

How Do Citizenship Policies Shape Integration? Evidence from Spain’s Dual-Track Naturalization System

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Abstract

How do citizenship policies affect immigrants’ pathways to integration? We examine Spain’s dual-track naturalization system, where most immigrants face a ten-year residency requirement to apply for citizenship, while nationals from select countries—primarily Latin American—qualify after only two years. These different naturalization tracks impose different levels of vulnerabilities across immigrant groups, and potentially shape the cost-benefit calculations of immigrants to invest in integration through material and social mechanisms. Moreover, these differentiated policies can signal natives and immigrant groups about the social and cultural distance of different groups, shaping perceptions of belongingness and desirability. While citizenship laws are largely endogenous to preexisting cultural and social proximity between host and origin countries, we leverage the compounded impact of the 2008 economic crisis and its heterogeneous consequences across various immigrant groups with different vulnerabilities generated by the dual-track system. We implement differences-in-differences models with local level demographic data and integration measures to observe the trajectories across various immigrant groups. Moreover, we combine this evidence with fine-grained individual survey data representative of the immigrant population in the Basque Country. Preliminary analyses show that the dual-track system affected the response to the economic crisis in shaping integration patterns and incentives for naturalization across different immigrant groups, producing diverging patterns of naturalization across communities with Latin American and North African origin.

Keywords: Citizenship policies, Integration, Differences-in-Differences, Naturalization, Spain

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