Handbook of Research Methods in Migration

Edited by

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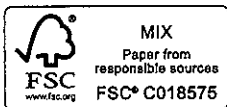**Edward Elgar**
Cheltenham, UK • Northampton, MA, USA

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Irene Bloemraad

During my undergraduate degree, I was a consumer of academic research. I read books and articles that my professors assigned, and I searched for more books and articles when asked to write a 'research paper.' My papers were analyses of other people's scholarship: I compared, contrasted, and criticized theory and research, but I did not carry out my own studies.

One of the harder parts of being a graduate student was becoming a producer of research. I had become so well trained in criticizing other people's work that the thought of producing my own was unnerving. How do you map out a solid research plan when you had never done research before? The dissertation felt like a mountain of Everest-like heights, and all I had were hiking boots, but no other climbing gear.

The methods textbooks, which were supposed to be the 'how-to' guides for this journey, tended to increase my anxiety rather than alleviate it. They invariably made the research process sound easy: identify a research question, review the relevant literature, pick an appropriate methodology, collect data, analyse the data, and then write up the results. The academic articles I read in class all seemed to follow the textbook format, describing a logical and orderly process that unfolded effortlessly.

Over the seven years of my PhD, I learned that these templates, while accurate about the parts of a research project, obscure the messy reality of putting it all together and carrying out the project. In this chapter, I describe my own journey, focusing on articulating a research question, building comparisons into research design, and using mixed methodologies. There is much that textbooks, and polished academic articles, don't tell you about the research process.

24.1 FINDING A PUZZLE: THE RESEARCH QUESTION

In my first year of doctoral studies at Harvard University, I had an unnerving experience that made me question whether I should be in graduate school. I had managed to get an appointment with my advisor – which meant signing up for a 15-minute time slot weeks in advance – and I was trying to outline a dissertation project. As my advisor listened, tapping a stack of yellow 'While you were out' message slips against her chair, I felt more and more foolish. With my vast knowledge of US society – I had lived in the United States for six months at that point – I was convinced that the dynamics of immigrant integration differed significantly in the United States compared to Canada. I was having trouble, however, articulating the difference, much less how I was going to study it.

I had lived in Canada for 14 years before moving to Massachusetts for graduate school, and I believed the Canadian cliché contrasting Canada's multicultural mosaic with the melting pot to the south. According to Canadian conventional wisdom, immigrants in Canada could be themselves – a unique tile in a vast mosaic – and still be Canadian; in the United States, assimilatory pressures forced immigrants to pledge exclusive loyalty to an American identity and way of life. I suspected that the Canadian government's support for official multiculturalism affected immigrants' integration, especially their incorporation into the political system. I thought it would make them feel more included, and thus participate more in the political and civic life of their adopted country. I was aware that the opposite argument could be made – by promoting diversity and pluralism, official multiculturalism might divide Canadian residents and ghettoize newcomers, thereby marginalizing immigrants from politics – but I thought this perspective was wrong. Now I wanted to write a dissertation to support my claim.

An obvious problem, of which I became more and more aware as I spoke, was that I was starting my research project at its conclusion: I had an argument, and now I seemed to be looking for evidence to back it up. My advisor quickly showed me that I faced an even more fundamental problem. She put the message slips down and asked a single question: 'What is the puzzle?' I didn't have an answer. After a short silence, she asked a second question: 'Do you have any evidence that there are differences?' I shook my head. I had lots of ideas, but not an iota of data. I left her office as soon as I could, convinced that my career as a political sociologist was over before it had begun.

While not particularly good for my self-esteem, this meeting was critical to the success of my dissertation. It forced me to think about what, exactly, I wanted to study. What was the outcome that I wanted to explain? What were the hypothesized dynamics, the mechanisms, by which differences in Canadian and American society and public policy, as epitomized in the mosaic/melting pot distinction, influenced immigrants' political behaviors?

My advisor's challenge – What is the puzzle? – demanded a clear statement of the research problem. As a new graduate student, I viewed social science research as a quest for answers. I had not realized that an equally difficult task was finding and asking the right question. Before I could develop an argument about Canadian and American societies' affect on immigrants, I needed to establish that there was some US-Canada difference worth explaining. In the language of hypothesis testing, I needed a dependent variable. This sounds obvious now, but specifying the research question became a project in itself.

24.1.1   Research Questions and 'the Literature': From Books to Real Life

According to the literature, my assumption about a significant US-Canada difference was wrong. As a political science undergraduate I had reviewed research on naturalization, the process by which immigrants acquire citizenship. While variation in citizenship acquisition in Europe was explained by contrasting different state structures and national ideologies, research on the United States and Canada suggested that the two countries were interchangeable: both are traditional immigrant-receiving societies with liberal welfare states and low obstacles to political participation. Given few structural barriers, differences in citizenship acquisition must stem from immigrants' attributes – differences in skills, resources, and interests – not from differences in the context of reception. As one long-time observer of American immigration put it, 'the settlement, adaptation, and progress, or lack of it, of immigrants is largely, in the US context, up to them' (Glazer, 1998, p. 60).

Most North American naturalization research consequently replicated standard voting models in political science using statistical models. Variables such as immigrants' length of residence, income, and level of education were regressed on an individual's propensity to acquire citizenship. These studies were helpful in identifying individual-level variation in naturalization, but I found the exclusive focus on newcomers' attributes problematic. This approach invited the seductive conclusion that if some immigrants, or some immigrant groups, did not integrate into the political system, there must be something wrong with them, rather than with the reception provided by the receiving society.

For my graduate training, I turned to sociology, drawn to sociologists' attention to structure and institutions. I thought that interpersonal ties, immigrant organizations, and the symbolism of public policies, such as multiculturalism, must affect political incorporation. Even here, however, existing research challenged my presumptions. One book published by two sociologists a few years earlier questioned the mosaic/melting pot

duality, showing little difference in Canadians' and Americans' attitudes on diversity and cultural retention (Reitz and Breton, 1994). The authors were cautious in generalizing from their data, but based on results cobbled together from a variety of surveys and opinion polls, they argued that US-Canada distinctions were overblown. Their thesis did not auger well for my project.

My hunch about US-Canada differences in immigrants' political incorporation went against prevailing academic models, but I could not shake the sense that the two societies felt different, and that these differences mattered for immigrant integration. Method textbooks usually suggest that research projects come from literature reviews. In my case, knowing the literature was important, but mostly because it seemed to contradict my own observations. Only a few textbooks talk about using personal experience to generate research questions, but now that I have worked with many students on their research, I think all textbooks should point out that many – perhaps most – research projects flow from the personal interests and individual experiences of the researcher. The lab coat model of the social scientist is wrong; most of us build projects from ideas that come from our own lives and our interaction with the society around us. Articulating a theoretically informed research question becomes a conversation between literature and personal observations.

24.1.2   Comparing Numbers is Harder than You Think

My first step in identifying a research puzzle was to define 'political incorporation.' I read a variety of theoretical literatures and developed a conceptual understanding of political incorporation, but I kept getting stuck when it came to specifying observable, empirical indicators of my phenomenon. What could I measure to see whether a US-Canada difference in political incorporation actually existed? More problematic: what could I measure that was 'comparable' in the two countries?

I started with naturalization.[1] Immigrants acquire citizenship for myriad reasons, from feelings of belonging and a desire to vote to more practical concerns such as wanting to sponsor a relative to the United States or wanting a Canadian passport for travel. Indeed, when I casually asked acquaintances about acquiring citizenship, most stressed the mundane rather than the political. Nevertheless, citizenship is a prerequisite for political acts such as voting and running for office, and it is a symbol of political membership. I felt it would be a good measure of political integration.

I then had to move from conceptualization to measurement. I assumed that collecting and comparing data on naturalization would be simple: A

person either was or was not an American or Canadian citizen. However, I soon learned that gathering and comparing statistical data was much more complex than a neat column of numbers lets on. A naturalization statistic could be calculated in diverse ways, but I found myself constrained by the data available.

I first had to figure out how I should measure citizenship acquisition. I assumed that this would be easy: I would find out how many immigrants held the citizenship of their country of residence, and I would compare these numbers for various immigrant groups living in the two countries. However, naturalization could be measured as a flow (how many people became citizens in any particular year?), as a level (what proportion of the total immigrant population in the country were naturalized?), or as a rate (how many years did it take the average immigrant to naturalize, or what proportion of all immigrants who entered a country ten years earlier had naturalized?). Which should I use?

Working from the assumption that the agencies in charge of naturalization, the (then) US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), would have good data on immigrants' citizenship, I poured over their publications and asked about public use datasets. The INS published the number of naturalizations annually, but it did not put this number in relation to the number of immigrants eligible for naturalization. The INS figures thus had limited value: if the number of naturalizations in one decade exceeds that of a previous decade, but the number of immigrants increases more rapidly, political incorporation is slowing down, despite the increasing number of new citizens. I decided that it made more sense to talk about the level of naturalization – the total number of naturalized immigrants divided by all immigrants eligible for naturalization – but neither the INS nor CIC could furnish the denominator for these calculations. They didn't know how many immigrants eligible for citizenship lived in the country.[2] I needed another data source.

Luckily national census enumerations in each country ask residents where they were born, whether they are citizens, and how they acquired citizenship, by birth or by naturalization. Using these pieces of information, I could calculate the total foreign-born population and the population of naturalized citizens, producing an estimate of each country's level of naturalization. Unfortunately, the foreign-born population is not the same thing as the population of immigrants eligible for citizenship. The former category includes those without legal residence status and temporary residents who cannot apply for citizenship. My inability to separate those eligible for citizenship from all foreign-born individuals was problematic since the United States has a bigger undocumented migrant

population than Canada. However, an alternative measure, calculating a rate of naturalization, was impossible; the INS and CIC rarely published these data and when they did, the calculation was done differently in the two countries.

And so it went. What I thought would be a simple exercise in gathering readily available numbers turned into a significant undertaking. I kept confronting comparability challenges, not just in measuring citizenship, but in measuring all sorts of information that I initially thought was self-evident. Instead, I learned that statistics are rarely self-evident. How do you compare people's level of education across two countries (and multiple states and provinces) when education systems vary? How do you compare immigrants' ability to speak English when the Canadian and US Census questions have slightly different wording? I nevertheless opted to use census data despite their limitations, as these data were the most reliable and extensive available. They also included important information on immigrants' socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender, level of education, and length of residence. All told, it took months to evaluate the available data, learn how to work with public use census data, and resolve issues of comparability. All this to establish a 'puzzle' for my advisor!

I was thus thrilled – and relieved – when my citizenship calculations were transformed into a striking bar graph. The graph showed that naturalization in the United States and Canada rose and fell in tandem throughout most of the twentieth century, but after 1970, the patterns diverged. In 1970, 64 percent of the foreign-born in the United States were Americans, a figure close to the 60 percent of naturalized immigrants in Canada. By the 2000 US Census, the level of naturalization had fallen to 40 percent, but north of the border, 72 percent of the foreign-born living in Canada held Canadian citizenship. I had a puzzle!

Or so I thought.

24.2 RESEARCH DESIGN: SELECTING CASES AS A CREATIVE ENDEAVOR

I shared my research puzzle with all and sundry – I finally had a question! – but I was quickly confronted by doubters. Sure, maybe aggregate citizenship levels differed, but getting citizenship was probably easier in Canada. Or, some suggested, the benefits of citizenship were more attractive in Canada than the United States. Perhaps, others said, the naturalization gap was just due to differences in the sorts of immigrants who moved to the two countries. Finding a puzzle was not enough. I had to convince

people that it was a true research problem, a surprising difference that could not be easily explained by common sense.

Those who questioned the significance of the citizenship gap frequently pointed out that immigration flows to Canada and the United States differ in important ways. About two thirds to three quarters of legal newcomers arrive in the United States through family sponsorship. In Canada, the percentage is smaller, about a third to a half, while a substantial proportion of migrants instead enter as 'independent immigrants,' selected on factors such as education, language skills, and age. The national origins of immigrants also vary. Most migrants to the United States come from Mexico and Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America, South America, and the Caribbean. In contrast, a majority of contemporary migrants to Canada come from Asia. Skeptics objected that the gap in naturalization levels stemmed from differences in immigration, not from the two societies' reception of immigrants. I needed to find a way to respond to these doubters.

24.2.1   The Portuguese as Quasi-experiment

Many introductory research methods courses, including one I took as a master's student at McGill University, introduce novice researchers to social science by holding up experimental design as the golden yardstick. Students are told that a well-designed experiment isolates causal forces in a way that observational data cannot. Most observational data suffer from selection bias: if you compare the educational outcomes of children in public and private schools, you cannot necessarily conclude that one type of school is better than another. Families that send their children to private schools are inherently different from those who enroll their children in public schools, and this difference cannot be captured completely through statistical controls for income, religious background, and parents' education. Thus, if you find a statistically significant difference in public and private students' test scores, you cannot be sure whether this is because of the school, or because of the factors that led parents to enroll their children in one system or another. In contrast, experimenters randomly assign participants to a 'treatment' or a 'control' group. Since placement in one group or the other occurs by chance, variations in the outcome can be attributed to the treatment, not selection.[3]

It is usually unethical or impractical to do random assignment in social science. Ideally, to see whether the context of reception in one immigrant-receiving society facilitates naturalization more than in another, we should randomly place foreigners in one country or another and compare outcomes. But we cannot travel the world arbitrarily sending some people to certain countries and forcing others to stay where they are. We can, however, try to minimize selection biases by comparing immigrants with very similar origins and comparable patterns of migration.

To deal with the doubters, I thus learned of the importance of carefully selecting the cases you study. Case selection – from the immigrant groups examined, to the research sites compared – is a creative endeavor of research design. Studying particular groups or sites can have value because the group or place hasn't been studied before, but it is even better when case selection advances a project's theoretical focus or the ability to test a hypothesis.

For my research, I set up a 'quasi-experiment' by studying Portuguese immigrants. Early in my doctoral program, a summer research job introduced me to the glories of salted cod, Holy Ghost festivals, and the spirit of migration that many Portuguese trace back to Henry the Navigator and Vasco da Gama. For this job, I had to write up a migration history of Portuguese migrants to the United States. I knew little about Portugal prior to my PhD studies and, embarrassingly, I had never heard of the Azores, Portuguese islands home to the majority of Portuguese immigrants in North America. Coincidentally, I lived in an area with a heavy concentration of Portuguese Americans, so I struck up conversations at the grocery store that sold *linguica*, Portuguese sausage, and at a local tailor shop where I went to get a zipper replaced. These conversations provided a human face and direct testimony to what I was reading in books and scholarly articles, and they encouraged my interest in in-depth interviews as a method of gathering data. Equally intriguing, when I told people that I was from Canada, they would invariably mention that they had a Portuguese-born cousin, aunt, or brother who lived in the Toronto area.

These casual conversations pushed me to systematically investigate Portuguese migration to Canada and the United States. Using my new familiarity with census data, I created a statistical portrait of Portuguese-born individuals in Ontario and Massachusetts. The two groups were strikingly alike. Indeed, when later I conducted interviews in Toronto, one Portuguese Canadian man told of being selected for agricultural work by Canadian immigration officials the same week that his brother stepped on a plane for New England. Portuguese migration became my quasi-experiment.

Given the substantial similarities between the Portuguese communities of Ontario and Massachusetts, we would expect little variation in citizenship levels if the US-Canada naturalization gap is purely a function of immigrants' characteristics, rather than the context of reception. I used the power of statistics to model the probability that a Portuguese immigrant

who lived in Ontario or Massachusetts was a naturalized citizen. My model included variables identified by prior research as consequential to explaining naturalization, such as length of residence, English ability, and educational attainment. Even after introducing these statistical controls, the odds that the average Portuguese immigrant in Ontario was a naturalized citizen were significantly higher, a three out of five chance, than a similarly situated compatriot in Massachusetts, whose odds were just two out of five. The research puzzle remained.

Dealing with the skeptics took a significant amount of time, but it paid off in an article published in *International Migration Review* (Bloemraad, 2002). The article shows that citizenship regulations in Canada and the United States are remarkably similar, so European research that identifies legal differences in citizenship law as a source of variation does not apply in North America. Further, the benefits of citizenship are higher in the United States than in Canada. For example, American citizens can more easily sponsor a broader range of relatives than permanent residents; Canadian citizenship provides no sponsorship benefits. Finally, the article breaks down aggregate naturalization data by country of origin, revealing that in every case proportionally more immigrants hold citizenship in Canada than in the United States. I had a solid, intriguing puzzle.

24.2.2   Using Comparative Logic to Deal with the 'Small *N*' Problem

During my time at Harvard University, the sociology faculty included Theda Skocpol and Stanley Lieberson, two leading scholars of social science methodology. I purposely took courses from both of them because they hold opposing approaches to comparative research. I wanted to be exposed to this diversity in outlook to better determine my own approach to research design and epistemology. Both fundamentally influenced my overall project, as did conversations with other students who took these classes.

Skocpol helped instigate a revival in comparative-historical studies in sociology and political science by insisting that a small number of case studies, carefully compared for their differences and similarities, can produce causal theories (Skocpol, 1979, 1984; Skocpol and Somers, 1980). Critics such as Lieberson question such 'small *N*' studies. According to Lieberson, such studies imply deterministic theories in a world that can be better understood using probabilistic causality (Lieberson, 1991). Furthermore, given numerous possible explanations – or independent variables – for an outcome, a researcher cannot dismiss all alternative hypotheses if the number of cases is smaller than the number of potential

explanations. Studies with a large number of cases – that is, with a 'large *N*' – should be preferred.

Case-oriented researchers respond to these criticisms by arguing for the power of process tracing: researchers who study a limited number of cases can use their in-depth knowledge to follow the sequence of behaviors and events that led to a particular outcome. Comparative-historical research, according to proponents, gets much closer to robust explanation of social phenomena than the correlation analysis conducted in 'large *N*' studies precisely because of the careful selection and examination of cases.

In the spirit of true open-mindedness, or indecisiveness, I saw merit in both sets of arguments. My overarching project was a 'small *N*' comparison of just two countries, the United States and Canada. As I had already seen, each time I suggested that government multiculturalism or integration policies might explain cross-national differences in immigrants' political incorporation, people came up with alternative explanations. I was thus faced with many potential explanations, but only two country cases.

I could have increased the number of countries studied to make my project a traditional statistical analysis, but the data requirements were insurmountable – countries just did not have similar data on immigrants and their political behaviors. More fundamentally, however, I agreed with the critics of variable-oriented comparisons that causal mechanisms could be better understood through in-depth comparison than statistical correlation. If differences in the social and political contexts of Canada and the United States influenced immigrants, the effects would occur through a complex conjunction of causal dynamics, not the additive effects of variables understood to be independent of each other.

Yet I felt very vulnerable to the 'small *N*' criticisms. The United States and Canada might be quite similar relative to most countries in the world, but they clearly differ in many ways. The United States is founded on a republican Presidential system; Canada has a parliamentary constitutional monarchy. The United States must contend with a legacy of slavery, while Canada has repeatedly overcome secession threats by its French-speaking minority. The United States is a country almost ten times more populous than Canada, and it is a world superpower. Canada has a slightly more generous welfare state and more income redistribution through its tax system. The list could go on. If I identified a reason for the divergent pattern of political incorporation over the past 30 years, how could I be sure that it was the right one, rather than a product of one of the other numerous US-Canada differences?

The short answer was that I could not be sure, but as I audited a course on research methods with Lieberson and read more about research

design, I began to consider the power of multiple comparisons. Could I extend the logic of my argument to another comparison, within the over-arching US-Canada study? By this time I had started doing interviews with Portuguese immigrants and community leaders in the Toronto and Boston areas. Based on these interviews, I began to develop an explanation centered on the ways that government policy could foster immigrants' political participation. Many of the local advocacy organizations and social service providers, which often spoke up in the media on behalf of immigrants and which occasionally organized citizenship drives or voter registration campaigns, relied heavily on government grants and contracts to stay alive. In Canada, governments provide more money to such organizations through settlement assistance and multiculturalism programs than similar groups receive in the United States. Was there a way to test the general applicability of this argument using another comparison?

I found that there was, thanks to an inspired idea from a fellow graduate student. Discussing my 'small N' problem in the research methods seminar, a classmate noted that refugees in the United States also receive significant government assistance, unlike migrants who come to the United States as workers or through family reunification. Indeed, the US government has a long history of working with refugee settlement organizations and mutual assistance associations to help this special category of migrant. According to the logic of my argument, I should see less variation in the political incorporation of refugees in Canada and the United States since they are supported by governments in both places. I should see more variation between non-refugee immigrants given broader Canadian support to all migrants. And I should see significant differences in political incorporation between similarly situated refugees and non-refugees within the United States. By carrying out this third comparison within the United States, I could hold constant all the alternative explanations suggested by the Canada-US comparison.

My colleague's observation led me to expand my project to include the Vietnamese communities living in the Boston and Toronto areas. The Vietnamese also constitute something of a quasi-experiment. Vietnamese populations in the two metropolitan areas differ more than the Portuguese, but the resettlement decisions made for many refugees in Thai, Indonesian, or Filipino refugee camps at times felt like the random assignment of a lab experiment. My dissertation project was thus built on multiple comparisons specifically chosen to rule out alternative theories and to provide further evidence for my emerging argument. This argument would also lead me to go beyond statistical analyses to conduct in-depth interviews and documentary analysis.

24.3   MIXED METHODS: COMBINING STATISTICS AND IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Many research method textbooks, if they mention mixed methods at all, outline a division of labor between quantitative- and qualitative-oriented social science. In-depth interviews and ethnography, we are told, help generate ideas and provide fertile ground for the germination of new theories. For these ideas and theories to put down roots, however, they must be tested using rigorous statistical methods that evaluate their credibility and generalizability.[4]

My research did not follow this conventional wisdom. Quantitative data and statistical modeling laid the groundwork for the project. I needed numbers to establish the citizenship puzzle and, later, that representation by the foreign-born in national legislative office is more prevalent in Canada than in the United States. Statistical modeling also helped eliminate some alternative hypotheses. In this way, quantification set the stage. It was ill-equipped, however, to explain the players' actions.

24.3.1   In-depth Interviews and Process Tracing

I turned to in-depth interviewing to uncover the mechanisms structuring political incorporation. Whether quantitative or qualitative, the purpose of an interview is to collect information from those with direct knowledge of or experiences with something. The census data I used were based on survey-style interviews. These follow a predetermined interview schedule with carefully chosen question wording. Survey questionnaires assume that people understand questions in a similar manner so that the researcher can compare answers and identify patterns.

In contrast, in-depth interviews are guided conversations where respondents are encouraged to tell stories or elaborate on answers rather than checking a box or giving an answer of a few words (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Weiss, 1995).[5] In-depth interviewing assumes that respondents might have different understandings of key concepts, and that the researcher does not necessarily know the right questions to ask. Instead, during the interview, the researcher probes respondents' answers specifically for unanticipated discoveries. This type of interviewing is especially helpful for process tracing and to better understand the meaning people give to particular words, experiences, identities, and so forth.

For my dissertation, I conducted 151 in-depth interviews with ordinary immigrants and refugees, community leaders, government officials, and others involved in newcomer settlement. I started my interviews with immigrants by asking how the person came to North America. This

open-ended question usually led them to tell their migration story. Many of those I interviewed were nervous, never having been asked questions for a research project before, and some were intimidated, uncomfortable with my status as a university student when they had not completed elementary school in their homeland. More than once, after the interview was finished, a person would ask worriedly, 'Did I pass?' Since everyone is an expert on their own migration journey, this question usually broke the ice and encouraged people to talk freely.

I would follow up with questions about their early experiences finding work or going to school in North America, experiences with discrimination, and their sense of identity and awareness of multiculturalism. I then asked a series of questions about political incorporation: whether they had naturalized, whether they voted, what type of civic groups they belonged to, and so on. I had a complementary set of questions for community leaders, government officials, and others involved in immigrant settlement.

I faced a number of challenges. First, I speak neither Portuguese nor Vietnamese, so at times I turned to interpreters to help me understand migrants' narratives of political activity. This was not ideal – I literally lost some of the richness of their stories in translation – but the loss was similar in the United States and Canada, thereby avoiding bias in my overall comparison.[6]

I also had unanticipated emotional challenges. For a number of immigrants, recounting their trip to North America and discussing what they had gained – and lost – in migrating provoked tears. Ilda told of how an American teacher humiliated her when, in the eighth grade, she did long division as she had been taught in Portugal rather than the 'American way.' This led her to drop out of school, killing her dream of becoming a nurse. The first time a man cried during an interview, he told of leaving his family by boat after a nighttime dash across a Vietnamese beach. My cultural background left me ill-prepared to see a man cry, and I didn't know what to do, other than listen. I often came home exhausted from my interviews. Asking questions and listening carefully, with empathy, is much more difficult than textbooks let on.

A third intellectual challenge was trying to link individuals' personal stories to the larger institutional factors that I thought influenced political incorporation. In-depth interviews were invaluable here, since they helped get at the process tracing I found so powerful. Instead of 'yes' or 'no' questions, like those used in surveys, I asked my respondents how they became citizens or learned about voting. I asked questions such as 'When did you first hear about citizenship? From whom? Where? Did anyone help you file for citizenship? Who? Was this person affiliated with any organization?

Did someone else help? In what way? What was the process like?' Using these types of questions, I had respondents reconstruct the thoughts and events that led to a successful citizenship application, or their first experience voting, or the respondent's most recent electoral campaign.

The answers to these questions helped show that political incorporation is a 'social' process: immigrants received assistance from friends and family, from employers and coworkers, from teachers at school and from fellow students. Community organizations played a significant role. Immigrants with limited English language skills often received help from a local social service agency with co-ethnic staff, or from the agency that first helped them resettle, even though naturalization came many years later. From my respondents' narratives, it was clear that political incorporation was not the atomized, individual process implicit in many statistical models of naturalization and voting.[7]

I then took process tracing to the next level. While personal ties facilitated political incorporation, the institutional location of various 'helpers' was also important. A number of these helpers worked for nonprofit organizations or government agencies, so I wanted to know more about the establishment and maintenance of immigrant community-based organizations. I visited most of the major organizations and agencies serving Portuguese and Vietnamese migrants in the Toronto and Boston areas, interviewed key informants in these organizations, and, where possible, collected copies of annual reports and financial statements. The financial statements allowed me to trace funding streams; in almost all cases, government played a significant role. Given what I knew about greater government funding for immigrants in Canada, and relatively more support for refugees in the United States as compared to others, I speculated that the organizational capacity of a migrant community – that is, the number and diversity of its community organizations – should vary with public financial support. This was indeed the case (Bloemraad, 2005).

By tracing immigrants' stories of their political incorporation upward, to the assistance provided by community organizations, and government funding downward, to the financial backing given to these organizations, I linked micro-level dynamics with my larger structural argument about institutional differences. I call this process of political incorporation 'structured mobilization': immigrants acquire citizenship, learn about politics, and, in numerous cases, participate due to localized social relations and personal mobilization efforts. These efforts lie nested in, and are structured by, the level of public and symbolic support afforded to the newcomer community.

24.3.2   In-depth Interviews and Meaning

In-depth interviewing also offered an advantage over standard survey questions by allowing me to probe respondents' feelings about their new home and their understanding of what citizenship was and what it entailed. To incorporate feelings and beliefs in quantitative studies, a researcher must classify responses into a relatively small number of mutually exclusive categories, thereby losing much of the richness, and contradictoriness, of people's emotions. In the United States and Canada, for instance, the Census Bureaus ask respondents' race and provide a set of specific options. Respondents can check one of these predetermined categories, 'other' (and write in an alternative category), or refuse to answer the question. This allows researchers to provide statistics based on racial self-identification, but we learn very little about people's understandings of these race categories as a salient identity, or how context might alter the label someone adopts at any particular time.

In-depth interviewing allows for more of this nuance. For example, Ann, who I interviewed in Toronto, repeatedly said that she loved Canada and that she felt at home in her new country. Asked why she had applied for Canadian citizenship only three years after arriving, she told me, 'Because I love my country! This I look at like my country. I feel it's my country.' She had arrived in Canada as an adult from Vietnam with few job skills, but she took courses at a local community college and eventually became the owner of a successful beauty salon. She claimed to have experienced no discrimination in Toronto, be it at school, work, or in public places.[8] I expected, when I asked her how she would identify herself, to say Canadian or Vietnamese Canadian. But when I asked whether she felt Canadian, she looked surprised and answered, 'I still Vietnamese . . . I never think I'm Canadian, right? Because I live here, I from Vietnam, I still Vietnamese. Maybe my son will think differently . . . because he born here. But for me, I think I still Vietnamese.' Ann was not the only one who claimed strong attachment to her new country, but who found it incomprehensible to say that she was just Canadian, or even Vietnamese Canadian.

These responses forced me to rethink my simplistic assumptions about the Canadian mosaic versus the American melting pot, or any automatic association between citizenship and ethnic identity. Immigrants and refugees in Canada usually felt accepted in their new home, but this did not necessarily translate into a clear preference for a Canadian or hyphenated Canadian identity. Some could not imagine themselves as Canadian while others bristled at being anything but 'only' Canadian; they believed that hyphenation ghettoizes minorities by underscoring their otherness. In the

United States, some immigrants who had migrated decades earlier, like Ilda, recounted stories of unforgiving Americanization, but many recent newcomers experienced American society as tolerant and welcoming of diversity. In the eyes of many, Americans accepted multiculturalism, so immigrants could easily be American and identify with their cultural origins. As Reitz and Breton (1994) had argued, the Canadian mosaic/US melting pot distinction was overblown.

Yet official multiculturalism does matter for notions of 'political' inclusion, rather than personal or ethnic identity. I found that the political expression of multiculturalism, especially as a discourse that legitimizes immigrants' place in the country, sends a strong message to immigrants that they are rightful citizens. Participation in the political system – both as a right and a responsibility – is normalized. Government programs that include or explicitly serve immigrants reinforce this sentiment. Ann, for example, took part in a new mothers' program hosted in a municipal community center soon after arriving in Toronto. Sensitive to local demographics, the program was offered in a variety of languages, including Vietnamese. The more universal nature of social programs in Canada also fosters a sense of engagement with government. Since government programs affect people's lives, participating in the selection of government matters.

In the United States, immigrants had more ambiguous views of political inclusion. Social benefits, a link between people and government in Canada, are more prone to stigmatization in the United States, and are often overlaid with the politics of race (Lieberman, 1998; Quadagno, 1994). Multiculturalism in the United States also centers on groups distinguished by race, with a greater focus on native-born minorities than immigrant newcomers. These dynamics affect immigrants' notions of citizenship. Migrants in the United States were grateful for the rule of law and economic opportunity, but they did not feel the same sense of engagement or invitation to participate in a common political space (Bloemraad, 2006). My in-depth interviews consequently showed not only the social processes behind citizenship and political engagement, but also how government policy affected the very meaning people attributed to citizenship and political engagement.

24.4   CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

I regularly show the graph of divergent citizenship levels when I give talks about my dissertation research, published in 2006 as a book called *Becoming a Citizen*. The graph is a striking visual representation of my

research question and it immediately invites the audience to speculate about what is going on. Having others puzzle with you engages them in your research enterprise. Not everyone will agree with the conclusions, but most will be sufficiently curious to listen and become absorbed in the work. Not all research requires a neat puzzle, but a crisply worded question certainly helps the researcher, and her audience.

Working through this project also taught me not to see research design as a dry methodological enterprise, but rather as a creative venture. We are all limited in what we can do – how many countries we can study, how many groups we can include, whether we can find the right data for our topic. But every project contains multiple observations, as ethnographic field notes, interview responses, or cases considered. Creative comparisons can leverage the available data by testing the logical implications of an emerging or hypothesized relationship. Maximizing such comparisons increases confidence in your conclusions.

I also found mixing methods to be particularly helpful in building my argument. Some are suspicious of mixed methods – I was told by one professor while on the job market that those who mix quantitative and qualitative research tend to do neither very well – but I find my results much more convincing after I triangulate data sources and data types. In my case, statistics described the generalized nature of the problem and helped cast doubt on alternative hypotheses. Qualitative interviews and documentary data uncovered the mechanisms linking the structuring forces of governmental policy to the individual actions, decisions, and understandings of immigrants and refugees. Without one or the other, the story would have been incomplete.

Finally, ego considerations aside, I learned to be thankful for the hard questions of a dissertation advisor that forced me to rethink my entire project and to get serious about research design.

NOTES

1. I also considered voting as an outcome measure, but voting surveys included too few immigrants to allow for sustained statistical analysis, especially when the category of 'immigrant' was broken down by country of origin. In addition, most surveys are conducted in a single receiving society. It is rare to find a survey conducted in multiple countries or using wording that is similar across countries. I had more success with a second outcome measure, immigrants' election to national office. I found a pattern similar to the citizenship data.
2. The INS and CIC compile data on inflows of legal migrants, but they do not keep track of who leaves the country or passes away. They consequently do not publish figures for the stock of legal immigrants in the country at any given time.
3. I leave aside the question of whether experiments actually help determine the 'mechanisms'

of causality. Even if we could conduct an experiment on public versus private school education, random assignment would only tell us that the absence or presence of a certain factor leads to a specific outcome (for example, low teacher:student ratios produce better test scores), but it would not necessarily tell us how this happened (for example, by providing each student with more time with the teacher and more personalized instruction, or by creating fewer distractions from a smaller number of peers, allowing students to better concentrate on the material).
4. See also Bose (Chapter 13, this volume) and Boccagni (Chapter 14, this volume) for further discussion of mixed methods and interdisciplinary approaches.
5. See Sánchez-Ayala (Chapter 6, this volume) for further discussion of interviewing techniques.
6. People often study communities that they know well: the adult child of Hmong refugees might study the Hmong in California, or a researcher born in India who grew up in Canada might study transnationalism among Indian migrants. This approach offers clear advantages: you often have easier access to people because of past interactions, you likely speak the language better than someone outside the community, you better understand cultural codes and taken-for-granted norms alien to an outsider, and so forth. My background – someone born in Spain to Dutch parents and who migrated to North America as a young child – was very different from those I interviewed. This sometimes made it more difficult to understand my respondents' lives. However, being an outsider also had advantages: I was seen as more neutral when it came to internal community divisions, I was better able to identify what was unique or different about community practices than someone who takes such practices for granted, and I found that people wanted to speak to me as an outsider, to tell a broader audience about their experiences. Not being Portuguese or Vietnamese sometimes made my work more difficult, but researchers should not assume they need to be of a particular immigrant community in order to study it.
7. Of course, not all the literature takes this tack. The qualitative naturalization study by Alvarez (1987) first alerted me to the role of non-profit organizations in citizenship acquisition. I also found the social and institutional approaches of Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) and Sidney Verba and colleagues (Verba et al., 1995) useful; both books rely on statistical data.
8. Since I am of European origin, it is likely that my respondents under-reported instances of racial or ethnic discrimination. In addition to such interviewer effects, the Vietnamese appear to report far fewer experiences with discrimination than other Asian groups (Lien et al., 2001). It is unclear whether this is because the Vietnamese experience fewer problems or, more likely, because they are more reluctant to report problems.

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PART VII

EXPERIENCES FROM THE FIELD