Conclusion
Rethinking Immigrant Political Incorporation: What Have We Learned, and What Next?

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In the introduction to this volume, the editors make several interrelated critiques of prior research on immigrant political incorporation (IPI): that few studies have defined the concept explicitly; that definitions (such as they appear) are inconsistent; that few studies have made comparisons across nation-states or cities or other well-defined contexts for political action (comparing groups in a given context is somewhat more common); that premises or rationales for particular theoretical or empirical approaches are often unstated; that discrete outcomes—organizational formation, mobilization behavior, rates or outcomes of electoral participation, and so on—are often examined in isolation from any larger process or pathway of incorporation; and that causal mechanisms are frequently unspecified. They also charge that few researchers endeavor to build on the specified models that do exist and thereby build a field. In sum, the editors conclude that there has been relatively little development of theory that can be shown to have broad applicability, that is, to provide a strong basis for making comparisons across contexts (time, place, groups) or for generating predictions. Perhaps this is because many researchers have had other priorities—that their work, while informative and relevant, was not designed to illuminate IPI as a whole, let alone cumulate into a broadly applicable theory of IPI. The key question for readers of this volume, and the one on which I will focus in this essay, is: how can the contributions in this volume help us compare and predict more effectively?

Theory building is a gradual—some would say glacial—process, proceeding through distinct stages. What expectations are reasonable at this stage, since all agree that IPI is a multifaceted social phenomenon with features that are very
context dependent? It seems reasonable to expect research to mature beyond a norm of particularistic, wholly descriptive accounts of single cases—one or two immigrant groups in one place and time period—toward greater generalizability and predictive power. To put a finer point on that: it is desirable to push for that and reasonable to hope to achieve it if the effort is made. But this implies developing and using concepts that are encompassing enough to work across cases and dimensions of IPI and yet specific enough to generate useful prediction (“X factor tends to produce Y effect under conditions ABC”). I focus on several such concepts in this essay, which is an effort to synthesize.

Conversely, we should not read the editors’ critique to encourage a new orthodoxy. It is not reasonable—and indeed would not be fruitful—to expect research to converge right away on one best approach to examining a given phenomenon (e.g., civic mobilization or another facet of IPI), not from researchers working to bring varied analytic tools to bear in disparate contexts, nor to expect comprehensiveness (that every researcher seek to explain how all facets of IPI add up to a whole). As in any maturing field of inquiry, some researchers will and should tackle broad theory building, others more discrete hypothesis testing, and some methodological refinements that support those and other types of work. But all researchers can do so—more purposefully, we hope, after this volume—with the larger value of theory development in mind. And regularly debating the best approaches to examining key facets of IPI, in lieu of quick convergence on a one best way, would be productive for the larger enterprise.

With those premises in mind, I begin with the fundamentals of theory building—by discussing scope conditions (what does IPI in fact encompass?) and then addressing causal processes (how do they work?). To do this, I invert the sequence of the volume: I begin with what incorporation can most productively be conceptualized to include, in light of the perspectives and evidence in this volume; turn next to how incorporation operates (factors and pathways); and map backward from there to the editor’s first question: who are the “immigrants” in IPI. My rationale for this sequence is straightforward: defining the who could easily remain a source of inconsistency across studies—and even a mechanical matter of specifying subgroups to model, with no larger theoretical motivation—unless we are more precise and consistent about the “PI”—the process and what it includes. I try to build on the editors’ foundation laying in the introduction but aim to tie this essay most closely to the contributors’ chapters and reason inductively from their empirical work and claims to more generalizable propositions, rather than use the editors’ more deductive approach (from general principles to testable ideas).

This essay offers two main arguments. The first, which builds directly on the editors’ effort to scope and define IPI in the introduction, concerns cross-cutting emphases. Notwithstanding their varied approaches and empirical bases, the chapters in this volume strongly reflect two core dimensions of IPI and vacillate...
somewhat between them: membership, connoting recognition and belonging, felt by the immigrant “outsiders” and also host country insiders vis-à-vis the outsiders; and capacity for influence, that is, to successfully make claims in the polity. Many of the chapters either indicate or strongly imply, furthermore, that each of these dimensions is a continuum (from none to full), rather than a simple dichotomy (e.g., member vs. nonmember), and is, at least in principle, reversible and contingent. By contingent I mean dependent, both in degree and in direction of change, on a variety of factors that interact in complex ways (cf. Hochschild, Jones-Correa). I will argue, furthermore, that membership and influence are the two, and only two, intrinsic, necessary concepts for IPI. I develop each of these concepts in the next part of the essay. I then argue that both membership and influence, or capacity for influence, can be theorized and examined as things that are secured through a social process of attainment. I examine the direction of change (in that process) in the final part, which considers causal factors and pathways of change.

The second main argument, likewise in several steps, is at once an assessment of the volume’s contribution in toto and an argument about the most important work ahead: with some synthesis, the chapters in this volume advance the work of scoping the boundaries and core contents of IPI (as previewed above), though the contributors have very different ideas about what most deserves attention. Moreover, the chapters help somewhat when it comes to conceptualizing the causal processes—call them contingent and context-sensitive models of change—in IPI. Again, it is making such models comparative and encompassing of multiple dimensions of IPI that remains so challenging, not fitting a plausible account to a single case (one immigrant group in a given context) or, more modest still, a single facet of a single case (that immigrant group’s participation in elections, say, given access to the vote). But the contributors largely leave on the agenda for future research the task of closely specifying critical causal mechanisms, for example, tied to the most common or significant contingent factors, and how they should be measured. Future work should focus, as much as possible, on testing competing explanations of change (including the interplay of immigrant agency and societal opportunity structure) and illuminating the role of contingency in pathways of change.

My references below to the contributors refer specifically to their chapters in this volume unless otherwise noted or cited.

What Does “Immigrant Political Incorporation” Encompass?

The contributors to this volume have collectively examined most of the globe’s major immigrant destinations in the industrialized “North,” with emphasis on North America and Western Europe and some reference to other regions.
Drawing on diverse bodies of theory and a range of empirical approaches, their work strongly suggests that **immigrant political incorporation** encompasses two things essentially—membership and influence—and how they are attained.

For example, Gerstle’s definition of IPI centers on immigrants’ self-perception: “Political incorporation is the process through which immigrants and their descendants **come to think of themselves** as members of a polity with political rights and with a voice in politics, should they choose to exercise it” (emphasis added). Bloemraad, Mollenkopf, Maxwell, and other contributors in this volume argue persuasively that both membership and influence have multiple dimensions, each inviting a debate about which measures are most appropriate for which kinds of explanation. A focus on descriptive representation centers on widely used and well-understood, if limited, metrics of membership and influence, for example. Likewise, extending representation to consider, as Mollenkopf does, membership in a governing coalition posits one pathway from membership to influence but not necessarily the only one or most common one for immigrants.

There is broad agreement that membership (insiderness) is a social construct, a status defined substantially by insiders but secured in part by the agency of the aspirants. Like other attained statuses—a professional occupation, homeownership, public opinion leadership—membership in the polity is a matter of degree, some forms of membership are reversible, and recognized legal citizenship is but one form, albeit an important one for various forms of access, including access to the vote in most times and places (cf. the editors, Joppke, Cook, Morawska). While discrete measures of membership, such as formal citizenship, are useful for both practical and conceptual reasons, less discrete forms of standing, and conversely of stigma or social invisibility, are embedded, as McDermott, Segura, Hochschild, Wong, Gerstle, and others explore, in the history of intergroup relations; those histories cast a shadow over and affect groups that have little history themselves in a given region, such as Hispanic immigrants in the American South (McDermott).

Most of the authors in this volume state or strongly imply that membership is a precondition for most important kinds of influence, though configurations of membership and aims of the foreign born can vary widely. On one end are those of the seemingly footloose, high-status, and “pragmatic” cosmopolitans (cf. Morawska on Chinese global entrepreneurs residing in Los Angeles while belonging to no nation in particular), whose political orientation and engagement may retain a bounded, transactional character vis-à-vis multiple nation-states and interest groups. On the other end are those with a long-term stake and aspiration to belong that is focused, either primarily or exclusively, on the host country, and that expresses itself in various forms of allegiance, sometimes in the face of abject exclusion. For example, Gerstle writes of
Japanese Americans fighting for the United States during World War II as their co-ethnics endured stigma, internment, and in some cases expropriation of their assets on American soil.

In this light, Cook’s rather exceptional (for this volume) argument is very useful for scoping purposes, in particular for sharpening the meaning and significance of both membership and influence. Her dual concern appears to be institutional recognition of immigrants and immigrant access to tangible, publicly provided benefits, the attainment of which she labels “inclusion” rather than “incorporation.” This concern is distinct from that of the other contributors (including the editors) and also from the seminal Browning, Marshall, and Tabb (1984) model of racial and ethnic minority politics in the United States, which serves as a reference point for many of the contributors.

Strictly speaking, such recognition and access do not require either membership or influence, let alone influence attained via sustained claims making in the public sphere (from the editors’ definition of IPI). Under the right conditions, Cook and others show, immigrants’ presence (“personhood”) alone is enough to promote a measure of inclusion. Established organizational missions and espoused values, including professional values of service and care, make claims on the behavior of public officials, for example, to motivate police officers and teachers to protect and serve the undocumented. Bureaucracies may thus act to incorporate without an outside force mobilizing to make it so through advocacy, signals from the ballot box, or other means (see also Marrow 2009). More to the point, a person—including a legally undocumented person with little or no recognized standing in the polity—is still a person, and that can be enough to make him or her a worthy client to be served.

As an empirical matter, then, inclusion thus defined is different from political incorporation, and understanding this helps us understand what IPI per se encompasses versus what it may help produce in the way of changes in policy, practice, or social and economic outcomes (meaning: these changes may act as markers for incorporation). Normatively, however, there is little in this volume to counter the editors’ assertion that the capacity to sustain the making of claims is a desirable target for individuals and groups in democratic politics, that is, leaving aside whether it is necessary to obtain a particular public good or other benefit in a particular time and place. Such capacity helps guard against political domination by the few and the subversion of core values, and it tends—over time and space—to be associated with more equitable access to “opportunity” (read: the material advancement that is a primary motivator for migration worldwide) and also greater citizen participation in the public sphere (Briggs 2008; Shapiro 2003).
If Cook’s arguments help clarify what lies outside the bounds of IPI, what exactly lies inside? I have argued thus far that membership and influence are the two principal dimensions, stated or unstated, in the wide range of work presented and surveyed by the contributors. But if we take, axiomatically, the idea that IPI is a process and not simply a well-defined status or resource, what kind of process is it? Here, a wider body of social science, some of it focused on immigrants and some not—the status attainment literature—is helpful. More specifically, that well-established line of inquiry is adaptable: namely, from a focus on how socioeconomic status is attained—how agency and social structure together determine “ladder climbing” or status maintenance in a given society, typically centered on the education and labor markets (Sorokin 1959; Newman 1988; Lin 1999)—to a focus on how membership and the capacity for influence are attained in the polity, likewise through the interplay of agency (by groups and individuals) and institutionalized rules and other structures.

Let me scope this more formally before suggesting what “incorporation as attainment” implies and why attainment is more appropriate than assimilation or other frequently interchanged concepts. While good arguments can be made for a stricter definition of IPI, let me begin, for reasons outlined in the introduction to this essay, with a fairly encompassing one, a definition grounded in the breadth of research to date: *IPI refers to the processes by which the foreign born or other noncitizens attain membership and the capacity for legitimate influence in a host country polity* (a widely applicable definition cannot be limited to the foreign born since not all countries grant birthright citizenship). This is broader than the editors’ definition and, in my view, fully encompasses theirs. It likewise encompasses Gerstle’s but goes beyond how immigrants “come to think of themselves as members of a polity with political rights and with a voice in politics”; that is, it goes beyond immigrant self-perception and disposition to require the external recognition (conferral) of membership by the host society.

There are two important caveats at this point. First, following the editors, one can specify *claims making over public goods* as the target for influence and apply the stricter test of capacity for sustained claims making. While these steps narrow the definition and may be appropriate on both empirical and normative grounds, each deserves further debate and neither, in my view, changes the essence of the theory-building challenge: to better specify, through comparison and useful prediction, a complex social process—one that hinges on agency, structure, and historical contingency. Furthermore, neither narrowing changes the heretofore unstated premise that that process includes the attainment of (1) various forms of socially defined standing (membership), as well as (2) the capacity to shape events and outcomes (influence).
A second caveat is about how we treat descendants of the foreign born (or other noncitizens), and this begins to address the “who” question: who we should consider the “immigrants” in IPI. Depending on the social context, it may or may not make sense to treat the choices and fortunes of descendants (typically co-ethnics) as indicative of how immigrants attain membership and the capacity for influence. The boundaries of outsidersness are malleable and even reversible, as Wong, Hochschild, Segura, and other contributors argue forcefully; membership, as Hochschild demonstrates tragically in the case of African Americans in the United States, can be withdrawn. Joppke’s is one defensible approach: to ask whether descendants continue to receive ascriptive recognition by the host society—what is often treated in the social order of the United States as some form of racialization. Such an approach differs significantly from intergenerational attainment models of socioeconomic status (which rely on descendants’ outcomes over time as sine qua non indicators of group attainment) or traditional models of immigrant assimilation (which likewise track group attainment indicators, not just cultural practices, across generations). For now, I will assume that tracking descendants and treating them as immigrants (still) makes sense for some dimensions of IPI in at least some times and places, and may be crucial to the group-based emphasis in much research on IPI—that is, de-emphasizing individual choices and range of choice to focus on aggregate-level attainment—but may not be universally applicable.

Here, I differ with the editors’ insistence on strictly defining the “immigrants” in IPI by nativity and legal status. But as they acknowledge, “a crucial question in developing a model of immigrant political incorporation is how sharply to distinguish the legal status of immigrants and their children from some otherwise similar group.” I return to this in the final part of the essay.

Why Membership and Influence (Both)? Why “Legitimate” Influence?: The chapters in this volume underscore why the capacity for political influence is not sufficient, in terms of what is to be attained through IPI (i.e., why membership is intrinsically important to incorporation, too). Above, discussing Cook, I acknowledged that societies may confer material and other benefits—education, health care, and more—even on those who appear consigned to a perpetual noncitizen status, such as Turks were in Germany for generations or the large population of undocumented immigrants is in the United States (still). The presence of such immigrants may be recognized, for example, by benevolent public or nongovernmental agencies, though such outsiders have little or no standing to make political claims as individuals or groups in the public sphere and may fear pressing more transactional claims in the judicial and administrative arenas set up to process such claims.
This points to the importance of membership, not limited to having a level of psychological identification with and sense of belonging in the polity but extending to the socially recognized standing to make claims in its public sphere. An encompassing approach to IPI—the kind that could enable better comparison, as well as useful prediction—must contend with the fact that such standing can take a variety of forms and be determined in varied ways, in different places and times. Not only is standing socially constructed and subject to a range of causal forces, but also so is the public sphere itself. In liberal Western democracies, for example, it evolved from a socially and spatially limited discourse in relatively small and stable agrarian towns until the nineteenth century to much more heterogeneous “discursive publics” shaped by mass media, as well as local community attachments, in industrialized and urbanized societies (Calhoun 1998; Habermas [1962] 1989; Sennett 1977).

How, then, can “members” be distinguished, in theory or practice? We commonly refer to members and nonmembers, implying a binary, for simplicity and out of long custom—the metaphor of being inside or outside of “the club” and the benefits it confers. But political membership in the sense of acceptance and recognized standing is a matter of degree for more groups than we commonly acknowledge, long after formal citizenship status or, in the case of native-born excluded groups, voting and other formal rights have been extended by law (cf. Gerstle, Hochschild). As Joppke explains in detail, moreover, citizenship can be delimited or denied indefinitely (what he terms “immigrant qua immigrant” status), as it long was for immigrant minorities in Germany. Conversely, as McDermott, Ramakrishnan, Bloemraad, Morawksa, and others who study immigrant civic mobilization argue persuasively, certain forms of legitimate standing to make claims in the public sphere can precede the legal standing that traditional studies of electoral incorporation have treated as a precondition for meaningful political participation. Compelling moral narratives fashioned by movement organizers, alliances with native-born groups (whether co-ethnic or not), shifts in media portrayal of immigrants, and other factors can shape such standing, not to mention the impacts of such standing on political outcomes.

Influence without membership is not enough, and conversely, a number of contributors have shown how and why, by many measures, membership without the capacity for influence is likewise insufficient. The latter could take the form of attaining formal citizenship status without the conditions for its meaningful use, as in the extreme case of African Americans for much of American history prior to the civil rights movement; the latest wave of voting restrictions in many US states, including so-called battleground states critical in presidential elections, show how vulnerable the franchise remains, particularly for the poor and for racial and ethnic minorities.
Dancygier highlights the importance of including influence explicitly in any encompassing model of IPI when she writes of the inadequacy of tracking immigrant electoral participation, as opposed to the consequential interplay of group traits and behaviors on one hand and institutionalized rules that “facilitate immigrants becoming influential political actors” on the other. Similarly, Mollenkopf emphasizes the importance of generating more knowledge about a very specific pathway to influence: immigrants joining coalitions that govern—that develop and advance substantive policy agendas—especially in local governments. While Lieberman (like Wong) is not convinced that IPI should be modeled on its own, as opposed to “built into” models of ethnic politics, his conception of politics clearly encompasses both formal access, standing, and belonging on one hand (membership) and capacity for influence on the other (resulting from coalitional strategies interacting with institutional opportunity structures, in particular to enhance rights and protection through policy change).

This volume has also underlined why the capacity for legitimate influence, not any and all forms of influence, is the rightful test for IPI. Corrupt means, even when membership is in place, do not suffice—not if the rule of law is our standard and fair play is a core democratic value—though historically, corruption defined a well-worn and quite pragmatic path to political influence for myriad immigrant groups, as Jones-Correa reminds us. It helped Irish, Italian, and other immigrants secure government contracts, political representation, and more, and in so doing, it had a wider effect on American government and political parties, helping to inspire the Progressive Movement and its reforms to “clean up” elections and the machinery of government. Having said that, it would be valuable, as Jones-Correa argues, to understand whether and how socially illegitimate means interact with legitimate ones, that is, as part of a broader repertoire of politically relevant strategies and tactics. And as a practical matter, the avenues to legitimate influence can be limited enough within a nation-state, depending on the issue terrain, timing, or jurisdiction, that immigrants and other political actors are bound to confront incentives to cheat, especially if cheating remains relatively commonplace—not an artifact of history.¹

Why Is IPI “Attainment”—Versus Integration, Assimilation, or Something Else?: To recap the argument thus far, the contributors to this volume, though they bring varied emphasis and methods to the debate, point us toward future

¹ Indexes and reports published by the Center for Public Integrity, Transparency International, and other groups indicate that corruption is not, by any means, an artifact—in any major region of the globe—though rates vary widely within some nations (the U.S., for example) and between them.
theorizing and empirical analyses that explicitly encompass both membership and influence—specifically, the capacity for legitimate influence—as intrinsic to IPI. But identifying those two things does not, by itself, dictate how the process of securing them should be conceived or studied. Here, I develop my argument that attainment is an appropriate, and perhaps uniquely generative, way to think about the kind of process that IPI encompasses across the globe.

The attainment of standing and influence, or at least the capacity for influence, is what the myriad specific processes examined in this volume either lead to or fail to lead to, under particular conditions. This is taken for granted in many of the chapters—again, see the editors’ complaint that premises frequently go unstated—and that is reflected in the fact that some of the chapters use “incorporation,” “integration,” and even “assimilation” and “acculturation” interchangeably—or virtually so. The failure to define those concepts clearly and use them consistently in research is part of the problem, and flexible use of these terms in everyday discourse no doubt compounds the tendency in research. In addition, a number of chapters in this volume juxtapose assimilation and attainment. Hochschild does so, in effect, in her two-dimensional model of how out-groups, including immigrants and historically excluded native-born out-groups, can “move up or in.” Lieberman premises his discussion of politics on the notion that incorporation is “another dimension of inclusion,” but his argument appears to be that inclusion is determined, to an important degree, by politics; he does not explain why or how IPI per se is a dimension of “inclusion.” Both McDermott and Cook argue that various forms of “inclusion”—they variously refer to benefits received or to attained socioeconomic status—are not tightly coupled with political incorporation. There are good reasons—both theoretical and practical—to distinguish attainment from closely related concepts, such as assimilation, and to privilege attainment, rather than the others, going forward, in order to make more useful comparisons and predictions about IPI.

Over the decades, as Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, and Waters (2005) observe, researchers have often written of assimilation, attainment (social and economic upward mobility), and acculturation as though describing a single, multifaceted process. But as Gans (2007, 152) notes,

American empirical studies of ethnic assimilation began during a period of nearly universal upward mobility, and examined European immigrants, virtually all of whom came here extremely poor and could only move up. In the process, the researchers conflated assimilation and mobility and seem to have ignored the possibility that they were actually independent, if often co-existent or concurrent processes.
If we understand assimilation, more narrowly and traditionally, to be the process by which a recognized ethnic distinction “declines” (Alba and Nee 2003), then immigrants, Gans reminds us, can assimilate without moving up and move up without assimilating. Assimilation is an outcome, not simply a choice. It can be shaped in part by immigrant decisions to adopt certain symbols and cultural practices (acculturation to “ways” considered mainstream, as Gerstle emphasizes). But because an ethnic distinction has meaning only if it is socially recognized, assimilation requires being accepted by the host society—another form of adoption, and one that the hosts, as in the in-group, either offer or do not offer to particular out-groups, or offer in some dimensions but not others.

Moving up or getting ahead (attaining status), in contrast, is not about chosen acculturation or conferred acceptance necessarily but rather proceeding through graded status markers: attaining higher income, wealth, and esteemed social positions (e.g., homeowner, elected official, civic leader). There is considerable evidence that these processes are interrelated—that acculturation facilitates assimilation and assimilation, in turn, facilitates status attainment—but they are conceptually distinct. Many discussions of “inclusions,” in turn (including those in this volume: Bloemraad, Cook, Hochschild, Joppke, Lieberman, McCarty, Minkenberg, Segura), reflect elements of both assimilation and attainment. Furthermore, acculturation, assimilation, and attainment are distinct in the ways they are experienced by the immigrants themselves. Feelings of being culturally “equipped” to navigate socially or of belonging and welcome, for example, are quite distinct from feelings of success, especially if success is externally validated, though the three types of emotions may reinforce one another. Likewise, one may be accepted culturally but not rewarded materially.

Yet the assumption, at least in America for many years, in research and also popular conversation was that you had to assimilate to attain, making assimilation a necessary condition. And it has been further assumed that if you assimilated, you would attain, making assimilation a sufficient condition. At least, that was thought to be true, on average, for members of immigrant ethnic groups that both largely assimilated and largely attained, while African Americans served as the exception to prove the otherwise universal rule (Alba and Nee 2003).

Success markers, both inside and outside the debate over assimilation, thus developed in several dimensions, largely focused on measures of integration (aligning with the in-group): relational (integrating via one’s acquaintanceships, friendships, or marriage), residential (being spatially integrated), occupational (integrating into the labor market), and political (primarily voting and running for office, at least in traditional studies).
Distinguishing assimilation per se from the attainment that sometimes accompanies it, and considering the full range of patterns in each, has led to a more cautious and robust set of claims and theoretical arguments about both. To briefly review several of the most important: assimilation can be “segmented,” as in limited to relationships or labor markets or other spheres, and not comprehensive (Portes and Zhou 1993); the trajectory of attainment, meanwhile, as immigrants assimilate can be “downward” and choppy—with losses in health status, educational attainment, and rates of law abidance—rather than inevitably and smoothly (monotonically) upward (Gans 2007; Kasinitz et al. 2005; Portes and Zhou 1993); and, over time, it is the case not only that the boundaries defining out-groups can shift or disappear, turning outsiders into insiders, but also that the “mainstream” defining the in-group can shift as well—expanding, for example, to include new ways of thinking and behaving (Alba and Nee 2003; Briggs 2004). Finally, to restate an axiom lest it be overlooked: these latest puzzles and developments underscore how structure, agency, and historical contingency matter for assimilation, as well as attainment. Neither can be well understood without an even-handed look at structural context (over time and between groups), individual and group agency (what choices are actively made and why, with what logic of action), and era-specific contingencies (conditioning factors that influence pathways of change at specific moments in time).

Each of these patterns, and the theoretical arguments about them, has important implications for understanding IPI, as the editors argue, in somewhat different terms, in the introduction. The notion of a gradually migrating, rather than fixed, host society mainstream, for instance, suggests that we indeed must consider how and why immigrants, particularly if their migration is large in scale and sustained, may transform politics, as Gerstle shows in the case of twentieth-century America, rather than merely adopt the political ways of their host country. He posits transformation versus acquiescence as the two major orientations of immigrants, though he acknowledges that a choice of orientation does not dictate particular outcomes, especially in the short to medium run.

Transformation, of course, is a great source of concern and a perceived threat to some host country observers. But conceptualizing IPI in ways that allow for the possibility of transformation does not suggest the forms transformation may take nor how it should be judged: whether it is desirable or undesirable, why, and from who’s vantage point. Joppke posits an extreme test case for European nation-states that are a home to growing populations of Muslim immigrants, though his arguments appear to implicate the most conservative strains and subgroups within Islam, not Muslims generally. He argues that Islamic beliefs and practices may challenge the very foundations of citizenship
and the boundaries of the public versus private, and secular versus religious, spheres that evolved over centuries and helped to define the liberal-democratic nation-state.

The How of Incorporation: Factors and Pathways

Taken together, the chapters in this volume suggest that a generalized model of the process of immigrant political incorporation must have at least the following parts: agency, opportunity structure, outcomes, feedback loops, and contingencies. Though the chapters have less to say, at least in formal theoretical terms, about how to theorize the contingencies, I have included them in Figure 1 (a simple heuristic). Having discussed membership and influence as the two conceptual dimensions for attained outcomes in the first half of this essay, I focus here on agency, structure, and feedback loops as predictors of change. In the model, agents, influenced by an opportunity structure, act on and in that structure, and the interplay of agency and structure produces outcomes, which feed back.

Agency: A growing body of research on IPI closely examines the agency of immigrants, individually and more so collectively. As the editors and Bloemraad note, this emphasis has long characterized research on North American and other historically incorporative “settlement states” but has only more recently begun to drive research on European nations, where research had long focused on historically exclusive and exclusionary citizenship institutions and other structures. Mollenkopf underscores the need to more closely understand the motives and repertoires of the individuals who organize immigrants politically. Organizations are far more studied and theorized to date, particularly by those focused on a variety of forms of civic mobilization, in addition to or instead of electoral mobilization (cf. Bloemraad, Dancygier, McDermott, Maxwell, Ramakrishnan). As Mollenkopf notes, there has been relatively little attention to particular organizers or other influential individuals, who may or may not be “of” the immigrant group.

But agency, in any useful predictive model of causes and effects, cannot be limited to immigrants or those who encourage them to mobilize. The chapters in this volume underscore the importance of carefully analyzing established and organized political actors—including other interest groups and political parties—who may act as allies, competitors, and/or enemies. As Howard, Maxwell, McDermott, Mollenkopf, and Minkenberg each explore, these established actors can be highly inclusionary of immigrants, indirect facilitators, highly exclusionary, or a blend of these, depending on the motives, stakes, and incentives.
Mollenkopf suggests one predictive factor—relative group sizes—in his illustrative comparison of Amsterdam, Berlin, Los Angeles, and New York as contexts for political organizing and coalition building. Specifically, he posits that intergroup interactions should be more cooperative and coalition oriented where no one group has numbers sufficient to act alone, and less so where some group can do so. In contrast to Dancygier, he also suggests that interlocal differences may be both greater and more significant than international ones for key aspects of political incorporation (though he does not specify which).

McDermott usefully questions the assumption that in all receiving contexts, the established actors will behave like pluralist bargainers, rationally pursuing their tangible interests in electoral outcomes and policy debates. She reminds us that they may also be motivated by the desire to reproduce, or cope with, an entrenched social and economic hierarchy (both cause and effect of political action). These arguments point to the importance of examining contingencies, in which some factor Z mediates the effect of X on Y: stipulating that many liberal democracies have no direct equivalent to the long-established black–white racial hierarchy in the American South, under what conditions can or does this kind of foundational motive—grounded in protecting relative group position and defending against perceived group threat—trump more immediate and tangible political interests?

Thus far in this section, I have not addressed the important question of what, specifically, immigrants are looking to accomplish in the public sphere and why. In many of the chapters in this volume, it is axiomatic that immigrants seek advancement, but beyond a universal set of human aspirations, what exactly do immigrants expect the polity to provide? And what orientation(s) do those expectations engender? Is their orientation to the host country acquiescent, as Gerstle terms one ideal type, or transformative; that is, is it more conformist or reformist? As Gerstle shows, the question of motives ties closely to choice among political strategies and, based on historical and contemporary

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Figure C.1 Heuristic Model of Immigrant Political Incorporation Process
examples, to competition within immigrant groups to win converts. In principle, these factors can apply to broad movements or narrower issue-focused or candidate-focused campaigns.

Here, though, it is difficult, given the base of evidence and commentary to date, to suggest what litmus test separates issue advocacy, some of it narrow and fairly short lived, from broader and more sustained claims making, that is, as indicators of progress on incorporation (cf. Jones-Correa, Morawska). As the editors note, the capacity to make sustained claims is plausibly a telling indicator, albeit one that could be measured in a variety of ways, even if particular immigrants or groups choose not to deploy that capacity in a given time and place.

As the editors further note, we need to better specify and show empirically how what is broadly “civic” is consequential for the more narrowly “political.” “Civic” tends to encompass participation in associational life and all that it can affect: beliefs and attitudes, norms, networks, skills, material and symbolic resources for action—action both political and nonpolitical. Civic habits and organization matter not only because they can provide a platform for securing electoral outcomes. The pathways to influence are more varied and contingent than that. Civic organization can contribute to political identity and to alliances that matter outside of the electoral arena. And such organization can likewise impact policy outcomes directly, via pressure politics, or shape desired economic or other outcomes in ways that are not mediated by the state (and so do not hinge on formal policy decisions). This can happen, for example, through movements to change consumer behavior relevant to a social problem, make the public more effective “co-producers” of change and not just citizen claimants on government rules and resources, or bargain a better deal directly with key business or nongovernmental organizations (Briggs 2008).

But must comparative and, ideally, predictive work on IPI be encompassing in this sense, as Morawska argues? Like the editors, I think not—not if the aim is to illuminate political incorporation. Consider Morawska’s example of the civic activism of ethnic Cuban women, compared to Cuban men, in South Florida. While that activism channels talent and influence into service organizations, it does not clearly (in her account) extend to claims making in the public sphere. Again, associational life has other valuable purposes, a number of which can support immigrant advancement and also shifts in social boundaries and other large-scale change over time. But to enhance our understanding of IPI, we need to understand clear, empirically supported links between activism and pathways of change that confer membership and influence in the polity. Morawska’s example is a key reminder, however, that we could miss big facets of political incorporation, including how pathways to leadership roles and everyday activism are gendered, if we do not, in comparative models of IPI, make room for carefully specified civic engagement.
Morawska underscores another fundamental point about agency in IPI: the role of segmentation by status and skills. Sharper economic inequality, the impacts of technology on the structure of industries and nature of work, the mobility of a high-skill business elite (that enjoys exit options from the polity, if not necessarily voice through traditional electoral participation), and the sharp disparities in traditional assimilation measures for high- versus low-skill immigrants in some host countries (e.g., the United States) all suggest that Morawska’s analysis of the “pragmatic cosmopolitans” is pointing to a first-order divide in the experience of immigrants and the countries they live in, not an outlier group or region. The number of truly elite migrants may be small, in most immigrant-receiving countries, relative to the number of nonelite (who have fewer options). And that is one reason to focus on broad-application or “mass” models of IPI. It may be that researchers have also focused on the latter because of a perceived conflict between espoused values and actual reception by the native born, specifically to racialized and other lower-status immigrants, especially in the United States and other traditionally incorporative societies. But there is a strong case for segmenting future analyses to include more high-skill and high-status immigrants alongside lower-status ones. A rich, comparative understanding of IPI needs to persuasively explain diverse immigrant goals and a range of chosen pathways—particularly because choices for immigrants run from somewhat to highly constrained—and not just divergent contexts of reception or divergent outcomes. I have underlined the strong case for differentiating by skills and status, following Morawska, but in this volume, it is Jones-Correa who develops the important and more general argument—that we need the field to become more encompassing of that diversity of objectives and choices by immigrants.

Opportunity Structure: As with other central issues in this volume—the scope of political action, the most important outcome “tests” of incorporation, and so on—the concept of opportunity structure is treated fairly narrowly—and this is not meant as criticism—in some chapters and much more expansively in others. In narrow form, the key features of structure are relatively discrete, measurable, and proximate to political action and the longest-studied political outcomes: the rules for conferring citizenship, defining citizens’ rights and responsibilities, determining who gets on the ballot, and so on. In expansive form, structure is a much more socially embedded concept. It begins, in the chapters in this volume and in other work, with social boundaries between racial-ethnic groups: are they “bright” or blurred (Alba 2005), fluid or more durable? Joppke, for example, emphasizes the structural differences confronting language minorities versus religious ones, suggesting that the empirical evidence overwhelmingly points to language assimilation within years or a generation at most, while religion can endure as a bright, stigma-laden, and
contentious boundary for centuries. Likewise, McDermott’s chapter draws mainly on the American South, a region where social boundaries have long been fixed, bright, and highly consequential for influence and social outcomes—a black–white racial binary.

The question is not simply who immigrants will align with, say, in that binary but—over the medium to long run—how that hierarchical order itself, and the boundaries that define it, may shift. This is a structural concern, but it is also about structural change (or structuration) and the role of agency and contingency in shaping that change. In this space, very different time scales—big, long-run processes versus relatively short-run, discrete ones—may call for different conceptual models (on which more below).

Related to the possibilities for change, Joppke raises another fundamental question: as previewed earlier, whether fuller IPI poses a perceived structural challenge to the cultural and constitutional basis of the nation-state itself. He cites the example of a controversial and thus far unsuccessful proposal to add a “diversity” clause to the French constitution, and he discusses the structural dilemmas that progressive-minded “discrimination” policies may pose. I differ with Joppke on what is at stake in such policy debates, though I understand the perception of reverse discrimination to be potent politically. Arguably, the primary challenge for liberal democracies is protecting persons against invidious forms of disparate treatment (e.g., biased hiring or firing that serves no larger social goal), not ruling out all mechanisms for recognizing differences and making noninvidious accommodations of those differences (e.g., everyday religious customs, if decided; cf. Young 1990; Minow 1997).

My final point about opportunity structure in models of IPI is temporal: whether short- versus long-run processes can be modeled together or treated as part of a whole—a well-defined process of IPI. The contributors to this volume imply, though they do not argue explicitly, that there is room for fruitful comparative modeling of short- to medium-run pathways to membership and influence, most of which will treat the major elements of political opportunity structures as defined and relatively stable (e.g., Cook, McDermott, Mollenkopf), but also for modeling of longer-run structuration, from party nomination rules (discrete target for change) to the roles that parties versus other civil society actors play (broad target, direct leverage for change limited, consequences huge; cf. Gerstle) or the content and boundaries defining political membership itself (e.g., Hochschild). This point invites a closer look at feedback loops.

Feedback Loops: The heuristic in Figure 1 posited feedback loops, in which “outcomes” affect both structure and agency. On the first: it is not enough, at this point, to point out that immigrants bring the potential to transform host societies. We need predictive models of the conditions under which particular
kinds of transformation, especially of the political opportunity structure and its rules of engagement, are likely and also how those changes affect further incorporation. Loops have been examined in limited ways thus far:

(a) in long-run retrospective (cf. Gerstle), though persuasively attributing causal impacts is especially hard when attempted many years ex post (broad social changes, as distinct from revolutions or other discrete events, are arguably overdetermined);

(b) in contemporary outliers—exceptional cases of concentrated immigrant political influence on governance in an enclave town or region, for example, Cuban émigrés to Miami (cf. Morawska, this volume, and other scholars); and

(c) in social movement accounts, for example, of high-impact, large-scale immigrant unionization (e.g., Ganz 2009).

Somewhat more modest and perhaps tractable is the concept of feedback loops reshaping immigrants’ political agency, which researchers have examined: what explains the ebb and flow of particular strategies or repertoires of action and, less often examined, how does learning happen or not happen for the group and its allies? Building from there, it should be possible to make stronger arguments about virtuous or vicious cycles over time—as the editors note, for example, of mobilization and policy gains feeding back positively into the same versus feeding into backlash (opposition, exclusion), set-backs, and loss. Scanning prior research and this volume, one might reasonably conclude that demonstrating such loops remains in the very early stages—notional, underdeveloped. Historical work—and most importantly, comparative historical work—while suggestive, has often not been constructed to meet current standards of social scientific explanation. Plausible explanations of change are not necessarily the best-possible explanations.

Who Are “Immigrants”?

The chapters in this volume imply that the “what is an immigrant?” question is not merely about empirically observable distinctiveness viz. Browning-Marshall-Tabb minority groups (the editors’ point of departure) but relative group position, social boundary dynamics, and therefore “groupness.” The chapters have, in effect, highlighted two distinct but related frames for this question.

First, from the vantage point of researchers (and per the editors), it is an analytic question: how much to treat a given group (“them”) as distinctive
from referent groups, for example, native-born minority groups? On one end, Lieberman argues for building immigrants into models of racial and ethnic politics (call this Browning-Marshall-Tabb updated). On the other end, some scholars argue for modeling immigrant incorporation very distinctively, as uniquely precarious (Cook) or as persistently different only in the case of some “primordial” ethnic groups (Joppke). Call the last approach “different sometimes.” This approach is implicit in most chapters. Morawska (an exemplar of comparison) contrasts cases (different groups, same national context), under-scoring the importance of carefully understanding group goals, strategies, and resources. But by downplaying within-group variation by citizenship status or origin, her approach quickly blurs the boundaries between immigrants (in the sense of nativity) and their co-ethnics. Bloemraad offers the most extensive case for immigrant distinctiveness, grounded in the influence of public policies that set immigrants apart, both to the immigrants and to the society:

[My] argument is based on a belief in the specificity of the immigrant experience, one that cannot be reduced to standard accounts of skills and resources or even existing models of minority politics. Immigrant specificity lies, in part, on the legal constructs of citizenship and residency status…. But the argument here contends that we need to go beyond a narrow, rule-bound understanding of political opportunity structures. Status as a foreign-born individual, either as a matter of formal regulations or social policy, also affects access to or targeting by a host of public policies, from receipt of redistributive benefits and health care to language instruction or job training.

None of the chapters has, in my view, clearly delineated the analytic conditions under which one approach or another should be preferred, yet almost all agree that nativity and legal status alone (as emphasized by the editors) create a strong presumption in favor of treating “immigrants” as more than members of one ethnic group or another. Given the discussion in the prior section, particularly about short- versus long-run views of attainment and transformation, it may be fruitful for the field to offer more contingent arguments, for example, about when and where it is appropriate to treat the behaviors and outcomes of co-ethnics as crucial to the story of attainment and when and where, presumably in the shorter run, it is useful to distinguish legally defined immigrants from their native-born co-ethnics (and other ethnic groups).

Second, for immigrants, this is a strategic question—about whether and how much to organize and mobilize through self-identification as a distinctive group. McDermott, Hochschild, Gerstle, Mollenkopf, and Jones-Correa all link this question to the character of the opportunity structure (what it encourages or
discourages) and, in some cases, to historical contingencies (e.g., wars, sudden regime shifts, or other relatively exogenous events or processes). Considered in this second, self-definition frame, the “who are the immigrants?” question becomes an important facet of the larger question about contending motives, political repertoires, and strategic choices made by immigrants, and also by their allies and enemies, in particular places and times. At the risk of belaboring the point: this is anything but a mechanical matter of model specification (how to code individuals into groups) by researchers.

What Next?

In this essay, I have argued that IPI can most productively be thought of and explained as a structured process of attainment, essentially of two things—membership and influence in a polity. I have argued further that while the essays in toto help significantly in the project of scoping IPI, they largely leave on the agenda of future research the task of carefully specifying causal mechanisms and best measures. The most important work facing this field of inquiry—if it is to develop, more self-consciously, as a field, with well-specified definitions and other components of good theory—is to move convincingly toward generalizability and useful prediction. To do this, in my view, future work should focus, as much as possible, on testing competing explanations of change (including the interplay of immigrant agency and societal opportunity structure) and illuminating the role of contingency in pathways of change. Thus far, researchers have done a much more thorough job uncovering what matters for the process of IPI than (1) explaining how exactly particular factors matter, and how they interact, along pathways of change over time; or (2) allowing for historical contingencies. Many causal claims have merely been assertions awaiting rebuttal or competing hypotheses.

Both steps—testing competing explanations of change and revealing the role of contingent factors—would benefit most from a next generation of comparative research: within immigrant groups and across place within time periods; within groups and across time periods within place; across group by each of those permutations; and even “cross-over.” To generate useful prediction, such comparative research, which implies some reorganizing of research capacity toward more ambitious study models, must proceed with more carefully specified and consistent definitions, premises, case selection, and corresponding causal models (Ragin 2000). Since causal explanation in comparative analyses has typically been applied to discrete events (wars, coups, strikes) rather than long, socially structured processes of change (e.g., group
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It is particularly important that researchers make creative use of more highly developed bodies of theory. State making in comparative perspective (e.g., Tilly 1984) is one promising example, but comparative studies of socioeconomic status attainment by immigrants (e.g., Perlmann 2005) offer lessons as well.

References


