



The Politics of Naturalization in
Europe, Asia, and North America

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How do liberal democracies make immigrants into nationals? Debates over naturalization and dual citizenship have gained salience in recent years as the result of increased migration flows to Europe, North America, and East Asia. Recent years have witnessed the establishment of new barriers to naturalization, including revamped citizenship tests and other integration requirements, across numerous states. But why have these changes occurred? Furthermore, to what extent are naturalization and citizenship policies converging or diverging across liberal democratic polities?

On May 20th, 2011, a dozen scholars gathered at the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies at the University of California, San Diego, to explore the political forces shaping naturalization and citizenship policy in Europe, North America, and East Asia. They found broad patterns of convergence within Western Europe, though national variation does continue even in EU countries, because citizenship policy remains in the purview of member states. Some of this variation can be explained by specific national histories of emigration or immigration. When comparing Europe to East Asia, European policies tend to appear much more clustered together and welcoming. North American policies appear more closely aligned with Europe than East Asia. Recent changes in U.S. and Canadian nationality policies have been incremental and are much less important than broader immigration policies that form the gateway to naturalization.

Europe

The conference opened with an analysis of recent policy developments in Europe.

Dr. Maarten Vink, a political scientist at Maastricht University in the Netherlands, explored the effects of naturalization policies in European states on rates of citizenship acquisition. He noted that European countries diverge in their approaches to naturalization, with some countries accepting dual citizenship while others requiring would-be immigrants to renounce their original citizenship. Seeking to evaluate the causes of divergent naturalization rates across European countries, Vink conducted a series of multilevel statistical tests based on survey data including first and second generation immigrants. His results suggest that naturalization rates are not simply a function of individual states' citizenship policies, but are also shaped by the individual characteristics of migrants and the socioeconomic characteristics of their countries of origin.

Dr. Sara Wallace Goodman of the University of California, Irvine, next discussed recent developments in naturalization policy in Western Europe and explaining the sources of that variation. Over the last decade, many European states have instituted new citizenship tests requiring would-be migrants to demonstrate knowledge of civics as well as their host country's language and history. These new requirements are distinct from earlier policies in that they

frequently require would-be immigrants to demonstrate integration early in the legal immigration process, sometimes even upon entry. Acknowledging that citizenship can be understood as a contract entailing rights and obligations, she argued that perceived imbalances between citizenship's implied rights and obligations can become problematic if states' normative orientations do not correspond to extant institutions. She concluded by asserting that states' naturalization policy strategies are a function of their domestic political context as leaders try to achieve a balance between migrants' rights and obligations. Restrictive citizenship requirements cannot, therefore, be categorically interpreted as the re-assertion of national identity in light of migration.

Finally, Dr. Alberto Martín Pérez of the University of Barcelona employed examples from Spanish history to explore the links between migration processes and citizenship legislation. Spain's naturalization policy, he argued, reflects its history as a country of emigration rather than its present as a destination country for migrants. Spanish naturalization policy is hence anchored in the logic of protecting Spanish communities abroad, and dual citizenship is, for the most part, restricted to citizens of former Spanish colonies. He noted that Spain's citizenship law has been relatively static relative to that of many other Western European countries. Explaining this divergence, Martín Pérez notes that Spain's right-wing parties have avoided politicizing immigration and that pro-immigrant groups have not actively lobbied for changes in naturalization policy. In the absence of political impetus for change, Spain's citizenship laws continue to reflect its colonial past rather than its status as a new country of immigration.

Finally, in light of the speakers' presentations, Dr. Jon Fox of the University of Bristol questioned whether it is appropriate to downplay the notion that the tightening of naturalization policies across many European states constitutes a response to a growing crisis of multiculturalism. While domestic political contexts may explain specific policy differences across states, he argued, the rising level of convergence in most European states' naturalization laws begs further analysis.

North America

The conference's second panel focused on the politics of naturalization in North America.

First, Professor Hiroshi Motomura, a legal scholar at the University of California, Los Angeles, discussed the new U.S. citizenship test, arguing that it does not represent a very significant departure from the previous test. The new naturalization test is only one element of the U.S. naturalization process. Admission policy and the green card application process, he argued, as well as application fees for permanent residency and citizenship, serve as de facto screening mechanisms for would-be immigrants. Migrants are required to confirm some degree of integration into U.S. society well before taking the citizenship test, but the naturalization process is also expected to lay the foundation for integration that will continue well beyond naturalization.

Motomura also explored the relationship between integration and birthright citizenship based on birth in the state's territory (*jus soli*). Arguments against *jus soli*, he noted, are often rooted in the notion that granting citizenship based on birth results in a loss of government control over immigration. Naturalization law, on the other hand, strengthens governments' capacity to manage access to citizenship. Hence, future analysis of U.S. naturalization law should explore linkages between naturalization and other facets of citizenship and admission policy.

Dr. Catherine Dauvergne of the University of British Columbia next addressed the politics of naturalization in Canada. While Canadian naturalization law has historically been inclusive, Dauvergne argued, recent legal developments highlight an incremental shift towards more restrictive citizenship policies. Most recent reforms in naturalization law have been procedural, focusing primarily on the citizenship status of the so-called "Lost Canadians," individuals left stateless due primarily to legal loopholes. A new law passed in 2008 sought to close some of these loopholes by imposing a generational limit on Canadian citizenship by descent, the first restriction of its kind. A proposed 2010 bill called for 3 years of 'physical presence' on Canadian soil prior to naturalization and streamlined the process by which the Canadian government adjudicates cases of alleged citizenship fraud. These developments suggested that a more aggressive form of territoriality is gradually being integrated into Canadian law.

Finally, drawing from these presentations, Dr. Irene Bloemraad of the University of California, Berkeley, suggested that the difference between European and North American naturalization policies may be attributable to their different immigration histories. While the United States and Canada are "nations of immigrants," most European states are relatively new to immigration. Hence, immigration is not part of most European states' national self-concept. Bloemraad concluded by suggesting that the importance of naturalization policies must be assessed in light of states' individual political cultures and institutional contexts. A particular naturalization requirement may be perceived as restrictive in one national context while it is perceived as a means of pragmatically integrating new citizens in other national contexts. Simply tallying up policies across countries hides these differences in how naturalization policies work on the ground. We should therefore shift our attention to determining why and how specific institutional and cultural developments render some states more inclusionary than others.

East Asia

The final session concerned the politics of naturalization in East Asia, especially in Japan and South Korea. The naturalization laws of Japan and South Korea appear markedly different from those of European and North American countries because they operate within a highly restrictive immigration system and visa preferences are targeted at ethnic kinship ties.

Focusing on Japan and South Korea, Dr. John Skrentny and doctoral student Gary Lee of the University of California, San Diego, argued that East Asian approaches to naturalization have been exclusive, focusing primarily on ethnic kinship and placing severe restrictions on low-

skilled migration. In South Korea, most naturalizations since the Korean War have been granted to ethnic Koreans returning from China. While naturalization procedures exist for non-Koreans, it is very difficult for those individuals to settle in Korea in the first place. In Japan, the politics of naturalization law focus largely on the *Zainichi*, or former colonial subjects from Korea and Taiwan residing in Japan, and the *Nikkeijin*, ethnic Japanese individuals living in Latin America, notably Brazil. Naturalization rates for both of these groups are low, due in part to strict procedural requirements. Skrentny and Lee concluded by noting that Japan and South Korea's aging populations, combined with a limited supply of co-ethnic foreigners, may eventually place pressure on leaders to rethink restrictive immigration policies.

Dr. Mara Loveman of the University of Wisconsin closed the session by pointing out that theories of naturalization politics drawn from the European and North American cases may not be applicable to East Asia. Furthermore, when compared with East Asian policies, European naturalization policies look remarkably similar to each other, even if there are ongoing smaller differences among the European cases. How, then, can diverging approaches to naturalization in different parts of the world be explained? To understand diverging approaches to naturalization, Loveman emphasized, it is important to assess the degree to which citizenship represents social closure across different national contexts. How does formal citizenship change individuals' status in different states and communities?