

Ashore on the Land of Joiners: Intergenerational Social Incorporation of Immigrants¹

Shin-Kap Han

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Juxtaposing two clichés, “the land of immigrants” and “the land of joiners,” poses an intriguing question: Do they fit in with each other? In other words, is Tocqueville’s oft-quoted dictum – “Americans of all ages, all stations of life, and all types of disposition are forever forming associations” – applicable to immigrants as well? Focusing on the process of social incorporation of immigrants that connects the two sides, and taking advantage of the unique features of the dataset, the study examines intergenerational patterns of immigrants’ participation in voluntary associations. Substantial variations across generations and association types are found, and their pathways of social incorporation are charted.

“The land of immigrants” and “the land of joiners” are well-worn clichés that many – lay and expert alike – use to characterize the United States. Not only do both hold up squarely under historical scrutiny, they are also of critical importance to understanding the country today. As of 2000, 55.9 million are either foreign-born residents or their children, accounting for about 20 percent of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000; Hirschman, Kasinitz and DeWind, 1999). And, as they were two centuries ago, Americans are more likely to be involved in voluntary associations than are citizens of most other nations (Putnam, 2000; Tocqueville, 1969).

Juxtaposing the two, however, leads to a vexing question. The latter is based on the high level of participation that keeps those within the population integrated. Yet the former indicates a massive and continuous supply of newcomers that keeps the pool of those from without replenished. The

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dynamics they refer to seem to be at cross-purposes on the surface. Do they fit in with each other? And, if so, how? To put it another way, is Tocqueville's oft-quoted dictum – "Americans of all ages, all stations of life, and all types of disposition are forever forming associations" (1969:513) – applicable to immigrants as well?

What should connect the two sides, and what this note focuses on, is the process of social incorporation of immigrants, through which they are turned into joiners. Although it may not be the capstone of the "arc of assimilation," as Gordon (1964) put it, social incorporation certainly is an important part of the immigrants' experience. Voluntary associations, in particular, are well-known organizational foci (Feld, 1981), in which many social ties originate, which in turn contribute to overall integration (Han, 1999). Also, the exclusion and inclusion the immigrants experience do have significant "social capital" implications for various aspects of their lives – such as socioeconomic attainment (Lin, 1999; Breiger, 1995; Granovetter, 1974) and political participation (Ramakrishnan and Espenshade, 2001) – and for the society at large (Putnam, 2000; Granovetter, 1973; Verba and Nie, 1972). This is precisely why Portes highlights the relevance of "the concepts such as embeddedness, social networks, and social capital" (1994:636), especially in the American context as Tocqueville observed (1969).

Nonetheless, the issue has largely been neglected hitherto in the literature. In order to provide a sense of breadth and depth of the research on it, a database extensively used in the field – *Sociological Abstracts* (formerly *Sociofile*) – was searched. While the keyword "immigrant" produced 7,725 hits, intersecting it with the additional keyword of "social incorporation" or "voluntary association" pared the number down to a mere 22. Moreover, only a few of those 22 entries bear on the issue directly; and even when they do, they are mostly small-scale studies limited to particular locale or ethnic group (e.g., Hagan, 1998; Rosenthal and Auerbach, 1992; Sassen-Koob, 1979; Sandis, 1977; Kuo, 1977; cf. Massey, 1981).

This note thus aims to lay the groundwork for further research on the issue by examining intergenerational patterns of immigrants' participation in various voluntary associations. The data are described in the next section, focusing on the two main dimensions of the study. An analysis section follows, where substantial variations are found across generations and association types. The map that takes into account both of the dimensions, in particular, shows a unique contour of social incorporation of immigrants. In the concluding section, I summarize the findings and discuss their implications.

DATA

The data come from the *General Social Survey* (GSS), which is a nearly annual, “omnibus” sample survey in which a cross-section of English-speaking residents of U.S. households is interviewed by the National Opinion Research Center using a stratified random sampling method (Davis, Smith, and Marsden, 2001; *see* Davis and Smith, 1992, for a general introduction to the design and content of the GSS). In 1987, it included a special topical module on sociopolitical participation, partially replicating the 1967 Verba-Nie study of political participation (Knoke, 1990; Smith, 1990; Verba and Nie, 1972). A total of 1,819 persons responded to the 1987 survey, including the oversample of blacks.²

One of the questions in the topical module (Q. 328) asks the following: “Now we would like to know something about the groups or organizations to which individuals belong. Here is a list of various organizations. Could you tell me whether or not you are a member of each type?” The list consists of sixteen different types of organizations – ranging from fraternal groups (*e.g.*, Masons) and veteran’s group (*e.g.*, V.F.W.) to church-affiliated groups and professional or academic societies. The responses are coded as either “Yes” or “No.” As Table 1 shows, participation rate ranges from 2.1 percent for nationality groups and 3.6 percent for farm organizations to 19.4 percent for sports groups and 30.9 percent for church-affiliated groups. As an overall measure of participation, the number of memberships (MEMNUM) is obtained by taking the sum over the sixteen responses, which varies from 0 to 16 with the mean of 1.7.

Also particularly germane to the analysis that follows is the set of variables that measure the nativity status over three generations. In addition to distinguishing the respondents into native born and foreign born (BORN), the variables trace the nativity status of their parents (PARBORN) and grandparents (GRANBORN).³ These variables provide a critical and rather unusual advantage in studying the intergenerational process of immigrant incorporation, for they allow an improvement upon the standard trichotomy of immigrants (the first generation), their children (the second generation – “native born of foreign or mixed parentage”), and everybody else (the reference population – “native born or native parentage”) (Hirschman, 1994; Farley, 1991).

²Throughout the analysis, hence, the data were weighted when and where appropriate.

³The official census definition of nativity is as follows: The native population consists of all persons born in the United States, Puerto Rico, or an outlying area of the United States. It also includes persons born in a foreign country who had at least one parent who was a U.S. citizen. All other persons are classified as “foreign born.”

TABLE 1
MEMBERSHIP BY TYPE OF ASSOCIATION

Description	Abbreviated		Valid N ^a	% Yes	
	Label	Yes			No
Fraternal Groups	FRAT	169	1,629	1,798	9.4
Service Clubs	SERV	172	1,625	1,797	9.6
Veteran's Groups	VETS	112	1,685	1,796	6.2
Political Clubs	POLI	77	1,718	1,795	4.3
Labor Unions	UNIN	236	1,561	1,798	13.2
Sports Groups	SPRT	349	1,450	1,799	19.4
Youth Groups	YUTH	156	1,639	1,796	8.7
School Service Groups	SCHL	229	1,568	1,796	12.7
Hobby or Garden Clubs	HBBY	165	1,630	1,795	9.2
School Fraternities or Sororities	GREK	90	1,705	1,795	5.0
Nationality Groups	NATL	37	1,757	1,794	2.1
Farm Organizations	FARM	65	1,731	1,796	3.6
Literary, Art, Discussion or Study Groups	LITR	133	1,662	1,795	7.4
Professional or Academic Societies	PROF	269	1,527	1,795	15.0
Church-affiliated Groups	CHUR	556	1,242	1,798	30.9
Any Other Groups	OTHR	215	1,567	1,782	12.1
Average		189	1,606	1,795	10.55

Notes: ^aInitial N was 1,819, from which the following response categories were excluded: "Don't know," "No answer," and "Not applicable."

Four tiers in generational nativity status can be ascertained by cross-classifying these variables. Those who were not born in the United States comprise the first generation (6.0%). Next, among those who are native born, their parental nativity status determines whether they belong to the second generation (at least one of the parents is not native born, 11.0%). The nativity statuses of their grandparents sort the rest into the third generation (at least one of the grandparents is not native born, 16.7%) and the fourth generation or beyond (all four of the grandparents are native born, 66.2%).

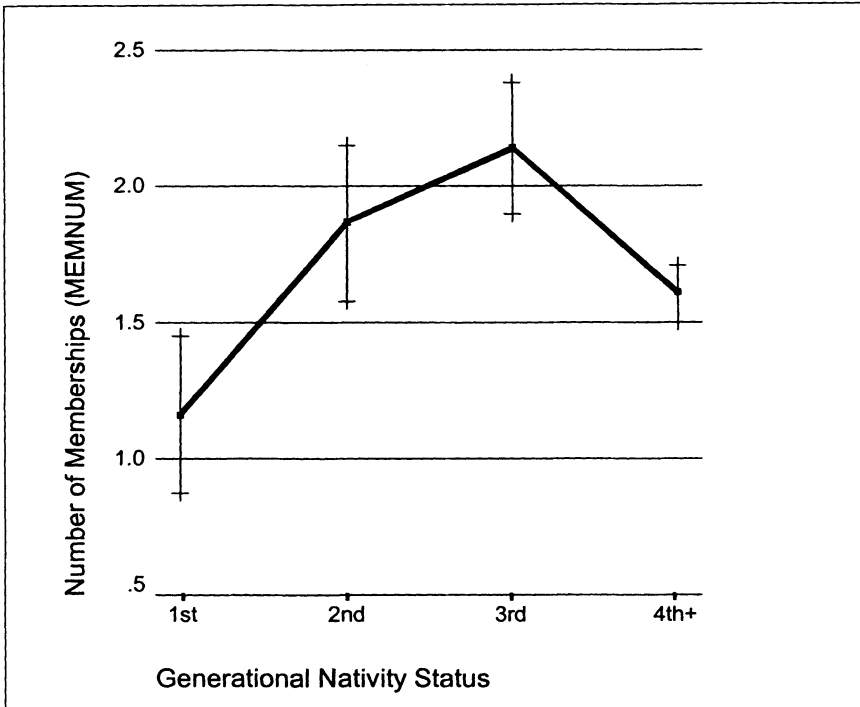
FINDINGS

Intergenerational Differences in Participation

Two of the widely used baselines are reexamined. First, the means plot of Figure I shows the intergenerational trajectory in terms of the extent of overall participation. It varies substantially across generations ($F = 9.504$ with $df = 3$ and $1,693$, $p < .001$). Except for the first generation, they join eagerly – more so than the population in general. The pattern, by and large, appears to be what is expected by the extant literature (Hirschman, 1994; Portes, 1994; Alba, 1985; Neidert and Farley, 1985; Sowell, 1981; Handlin, 1973; Gordon, 1964).

There is, however, a noticeable misalignment that suggests a need for reconsideration or modification of the previously established thesis of “sec-

Figure I. Means Plot: Number of Memberships by Generational Nativity Status^a



Notes: ^aF = 9,504 with df = 3 and 1,693, $p < .001$. Lower and upper bounds of 95% confidence interval for mean are indicated by '+', which allow pairwise comparisons.

ond-generation advantage” – *i.e.*, a progressive increase in participation with-in the first generation with duration of stay in the United States, a peak in participation among the second generation, followed by a decline among “3+-generation” respondents (Ramakrishnan and Espenshade, 2001). The figure shows, however, that when the generational dimension is further disaggregated the increase in participation rate extends further and the peak occurs later in the third generation.

It is not only in the magnitude of the participation that the immigrants differ from the population in general. The second baseline to be examined concerns the factors related to their participation. Table 2 presents the results of the logistic regressions with a dichotomized dependent variable indicating

the level of participation.⁴ What is readily visible in the table is the contrast between the first three and the last two columns. When the factors that have typically been postulated to predict participation in voluntary associations in the literature – such as age, education and employment status (Curtis, Baer, and Grabb, 2001; Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001; Putnam, 2000; Knoke, 1990; McPherson and Lockwood, 1980) – are applied separately by

TABLE 2
FACTORS PREDICTING VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP BY GENERATIONAL NATIVITY
STATUS: LOGISTIC REGRESSION ESTIMATES^a

		By Generation				
		1st	2nd	3rd	4th+	All
Sex	Female ^b					
	Male	-.063	-.009	.421	.374 ^d	.360 ^c
Age	18-24					
	25-34	-.192	1.043	.765	.103	.228
	25-44	.603	.354	1.201	.231	.447
	45-54	14.460	.382	1.576	.429	.719 ^c
	55-64	1.337	-.424	1.127	.697 ^d	.620 ^d
	65+	2.801	.182	1.853 ^d	.904 ^c	1.041 ^f
Degree	Less than HS					
	High School	.530	.442	.897	1.049 ^f	.999 ^f
	Jr. College	-5.386	.933	2.310 ^d	.953 ^c	1.050 ^f
	College	2.235 ^d	2.541 ^d	1.174	2.418 ^f	2.056 ^f
	Graduate	2.959 ^d	9.242	2.540 ^d	2.509 ^f	2.434 ^f
Religion	None					
	Protestant	2.401 ^d	1.723 ^d	.069	.193	.460 ^d
	Catholic	1.953	1.380	-.470	.376	.469 ^d
	Jewish	11.789	8.376	-.852	-.120	1.184
Marital Status	Never Married					
	Married	.083	.469	-.916	.422	.173
	Widowed	.260	-.395	-2.071 ^d	.615	.138
	Divorced/ Separated	1.191	-.346	.276	.152	.052
Work Status	Not Working ^c					
	Full time	1.175	-.228	.206	.536 ^c	.415 ^c
	Part time	1.794	.095	1.057	.674 ^c	.628 ^c
(Constant)						
		-4.815 ^d	-1.368	-.367	-1.643 ^f	-1.664 ^f
	N	93	146	222	1,114	1,680
	χ^2	40.89 ^c	38.74 ^c	35.94 ^c	140.72 ^f	199.09 ^f
	d.f.	18	18	18	18	18

Notes: ^aNumber of memberships (MEMNUM) is dichotomized as follows to serve as the dependent variable: 1, if MEMNUM > 0, and 0, if MEMNUM = 0.

^bReference category is denoted in italics.

^cIt includes "unemployed," "laid off," "retired," and "stay at home."

^dp < .05

^ep < .01

^fp < .001

⁴Similar results are obtained consistently across different specifications of MEMNUM (*e.g.*, Davis, 1982), including the interval specification, and also across the 16 membership variables. The detailed results are available from the author upon request.

the generational status, almost all of them degenerate substantially in terms of significance, except for the “fourth+ generation.”

That is, what has been considered and generalized as the normative pattern of participation in voluntary associations is chiefly, if not exclusively, based on the behavioral regularities found among the fourth+ generation. For first-, second- and third-generation immigrants, however, the pattern does not hold, suggesting that the mechanism that brings in the outsiders operates in a distinct fashion from the mechanism that maintains the cohesion among the insiders.

Pathway of Social Incorporation

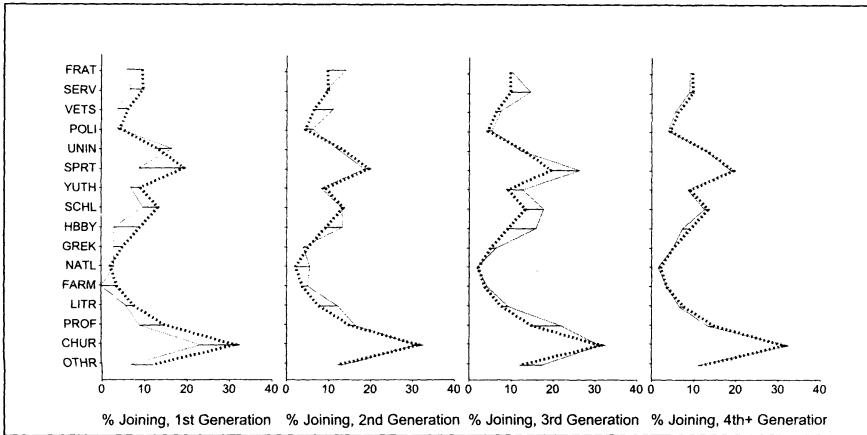
How, then, can the two findings – that the immigrants do participate actively once they establish a toehold, on one hand (Figure I), and that their participation seems to be driven quite differently, on the other (Table 2) – be reconciled? As a heuristic, I examine the pathways of immigrant social incorporation by examining the dimensions of generational status and association type together.

Figure II breaks down the overall participation rate by type of association across generational nativity status. For each generation, the solid gray line denotes the observed participation rate (*i.e.*, percent joining) in each type of association, and the dotted black line indicates the baseline rate obtained from the overall expected values. By and large, it replicates the pattern shown in Figure I: the rate begins low (the first generation), yet increases significantly over the next two generations, exceeding that of the general population, and eventually converges (the fourth+ generation). The trajectory, however, shows substantial unevenness: the discrepancies between the observed and baseline rates are not evenly distributed across association types.

Another way to examine the profile of social incorporation is presented in Figure III, which shifts the main axis of comparison to association type. These “profile icons” (Chambers *et al.*, 1983) represent generational membership composition in each of the association types.⁵ Roughly, the icons can

⁵The icons are constructed as follows. First, given the distribution of respondents across generational nativity status (*see* Figure I), the generational participation rates are obtained for each type. For instance, 5.8 percent, 14.1 percent, 10.4 percent, and 9.1 percent of the first, second, third, and fourth+ generations, respectively, are members of fraternal groups (*see* Figure III). Second, using the rate for the fourth+ generation as the reference, the ratios are calculated, producing .64, 1.55, 1.14, and – by definition – 1.00 for the first, second, third, and fourth+ generations, respectively. They are assigned from left to right, the right end thus providing the benchmark for comparison.

Figure II. Participation Rates by Type of Association and Generational Nativity Status^a



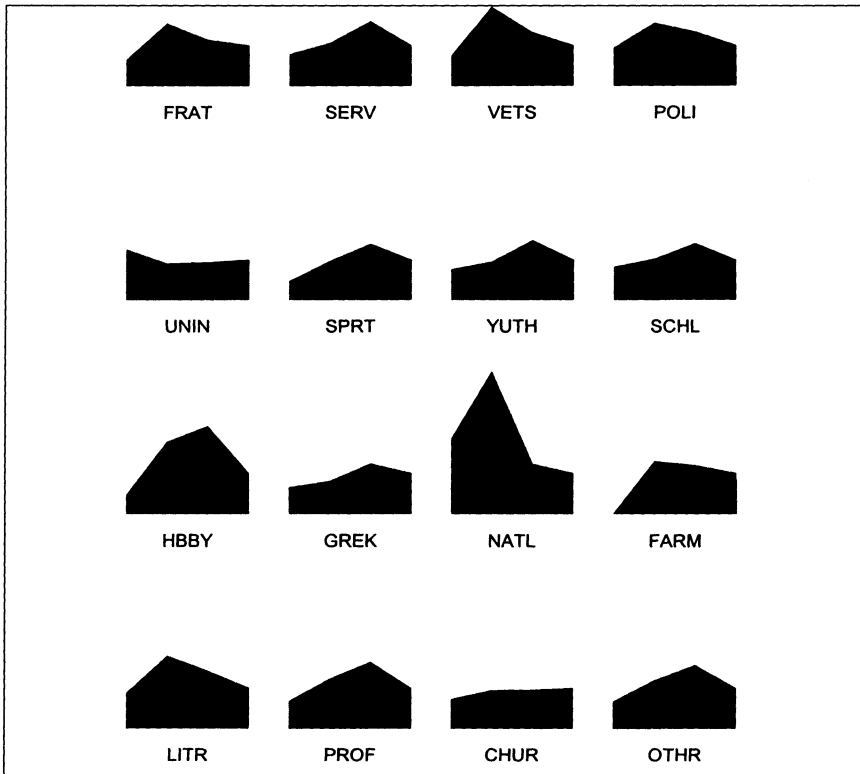
Note: ^aSolid gray lines denote the observed participation rates and dotted black lines the baseline rates obtained from the overall expected values.

be sorted into three clusters according to their shapes. To the first cluster belong fraternal groups, veteran’s groups, political clubs, nationality groups, and literary groups, and to the second belong service clubs, sports groups, youth groups, school service groups, hobby clubs, school fraternities and sororities, professional societies, and other groups. The remaining association types comprise the third cluster – labor unions, farm organizations, and church-affiliated groups.

In the first cluster, except for the extraordinary salience of the early participation rates in nationality group (NATL), they share the shape that can be described by the second-generation advantage. In contrast, the next cluster shows the peak in the third generation, indicating longer probation periods. Note that most of these associations are the ones that involve informal, primary-group level interactions among the members. Lastly, in the third cluster, labor unions show the peak in the first generation, which might have to do with immigrants’ unique path of occupational attainment. It might also be the case for farm organizations, in which no first-generation members are found. Church-affiliated groups show a flat trajectory.

Finally, to directly map-out the pathway of immigrants’ social incorporation over the generations and across the association types, a correspondence analysis is used. Correspondence analysis is a technique for examining the correlations between two sets of variables – in this case, generational nativity

Figure III. Generational Profile of Membership Composition

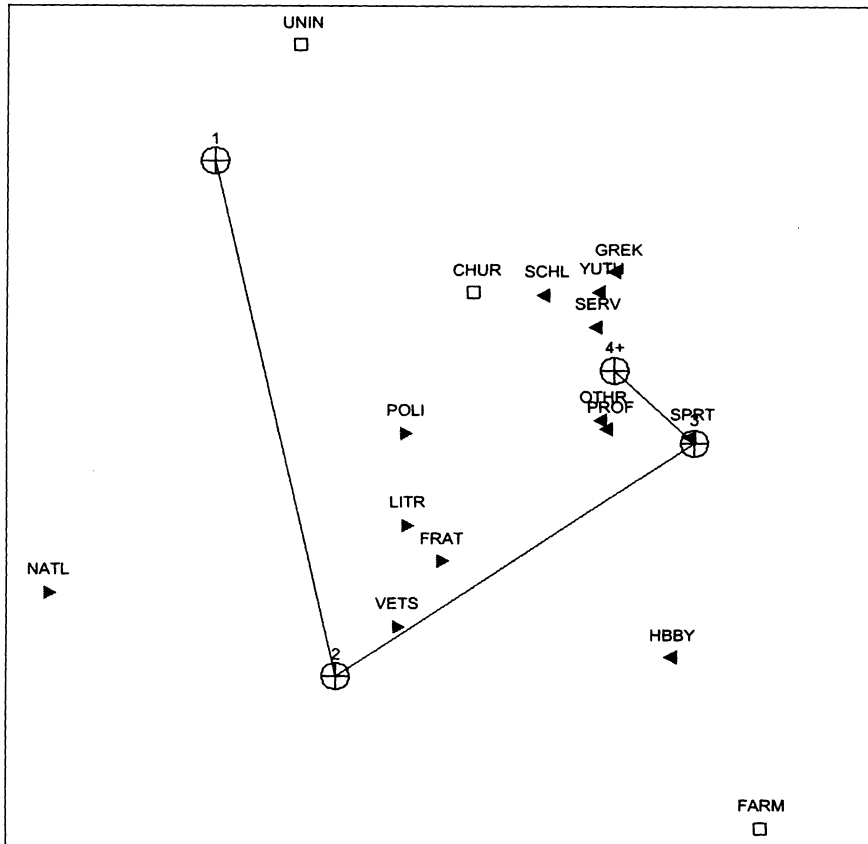


Notes: For each icon, plotted from left to right are relative ratios of participation rate of first, second, third, and fourth+ generation to that of the fourth+ generation. The right edge thus provides the reference for comparison.

status and association type – by placing them jointly in a common multidimensional space (Greenacre and Blasius, 1994). Represented in Figure IV is a social space, in which each type of voluntary association is located by its generational membership profile. It reproduces the pattern of clustering described earlier, especially with regard to the first two clusters (noted by ► and ◀, respectively). In the same space, it also locates each generation (1 to 4+), which, when connected as shown, charts the path of intergenerational incorporation process. Tracing the path shows that the membership interface itself is changing along the generational progression.

There might be two sides to this pattern, operating in tandem. The first-generation immigrants, on the one hand, are more likely to join specific

Figure IV. Correspondence Analysis between Type of Association and Generational Nativity Status*



Notes: *First two nontrivial dimensions (eigenvectors) from SVD are used to assign the coordinates. $R^2 = .842$. Symbols are used for cluster identification as follows: ▶ for cluster I, ◄ for cluster II, and □ for III.

types of associations – *e.g.*, nationality group or labor unions – than the others due to the needs and predicaments particular to their generational status. On the other hand, given the same set of circumstances, the other types of associations – *e.g.*, sports or hobby clubs – might not be as needed, or more importantly, as accessible. The veterans' group (VETS) is another good example that illustrates the interplay between need and access. Historically, and during wartimes in particular, citizenship as a reward for military service has been common, and citizenship requirements for those who serve have been

rather liberal (Jacobs and Hayes, 1981). As they pass through the generations, however, the balance shifts as their circumstances change, and eventually they reach the point where they become part of the norm. The pattern thus traces the constrained choices the immigrants have made over the generations and the changing balance between inclusion and exclusion.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the results discussed thus far, the initial quandary – is Tocqueville’s thesis (“Americans of all ages, all stations of life, and all types of disposition are forever forming associations”) applicable to immigrants as well – can be answered in the affirmative. Yes, the doors are open; yet not all at once and only in the long run. The quantitative differences dissipate over the generations as the immigrants slowly but steadily, and sometimes even more eagerly than the natives, turn into joiners and eventually converge to the norm. The path of their progression also reveals the qualitative differences they experience, which could probably explain why the factors that are known to affect the participation behavior of the population in general do not fare well when applied to the immigrant generations.

Although these findings are rather exploratory and descriptive, they do more than simply fill in the gap in the extant literature, as they bring to light a few issues that require reexamination and make strong suggestions. First, the “second-generation advantage” needs a modification or respecification. More broadly, a recalibration of the time frame in the research on immigrants’ incorporation in general seems to be due. Second, the existing models of voluntary association participation will have to be reconsidered critically, taking into account that immigrants show a distinct dynamics of participation and that there is a significant degree of heterogeneity across association types. Third, the finding that the two sides – “land of immigrants” and “land of joiners” – are systematically connected with each other, as the course of social incorporation observed here illustrates, should be elaborated further both substantively and theoretically.

There are a couple of limitations to be noted, mainly due to the nature of the available data. First, the data did not allow identifying the voluntary associations in terms of whether and how much the association the immigrants joined was co-ethnic centered or immigrant specific. Since the voluntary associations could have diametrically opposite effects depending upon the mode of articulation (*e.g.*, inward vs. outward oriented), the issue should be addressed more explicitly in the future (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993;

Sassen-Koob, 1979). Second, the longitudinal thrust of the findings was apparently circumscribed by the cross-sectional design of the data used (Hirschman, 1994). Given the difficulties involved in obtaining data sets that span multiple generations, a more practical alternative for future researchers might be to sample on the basis of organizations and examine their archival membership records (*e.g.*, Kalleberg *et al.*, 1996; McPherson and Rotolo, 1995; Burt and Ronchi, 1990; McPherson, 1982).

Finally, the import of the findings extends beyond the social incorporation *per se*, as they directly and indirectly relate to the various aspects of “social capital” (Lin, Cook and Burt, 2001; Putnam, 2000; Portes, 1998). Civic participation, for instance, is a key channel that leads to greater political participation in democratic society (Ramakrishnan and Espenshade, 2001; Putnam, 2000; Baumgartner and Walker, 1988; Verba and Nie, 1972). Social incorporation also plays a critical role in the attainment process (Lin, 1999; Breiger, 1995; Granovetter, 1974) by organizing the interpersonal relations and structuring the networks (McPherson, 1983; Feld, 1982, 1981). For a more integrated understanding of the immigrants’ incorporation processes, a framework that puts these various aspects of their experience in perspective is called for.

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