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Review of Craig Parsons and Timothy Smeeding (eds.), Immigration and the Transformation of Europe

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the individual, the family, the (geographic) community, and context of the home society. She carefully walks the reader through variables appropriate for each level of analysis, devoting a chapter to each level. She is also particularly sensitive to issues of gender, offering hypotheses that differ for immigrant men and women, and taking into account patterns of gender relations in the country of origin.

In some cases, the statistical analysis reaffirms the findings of other studies. She notes the importance of education and socio-economic status for both naturalization and voting, and finds evidence for an approach that associates political incorporation with social integration. Thus, those who are married and who have lived in the United States longer are more likely to be citizens and to vote.

Some of the more intriguing findings speak to Bueker’s argument for different citizenship and voting models. For example, she finds that living in an area with many other foreign-born individuals lowers an immigrant’s propensity to naturalize, but, for those immigrants who are citizens, it increases the likelihood of voting. Similarly, coming from countries very different from the United States—those that are far away, less democratic and poorer—increases an immigrant’s likelihood of naturalizing, all else equal, but when it comes to voting, immigrants from countries more similar to the United States, in democratic tradition and GDP, are more likely to go to the polls. Since Bueker relies entirely on survey data collected through the CPS, she can’t probe these findings as carefully as she would like, but she speculates that citizenship is seen as a protection for those from very different societies, whereas immigrants from countries more like the U.S. see fewer benefits and perhaps greater chances of return to their homeland. However, once citizenship is acquired, those with greater resources—such as prior political experience in a democratic country—find it easier to participate. More generally, Bueker can be commended for trying to unpack “origin” effects in order to understand why certain immigrant groups have very different naturalization and voting tendencies, even after controlling for the usual individual-level variables.

Bueker has a nice discussion of the advantages and limits of the Current Population Survey. Students new to the statistical study of immigrant political incorporation would do well to review her discussion. The author has thought about problems modeling a population with many different legal statuses, language abilities, and willingness to respond to a government-run survey. At the same time, some may wonder whether differential response rates between the groups she studies biases the results, especially across countries of origin.

Overall, the strength of this book lies in Bueker’s clear exposition of multiple (at times, competing) hypotheses, her careful attention to a multitude of variables and her accessible writing. Some may have quibbles with some of the statistical analyses or discussion of classic texts, but Bueker does a nice job of laying out the complexity of political incorporation and offering many avenues for future research. The book is entirely statistical, perhaps off-putting for classroom adoption, but anyone doing research on immigrant naturalization or voting should consult From Immigrant to Naturalized Citizen.


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On a recent summer morning in Madrid, the demand for park benches lining a small playground is much greater than for jungle-gym equipment. Indeed, a dozen elderly adults and their Latin American caregivers outnumber a handful of raucous children by 3 to 1. The playground ratio of adults to children and the presence of immigrant caregivers are a microcosm of broader demographic and economic transformations in postwar Spain and in other Western European countries. The situation in Western Europe is not as stark as the one portrayed in the recent futurist film Children of Men—where a zero birth-rate has put the species at the brink of extinction and the only hope lies with a pregnant African migrant—but it does hint at
some of the dilemmas posed by a shrinking population of younger workers and taxpayers, and by an increase in outsiders perceived to challenge national membership myths.

Immigration and the Transformation of Europe (ITE) sets out to unpack fundamental questions raised by the “new” demographics of Europe. The collection contains a thorough introduction by the editors, two chapters on the contours of European demographic change in the postwar period, six chapters on the economic dimensions of immigration, and eight chapters on the political-cultural facets of new arrivals to an unwelcoming region. Although the book’s first nine chapters make arguments in their own right, they also provide a foundation for the core political and cultural chapters. The highly informative and well-written tome delivers plenty of data and helpful analyses. Its linked chapters represent a diversity of disciplinary and methodological approaches. ITE’s most appealing quality is the cross-national and longitudinal approach taken by most of its contributors (e.g., the effectiveness of asylum policies in 20 OECD countries over a 13-year period or the unfolding of immigration policies in Europe since 1945).

The mix of chapters on demographic, economic, political, and cultural facets of immigration nicely forefront the conflicting logics used to assess the movement of people across geo-political borders (chapter 12 following Hollifield). From a purely economic perspective, immigration is a simple matter of labor flows responding to market conditions. Employers see newcomers as tractable workers (relative to those with native aspirations and outlooks), while native workers may see them as scabs. A dual orientation to the homeland and to the receiving context shape foreign workers’ outlooks and willingness to do the jobs available to them. From a political standpoint, immigration entails a complex calculus by interest groups of how voters perceive newcomers’ effect on the economy and on collective identity. And not only do different actors assess immigration in often diametrically opposed ways, but their evaluations change over time.

If not for conflicting logics at work, cool-headed assessments of immigration would prevail. The controversy surrounding immigration in Western receiving contexts and the strange alliances it spaws suggest that something dear is at stake: the very scripts and schemas that help us legitimate our social worlds, give it cohesiveness, and orient our action. The book’s last 10 chapters demonstrate that states and the “national”—short-hand for authoritative scripts and schemas—continue to be relevant means of organizing social life and are threatened by immigration in ways that explain its controversial character. Laurence’s essay (chapter 11) underscores the means by which political institutions try to nationalize Islamic organizations and the consequences of these efforts. The continued significance of nation-states as containers of material and symbolic goods is what stands out in his account. Martinelli’s review of European immigration policy since 1945 (chapter 12), shows how the assumption of a zero-immigration baseline underlies the framing of immigration as a threat to those goods circumscribed by nation-states (jobs and welfare, law and order, and western Christendom). In the realm of public perception, Citrin and Sides (chapter 13) demonstrate that individual rather than country-level factors account for most attitudes toward immigrants and immigration in 20 European countries.

My sole reservation about ITE is the normative tone implicit in the framing of its topic (p. 4). To the extent that immigration is a challenge to overcome (chapter 2), the line between independent social scientific inquiry and the resolution of problems so defined by the state becomes dangerously blurred. To be sure, the social sciences have plenty to say about the intended and unintended consequences of population movement and state policies meant to control these flows, but it is arguably not their sole or even main purpose to fix “problems” as defined by government actors. On the other hand, the book’s cross-national and long view attenuates “methodologically nationalist” renderings of what could easily be interpreted solely from a state-centered standpoint. Therefore, I enthusiastically recommend this book for advanced undergraduate and graduate courses on comparative migration. In tandem with volumes on other migration systems, it can give a well-rounded picture of a crucial social process.