigrants.<sup>16</sup> For very low levels of enclave maturity, the probability of being naturalized is less than 10 percent. The likelihood of naturalization increases to about 30 percent in neighborhoods with an average maturity level and reaches about 60 percent in highly mature enclaves.

Model 1 is insufficient to understand the effect of enclave size on naturalization propensities. It only weakly suggests that enclave size affects immigrants' propensities to become U.S. citizens and that the estimated effect size is small. After the interaction between the two enclave characteristics is accounted for (model 2), it becomes apparent that enclave size plays a highly significant role for naturalization propensities and that the direction of the effect varies, depending on the level of enclave maturity. As exhibit 7 shows, in neighborhoods with low levels of enclave maturity, natu-

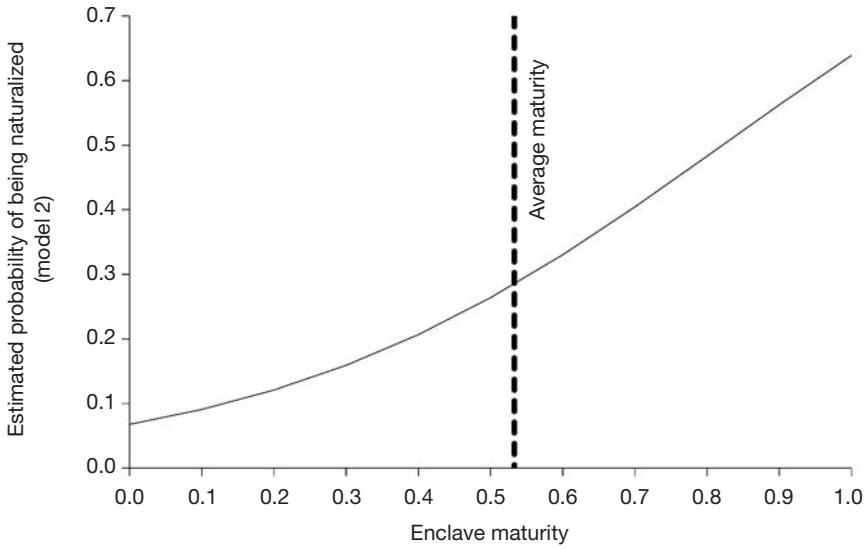
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<sup>15</sup> Rogers (2006) categorized Afro-Caribbean immigrants as Blacks from English-speaking Caribbean countries, such as Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, and considered immigrants from the Dominican Republic to be Latinos. The study's findings may thus suggest variations in naturalization rates by national origin rather than by race.

<sup>16</sup> The estimated probabilities shown in exhibit 6 refer to 40-year-old male, unmarried, non-White immigrants from the Dominican Republic who have been in the United States for 10 years, speak English well but do not speak English at home, have an average income, and do not have a high school diploma.

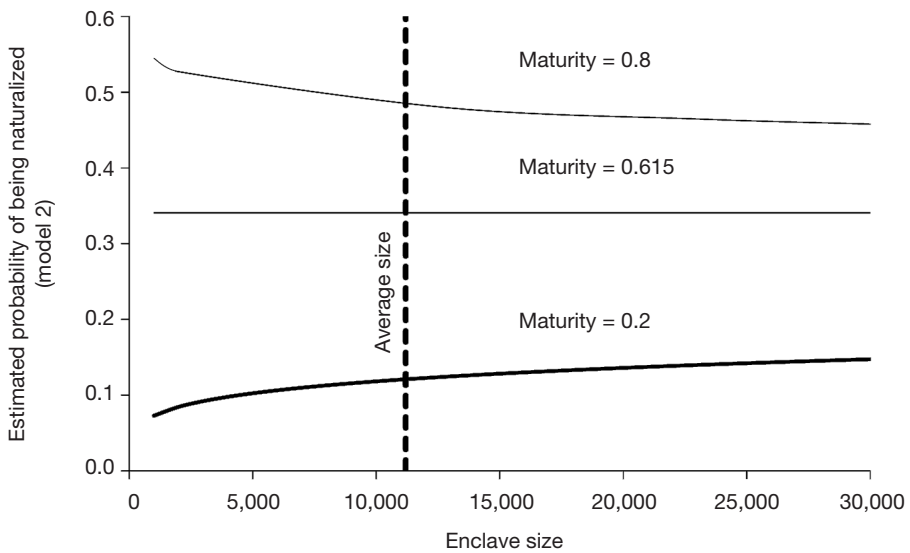
**Exhibit 6**

Probability of Being Naturalized as a Function of Enclave Maturity



**Exhibit 7**

Probability of Being Naturalized as a Function of Enclave Size and Maturity

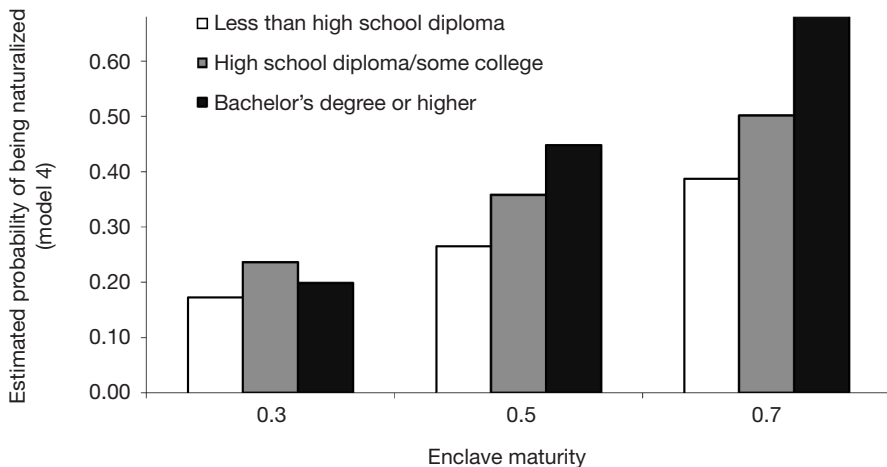


ralization rates increase with enclave size.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, in neighborhoods with a highly assimilated enclave, the probabilities of being naturalized are higher, but the enclave size has a detrimental effect on naturalization propensities. For neighborhoods with a medium level of maturity (maturity  $\approx 0.6$ ), the enclave size has no effect on naturalization rates.

Models 3 and 4 address the differential effect of enclave characteristics across educational attainment levels. Regardless of whether the interaction between enclave characteristics is taken into account, the results suggest an intricate interplay between education and enclave maturity. The mosaic of effects requires a more detailed disentanglement. Using model 4, exhibit 8 shows the estimated joint effects of changing enclave maturity and immigrants' educational status on their probability of having acquired U.S. citizenship. Again, the probabilities refer to Dominican immigrants, as specified in footnote 16. The immigrant enclave maturity and the immigrant educational attainment level are varied. Exhibit 8 shows that whether the most highly educated immigrants have the highest probabilities of being naturalized depends on the enclave maturity. In neighborhoods with very low enclave maturity, the probabilities are smaller for highly educated immigrants than they are for immigrants with a high school degree only. Exhibit 8 shows that, independent of educational attainment level, the probability of being naturalized goes up with increasing enclave maturity. Most important, this relationship between increasing naturalization rates and increasing enclave maturity is least pronounced for poorly educated immigrants. This somewhat troublesome result suggests that assimilation aid provided by the immigrant enclave benefits immigrants unevenly, favoring the highly educated rather than favoring immigrants who are most in need of assimilation aid.

**Exhibit 8**

The Joint Effect of Enclave Maturity and Education on Naturalization Rates



<sup>17</sup> The estimated probabilities shown in exhibit 7 refer to Dominican immigrants with attributes as specified in footnote 16. Enclave maturity and size vary.

## Discussion and Conclusions

In this article, we examined the effect of neighborhood on naturalization rates. Specifically, we estimated a series of logit models with immigrant enclave characteristics (size and maturity) as key explanatory variables. We found that *who they are* and *where they live* substantially affect immigrants' propensities to have acquired U.S. citizenship, which is unlikely for recent arrivals and for people who speak English poorly or not at all, are poorly educated, and have a low income. Living in a neighborhood with a well-assimilated immigrant enclave enhances the chance of acquiring U.S. citizenship. Whether the immigrant enclave size has a beneficial effect on naturalization rates, however, depends on how well the enclave is assimilated. In well-assimilated enclaves, increased enclave sizes reduce the probability of naturalization. In poorly assimilated enclaves, enclave size has a positive effect on immigrants' propensities to become U.S. citizens.

Our findings also suggest that the meaning of immigrant enclaves for the individual's assimilation changes with education. We found that enclave maturity plays a bigger role for highly educated immigrants than it does for poorly educated immigrants and, thus, misses the more vulnerable immigrant population segments. The implications for the United States, where integration assistance is left to immigrant communities and local civic organizations, are troublesome. Not only can this strategy backfire to the extent that immigrants remain unassimilated, but it also implies that less-educated immigrants are at risk of being left behind. The government, therefore, should introduce programs that make easily accessible classes available to promote integration.<sup>18</sup> These courses should be geared toward improving immigrants' English language and vocational skills, which will expand their employment opportunities and earning potential and, ultimately, increase their propensity to naturalize. We do not suggest that network activities at the local level be replaced by government services; our research indicates that mature enclaves do positively affect naturalization rates for all immigrant population segments. Government services should be complementary to the existing aids in the integration process, not a substitute, as is the current practice. In this way, government programs act as a safety net that catches immigrants who do not reside in neighborhoods with mature ethnic enclaves.

A new focus on governmental integration support gains additional importance in light of recent developments that raised the bar for immigrants' naturalization in the United States. Fees have increased and the examination has been redesigned to require a better command of English and cognitive ability (Fix et al., 2008), thus putting naturalization farther out of the reach of immigrants who were unable to afford it economically before and who are less educated and have less proficiency in English.

Although this article attempts to analyze the role of neighborhood effects on rates of naturalization, the results are limited. This research would benefit from longitudinal data with the year in which citizenship was acquired and an immigrant's location before and after becoming a citizen.

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<sup>18</sup> Americans can learn from the German integration initiative. Germany's Federal Office for Migration and Refugees is a clearinghouse for integration services provided by state and nonstate groups to immigrants. A similar agency in the United States would be useful for immigrants to access information on the naturalization process and gain assistance in preparing for the examination.

Such data would give a clearer understanding of the actual timing of the citizenship decision and the locational and personal attributes at the time of the decision. The complicated timelines of immigrant histories make it difficult to infer the proper causalities from cross-sectional data. The availability of such data would also enable researchers to take important sorting effects (Borjas, 1998) into account and investigate the possible interdependence of naturalization and neighborhood choice. In the absence of such data, future research should expand the analysis by including data from earlier years to complement the cross-sectional analysis with a synthetic cohort approach that might shed additional light on the relationship between the timing of the naturalization decision and neighborhood attributes.

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