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Sara Wallace Goodman & Matthew Wright
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Does Mandatory Integration Matter? Effects of Civic Requirements on Immigrant Socio-economic and Political Outcomes

Sara Wallace Goodman and Matthew Wright

Several Western European countries have adopted policies of mandatory integration, requiring immigrants to acquire country knowledge, language and values as conditions for immigration, settlement and citizenship. The underlying concept is that—in promoting civic skills—immigrants are better equipped to politically, socially and economically integrate. However, the question of whether civic integration is designed to be a real solution to repair integration problems has gone untested. This paper presents results, across a wide range of outcomes, which finds much more support for a symbolic narrative than a functional one. Using a unique data-set to measure civic integration policy across six waves of the European Social Survey (2002–2012), we find little evidence that these requirements produce tangible, long-term integration change. This does not diminish their significance; instead, we find requirements serve a meaningful gate-keeping role, while simultaneously repositioning the state closer to immigrant lives.

Keywords: Integration; Immigration; Europe

Introduction

Immigrant integration has proven to be a central challenge for the immigrant-receiving societies of Western Europe. Not content to just allow processes of acclimation and accommodation occur over time, many states have assumed a more proactive stance by erecting a series of policies designed to facilitate, expedite, and
sometimes even troubleshoot the incorporation of a diverse group of outsiders. As such, integration policies stand out as a core institutional feature that distinguishes countries of immigration: while nearly every country in the world receives immigrants, a far more limited set of states maintain policies that go beyond ‘passive reception’—that is, regulation of entry and quotas—to tackle accommodation and inclusion.

One integration policy that has proved to be increasingly utilised, and of great interest to policy-makers and academics alike, is civic integration, in which integration arises through immigrants’ acquisition of ‘citizen-like’, or civic, skills. These might include speaking the host country language, having knowledge about the country’s history, culture and rules, and understanding and following the liberal-democratic values that underscore their new home. Civic integration policy promotes these characteristics through the use of new assessment tools including integration tests, courses and contracts. These tools are uniquely applied as conditions in the process of obtaining citizenship and, increasingly, to non-traditional membership statuses, including long-term/permanent residence and entry. In this respect, new requirements both prepare an immigrant for fuller participation in a host society and serve as gatekeeper, where the path of transitioning from an outsider to an insider is marked by mandatory integration conditions alongside other restrictions.

Popular consensus among academics is that this new approach to immigrant integration has arisen in the shadow of the ‘failure of multiculturalism’. However, it is not quite right to view mandatory integration as a replacement for multiculturalism. Indeed, it has proven rhetorically popular even in states with no experience with multicultural policy, like Germany and France. And in states that do maintain multiculturalism, we see no evidence that civic integration has eroded said policies (Banting and Kymlicka 2013). Though this premise is empirically problematic as a point of departure, we can identify significant conceptual differences in the two integration approaches. Multiculturalism offers rules and procedures that promote accommodation along group lines, ranging from home language instruction to funding for religious schools, while civic integration is individual-oriented (so much so that spouses, formerly included on family visas, are independently required to demonstrate language and country knowledge). Moreover, there are important differences in the mechanism; civic integration compels substantive integration through requirements, specifically course attendance, language tests, etc. By contrast, multiculturalism maintains a set of arrangements that may produce integration along group lines but does not comprehensively facilitate them.

Civic integration is not merely novel, it is prolific: 12 out of 15 Western European states have taken part in this ‘civic turn’ (Mouritsen 2008), adopting robust policies of language acquisition, civic training and liberal value commitments since 1997 (Goodman 2014). These include high-volume immigrant receiving societies which are traditionally considered divergent in integration policy approaches, such as the Netherlands, Germany, France and the UK. Taking a macro-perspective, Christian Joppke (2007, 14) describes this cross-adoption as policy convergence, in which a
'focus on “obligation” (and reverse de-emphasis on “rights”) is a shared feature of all of them’. Yet, despite the widespread nature of this policy, its high political visibility and policy relevance, policy-makers and academics still know very little about its effects. Governments busily monitor these policies, but their measures of impact (primarily reported in test pass rates and levels of acquired proficiency) do not tap into larger questions of effects of civic integration on societal integration generally, such as comparative levels of well-being, political efficacy or sense of belonging. Moreover, these studies also do not get at the question of impact cross-nationally, where contextual factors can be taken into account.

This research paper picks up these tasks by examining the effects of civic integration policies on immigrant integration outcomes. Do mandatory integration requirements matter? Are there conditions in which mandatory skills acquisition improve an immigrant’s socio-political status, political inclusion or economic performance? Do civic integration investments meaningfully alter the life chance of an immigrant in an advanced, industrialised host society? Existing studies make use of individual interviews and focus groups (Strik et al. 2010; van Oers 2013), or run small case studies (e.g. Ministry of Immigration 2009) making it difficult to cross-nationally evaluate the policy effects of mandatory integration. This paper is the first to systematically examine these questions in a broadly comparative way.

We offer several contributions here. First, we bring evidence to bear on the question of whether mandatory integration matters. There is a particular speculation among scholars over the question of whether civic integration is designed to be a real solution to repair integration problems or whether civic integration is a symbolic gesture, to pacify native citizens that immigrants do not threaten their way of life and collective identity or to support enactment of new immigration controls. Our results, across a wide range of outcomes, speak to this issue directly, finding more support for the symbolic narrative than the functional one. We observe a positive effect of civic integration policy in political integration, but results are null for socio-economic domains. This, when examined alongside qualitative data and pass rates of exams and course completion, supports an interpretation of mandatory integration not as a central instrument of long-term immigrant integration but overall an effective mechanism of immigrant regulation—controlling the number of people who immigrate, obtain residence and naturalise.

Additionally, we build upon a growing literature among migration and citizenship studies that moves beyond the study of policy origins and towards a methodologically grounded concern for policy effects. The past decade has seen a proliferation of policy measures, first capturing dimensions of citizenship policy and, more recently, dimensions of immigration policy (Goodman 2013). In light of massive changes observed across Western Europe to implement civic integration policies, a systematic examination of policy effects is warranted.

Finally, given the findings here, the paper not only sheds light on the evolving nature of integration policy, it also, perhaps more significantly, provides evidence to consider the newly defined and closer role of the state in the lives of individuals.
through mandatory integration courses and exams. Stepping aside from the question of effect of policy on individual integration, we discuss this outcome of the repositioned state as value in of itself.

Theory and Literature: Assessing Civic Integration Policy

The empirical literature on immigrant integration is vast but suffers from theoretical under-specification and lack of systematic analysis of effects. More problematic, where scholarly opinion regarding the effects multicultural policies on integration outcomes remains divided, civic integration policy remains largely unexplored altogether. Therefore, in order to model effects of policy on integration outcomes, it is critical to first examine the unique contours of civic integration policy and how other scholars have interpreted policy design.

One of the central observations motivating the first civic integration policy (the Dutch Newcomers Integration Act of 1998) was ‘that many immigrants arriving in the Netherlands were not sufficiently qualified to enter the labour market on the requirements set by a highly developed economy’ (Entzinger 2003, 76). As such, in its initial design, civic integration encouraged immigrants to integrate as individuals while emphasising the shared responsibility between immigrant and state by participating in state-organised courses and orientation. As it states in the Explanatory Statement of Newcomers Act, ‘It is the task of the local municipality to assist immigrants with finding their way in Dutch society, at the same time [it] is the obligation of newcomers to make use of offered opportunities’ (Klaver and Odé 2009, 62).

To promote socio-economic self-sufficiency and improvement, civic integration uses new assessment tools such as integration tests, courses and contracts. Several European states historically assessed language before civic integration, e.g. Germany, the UK, but civic integration is novel because of this turn towards facilitated learning and standardised measures with innovative content. Not only is language and country knowledge assessed through standardised testing, often conducted by contracted private actors, many have argued that the substance being tested is also standardised, in which liberal values trump national differences. Joppke (2010, 148), for example, describes this as the ‘lightening of citizenship’, in which ‘everything and everyone flees the center’.

Related, and perhaps most significant for testing policy impact, civic integration does not merely promote integration to this ostensibly inclusive membership community, it requires it. Completing language and country orientation are conditions for obtaining a variety of residency statuses, including temporary residence, settlement and citizenship. It is in this observation that we see the policy’s inherent irony: the state mandates individuals obtain skills to achieve autonomy.

Given these potentially contradictory policy facets—where individual autonomy is realised through practices of state paternalism and newcomers ostensibly become national insiders through potentially non-national content—scholarship has mainly
questioned whether conditional integration actually promotes integration or, instead, produces exclusion (Guild et al. 2009; Kostakopoulou 2010; Böcker and Strik 2011; Groenendijk 2011; Van Oers 2013). In one study, restrictive integration policies are found to produce better socio-economic integration, particularly in contrast to laissez-faire multiculturalism (Koopmans 2010). A study of Dutch integration courses showed that ‘by learning the language and better understanding how the Dutch society is put together, it becomes easier for [immigrants] to make contacts’ as well as operate independently in society (Gelderloos and van Koert 2010). On the other hand, another comprehensive study of integration programmes found the ‘connection of the integration requirements with the granting of a certain legal status (admission, permanent residence or citizenship)’ as ‘not necessary to motivate migrants, and it inevitably leads to the exclusion of certain groups from a secure legal status’ (Strik et al. 2010, 118). Elsewhere, the absences of institutional barriers to engagement are found to positively affect political integration (Helbling et al. 2015). This perspective pervades civic integration studies, where most treat requirements like language and country knowledge as inherently restrictive, obstructive and culturally assimilationist.4

However, this debate reifies a false dichotomy. Policies may improve an immigrant’s labour market mobility by improving language skills while also prohibiting status acquisition if an immigrant cannot reach a certain level of proficiency. In other words, it obfuscates two distinct outcomes: a migrant can experience inclusion or exclusion in social, economic and political life (i.e. integration) and a migrant can experience inclusion or exclusion in legal status (e.g. obtain citizenship or not). They are certainly related (status exclusion obviously retards political incorporation), but hindering status acquisition is only one component of a migrant’s overall integration. Integration is comprised of four dimensions: economic, social, cultural and political (Council of Europe 2008). And where existing research is primarily occupied with how mandatory cultural conditions inhibit status acquisition (Goodman 2014; Böcker and Strik 2011) or serve as symbolic instruments of control (Permoser 2012), we know very little of their effect on these other areas of integration at the individual level.5 In distinguishing these outcomes of integration (effectiveness of requirements on outcomes concerned with inclusion) versus status (effectiveness of requirements as a mechanism of control), the empirical scope of this paper is the former.

A second problem with existing approaches to civic integration can be described as the underspecification of immigrant expectations. Short-term expectations of civic integration programmes may greatly differ from long-term expectations. Moreover, immigrants are not a monolithic group and begin integration with different skill-levels and background factors. Therefore, different expectations may correspond to different immigrant profiles. Employing ordinal instead of temporal (short term vs. long term) categories, we identify three increments of achievement. A first-order achievement of taking a language course is language acquisition (measured in passing a test or proceeding to the next proficiency level). A second-order achievement of the
course might be comfort in navigating the health care system, or confidence in communicating with a child’s teacher at school. It can be distinguished from first-order achievement in that the skill-acquirer can use newly acquired skills for immediate functions, not just in a classroom setting or to pass an exam. She/he is not a beginner but they are also not fluid in the host society as a native in terms of skill, behaviour and potential. In other words, second-order achievement is a type of transitional category, acknowledging and allowing for phases and iterations of integration. Finally, third-order achievements are those that render the migrant close to or indistinguishable from natives in terms of behaviour and values. Where second-order achievement is the enablement of functional navigation (in which the immigrant attends to immediate needs and wants), third-order achievements enables civic navigation as a member of the polity, where one might identify with shared values, hold a belief in one’s political efficacy or carry a sense of subjective well-being. Figure 1 provides a visualisation of these three conceptual stages.

Third-order goals capture the full experience of immigrant socio-economic and political integration. They are central to civic integration and often appear in orientation coursework, but the barriers and challenges of meeting first-order goals ensure that these ‘goods’ are invariably delayed. For more proficient speakers or immigrants with a closer cultural background, third-order goals are more easily and quickly obtained. Our analysis is not only the first to make this conceptual distinction and offer this theoretical precision, it is also the first to examine effects of civic integration policy on third-order achievements, recognising government policy performance reports sufficiently (though unsystematically and certainly not cross-nationally) monitor first- and second-order goals.

Figure 1. Increments of civic achievement.
Finally, before we move to consider what type of impact civic integration requirements have on participating immigrants—in other words, whether integration tests ‘help or hinder integration’ (Strik 2013)—there is a theoretically prior question of whether there is an impact at all. Aside from goals of integration and regulation, it may be that civic integration is simply designed to signal to voters that the government is ‘doing something’ about immigration. As such, political parties play a meaningful role by aiming to garner native electoral support, reassuring citizens that immigrants do not threaten their way of life. This draws on the competitive party politics literature in which policies are less symbolic for their own sake and more politically rational. In this sense, integration policy may be an area the government can demonstrate competence and control where so many other aspects of migration (e.g. border control) seem elusive, particularly where Gary Freeman (1995) observes a strong disconnect between inclusive policy-making elites and a restrictionist public. Integration policy may help bridge this difference, at least in voters’ minds, without conceding too much from the elites’ side of the issue.

It may also be that civic integration produces dual outcomes: mandatory integration could have no effect on individual-level integration but a significant effect on status acquisition. Requiring language proficiency and host society knowledge can work one of two ways: it can incentivise participation or it can penalise noncompliance. Both processes yield the same outcome of performative improvement. As a result, any change in measures of political, economic or social integration is confirming evidence of the utility of civic integration policies to achieve integration goals. This question, therefore, generates the central test of this paper: whether civic integration policies appear to have an effect on (third-order) immigrant integration. After testing the basic relationship with integration (holding aside the question of whether it has an impact on status regulation), we can refer back to the civic integration debate on ‘help versus hindrance’ to examine in what specific policy-areas civic integration seems to help or hurt, namely political, economic and/or social integration.

In general, then, aggregate differences on integration outcomes over time or across states requiring different levels of civic integration should tell us whether such policies matter, and in which direction. On the latter point, mandatory integration appearing to undercut or even retard integration would not be surprising, even where incorporation is the goal. This may especially be the case where applicants for citizenship are already integrated. Furthermore, from the perspective of the state, a negative effect of policy on integration outcome may not be seen as failure per se but, instead, indicative of an ulterior motive to policy other than integration itself (primarily control over status).

Data and Measures

Our primary data-set is the six waves of the European Social survey (2002–2012), with the recently released sixth wave merged into the off-the-shelf ESS Cumulative
file that incorporates waves 1–5. This survey contains several relevant social, political and economic integration outcome measures, including variables on: political integration (political interest and subjective political efficacy), economic integration (subjective financial well-being and recent unemployment) and social integration (generalised trust and perceived discrimination). And, despite its origin as a general purpose survey not specifically targeted to generating large immigrant samples, it contains a relatively large number of foreign-born respondents in each country and over time.

In order to examine third-order effects of a civic integration policy ‘treatment’ on immigrants, we use the Civic Integration Policy Index (CIVIX) (Goodman 2014). This is an additive scale designed to record the number of membership requirements, spanning both pre-entry (at the stage of immigration) and post-entry (requirements for permanent residence and citizenship) criteria. Scoring is for the ‘most-difficult’ scenario for an ordinary, third-country national migrant completing all three stages. To summarise coding rules: first, obligatory civic requirements at entry, settlement and citizenship receive one point per criterion. Examples include and range from the ‘civic integration test from abroad’ in the Netherlands to civic orientation courses in Germany to the Austrian citizenship test. Second, there are compounding and ameliorating factors that can make a requirement more or less arduous, respectively: quarter-point weights are added for increasing levels of language assessment or if a significant financial cost is incurred by the individual while deductions are factored in where, for example, a course is recommended but not required or completion of a requirement for permanent residence ‘double counts’ for citizenship. These simple scoring rules yield a representative and parsimonious policy snapshots of the original ‘EU-15’ countries and in four snapshot years (1997, 2004, 2009, 2013), for a total of 60 observations. States have experienced sizable policy change over this time period, but we can ascribe a separation between ‘high’ and ‘low’ CIVIX-practicing countries (see dashed line in Figure 2). In the data analysis, these policy snapshots are matched to their closest survey wave. Combining our ESS sample with CIVIX data yields 130 discrete country-years for analysis.

Examining the effects of civic integration presents some unique challenges for survey analysis. Since it is a recent requirement for recent immigrants, the field of potentially susceptible immigrants has to be reduced. We draw a cut point to include only immigrants with residence of 10 years or fewer. This choice constrains immigrant sample size rather dramatically, since only a minority of immigrant respondents claims to have arrived within that span. Moreover, it presents a potential problem in earlier waves, where policy only gets adopted in most cases between 2003 and 2007. However, this is a conservative cut of the eligible migrants for later waves, where 10 years would be around the average time in which an immigrant would apply for either residence or citizenship.

Indeed, and despite these potential drawbacks, the ESS presents a sufficient sample of immigrants to examine third-order integration achievements, namely social, economic and political. By design, most immigrants are susceptible to civic
integration conditions. Civic integration requirements are most pervasive for third-country nationals (immigrants born outside the Member States of the European Union), though second-country nationals (immigrants born inside the EU and relocating to another EU state) are required to complete these requirements for citizenship. Thus, while limitations in the ESS make it impossible to rigorously ascertain a given immigrant’s ‘treatment status’ with respect to civic integration policy, we can make sufficiently educated guesses by only considering those who arrived during the period where such policies came into vogue.

There is, of course, also the issue of sampling bias, or in other words the fact that immigrants responding to the ESS are more likely to be ‘integrated’ (in the many senses discussed here) than a country’s immigrant population writ large because the questionnaire is conducted in the native language. That said, it is not altogether clear what to make of this bias for our specific purposes here, which is to ascertain the apparent effect of policy on attitudes in the domain of third-order integration. Countries scoring highly on civic integration policy might be expected to produce a disproportionate number of immigrants able and willing to answer a survey (versus countries scoring low), and that this is somehow biasing upwards the apparent effect on our dependent variables. But there are additional considerations: first, there is the possibility that this bias works in the opposite direction, if the imbalance across policy regime favours immigrants who are able to answer a survey but feel otherwise stigmatised by the integration requirements. More broadly, however, it is also the case that if non-response is systematically lower in high civic integration countries—which is the minimum condition for bias of the kind that would upset our comparisons here—this would actually strengthen our argument that these policies actually matter. Moreover, the short time horizon since policy implementation also requires looking
at more proficient immigrants as they are unimpeded by first-order barriers, in other words, the sample provided in the ESS. In sum, our approach demands caution in a few respects, but we believe the temporal and spatial breadth of the data, which no immigrant-specific survey can match, is a worthwhile trade.

Analytical Approach

Integration is to a substantial degree the product of individual-level factors related to demographics (such as age, race and gender) as well as ‘human capital’-related determinants (such as education) (Almond and Verba 1963). There is some evidence that some of these are weaker predictors of political behaviour for immigrants (de Rooij 2012) but the direction of measured effects remains similar to more general models. Because socio-economic characteristics matter, the unique demographic profile of each nation’s immigrant population complicates cross-national comparisons. Put another way, countries vary based in terms of their immigrant populations’ average level of education, country of origin, racial balance, age and length of residence. These average differences may lie at the root of any apparent policy differences we observe, thus making the latter spurious. As such, they must be statistically controlled as far as possible.

We follow Wright and Bloemraad (2012) in estimating ‘regime-level’ effects by using a variation on the two-step visualisation technique originally suggested by Bowers and Drake (2005). We compare the intercept values produced when outcomes are regressed on the predictors in a baseline individual-level model pooled within each policy regime category (e.g. in high CIVIX countries vs. low CIVIX countries). All respondents we analyse are immigrants to the country who have arrived within the last 10 years. The individual-level model includes the following variables: dummy variables tapping whether or not the respondent was born in an EU-member state (0 = yes, 1 = no), is a citizen of the country of interview (0 = no, 1 = yes), identifies as a member of an ethnic minority group in the country (0 = yes, 1 = no), age (5-category, 0 = 16–29), gender (0 = male, 1 = female) and formal education (in years).

Given the way the individual-level predictors are coded, what this amounts to is estimating, for each policy regime category, predicted outcomes for a hypothetical immigrant who is a visible ethnic minority member, was born outside the EU, has been in the country for 10 years or less, lacks citizenship, is less-educated, male and young. Whenever we refer to immigrant ‘intercept’ scores, we refer to these estimates. Given the political debate over civic integration, we believe that it is precisely this sort of immigrant who is at the heart of integration concerns. Our estimator in these equations depends upon the nature of the dependent variable: dichotomous measures employ logistic regression, whereas all other measures (which have four or more response values) are estimated using Ordinary Least Squares.

An important conceptual and methodological challenge in immigrant integration research is establishing a reference point (Bloemraad, Korteweg, and Yurdakul 2008,
Different analytical strategies speak to distinct theoretical interests. We consequently employ two comparisons: one that directly compares predicted values for our hypothetical immigrant—in other words, *levels*—and a second that compares country-level *gaps* between immigrant and native-born means across our policy categories. The first comparison offers important parsimony: on the whole, do immigrants do better in high CIVIX countries than low CIVIX countries? This type of analysis is useful not only for its simplicity, but also because the outcome measures we assess can be seen as ‘goods’ in and of themselves. Normatively, higher levels of social, social and economic engagement are presumably good for immigrants, and support a view of positive civic integration policy effects.

At the same time, the concept of ‘integration’ connotes movement towards some attitude or behaviour consonant with the mainstream position in the host country. In other words, examining levels across values of CIVIX does not, in and of itself, convey whether or not immigrants in fact more ‘integrated’, since there is no reference point. Comparing immigrant levels to native levels—deriving a series of comparative gaps—conveys a distance to the value immigrants are putatively integrating to, and, as such, native scores provide an ‘anchor point’ to discern how much immigrants differ from the native-born majority. In the large-*n* ESS, the outcome variables become the individual-level *difference* between a given immigrant’s score on the measure of interest and the overall mean among native-born respondents in his or her country. Throughout, our reference point in the ‘gap analyses’ is immigrant scores with respect to the mainstream population *within their country* (as opposed to, say, within all countries of a specific policy regime). Thus, we are considering gaps between immigrants and their native-born counterparts to assess the ‘effect’ of policy, holding constant what some might call ‘national political culture’.

Despite efforts made in controlling for individual-level characteristics, on the one hand, and establishing a valid reference point on the other hand, it remains the case that our approach leaves open the possibility of contextual-level confounds, including other policy indicators on the one hand, and broader economic and political factors on the other hand. With so few country cases, it is difficult to credibly control for such factors explicitly. That said, we offer two circumstantial arguments in response: first, the fact that CIVIX stands analytically distinct from most other measures of policy across domains of immigration is evidence that these are not likely to spuriously cause any pattern we observe between CIVIX and our outcomes at the bivariate level (Helbling 2013). Second, CIVIX is by-and-large unrelated to other ‘usual suspects’ at the macro-level, including measures of economic prosperity and immigrant inflows. CIVIX is, however, positively correlated with two macro-political indicators: the broader Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) ($r_{xy} = -.46, p = .09$) and a measure of extreme right-wing (ERW) party share ($r_{xy} = .33, p = .09$). Both of these relationships are straightforward, and neither undercut the argument we wish to make here. MIPEX includes a whole spectrum of indicators, including civic integration, and also policies ranging from labour market mobility to
education. It is coded in an inverse direction to CIVIX, where high scores indicate benchmark or ‘best practice’ outcomes for immigrant integration. However, by employing normative instead of descriptive coding rules, the relationship captured does not convey a story about policy effects but about policy expectations (Goodman 2014, 57–59). With respect to ERW party share, we underline that the growth of viable far-right parties has catalysed CIVIX policy in many countries, and to the extent that this is the case any relationship we observe between the latter and integration outcomes would not be spurious to the former per se but rather a factor further back in the causal chain. To the extent that there is direct relationship between ERW party strength and immigrant attitudes, we would anticipate it to be a largely alienating one, since immigrants are likely to feel less integrated in a polity that gives voice to anti-immigrant sentiment. What this means for us, in short, is that, should we turn up a negative influence of CIVIX on outcomes we should worry about a (potentially) spurious relationship with respect to right-wing party share. But, should the relationship be null or positive, the driving force of immigrant attitudes is unlikely to be right wing parties.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Political Integration

We examine three measures of political integration: political interest, perception of politics as complicated or not, and difficulty in making political decisions. These three measures all tap into the educative overtones of civic integration courses and tests: creating an awareness of and capacity to participate in politics. We exclude political participation for two reasons. First, it is too tied to status acquisition to convey anything distinct about political integration. Second, as civic integration is meant to enable participation over time, it may still be too early to discern effects of integration programmes and tests on participation, where the sample includes immigrant with residence of 10 years or less. The same argument can be made for measures of trust.

Figure 3 presents the mean intercept value of political interest. In the top panel, we depict immigrant scores in absolute levels on the outcome measure; in the bottom panel, we depict immigrant scores relative to native respondents’ mean scores within a country. The difference between the top and bottom panels lies in the outcome measure: in the former case, it is individual-level immigrant responses on the measure of interest; in the latter, it is the individual-level difference between a given immigrant’s expressed attitude and the native-born mean in his or her adoptive country. In this example, this amounts to the difference between asking ‘how interested in politics is a hypothetical immigrant in Germany’ and ‘how interested in politics is the same hypothetical immigrant in Germany compared to the average native-born Germany?’

In the top panel, we see meaningful significance in interest in politics increase among respondents in high CIVIX countries. This distinction goes away, however,
when looking at gaps with natives in the bottom panel. This is not surprising, as interest may be tied to perceptions of opportunity to participate (that may only come with status acquisition). Still, increased levels of interest are consistent with the expectation that exposure to information on the national political system and rules increase interest in it.

Figure 4 examines two other measures that tap into political integration: whether immigrants find politics complicated (top graph) and whether immigrants have difficulty in making political decisions (bottom graph). Again, the idea here is that integration requirements are, at least on paper, designed to help acquaint immigrants with their adoptive nation’s political life; as such, it makes sense to ask whether or not such requirements have any influence in clarifying the political landscape. The results are basically the same across measures, and seem to affirm this expectation (albeit modestly). In the top graph, the dependent variable is scored from 0 (‘not complicated’) to 1 (‘complicated’). In the bottom graph, the dependent variable is scored such that higher scores mean the respondent has an easier time making political decisions. In that light, we see immigrants are much more ‘decisive’ about politics in high CIVIX countries. Both cases, immigrants in high CIVIX countries do substantially better in the absolute sense (e.g. they are less ‘confused’ and have less difficulty making political decisions), and the non-overlapping confidence intervals suggest a statistically significant gap at better than $p < .05$. And, in both cases, shifting emphasis to gaps rather than levels sands the statistical edge off of the relationship while leaving the direction of the gap intact.

Figure 3. Political interest by CIVIX (updated).

Notes: Point estimates and confidence intervals obtained from regressing (OLS) the dependent variable—either respondent’s score or the difference between respondent’s score and native mean—on a set of individual-level predictors (age, ethnic minority status, citizenship status, birth inside or outside EU, gender and education) and taking the intercept. Sample is restricted to immigrants with 10 years or fewer of residence in ESS country. Survey data are from the European Social Survey, Rounds 1–6.
The presumed individual-level mechanisms behind both of these finds are learning and socialisation, where immigrants sit civic orientation classes and obtain information on institutions and rules, find politics less complicated and may also imbue them with confidence which increases ease in political decision-making.

**Economic Integration**

As one of the stated and central aims of civic integration is to better-prepare immigrants for the labour market, we examine two measures: subjective financial well-being, tapped by a single item assessing respondents’ feeling about how they are getting by on their present household income (from 0 = ‘very difficult’ to 3 = ‘very comfortable’), which is useful as a holistic indicator of whether or not a given immigrant sees him or herself as ‘getting by’.\(^{19}\) We also assess whether an immigrant reports being unemployed (either looking for work or not presently looking for work) in the last seven days, scored 0 = No and 1 = Yes. Results for each are presented in Figure 5, below. In approaching the latter question, where the response scale is dichotomous, instead of showing levels and gaps we present logistic regression intercept in the top panel, and a predicted probability that the respondent will report unemployment for each value of CIVIX), with individual-level predictors in the model held at zero.

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**Figure 4.** Subjective political efficacy by CIVIX (updated).

*Notes:* Point estimates and confidence intervals obtained from regressing (OLS) the dependent variable—either respondent’s score or the difference between respondent’s score and native mean—on a set of individual-level predictors (age, ethnic minority status, citizenship status, birth inside or outside EU, gender and education) and taking the intercept. Sample is restricted to immigrants with 10 years or fewer of residence in ESS country. Survey data are from the European Social Survey, Rounds 1–6.
The findings here are less encouraging than political integration as we observe only minor differences and generally insignificant effects in subjective financial well-being. We see immigrants in high CIVIX countries both more likely to express satisfaction with their economic well-being, and less likely to report being unemployed. That said, these observations are tempered by large confidence intervals. As such, we cannot infer, at least on the basis of these data, that mandatory integration has the desired effect on labour market mobility that policy-makers putatively seek. This reflects a number of realities. First, there is pre-existing stratification of skill-level of immigrants in which some may benefit from skills acquisition while others see language and civic training as time-consuming and unnecessary. Part of this division is even reflected in policy design, where migrants can pass a language test instead of enrolling in language classes if they can demonstrate proficiency at a certain level. Or, in the Netherlands, for example, high-skilled migrants are exempt from the pre-entry test under the presumption they are already prepared to enter the labour market without the need to speak Dutch. In these cases, migrants would not be ‘assisted’ with integration requirements. In these cases, requirements verify instead of enhance skills.

Figure 5. Economic integration by CIVIX (updated).

Notes: Point estimates and confidence intervals obtained from regressing the dependent variable on a set of individual-level predictors (age, ethnic minority status, citizenship status, inside or outside EU, gender and education) and taking the intercept. For subjective well-being, the estimator is OLS; for unemployment status, it is logistic regression. Subjective well-being panel presents two separate dependent variables: levels and gaps with native-born. Unemployment panel presents logistic regression coefficient (intercept) and predicted probability of unemployment where all individual level variables are scored ‘0’. Sample is restricted to immigrants with 10 years or fewer of residence in ESS country. Survey data are from the European Social Survey, Rounds 1–6.
Social Integration

A final dimension examined here is social integration. This includes immigrants’ levels of social trust, indexed from 0 = Least to 10 = Most and indexed based on the ESS’ standard ‘Rosenberg’ items, and perceived discrimination, a dichotomous measure scored ‘1’ if respondent reports that he or she has been the victim of discrimination along ethnic, national, linguistic or religious lines. Both tap into the aspiration that civic integration—through the attainment of skills and knowledge—empower migrants to feel more connected and able to participate in the common bonds of the national political community. Both are plotted on Figure 6, below; as with Figure 4, CIVIX-related differences on the dichotomous ‘perceived discrimination’ measure are shown via logistic regression coefficient and predicted probability, rather than levels and gaps.

This last sphere of integration yields a similar impression as economic integration. We do not observe any statistical significance for the of civic integration policies in fostering trust, or minimising perceptions of discrimination. In this case, the absence of differences between high and low CIVIX countries suggests support for the null hypothesis: that civic integration policy has no effect on immigrant social (as well as

![Figure 6. Generalised trust and perceived discrimination by CIVIX (updated).](image)

**Notes:** Point estimates and confidence intervals obtained from regressing the dependent variable on a set of individual-level predictors (age, ethnic minority status, citizenship status, inside or outside EU, gender and education) and taking the intercept. For subjective well-being, the estimator is OLS; for unemployment status, it is logistic regression. Generalised trust panel presents two separate dependent variables: levels and gaps with native-born. Perceived discrimination panel presents logistic regression coefficient (intercept) and predicted probability of unemployment where all individual level variables are scored ‘0’. Sample is restricted to immigrants with 10 years or fewer of residence in ESS country. Survey data are from the European Social Survey, Rounds 1–6.
economic) integration. This is an important finding. As Perchinig (2010) reports in his interviews with immigrants in an integration course in Austria,

The question about ‘feeling part of society’ was rejected or not well-received by many respondents. Most of them answered that feeling part of society was not so much a question of knowing Germany, but of a tolerant and welcoming atmosphere, which many of them did not find in Vienna.

Similarly, in Denmark, ‘At least 50 per cent [of immigrant respondents] state that they have integrated as a result of factors other than the requirements. They point to their family, friends and work as factors that help them integrate’ (Ersbøll and Gravesen 2010, 41).

One reason requirements do not promote social integration may be by design. Social integration comes through interaction and the social aspect can be an important motivator for course participation. However, a significant number of immigrants qualify out of integration courses. Until 2013, the UK offered a dual-route to fulfilling the ‘Life in the UK requirement’ for settlement and citizenship where applicants could either complete an exam or take an English-speaker of other languages class with civic content. Applicants for permanent residence overwhelmingly opted for the test route instead of the course (in 2010, 81,688 took the test vs. 17,607 for the course). In Germany, the figures are closer together (in 2011, 92,547 took the language exam while 73,647 finished the integration course) (BAMF 2012, 677). Still, this is over half of the applicant pool that is not experiencing the necessary socialisation and integration experience that civic integration courses and test preparation are designed to foster. And, among those that do take a course, a Danish survey of municipality providers concluded that ‘the social value attributed to the examination is absent’ (Ersbøll and Gravesen 2010, 99).

It is also possible that civic integration does not show a difference in social integration because it washes out the different start points that first-generation immigrants bring to a country. For example, Rahsaan Maxwell (2010) argues that unlike native and second-generation immigrants, who have been socialised in the host society, ‘first-generation migrants, who have gone through the disruptive process of changing countries, will have lower expectations’. As the immigrants examined in this study are all first-generation migrants who have resided in the host society for 10 years or less (in order to overlap with the time in which civic integration policies were put into place), effects may be muted or premature.

Conclusion

Civic integration is quickly becoming a fixture in the immigrant experience in Europe. Modeled off of the USA, European nation-states have gone above and beyond relatively simple citizenship tests to design comprehensive integration courses, exams and contract for immigrants not merely seeking citizenship but, more crucially, seeking permanent residence. In practice, this has mandated a dense
integration experience for newcomers. What has been the effect of this massive investment? In this paper, we assessed the effects of civic integration policy on immigrants’ socio-political and economic integration, considering the extent to which dense versus minimal requirements impact integration outcomes that range from political awareness to economic well-being. We compared absolute levels of immigrants’ scores on measures across policy configurations and also compared immigrant/native-born gaps, in the event that policy differences and requirement difficulties are a function of the ‘national culture’ into which immigrants are integrating.

The findings are revealing. We observe little evidence that immigrant integration is impacted by civic integration, either positively or negatively. Leaving aside methodological issues for a moment, this raises issues of policy design, where the stated, central purpose in integration requirements is to better prepare the migrant for the labour market and society. One dimension where we do see an effect of civic integration requirements is in political integration, where a type of awareness and participatory confidence increases in high CIVIX countries. Presumably, as civic integration material is the first time an immigrant might sit down and consider political institutions and history in a broad sense, this bump is consistent with policy design. Academic literature tends to downplay null findings, but in this case the remainder of our findings carries important theoretical and practical significance: mandatory requirements may not help but they do not appear to hurt the immigrant in terms of individual integration. And, by testing and ruling out the impact of requirements on socio-economic integration, we are left to conclude that civic integration is more politically strategic and rhetorically popular (particularly with a public hostile to immigration) than it is functional and effective as an integration policy. In fact, as national qualitative interview data overwhelmingly shows, requirements are complicated, bureaucratic, arbitrary, and oftentimes time-consuming (Strik et al. 2010).

While we do not observe high or low civic integration policies dramatically altering an immigrant’s attitudes or behaviour here, though we cannot discount the possibility that requirements have an impact over a longer duration of time, evidence elsewhere shows a more immediate effect as a gatekeeper to status. The Dutch civic integration from abroad exam, for example, show pass rates impacting entry. In 2012, the overall test pass rate was 79% (Significant 2010, 23), though disaggregation of this figure reveals a greater impact on older and less educated migrants. Civic integration requirements also limit access to permanent residence, but the data can be misleading here. Very few immigrants actually get denied permanent residence (or subsequently deported) because of a failure to fulfil integration requirements. Instead, immigrants are kept in a cycle of having to complete more and more language training in order to reach an arbitrary level or pass an integration exam or, perhaps as a consequence, are disincentivised from applying in the first place. In Germany, there was a 67.6% pass rate for completing the integration course and language requirement among course graduates (BAMF 2012, 677). In Austria, only 53.89% among those required to fulfil
the integration agreement in 2010, and this was the highest completion rate since the agreements first implementation in 2003 (Permoser 2012, 193). These immigrants are not deported, but placed in a feedback loop of conditionality. By contrast, in Denmark we see a rather decisive gatekeeping effect of language on naturalisation, where 40% of applicants in 2008 were refused citizenship on the grounds of Danish language insufficiency (Ersbøll and Gravesen 2010, 33). In the UK, that number is only 2%, though the test pass rate is at an average of 68.6%. There is variation in the degree to which states use civic integration policies as a gatekeeper, and in particularly whether that gate is entry, permanent residence or citizenship. But, if we assume policy efficiency, there is no doubt that civic integration largely serves a control function, as the evidence does not suggest it serves much of an integrative one for the time being.

This leads to further issues. Methodologically, one issue to consider is the how the extent of civic integration policies themselves might condition the type and number of immigrants arriving. Conceptually, research shows these types of policies to be more onerous for populations already defined as vulnerable, including immigrants from less-developed countries, women, refugees, etc (Van Oers 2013). If true, such immigrants may be tempted to go elsewhere, and civic integration policy might ultimately ‘work’ through selection rather integration. There is no way to examine that at the present time, and with the data at hand, but we leave this question as a signpost for future research. This creates two unique but related problems: those who do not need integration find mandatory requirements tedious and potentially offensive while those who need assistance may find it insufficient or, worse, an insurmountable barrier to secure status and, in some cases, benefits assistance (e.g. the UK). In other words, civic integration policies appear to do little to integrate for the vast majority of participants. It may be useful for future, qualitative case work to examine integration effects given variation in skill-level (particularly to discern between first- and third-order integration goals) and status, where expectation of requirements on highly skilled workers may necessary diverge from the unskilled. For example, research on the effects of municipal-level integration courses have shown promising results on refugees in particular (Ministry of Immigration 2009).

Civic integration policies show no signs of letting up. If anything, existing policies are becoming more entrenched and more states, from Europe to Australia to the USA, are revisiting possibilities of and strategies for membership promotion. Not only are states revisiting the idea of membership, but also they are reinventing their role as states in that experience. Mandatory courses and tests—even when contracted out to private providers—bring the state ever-closer to the lives of immigrants. As such, increased requirements at increased membership gates create more ‘check-points’. It is then, perhaps, unsurprising that civic integration policy’s most visible function is as gatekeeper.

Therefore, the final issue at hand is asking what role the state can and should play in promoting autonomy-enabling skills in an immigrant. Where is the line between support and force? Whose interests are being served by this new paternalism, given...
the results presented here? The immigrant? The state? Perhaps a wary, xenoskeptic public? And does the state have the right to reposition itself in the name of integration as a matter of national interest? There are no clear answers here. These kinds of questions raise a number of interesting theoretical considerations for scholars to take up, examining not just the limits of liberalism (and when it crosses into ‘illiberal liberalism’ and whether this is normatively acceptable) but also state prerogatives of control, and to what extent this can evolve under changing circumstances. These lines of questioning, much like examining processes of immigrant integration, draw this policy story outside of the European context and towards a whole host of other cases, from advanced democracies that are forever consolidating to achieve more inclusivity and participation to democracies in transition, which are only beginning to ask questions about how to appropriately manage issues of diversity.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes


[3] On this, see Banting and Kymlicka (2013); Koopmans (2010); Wright and Bloemraad (2012).


[5] Case studies based on interviews with a limited number of migrants reveal only marginal integration benefits from integration courses and tests, recognising that time, stress and money countervail added benefits (Strik et al. 2010).

[6] This would involve measuring the degree immigrants are accepted by natives, or the extent to which there is improvement in migrant perception, after civic integration policy adoption. Testing this requires a longer timeline than the scope of this paper provides, though support for this hypothesis would not undermine present testing as it looks not at immigrant behaviour but public opinion. Moreover, more than one policy rationale can coexist.

[7] We exclude cultural integration, as it is explicitly excluded from civic integration policy objectives. The question of whether this is the case or not in practice is important (i.e. whether civic integration operates like assimilation), but one to be addressed elsewhere.

[8] For specific coding, see Appendix.


[10] Requirements can take different forms in the same category: language proficiency at citizenship can be demonstrated through certification, testing, obtaining a waiver based on
education or completing an interview. Coding these instruments equally avoids interjecting subjectivity in the scoring, for what is easy for one migrant, say, certification of language, might be impossible for another.

[11] This cut-point is 2.5, where countries at or below this score are considered 'low CIVIX countries'. This is consistent with qualitative evidence on policy design, where these states assess language but through traditional and subjective interviews and do not use the language of civic integration in policy-making. See Goodman (2014).

[12] An exception is the Dutch model, which requires 'oudkomers' (settled immigrants) to pass the integration exam for continued residence.

[13] Among country-years for which we have CIVIX data, the exact figure is 4482 out of 13,467, or 33%.

[14] EU nationals automatically acquire the right of permanence residence in another EU country if they have lived there for at least five years continuously. As a result, we include a dummy variable scored '0' for those born outside the EU and '1' for those born inside.

[15] In our ESS sample, 'Non-Minority' is a dummy indicating that the respondent does not claim to be a member of an ethnic minority in the country. 'Citizenship' is a dummy indicating that the respondent has citizenship in the host country. Age and formal education are both measured as years.

[16] Public opinion surveys capture only the most integrated people, minimising the kind of variance reflective of actual course and test participation. Still, ESS respondents represent 'typical' cases for testing third-order effects.


[18] Furthermore, it should be said that the goal of civic integration is not necessarily that people participate, but rather that they have the skills to do so (i.e. act autonomously).

[19] We choose this measure as it provides context for interpreting well-being, unlike a strict measure of income.

[20] The more relevant figure in the unemployment analysis is the confidence interval in the top panel, e.g. around the logistic regression estimate for the intercept. The tiny confidence intervals around the predicted probability reflect low simulation error, not low estimation error.

[21] The entry exam also does not apply to Turkish nationals and family members (since 2011), migrants with paid employment (except for spiritual leaders), migrants seeking temporary residence (e.g. students) or migrants with educational qualifications (e.g. Dutch language diploma).

[22] FOI #20784. 13 December 2011. On file with authors.

References


**Appendix**

All variables listed below are referenced to original measures in downloaded ESS data. For more detailed wordings, please see documentation available at [http://ess.nsd.uib.no/downloadwizard/#](http://ess.nsd.uib.no/downloadwizard/#).
Outcomes

Political interest: single item (from raw 4-category measure 'polintr'), recoded from 0 = 'not at all interested' to 1 = 'very interested'.

Politics too complicated: single item (from raw 5-category measure 'polcmpl'), recoded from 0 = 'never' to 4 = 'frequently'.

Difficulty making political decisions: single item (from raw 5-category measure 'poldcs'), recoded from 0 = 'very difficult' to 4 = 'very easy'.

Subjective economic well-being: single item (from raw 4-category measure '), recoded from 0 = 'very difficult' to 4 = 'very easy'.

Unemployed, last seven days: dummy variable based on a 'yes' response to either raw variable 'uempla' or 'uempli'.

Generalised trust: additive index of three 11-point 'Rosenberg' items (originally 'ppltrst', 'pplfair' and 'pplhlp.' Index is scored from 0 = least trusting to 1 = most trusting.

Perceived discrimination: whether respondent perceives him/herself as part of a minority that has been discriminated against the country on the basis of either 'color or race', 'nationality', 'religion', 'language' or 'ethnic group'. From raw variables 'dscrce', 'dscrntn', 'dscrrlg', 'dscrng' and 'dscretn', respectively. The measure employed is coded 1 if the response any of these way 'yes' and 0 if the response to all of them was 'no'.

Predictors

Citizenship status: R holds [country] citizenship (from raw measure 'ctzcntr'), recoded 0 = 'no' and 1 = 'yes'.

Length of residence: how long R has lived in country (from raw 5-category measure 'livecntr'), re-scored from 0 = 'within the last year' to 1 = 'more than 20 years ago'. Minority status: R identifies self as belonging to a minority ethnic group in country (from raw measure 'blgetmg'), recoded 0 = 'no' and 1 = 'yes'.

Gender: (from raw measure 'gndr'), recoded 0 = 'male' and 1 = 'female'.

Age: (from raw measure 'age'), recoded into 5-category measure such that 0 = '18–29', .25 = '30–39', .50 = '40–49', .75 = '50–64' and 1 = '65+'.

Education: (from raw measure 'eduyrs'), simply years of formal education completed.