The Political Participation of Immigrants and the Naturalization Backlog in Colorado

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GOLDA MEIR CENTER

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ABOUT THE REPORT

This report is intended as an empirical investigation of the voting behavior of immigrants in Colorado and the naturalization backlog within the state as part of the Golda Meir Center and Metropolitan State University of Denver's missions to provide relevant and timely community-based research. The data and analyses are presented to provide the public and stakeholders with evidence to further a discourse regarding immigrant voting rights and the naturalization process. The report covers three main topics: the naturalization backlog in Colorado; the propensity of immigrants in Colorado to vote; and the electoral preferences of Latino immigrants (the largest single group of immigrants in Colorado).

The Author

Dr. Robert Preuhs is Professor of Political Science at Metropolitan State University of Denver. His research focuses on issues of representation and democracy through the lens of racial and ethnic politics, state and national political institutions, and public policy. Preuhs' publications have appeared in the leading peer-reviewed journals in the discipline of political science, such as *The American Journal of Political Science*, *The Journal of Politics*, and *Political Research Quarterly*, among others. He is also the co-author of *Black-Latino Relations in U.S. National Politics: Beyond Conflict or Cooperation* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

The Golda Meir Center

The Golda Meir Center is a nonpartisan educational project whose purpose is to expand public understanding of the important role of leadership at all levels of political and civic life, from community affairs to transnational relations. As a woman from a poor family who was twice an immigrant to new lands, Golda Meir reminds us that the potential for leadership knows no class, ethnic, gender, religious, racial, age or geographical boundaries. Leadership can emerge from the most unlikely places.

Cover Image

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KEY FINDINGS

The naturalization backlog in Colorado includes over 9,000 applications awaiting completion (as of October 2018), with processing times of at least 11.5 months for over half of those applicants. The delay in processing means hundreds of applicants, and potentially thousands, will not be granted citizenship in time to vote in several upcoming elections barring a drastic and immediate reduction in the backlog.

- Colorado's backlog in naturalization application (Form N-400) processing is currently hovering at historic highs, with 9,325 applications pending and over 2,000 new applications received each quarter, as of October 1, 2018.
- Processing times range to a point that immigrants applying for naturalization in March of 2019, most likely will not complete the process in time to vote in the 2019 local elections.
- The gap between naturalized citizen voter registration and voting rates, and their U.S.-born counterparts' rates, continued over the last eight national elections in Colorado. However, the gap narrowed during this timeframe.
- The effect of excluding these potential voters due to delays in the naturalization process on statewide election outcomes is likely nominal as the numbers of affected applicants are extremely small compared to the overall electorate and registration rates further reduce the number likely to vote.
- Increases in the number of new applicants per quarter, combined with steady completions per quarter, resulted in reduced administrative effort, or the proportion of total caseload completed in the quarter.

132%
Increase in the Backlog

The percent change in the Number of Pending Naturalization Applications in Colorado between October 2013 and October 2018. (from 4,023 to 9,3255).

765
To
2,754
Prevented from Voting

The low and high estimate of the number of applicants for naturalization per quarter that would be able and likely to vote if the backlog were eliminated.

INTRODUCTION

This report focuses on documented, or authorized, immigrants who seek U.S. citizenship through the process of naturalization and their political participation and preferences after gaining citizenship. Immigrants seeking to become U.S. citizens are required to apply for citizenship through the naturalization process. This process usually follows the steps of authorized entry into the United States, and subsequently a five-year period of permanent residence within the United States (or three years for spouses of U.S. citizens), applying for naturalization by filing the Form N-400 (Application for Naturalization), and completing an interview and biometric screening at a U.S. Customs and Immigration Services Office. This process has recently experienced backlogs of up to two years in some states, and thus applicants may not be granted citizenship over an extended period beyond the alternative scenario without an application processing backlog.

While waiting may be an expected element of an interaction with bureaucratic agencies, the backlog in citizenship applications raises several important issues. First, assuming an immigrant is qualified for naturalization, the backlog period represents a period in which that individual is unable to exercise their rights as a citizen. The primary right of interest in this report is the right to vote. The potential for lengthy backlogs to span elections and election cycles means that otherwise qualified voters are simply unable to exercise this fundamental right in the democratic system over the course of the backlog. Moreover, if immigrants' electoral preferences tend to one set of candidates or another, the omission of their collective influence on electoral outcomes may bias results relative to a scenario absent the backlog. These issues related to a functioning democracy form the rationale for the analyses that follow, with a specific focus on Colorado and its immigrant population.

The report first addresses the naturalization backlog by presenting its trajectory and key indicators of effort to reduce the backlog in Colorado's naturalization centers. The analysis then turns to the degree to which naturalized immigrants participate in the electoral process, with the goal of understanding the potential, or implied, magnitude of the effects of the backlog on the voting rights of those awaiting citizenship. Finally, the report presents the preferences of Latino immigrants in Colorado during the 2012 and 2016 general elections to evaluate the potential for the backlog to exclude the unique preferences of the largest segment of Colorado's immigrant population.

Throughout the analyses, care is taken to present the facts as they stand and how they relate to hypotheses regarding intent. The limitations of the facts presented are also noted.

As with most issues on the political agenda, the results do not always point in a clear, single, direction. For instance, while the naturalization backlog has expanded in recent years, there is not a clear line where the trend deviates to the point of being able to identify a shift in administrative policy. Immigrants, particularly recent immigrants, are less likely to vote than longer term immigrants and thus the impact of the backlog on voting rights may not be as large as it would be if voting rates were in line with U.S.-born citizens. The evidence on Latino immigrants' political preferences are convincing, however. Latinos in Colorado, and particularly Latino immigrants, overwhelmingly favored Democratic candidates for President and the U.S. House of Representatives in the 2012 and 2016 election. In short, the picture is complicated. With distinct preferences, and some potential citizens not able to vote while they slog through the backlog process, the likely result is lower levels of statewide support for Democratic candidates in future elections compared to a world without a naturalization backlog. But with lower registration rates, and subsequently voting rates, and a relatively smaller portion of the overall electorate in Colorado, the impact may be marginal. Yet even if the magnitude of those affected is in the hundreds, the backlog raises serious concerns about its effect on the voting rights of the immigrant population.

Throughout the report, the analyses rely on graphical, and some tabular, presentation of the quantitative data. Detailed data sources and references are listed in the Appendix. Some supplemental figures, ie. national trends, and detailed tables of the statistical analyses are also presented in the Appendix. Interested readers are welcome to contact the author for any additional clarification if needed.

THE NATURALIZATION BACKLOG IN COLORADO

Immigrants seeking to become U.S. citizens are required to apply for citizenship through the naturalization process. This process usually follows the steps of authorized entry into the United States and the granting of Permanent Resident of the United States status through the issuance of a Permanent Resident Card (formally Alien Registration Card). After a period of five years (three if married to a U.S. citizen), holders of Permanent Resident Cards can apply for citizenship. The application, Form N-400, is required, as is an interview and potentially a biometric screening. The number of pending applications for naturalization in a given period is the backlog. For this report, the focus is on the backlog in USCIS centers in

Figure 1. Applications for Naturalization (N-400) in Colorado by Status, FY2013 to FY2018
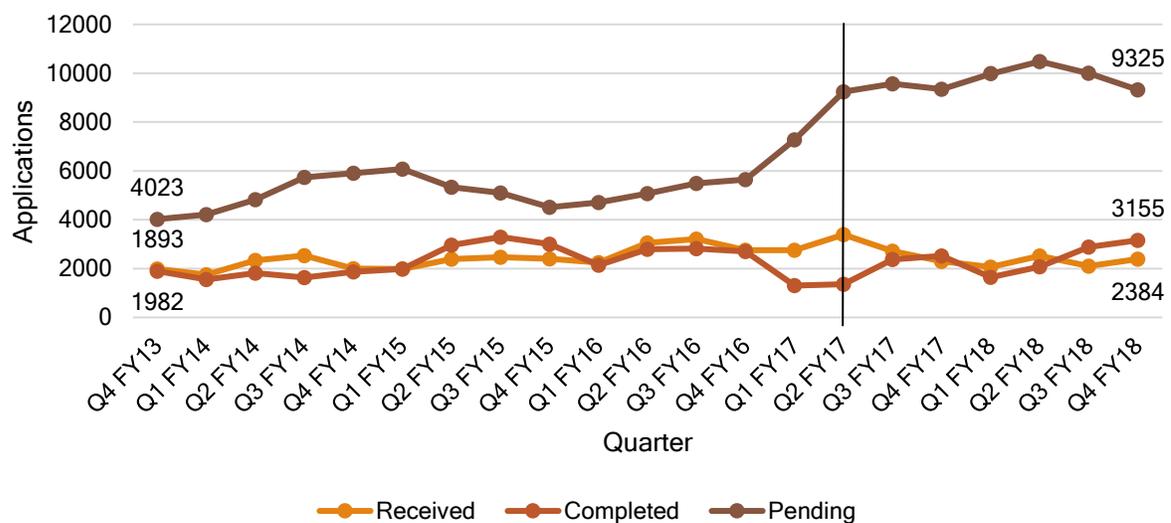
Colorado, noting trends in the backlog related to its overall size, a measure of administrative effort, and the proportion of denials over a roughly four-year timeframe (from late FY 2013 to late FY 2018). Note that the data is somewhat limited due to the availability of comparable quarterly data on pending applications, completed applications and denied applications.

The Increasing Backlog

The naturalization backlog (Figure 1), the number of pending applications in Colorado, exhibited a sharp increase between the fourth quarter (Q4) of FY 2016 and the second quarter (Q2) of FY 2017, or roughly August of 2016 through March 2017 (fiscal years begin on October 1 of the previous calendar year). During that period, pending applications rose in

number from 5,652 to 9,241, or about 63%. Subsequently, the number of pending applications generally increased, peaking in Q2 of FY 2018 at 10,482, and stood at 9,325 by the end of Q4 in FY 2018. In short, the immigration backlog in Colorado currently stands near four-year highs (See Figure 1). Following the thirty-plus day government shutdown in January of 2019, these numbers likely increased substantially.

Backlogs experienced an ebb and flow over the four years. The periods separated by the vertical line in Figure 1 indicate a sustained backlog during the Trump Administration that nearly doubles in magnitude relative to the last several years of the Obama Administration. In

Change in Average Quarterly Figures from Obama to Trump Administrations from 2014 to 2018

3.1%
increase in applications

83.8%
increase in pending applications

fact, the average number of pending cases per quarter between Q4 2013 and Q1 2017 stands at 5,281. During the six quarters where data is available during the Trump Administration, the average pending applications per quarter stood at 9,704.

The increase in pending cases coincides, in part, with a steady increase in applications and is reflected in national trends (Krogstad 2016). Applications in Colorado peaked during this timeframe in Q2 of 2017, at 3,390, likely a result of legal residents' heightened concern about the political climate following an election in which immigration policy played a central role (Ong 2011; Pantoja et al. 2001; Pastor et al. 206; Ramírez 2013; Wilkinson 2018). But, applications did not share the same upward trajectory of pending cases. While average quarterly applications increased slightly from 2,419 in the period prior to Q2 FY 2017, to 2,495 in subsequent quarters, it represents an increase of only 3.1%, well below the increase in average quarterly pending cases of 83.8% across the comparable time periods.

The backlog in pending cases translates to long waits between the initial filing of Form N-400 and when citizenship is granted after completion. The USCIS provides an estimated range of the time it will take to complete the process to gain citizenship, permitting immigrants to anticipate the wait. For those filing in September of 2018 (the latest available estimate at this writing), the median processing time was 11.5 months. In other words, 50% of the cases

were completed in less than 11.5 months, while 50% took longer. By 17.5 months, USCIS estimated that 93% of cases would be completed.

From the perspective of potential voters, the wait time limits the elections in which new citizens can participate. Assuming similar wait times exist as of March 2019, for instance, about 50% of applicants filing in that period will not have their applications completed by the May or June 2019 elections held by many municipalities in Colorado (ie. The City of Denver's general elections are held in May, with a run-off in June). At the far end of the range, some qualifying immigrants will not be able to vote in the 2020 national elections. As the backlog remains, the dates continue to roll over. While Colorado's same-day registration laws provide some additional time relative to other states, if the backlog remains, otherwise qualified immigrants may not be granted citizenship prior to the 2020 national elections. For instance, and assuming the processing time remains static or increases, at least 50% of those applying for citizenship in March of 2020 will not be able to vote in the November Presidential/General Election (nor the primaries which are generally held in mid- to late-summer). In short, the backlog and associated processing times impede the ability of otherwise qualified immigrants to gain citizenship and subsequently exercise their newly gained right to vote.
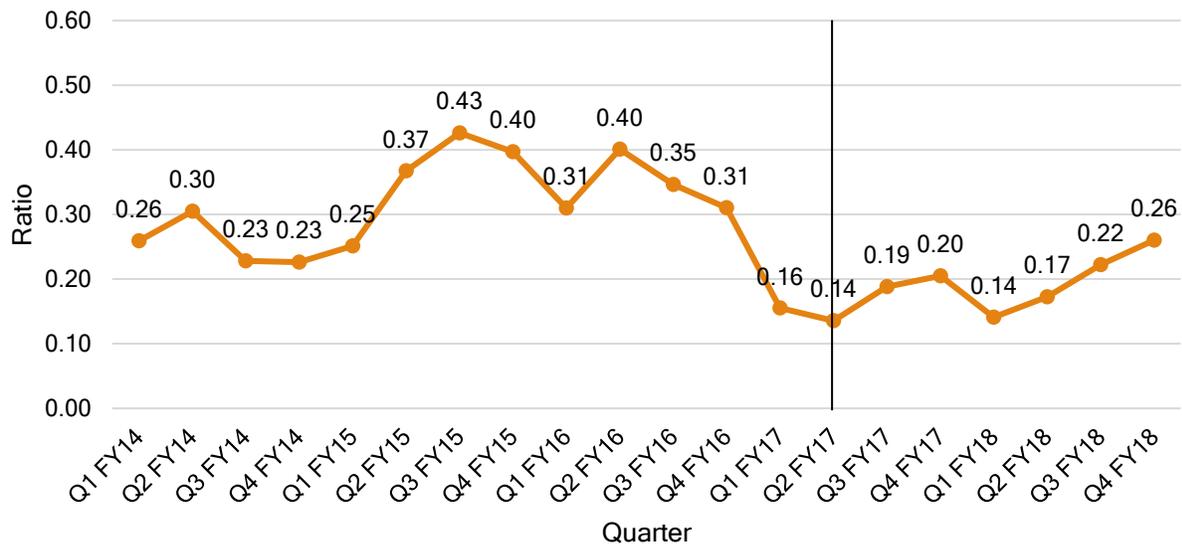
Administrative Effort

While the number of pending cases, and associated processing times, are increasing, these absolute figures are only one dimension to consider. Another is what might be called administrative effort, or the degree to which application completions relate to overall caseloads (caseloads are defined as the sum of pending applications and new applications). Formally, this measure can be calculated as the ratio of completions in the current quarter to caseloads in the previous quarter. Effort ratios are capped at one, where all applications in the previous quarter, both pending and newly received, are completed within the current quarter. Ratios below 1 indicate the proportion of the caseload that is completed in a given quarter. Higher ratios indicate greater administrative effort at addressing awaiting decisions.

Application Processing Time Range in Colorado

11.5 Months
(the median)
to
17.5 Months
(93% of cases are completed)

Source: Processing Time for Applications for Naturalization (N-400) in Colorado, US Citizenship and Immigration Services, as of September 2018.

Figure 2. Naturalization Appication Completions as a Proportion of Caseloads$_{t-1}$ in Colorado, FY 2014-2018


As Figure 2 indicates, effort has varied over the study's timeframe. Peaking in Q3 of FY 2015 at .43 (43% of the previous quarter's caseload was processed to completion), with lows of .14 in Q2 of 2017 and Q1 of 2018. The new Administration coincides with a substantially lower average effort ratio (.19) compared to the average across previous quarters during the Obama Administration (.31) which date back to Q1 of FY 2014. But note that the start of the decline in effort preceded the new Administration and has been sporadic, with some modest increases during the most quarters under the Trump Administration. While variation in applications received and the rollover of pending applications generally increased, completions per quarter remained relatively static during the Trump Administration. In other words, the driver of effort seems to lie in the inelastic nature of completions in the face of a growing caseload.

Denials

The application process can result in continuances, denials or approvals. The USCIS reports both denials and approvals which sum to completions. Variation in denials over time serves as an important indicator of the proportion of the applicants for naturalization that, by definition, would not be eligible to vote even with a reduced backlog. As an indicator of administrative behavior, it is less useful as the denial rates could reflect either an increase in the proportion of ineligible immigrants filing applications for naturalization, heightened scrutiny, an actual change in policy or any combination of such.

Figure 3 presents denial rates over the study's timeframe, where denial rates are denials as a percentage of total completions. Denials remained relatively low from FY 2014 until the end of FY 2015. Since that quarter, denial rates have risen to a peak of 19.9% in Q4 of FY 2015. From that period, denial rates only dipped below 13% in one quarter, compared to all but one quarter of the preceding period experiencing denial rates above 13%. Denial rates dipped slightly after the peak and have remained steady since. In terms of denials, there seems to be no obvious trend in rates since the end of FY 2015, and thus no sign of a shift under the new Administration.

Figure 3. Naturalization Application Denials as a Percentage of Completions in Colorado, FY 2013-2018
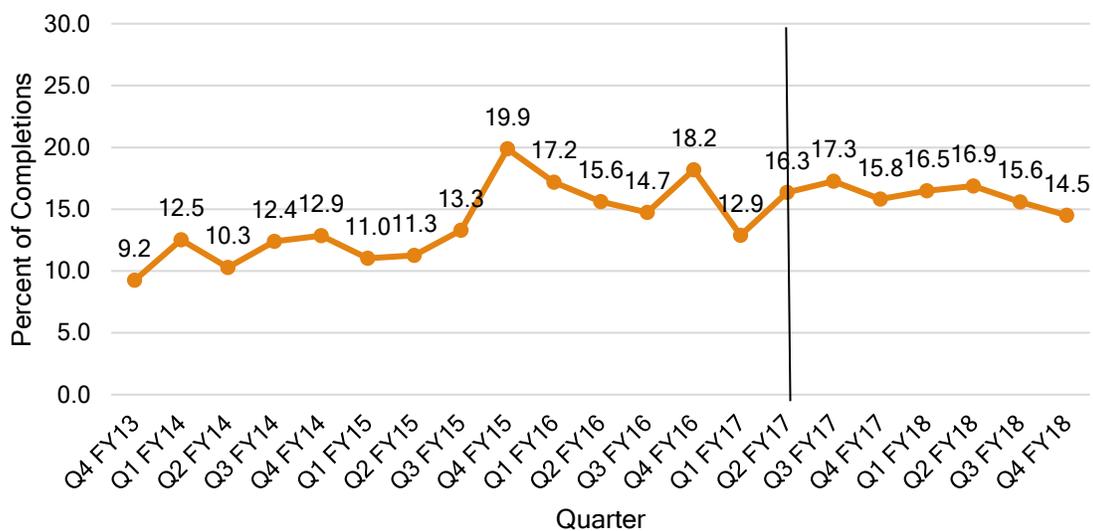
Why the spike in denial rates in FY 2015? One possible explanation is that the political environment in late 2015 shifted to a focus on immigration policy (about the time then-candidate Trump entered the presidential race) (Wilkinson 2018). This may have spurred aspiring, but not qualifying, immigrants to apply for naturalization. Another possible explanation is a misinterpretation of the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) which was signed as an Executive Order in 2014. This scenario would suggest that unauthorized resident parents of citizens may have incorrectly interpreted their eligibility. The data cannot address either of these possibilities, but it is clear that a structural shift in denial rates occurred in late 2014.

Summary

What is the state of the naturalization process in Colorado? Clearly, the backlog increased over the last several years and maintains recent highs, with between 9,000 and 10,000 applicants awaiting completion in recent quarters. This equates to a general range of 11.5 to

17.5 months wait time, enough to prevent otherwise eligible immigrants from voting in upcoming elections. The source of that backlog is a combination of new applicants being received at higher rates than completions, and subsequently a lower level of administrative effort. While effort levels recently experienced modest increases, rates under the Trump Administration remain low relative to overall rates in the four-year timeframe examined. Denial rates remain at their structurally higher levels experienced since late 2014. In sum, it is clear the naturalization backlog in Colorado remains a significant hurdle for immigrants seeking citizenship and its associated rights. The sources of this backlog are less clear, with both denials and effort at or near highs and lows respectively, but trends in those directions developed prior to the new Administration.

IMMIGRANT VOTER PARTICIPATION IN COLORADO

While the naturalization backlog clearly extends the time before eligible immigrants can participate in the electoral process, the impact of the backlog on potential citizens depends on their propensity to vote upon being granted citizenship. In other words, if new immigrants do not vote, backlogs may still cause a host of other problems, but the denial of the right to vote may not be of immediate concern. Moreover, a substantial amount of research at the national level and within some states finds that newly naturalized citizens tend to vote at lower rates than naturalized citizens, who in turn vote less at lower rates than citizens that were born in the U.S. (Bareto et al. 2005; Barreto and Segura 2014; Pantoja et al. 2001; Pastor et al. 2016; Ramírez 2013; Wals 2011; 2013; Wang 2013)

The following analyses presents data on the voting rates of naturalized citizens, making distinctions based on the amount of time immigrants have resided in the U.S. to access differences between the newly and longtime naturalized population in Colorado, as allowed by the data. Overall, naturalized citizens in Colorado are registered to vote, and vote, at lower rates than U.S.-born citizens, and newly naturalized citizens vote at the lowest rates, thus reflecting previous research. These results hold after controlling for several other contributing factors. However, once registered to vote, there is no significant difference in voting rates across these three groups. The key to increasing voter participation of naturalized and newly naturalized citizens seems to lie in ensuring foreign-born citizens are registered to vote in the first place.

Naturalized Citizen Registration and Voting

To what extent do naturalized citizens engage in the electoral process in Colorado? To address this question, the November Supplement of the Current Population Survey iPUMS Micro Data were utilized to estimate registration and voter turnout rates based on this self-reported survey. (Details of the data sources are provided in the Appendix.)

A consistent result of studies of immigrant political participation demonstrates that naturalized citizens' voting and registration rates, as a percent of their voting age population (VAP), tend be to lower than U.S.-born citizens (Barreto and Segura 2014; Ramírez 2013; Pastor et al. 2016). This is often attributed to a lack of socialization within the political system, as well as varying degrees of political engagement in their previous countries (Wals

2011; Wals 2013). As immigrants become more accustomed to the political process, and sometimes spurred by political events, they tend to vote and register at higher rates (Pantoja et al. 2001). Thus, it is the newly naturalized citizens that participate in the electoral process at substantially lower rates than longer term immigrants. Newly naturalized immigrants are also the most proximate and comparable group to those awaiting the completion of the naturalization process. Thus, this report is particularly interested in the voting and registration rates of newly naturalized citizens in Colorado.

Registration Rates. The voting process begins with registration in Colorado. Beginning with the 2014 November general election, same-day registration was implemented, with citizens able to register to vote through the day of the election. Figure 4 presents the self-reported registration rates for the voting age population of naturalized and U.S.-born citizens in Colorado's national elections from 2000 to 2016. For both groups, registration rates have generally increased over this timeframe which is also marked by a narrowing of the registration gap between U.S.-born and naturalized citizens. In the most recent election, an estimated 73.3% of naturalized VAP and 89.8% of U.S.-born citizen VAP in Colorado reporting that they are registered. These estimates are somewhat high since respondents tend to over-report registration and voting status but are still in line with independent estimates that report 78% of the overall VAP in Colorado was registered to vote

Figure 4. Colorado Self-Reported Voter Registration Rates by Citizenship Status, 2000-2016
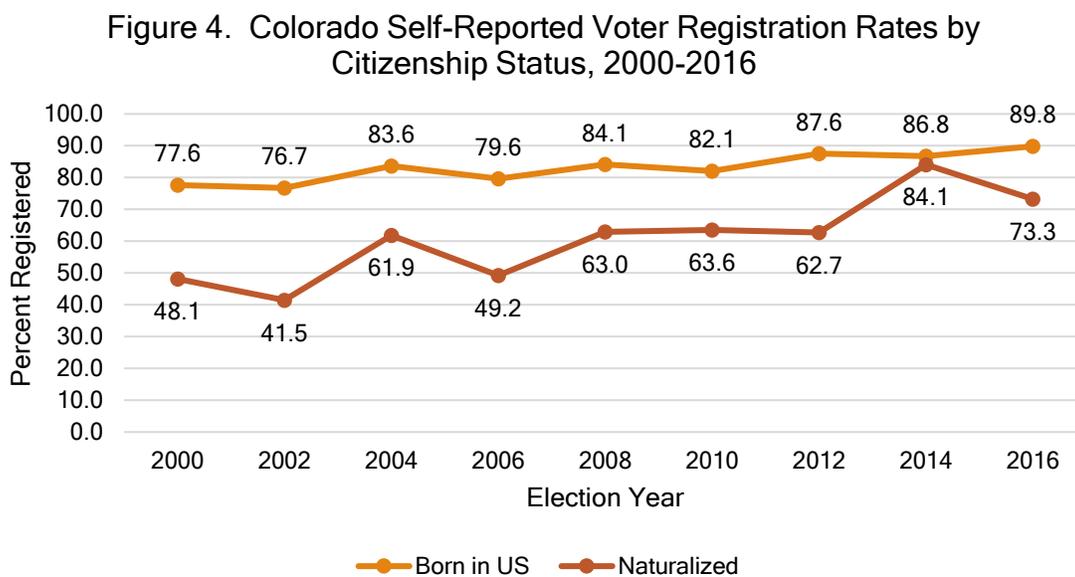

in the most recent 2018 election (Colorado Secretary of State, 2018). Regardless, the key insight is that the gap between naturalized and U.S.-born citizens remains but has narrowed from about 29 percentage points in 2000 to roughly 16 percentage points by 2016 (2014's exceptional result is discussed below). While still behind U.S.-born counterparts, Colorado's

naturalized citizens seem to be registering at higher rates than before and are in line with national registration rates of about 73% for naturalized citizens (see Appendix). These increasing rates imply that Colorado's naturalized citizen population is in a better position to vote compared to most of the preceding decade and a half.

Voting Rates. Figure 5 presents the self-reported voting rates for Colorado's naturalized citizens and U.S. born citizens as a percentage of their respective VAPs over the nine elections from 2000 to 2016. In the 2016 elections, 63.7% of naturalized citizens and 83.7% of U.S. born citizens reported voting in the CPS survey. These numbers are somewhat high, once again, due to over-reporting, but are still in line with independent estimates of around 71.9% of Colorado's VEP reported by the U.S. Elections Project (2019). Note that the pattern of voting closely follows the pattern of registration discussed above. Naturalized citizens tended throughout this period to vote at lower rates than U.S.-born citizens, with a narrowing of the gap from about 25 percentage points in 2000 to 20 percentage points in 2016. The reduced gap in voting rates is, however, not nearly as substantial as the gap reduction in registration rates–possibly a result of increased registration drives by several Latino advocacy groups during the last several elections combined with intense interest by Latinos spurred by the immigration debates (see Preuhs nd).

Figure 5. Colorado Self-Reported Voting Rates by Citizenship Status, 2000-2016
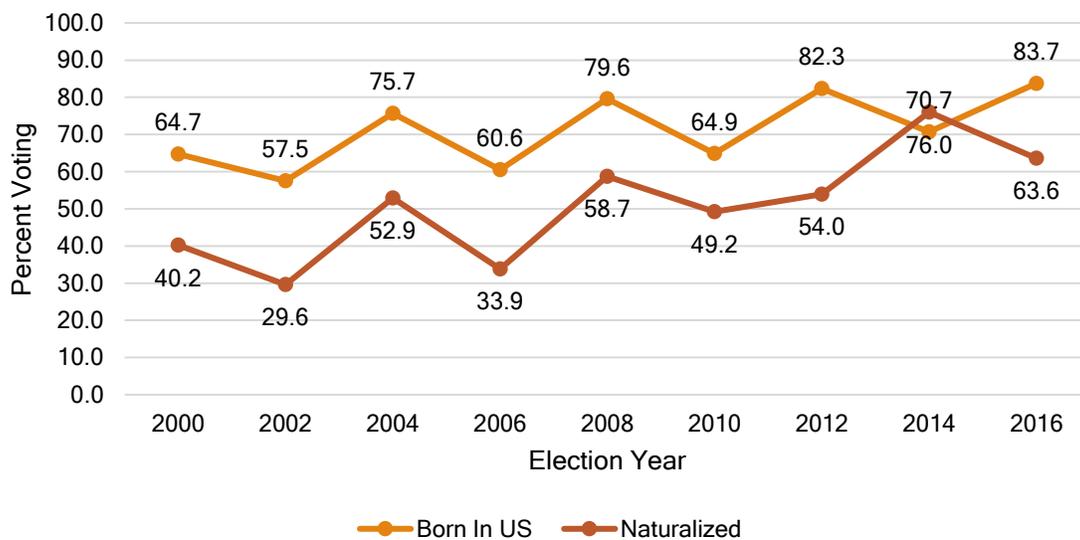
The exception to the general pattern of lower registration and voting rates of naturalized citizens is the 2014 election. As in all surveys, this may be due to random error in the sample during that year. However, 2014 marked the first year of same-day registration and all mail-in balloting in Colorado. It also came on the heals of the DAPA executive order,

and heightened debate regarding immigration policy at the both the national and state level. Each of these factors may have spurred increases in naturalized citizen interest in the elections. The likely cause is a combination of each of these factors, but the data do not allow for a conclusive answer to this anomaly.

Figure 6. Colorado Self-Reported Voting Rate for Registered Voters, by Citizenship Status, 2000-2016
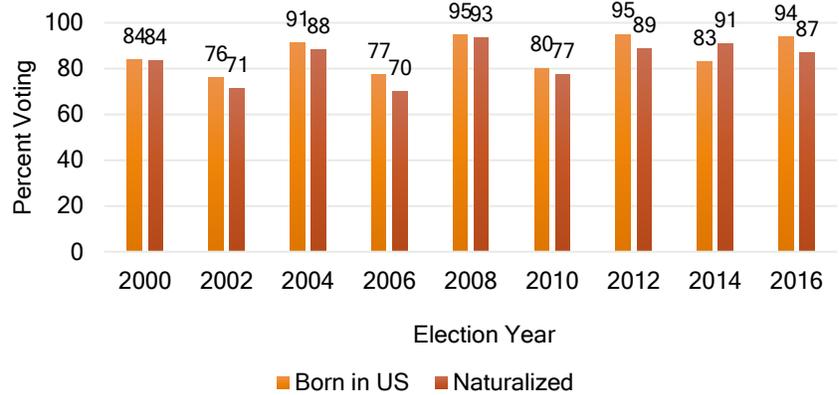
Once registered, naturalized citizens tend to vote at rates comparable to their U.S.-born counterparts. As Figure 6 shows, while a participation gap remains among registered voters, the magnitude of the gap is much smaller than gaps in registration or overall voting rates. The voting rate gap among registered voters never exceeded eight percentage points in national elections between 2000 and 2016, and in four of those elections, the gap was three percentage points or less. Thus, once registered, naturalized citizens vote at rates comparable to other citizens in Colorado.

Sample size issues preclude a yearly comparison of estimates of voting and registration rates for newly versus longtime naturalized citizens. Moreover, since newly naturalized citizens are likely younger, and in Colorado recently from Mexico and Latin America, it is worth a more systematic multivariate analysis of registration and voting among those registered. The multivariate analyses allow for estimation of the probabilities of registering to vote and voting among those registered for U.S.-born citizens, naturalized citizens who immigrated more than 20 years prior to the election and naturalized citizens who immigrated less than 20 years prior to the election, while controlling for age, racial/ethnic background, and

Estimated Colorado Voting Participation

Registration Rates

U.S.-born: 83%
Naturalized > 20 Yrs.: 72%
Naturalized < 20 Yrs.: 60%

Voting Rates Once Registered

U.S.-born: 87%
Naturalized > 20 Yrs.: 84%
Naturalized < 20 Yrs.: 86%

Note: Probabilities are calculated from the multivariate models presented in the Appendix, with the observed value approach which averages the respondents' predicted probabilities for each condition while holding all other factors at the respondent's actual value

election year (full model details are presented in the Appendix). Here again, the results reflect findings based on previously studies of national samples. Those born in the U.S. registered with a probability of .83, those immigrating more than 20 years prior to the election registered with a probability of .72, and newer immigrants were the least likely to register, with a probability of .60. Note that being a naturalized citizen and a newly naturalized citizen were statistically significant factors in the models.

Once registered, however, voting rates did not vary across the groups in a statistically discernable manner.   Reflecting the results of those presented for the overall naturalized population in Colorado in Figure 6, there appears to be no real difference in voting rates that can be attributed to naturalization status.

These data, combined with the actual quarterly processing data, allow for a general estimate of the number of applicants unable to vote in the 2018 midterm elections in Colorado due to the administrative backlog across several scenarios. Based solely on new applications in each quarter reported in Figure 1, and thus neglecting pending applications rolled over from previous quarters, estimates for six-month, nine-month and twelve-month backlogs can be constructed by assuming that all applicants share the same processing time. Given an application approval rate of 85%, a registration rate among newly naturalized citizens of 60%, and a voting rate after registration of 86%, the various scenarios lead to the following estimates of the number of otherwise eligible and likely voters that were prevented from participating in the 2018 general elections in Colorado:

Unable to Vote in 2018

919
Six-Month Backlog

1998
Nine-Month Backlog

2963
Twelve-Month Backlog

Estimated Number of Otherwise Eligible Immigrants Unable to Vote in the November 2018 Elections for Three Backlog Scenarios

Six-Month Backlog–919; Nine-Month Backlog–1998; Twelve-Month Backlog–2963. These estimates underscore the substantial impact of the backlog on the ability of otherwise eligible voters to participate in elections. Moreover, the estimates do not account for pending applications that roll over from previous quarters.

The Relative Size of Naturalized Immigrants in the Electorate. While registration and voting rates provide a glimpse of the potential for electoral influence, and the backlog's effect on voting potential, the proportion of the electorate comprised of naturalized citizens is another important consideration. The impact of any group on election results rests on both

the direction of their preferences (discussed below) as well as the overall size of that group. Thus, if naturalized citizens account for a very small proportion of the overall electorate, delaying their opportunity to vote will have almost no impact on statewide election results. Figure 7 presents the size of the naturalized VAP population in Colorado as a proportion of the VAP in the state. It also provides national-level statistics for comparison. These data were calculated by Pastor et al. (2016) with estimates reflecting 2015 levels. More recent data is not available.

Figure 7. Estimated Voting Age Naturalized Citizens as a Percentage of Citizen Voting Age Population, 2015
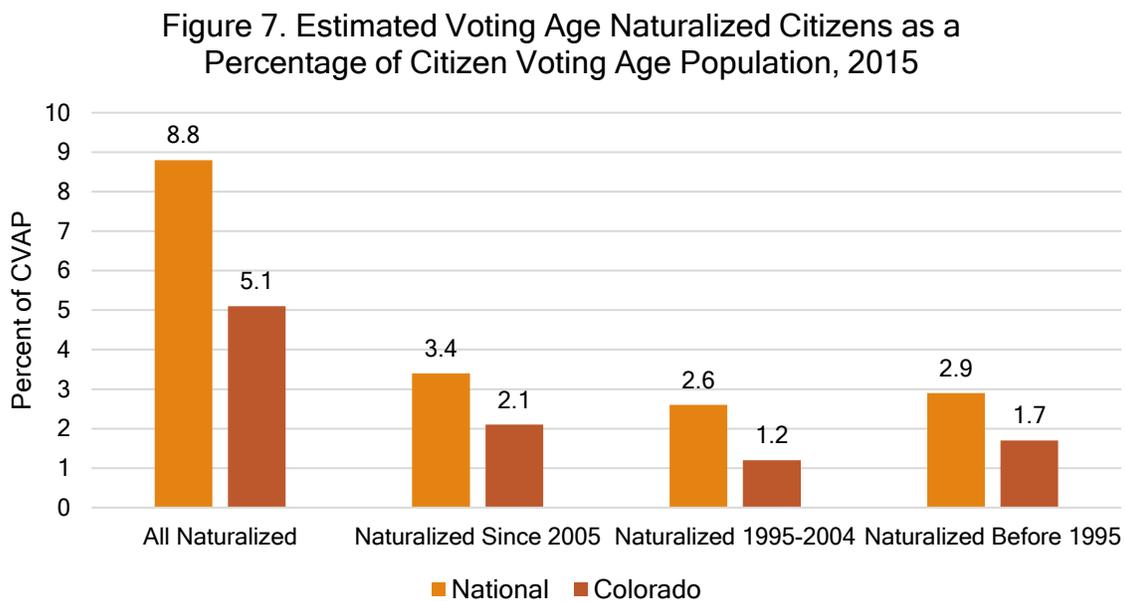
Note that Colorado's naturalized VAP comprises about 5.1% of the state's VAP. While a relatively small percentage, it is generally above similar metrics for Black and Asian residents. The largest segment of naturalized citizens is comprised of those who were naturalized since 2005. While Colorado's naturalized citizens make up a smaller proportion of the VAP than the nation as a whole, the size is still substantial, and given a strong bent in terms of political orientations, has the potential to alter statewide election outcomes.

Summary

Several key take-aways emerge from the substantial amount of data presented above. First, while naturalized citizens tend to register and vote at overall levels below U.S.-born citizens in Colorado, the registration and voting gap have decreased since 2000. Second, once registered, naturalized citizens tend to vote at rates comparable to those of U.S.-born counterparts, even after controlling for age and racial/ethnic background. Third, recent immigrants tend to register and vote at lower rates than those immigrating more than 20 years

prior to the election, but again, once registered, no difference is detectable. And finally, naturalized citizens comprise a small, but potentially decisive segment of the VAP in Colorado. Overall, these results suggest that while eliminating a backlog in naturalization will not result all newly naturalized citizens initially participating, it would allow a substantial portion of that group to vote compared to a continuation of the current 11.5 to 17.5 month naturalization processing range.

THE POLITICAL PREFERENCES OF NATURALIZED CITIZENS IN COLORADO

As briefly noted in the previous section, the impact of a group on election outcomes is a combination of group preferences and group size. Strong preferences for one candidate or another within a large portion of the VAP can swing elections. Lacking either a strong preference or a large relative VAP limits group effects. In this last section of the report, attention is turned to the political preferences of Latino naturalized citizens in 2012 and 2016 to understand their potential to impact election outcomes. Latino citizens are examined for both substantive and practical reasons. Practically, no data sources currently available provide a large enough sample to draw inferences about political preferences of other nation/region-of-origin groups in Colorado. Substantively, in FY 2017, Latinos made up 40.5% of all those naturalized in Colorado (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2017) and 36% of all recently naturalized citizens of voting age in Colorado in 2015 (Pastor et al. 2016). The data demonstrates that Latino naturalized citizens were more supportive of Democratic Presidential and Congressional candidates compared to U.S.-born Latinos, and substantially more supportive of Democrats than the overall electorate.

Latino Preferences in 2012 and 2016

To access the political preferences of Latinos in Colorado, survey data from the 2012 and 2016 Latino Decisions Election Eve Polls are utilized. The Latino Decisions' Colorado surveys were statewide samples of approximately 400 Latino registered voters. One advantage of these polls is that they allowed respondents to complete the surveys in English or Spanish. As a practical point, the two surveys are also the only available election eve polls with a sample of Latinos large enough to make reasonable inferences about Latinos in general, as well as naturalized Latinos. The polls were conducted in the last weeks prior to their respective elections, and generally have a margin of error of about 5%. These data have been used as the basis of analyses of Latino voters' preferences in other academic outlets (Bell 2016; Preuhs 2015; Preuhs n.d.; Sanchez 2015).

Latinos in Colorado display a high degree of support for Democratic candidates in both U.S. House races and for President (see Figure 8). Overall, 81% and 84% of all Latinos in Colorado indicated that they voted, or intended to vote, for the Democratic Congressional candidate in 2012 and 2016, respectively. Naturalized Latinos indicated even higher levels of

support for Democrats in Congressional races, at 82% and 91% for these two elections. This compares to the 44% and 47% of total votes cast in the statewide general election for Democratic Congressional candidates.

Presidential preferences display similar patterns. In 2012 and 2016, the Democratic vote share in the general election was 51% and 48%, respectively. Support among U.S.-born Latinos for Barack Obama in 2012 stood at 87%, while support for Hillary Clinton in 2016 was marginally lower at 81%. Naturalized Latinos displayed the highest level of support for the Democratic Presidential candidates, with 92% and 91% in 2012 and 2016, respectively.

Figure 8. Support in Colorado for the Democratic Candidate,
U.S. House and Presidential Elections, 2012 and 2016

(Source: Outcomes compiled from Ballotpedia and US Election Atlas; Latno and Foreign Born estimates from Latino Decisions' Election Eve Polls,
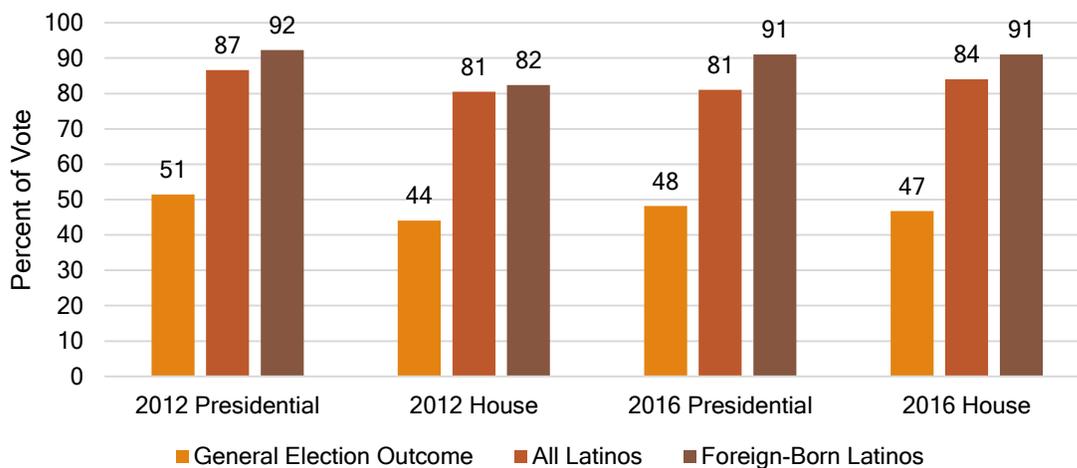
Latino preferences thus significantly differed from the statewide election outcomes. On average, Latinos in Colorado supported the Democratic candidates in these two elections by a 46.5 percentage point margin over the electorate as a whole. Naturalized Latinos' preferences tended to be even more unique, with levels of support for the Democratic candidates deviating from the statewide electorate by a margin of 52.3 percentage points. The distinct, and highly cohesive, political preferences of Latinos in 2012 and 2016 are likely to remain in 2020 as the political context has remained similar to that of the 2016 general election–an anticipation based on a wide array of research demonstrating a generally liberal tilt among Latinos across the nation (Barreto and Segura 2014; Bell 2016; Leal 2007).

Summary

An important concern emerging from the naturalization backlog in Colorado is that it prevents some otherwise eligible voters from participating in the elections while they await completion of their applications. How might preventing otherwise eligible immigrants from voting affect

Colorado's election outcomes? This section laid the foundation for understanding the statewide electoral effects by demonstrating that naturalized Latino citizens tended to display clear preferences in vote choice which where overwhelmingly Democratic.

Estimating the electoral impact in 2020 is impossible, but a hypothetical example based on data presented in this report may allow for a more concrete understanding of the linkage between the magnitude of the backlog, naturalized citizens' propensity to vote, and vote choice. Following a method similar to the one used to estimate scenarios for the 2018 election, if we assume that 9,000 applicants await naturalization decisions prior to the 2020 election, and 85% of those will eventually be granted citizenship, 7,650 otherwise eligible citizens will be prevented from casting a vote. Among these 7,650, about 60% (estimated from Tables S1 and S2) will register, and 86% of those registered will ultimately vote. That translates to 2,754 otherwise eligible immigrants who, based on previous elections, are likely to vote will be prevented from exercising that right. If we use a new applicant estimate as the baseline, then 765 eligible voters will be prohibited from voting.

In terms of electoral influence, given that data on Latino immigrants is the only data available, the focus is on Latino naturalized citizens, who comprised 40% of naturalized adults in 2017 (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2017) and thus about 1,101 voters. Given the level of support for the Democratic Presidential candidate among naturalized Latinos in 2016 (81%), this translates to about 892 Democratic votes and 209 Republican votes. That 872 Democratic vote margin would not be enough to tilt an election in Colorado as it represents only 0.6% of Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton's 136,000 vote margin over Republican Donald Trump in 2016. (And if the level of support for Democratic candidates is reduced due to election-specific factors, the marginal impact would be even lower). In other words, a statewide election would have to be essentially tied to be affected by Latino immigrants waiting to complete the naturalization process. If the preferences of Latinos were applied to all naturalization applicants that would otherwise be eligible to vote (2,754 calculated above), the Democratic margin would be 1,652 votes, or 1.2 % of Clintons margin— still a generally small impact.

The impacts above are purely hypothetical and given the inherent random sampling error and likely deviations from election to election, should be interpreted very cautiously. But one clear conclusion is that the effect on the overall election results would be nominal if the backlog were completely halted. Nevertheless, with over 2,700 likely, and otherwise eligible, voters being denied the right to vote due to an administrative backlog, the individual-level impact should be considered an important voting rights issue within the State of Colorado.

APPENDIX

This appendix provides a variety of additional material noted in, or related to, the discussion in the body of the report. The Appendix includes a set of additional figures and tables that supplement, or are the basis of, data reported in the body of the report. Second, is a section listing the data sources for each of the figures. Finally, a list of references cited in the body of the report is presented.

Supplemental Tables and Figures

Below are brief descriptions and associated tables and figures related to the analyses presented in the body of the report. The content includes national-level self-reported registration and voting participation data and the full models of registration and participation used to estimate voter participation and registration rates.

National-level Voter Registration and Voting Data. Below, in Figures S1, S2 and S3 are the national Self-Reported Voter Registration Rates (S1), Self-Reported Voting Rates (S2) and Self-Reported Voting Rates Among Those Registered (S3). All were calculated using the CPS November Surveys.
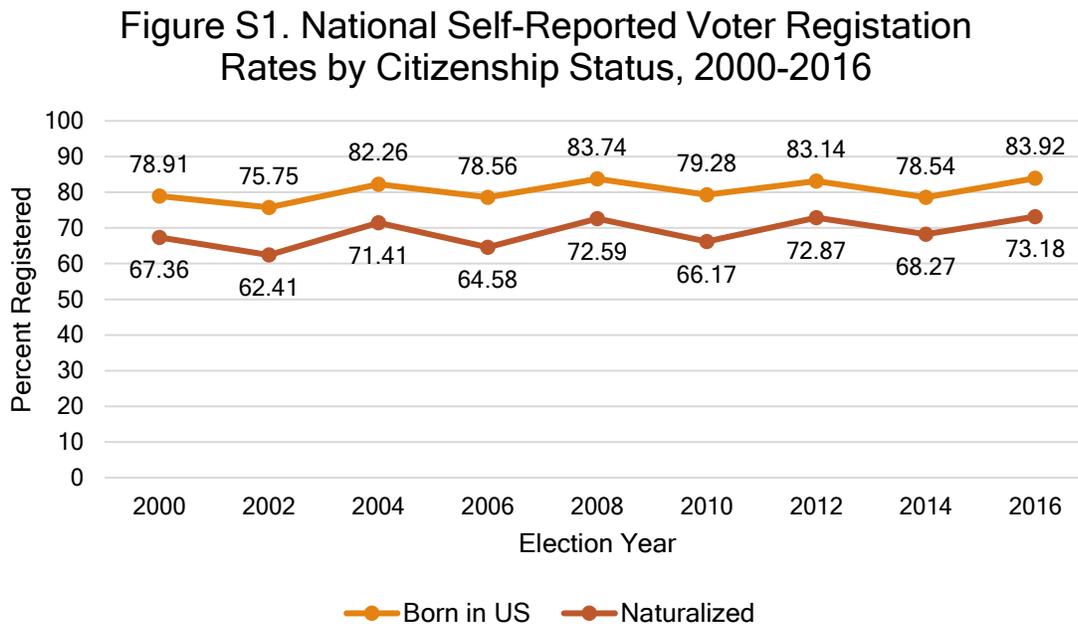

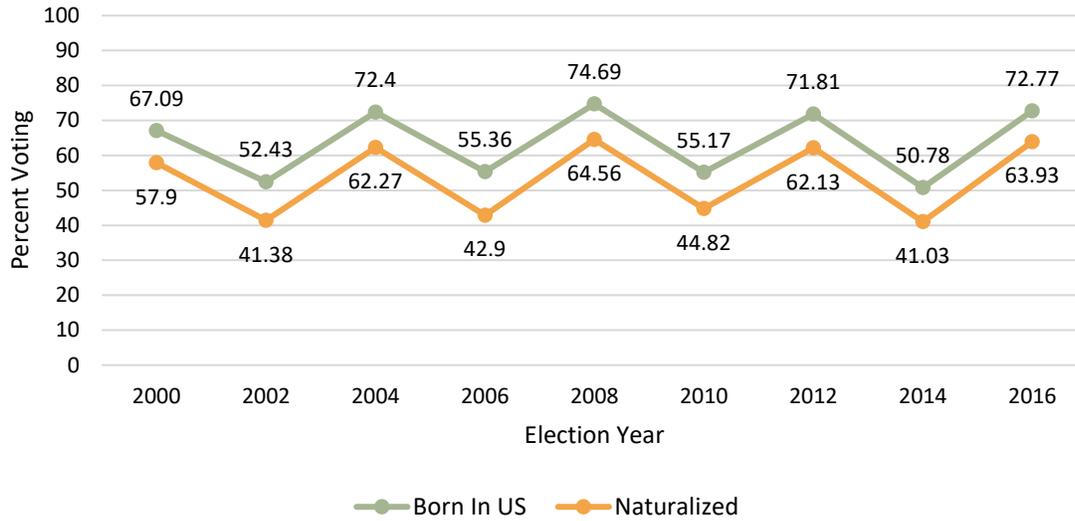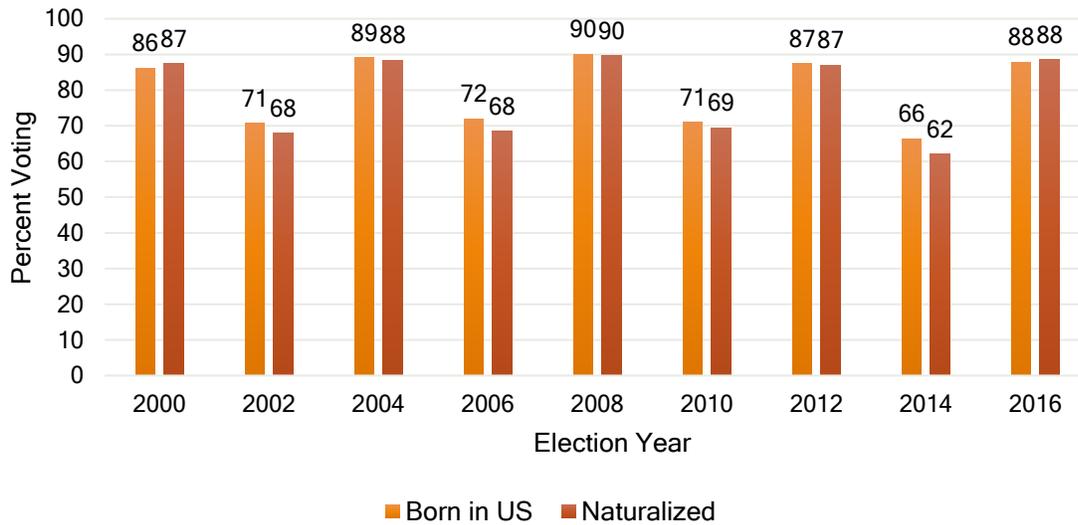Figure S1. National Self-Reported Voter Registation Rates by Citizenship Status, 2000-2016

Figure S2. National Self-Reported Voting Rates by Citizenship Status, 2000-2016

Figure S2. National Self-Reported Voting Rates by Citizenship Status, 2000-2016

Born In US values: 67.09 (2000), 52.43 (2002), 72.4 (2004), 55.36 (2006), 74.69 (2008), 55.17 (2010), 71.81 (2012), 50.78 (2014), 72.77 (2016)

Naturalized values: 57.9 (2000), 41.38 (2002), 62.27 (2004), 42.9 (2006), 64.56 (2008), 44.82 (2010), 62.13 (2012), 41.03 (2014), 63.93 (2016)

Figure S3. National Self-Reported Voting Rate for Registered Voters, by Citizenship Status, 2000-2016

Figure S3. National Self-Reported Voting Rate for Registered Voters, by Citizenship Status, 2000-2016

Born in US / Naturalized: 86/87 (2000), 71/68 (2002), 89/88 (2004), 72/68 (2006), 90/90 (2008), 71/69 (2010), 87/87 (2012), 66/62 (2014), 88/88 (2016)

Multivariate Regression Analyses. Below are two tables. Table S1 presents the coefficients and significance levels from the Logit Regression Model utilized to estimate voter turnout among Coloradans based on the 2000-2016 pooled CPS November Supplement. Table S2 reports the estimates of voter registration and voting among the registered as reported in the sidebar on Page 16.

Table S1. Models of the Estimated Probability of Registering, and Voting Among those Registered, in Colorado, 2000-2016 Combined.

	Registration	Voting Among Registered
Foreign Born	-.70***	-.23
Less than 20 Years	-.61***	.18
Hispanic	-.75***	-.60***
Black	-.62***	-.45**
Asian	-.73*	-.58
American Indian	-.73***	-.41
Other	-.59***	-.32
Age	.03***	.04***
N	13,439	10,983
Pseudo R^2	.08	.11

Note: ***p<.001; **p<.01; *p<.05 (two tailed). Cell entries are coefficients of a logistic regression model for the respective dependent variables. Positive values indicate higher likelihood of registration or voting as values of the factor increase. Negative values indicate a reduced likelihood. All variables are coded 1 for the indicated factor, and zero otherwise, except for Age, which is the age in years of the respondent. Cumulative Data for November Voter Supplement CPS with all respondents from 2000 to 2016. Election year dummy variables were included in the models, but not reported.

Table S2. Estimated Probability of Registering and Voting in Colorado, by Immigration Status, 2000-2016

Citizenship Status	Probability of Registering	Probability of Voting Among Those Registered
Born in the US	0.83	0.87
Naturalized and Immigrated More than 20 Years Prior to the Election	0.72	0.84
Naturalized and Immigrated Less than 20 Years Prior to the Election	0.60	0.86

Note: Probabilities are calculated from the models presented above with the observed value approach which averages the respondents' predicted probabilities for each condition while holding all other factors at the respondent's actual value.

Data Sources:

Figure 1 (p. 7): Data on N-400 Applications were compiled by the author from the USCIS Quarterly Reports that are produced from the *Office of Performance and Quality (OPQ), Performance Analysis and External Reporting Branch (PAER) - MLL. Reports can be assessed directly at:* https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/naturalizations

Figure 2 (p. 10): Data on N-400 Applications were compiled by the author from the USCIS Quarterly Reports that are produced from the *Office of Performance and Quality (OPQ), Performance Analysis and External Reporting Branch (PAER) - MLL. Reports can be assessed directly at:* https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/naturalizations

Figure 3 (p. 11): Data on N-400 Applications were compiled by the author from the USCIS Quarterly Reports that are produced from the *Office of Performance and Quality (OPQ), Performance Analysis and External Reporting Branch (PAER) - MLL. Reports can be assessed directly at:* https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/naturalizations

Figure 4 (p. 14): All voting and registration estimates are based on the biennial 2000-2016 November Supplements of the Current Population Survey, with subsequent calculations by the author. Data were provided by: *IPUMS-CPS, University of Minnesota,* www.ipums.org.

Figure 5 (p. 15): All voting and registration estimates are based on the biennial 2000-2016 November Supplements of the Current Population Survey, with subsequent calculations by the author. Data were provided by: *IPUMS-CPS, University of Minnesota,* www.ipums.org.

Figure 6 (p. 16): Figure 4: All voting and registration estimates are based on the biennial 2000-2016 November Supplements of the Current Population Survey, with subsequent calculations by the author. Data were provided by: *IPUMS-CPS, University of Minnesota,* www.ipums.org.

Figure 7 (p. 18): Immigrant proportions of the electorate were reported by: Pastor, Manuel, Justin Scoggins and Magaly N. Lopez. 2016. *Rock the (Naturalized) Vote II: The size and location of recently naturalized voting Age Citizen Population*. Center for the Study of Immigrant Intergration, University of Southern California. Accessed January 2019 at: https://dornsife.usc.edu/csii/rock-the-naturalized-vote/

Figure 8 (p. 20): Presidential election results are collected from : David. *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*. http://uselectionatlas.org (February 1 2019). U.S. House of Representatives the sum of all votes cast for the Democratic candidate in all seven of Colorado's congressional districts as a percentage of the sum of total votes cast in all congressional district races. Votes were reported by Ballotpedia. 2019. https://ballotpedia.org/Main_Page (February 15, 2019). Polling data was provided by Latino Decisions. Latino Decisions Election Eve Polls in 2012 and 2016. For toplines and sample details, see Latino Decisions' Website at: http://www.latinodecisions.com/

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