Understanding Membership
(How) Does Citizenship Matter?
Irene Bloemraad
Citizenship Acquisition Compared: Working-age immigrants with at least 10 years of residence

Source: OECD 2015: 205
Explaining Citizenship

National laws structure access

(Europe): ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ nationalism → citizenship
Explaining Citizenship

Individual choice and ability

(N. America): individual and group variation based on skills, motivations, resources, etc.
Explaining Citizenship

Public-private partnership
(Canada-US): public policy sends symbolic welcome and builds civic infrastructures
But, does citizenship actually matter?
Of course it does, for those without

Without any citizenship

- A person has no secure residence, no protection against expulsion;
- Int’l travel is very hard.

- UN push for a legal ‘right’ to nationality (1954 and 1961 Conventions), and moral suasion, e.g., “I Belong” campaign
But what about for secure migrants?

“"The real prize is legal residency, not citizenship."" 

- Peter Spiro 
(2007: 159)

House speaker John Boehner, proposing legalization without a path to citizenship, January 2014
“postnational” critique+

- Rights based on common humanity, legal residency, or social/economic contribution.
- Identity more local and transnational, rather than in nation-states.
“hollow promise” critique

• **failed promise**: substantive citizenship – equality of rights, participation and outcomes – varies so widely, formal citizenship is irrelevant

• **outright deflection**: citizenship divides those in structurally vulnerable positions, hindering mobilization to true equality
Surveying the (limited!) evidence:

- **Political and civic engagement**
  - More local voting, even if citizenship not needed

- **Socio-economic integration**
  - Income boost of 2-10%

- **Social integration/ cohesion**
  - Greater identification with country

➤ Modest ‘yes’ for all, but no big effects.
Methodological challenges:

• **Data limitations**
  – Cross-sectional vs. longitudinal data
  – Lack citizenship, immigration variables, timing

• **Causal identification**
  – “selection” into citizenship [law, indiv. action]
  – across countries: endogeneity

• **Responses**
  – Multiple regression, IVs, diff.-in-diff. analysis, Heckman selection, fixed effects, quasi-experiments
Methods, and Theory:

- narrow ‘loss’ or ‘win’ in Swiss citizen vote
- change in German citizenship law (2000)

- Matters more for ‘non-Western’ immigrants
- Perhaps more for younger, recent migrants

For whom, in what contexts and why does citizenship matter?
Theorizing Mechanisms

- **Access** – laws restrict rights, benefits, access
- **Investment/socialization** – by individuals (in job training, language, civic norms)
- **Social psychological effects** – well-being, identity
- **Signaling** – to others (employers, teachers...)
- **Standing/legitimacy** – for claims-making
- **Mobilization** – invitations to participate
I: What does it mean, to be American?

...most people picture Americans with money, white... [but] we are all 100% Americans, we were born here. No matter what people say. We are Americans.

(US-born Mexican American)
Thank you!

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