

Life Satisfaction and the UK Citizenship Process: Do Tests and Ceremonies Enhance Immigrants' Lives?

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ABSTRACT

Gaining citizenship in the UK requires applicants to pass a “Life in the UK” test and (if successful) attend a citizenship ceremony. Critics of this policy agenda assert that it exacerbates exclusion of an already vulnerable and disadvantaged population. The UK government justifies the requirements in part on the basis that they facilitate integration, thus enhancing immigrants' lives. This article, using data from the UK longitudinal household survey (“Understanding Society”) considers outcomes for immigrants by investigating whether gaining citizenship in the current period is associated with immigrants' subjective well-being. Results from regression models and matching analyses show that participating in the citizenship process (or not) is not generally associated with individuals' life satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

The adoption of a new “citizenship process” in the UK in the mid-2000s was met with great concern by academics and activists. To gain citizenship, immigrants now had to pass a “Life in the UK” test and then attend a ceremony. These policy requirements were adopted as a response to social unrest and riots in three northern English cities in 2001; they emerged also out of a more general concern about “social cohesion”, i.e., the notion that immigration was creating “excess” diversity along with residential segregation and social fragmentation (e.g. Putnam, 2007; Goodhart, 2004). But many observers took the view that the new citizenship requirements were rooted in a faulty diagnosis of the riots (e.g. Ratcliffe, 2012). Deeper concerns were expressed about the likely impacts on immigrants: some writers anticipated that the policy would exacerbate the marginalization of members of minority groups by signalling their alleged deficiencies and erecting hurdles to full membership (e.g. Kalra and Kapoor, 2008; Burnett, 2004), and Kundnani (2007) described the new policy orientation quite directly as racist (against Muslims in particular).

These concerns are worrying insofar as one can imagine that the people subject to the requirements will perhaps experience significant negative consequences, in ways that are apparent to them. This article emerges from the premise that a more directly empirical approach is needed to investigate whether the policy indeed has such consequences. Identifying intrinsic problems in the policy itself is a valuable exercise, but our concern is surely even deeper if there is evidence that the policy requirements impinge on the lives of the people who are subject to them, in ways they genuinely experience.

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Consideration of this possibility requires identifying a measure that stands as a relevant indicator of impact. In this article we investigate whether it is possible to discern impacts of the citizenship process on the *life satisfaction* (subjective well-being) of the targeted population (non-citizen immigrants). Life satisfaction is a form of “subjective well-being”, a measure which, in recent years, has increasingly been used by social scientists seeking to evaluate the consequences of public policy interventions for individuals’ well-being (see e.g. Clark and Senik, 2011; Radcliff, 2013; Bartram, 2012). We use panel data from “Understanding Society” (the UK household panel survey) for evaluation in this context, comparing those (among non-citizens at Wave 1) who by Wave 6 had become citizens (and thus met the requirements of the policy) to those who had not. Given the forcefulness of the critiques mounted by academics and others against the citizenship process, one might anticipate that those who met the requirements of the policy would end up less satisfied with their lives than those who kept their distance from it. Alternatively, we might wonder whether the policy has negative impacts on those who do *not* become citizens, perhaps because they are unable to meet the requirements (or perceive them as alienating and decide not to try).

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The “Life in the UK” test was introduced as a requirement for naturalization by the 2002 Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act and implemented in 2005.¹ Concerns about citizenship education had been brewing since the election of the Blair government in 1997; a number of “riots” in northern English cities in 2001 made these concerns appear urgent, leading to a report (Cantle, 2001) that identified “communities” (defined in ethnic terms) leading “parallel lives” as the main cause of the unrest. This notion signalled (for some) a failure of integration among immigrants, especially those from the so-called “New Commonwealth” (Modood, 2012). The response was to require a test (comprising 24 multiple-choice questions administered via computer, with a pass awarded for scores of 18 and above) and attendance at a naturalization ceremony where one affirms an oath or pledge of loyalty.

The manifest purpose of the test and ceremony requirements is to enhance migrants’ identification with the UK and increase their knowledge of British institutions. Particularly in the early stages, the goal in the UK was to promote integration and naturalization (in contrast to the more restrictive purposes in other countries that have adopted similar requirements, as well as the more restrictive direction of recent UK policy – see Goodman, 2014). Prior to the introduction of the new policy, minimum residence conditions carried an implicit expectation that time and experience would lead naturally to integration. The “civic integration” policies formalize this expectation, imposing requirements for formal demonstration of language abilities and knowledge (Joppke, 2010a).

Politicians responsible for developing this new policy framework could plausibly claim to be doing something that promised to enhance the lives of the people who met the requirements. David Blunkett, Home Secretary during this period, asserted a positive vision in this respect, writing: “The Government is concerned that those who become citizens should play an active role ... in our society and have a sense of belonging to a wider community” (Home Office, 2004: 3). A member of the Home Office’s “Life in the UK” Advisory Group (which developed proposals for the test) asserted that the requirement was not intended to be restrictive but rather “part of a set of measures to promote the integration of newcomers” (Kiwan, 2008: 72). English-language ability was identified as essential for inclusion in core social institutions; raising English proficiency was perceived as urgent, especially for women who arrive from South Asian countries as spouses in arranged marriages (Blackledge, 2006).

Most external observers, however, have discerned a much more negative impact for immigrants. To an extent, the expected impact is symbolic, via the way the policy implies negative ideas about immigrants. By imposing requirements about what immigrants must do to earn citizenship, the policy implies that they do not *deserve* it for their own attributes and their existing contributions to economic and social life (Kostakopoulou, 2010a; Van Houdt et al., 2011). The evident premise of requiring a test, in particular, is that the people who must take it are likely (prior to study, at least) to be ignorant in significant respects (Byrne, 2017; Osler, 2009). Similarly regarding the citizenship ceremony: to require participation in an event designed to enhance affective identification with British nationality, one might have to believe that immigrants are not already sufficiently loyal (cf. Yuval-Davis et al., 2005). These concerns are perceived not just for individuals but at the level of ethnicity, religion, and culture as well (Kalra and Kapoor, 2008), reinforcing pervasive suspicion about Muslims in particular, especially young Muslim men (Burnett, 2004).

But negative impacts are by no means *only* symbolic; observers expect to find consequences that are directly exclusionary in practice. For Ryan (2008), this is in part a matter of different pass rates for different origin countries: people from e.g. Turkey, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Bangladesh find it much harder to pass the test than do Americans and Canadians (see also Van Oers, 2009). Even when exclusion does not rise to the level of reinforcing second-class status (via denial of citizenship), many immigrants are said to *feel* excluded, experiencing anxiety about their status before and sometimes even after gaining citizenship (Cooke, 2009; Fortier, 2017). In addition, the requirements have become increasingly restrictive over time, oriented (certainly via political rhetoric) to the purpose of immigration control (Goodman, 2014; McGhee, 2009).

In short, one can perceive sharply diverging expectations about the impact of the UK citizenship process on immigrants. Political leaders expect positive outcomes, justifying the policy in part by predicting that it will enhance immigrants' lives (via "integration"). Most academic observers anticipate that the policy will exacerbate the exclusion many immigrants already experience. To a significant extent, these expectations are formed via a "reading" of the policy (and associated documents, including the test questions – e.g. Brooks, 2016). The question posed here is whether impacts (positive or negative) are apparent in the experiences of the immigrants themselves – and in particular their subjective well-being (life satisfaction). Neither critics nor supporters of the requirements frame their ideas with direct reference to life satisfaction consequences – but their arguments would be significantly bolstered if the requirements *did* have consequences at that level. A direct empirical investigation of consequences is thus a useful complement to the predictions implied by existing analyses.

DATA AND ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

Data are drawn from Wave 1 (data collected in 2009/10) and Wave 6 (2014/15) of "Understanding Society" (University of Essex, 2016; for technical details, see Buck and McFall, 2011); Wave 6 is selected because it is the first wave in which the question on citizenship was repeated, to enable comparison of new citizens to non-citizens. The sample includes a significant "boost" component to represent members of key ethnic minority groups, thus offering significant advantages for research on immigrants and immigration. The sample analysed here consists of 928 individuals who at Wave 1 were non-citizens and who participated in the survey (via the self-completion questionnaire, where the life satisfaction question is located) in Wave 6.² Of these, 372 were citizens as of Wave 6 while 556 remained non-citizens.³

The dependent variable analysed here is "life satisfaction", where the survey offered responses ranging from "completely dissatisfied" to "completely satisfied" (seven options total).⁴ The main independent variable is citizenship status, which is drawn directly from a question asking whether

the respondent is a UK citizen. The goal in using this question is to identify those individuals who met the requirements of the citizenship process. The variable available in the survey is imprecise in this respect: after 2007, the “Life in the UK” test was required not just for naturalization but for gaining permanent residence (indefinite leave to remain) – so, some of those who remained non-citizens in Wave 6 would nonetheless have taken the test. However, they would not have participated in a citizenship ceremony – so the variable distinguishes those who “participated fully” in the UK citizenship process. One might wonder whether cultural differences impede an investigation of life satisfaction among immigrants. But the analysis below controls for country/region of origin, as part of an effort to investigate the consequences of gaining citizenship. Given that the core of the analysis is a comparison of those who naturalize to those who remain non-citizens (with region of origin controlled), concerns about culture are not likely to figure prominently as a way of doubting the validity of the findings.

Control variables for models of life satisfaction were determined via consideration of widely used literature reviews of research on subjective well-being (e.g. Dolan et al., 2008). Models developed here include variables for sex, age (and age-squared, to reflect the usual U-shaped association with age), education, whether someone has a partner, unemployment (as against other modes of economic status), religiosity, whether one has a health problem, and income (adjusted for household size via an OECD scale, and imputed where missing). The analysis also includes how many friends the respondent reports having, whether he/she socializes as desired, and to what extent he/she feels a sense of belonging to the neighbourhood. Several additional variables are likely to be relevant to the life satisfaction of immigrants in particular: country/region of origin, difficulty speaking English, and time after arrival in the UK. The relatively small size of the sample means that origin countries must be aggregated into regions. The categorization used here is: Europe; North America / Australia / New Zealand; South Asia; Africa; and “other”. A separate variable indicates whether the respondent’s country of origin is a member of the Commonwealth (to capture potential impacts emerging from the fact that people from former colonies might have rights not held by other immigrants).

The analysis below uses methods designed to exploit the panel data structure, especially by ensuring that any difference in life satisfaction between naturalizers and non-naturalizers is not an artefact of a greater (or lesser) tendency towards naturalization among those with greater (or lesser) life satisfaction (a plausible form of potential endogeneity in this context). The core results are derived from random-effects ordered logistic regression models (xtologit in Stata; see e.g. Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal, 2008).⁵ Fixed-effects models were explored as well, though the small sample size offered little hope of seeing significant results in that specification (fixed-effects models can use only the observations for individuals who changed their citizenship status – thus a sample size here of 372). Random-effects models are also more desirable when there is reason to explore the impact of time-invariant characteristics that are likely to affect outcomes – and the obviously relevant characteristic in this context is region of origin. Because random-effects models involve demanding (and possibly unrealistic assumptions), we also considered results emerging from a “counterfactuals” framework (Morgan and Winship, 2007), implemented via a matching analysis (Abadie et al., 2004).

RESULTS

The bottom line for answering the core question posed here is that there is no evidence in any model for the notion that participation in the UK citizenship process has an impact, either positive or negative, on life satisfaction for the sample as a whole. That conclusion is evident in Table 2, where becoming a citizen is not associated with life satisfaction in a bivariate model (Model 1). It

TABLE 1
SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS, BY CITIZENSHIP STATUS AT WAVE 6

	Citizens	Non-citizens
Life satisfaction, Wave 1	5.24	5.22
Life Satisfaction, Wave 6	5.13	5.13
Female (%)	59.5	60.7
Unemployed (%)	7.9	9.3
Partner (%)	73.2	72.5
Age (mean)	37.4	38.8
Education (%):		
Primary/none	1.9	4.2
UK secondary school	2.9	4.7
UK university	18.3	20.9
Foreign secondary school	40.2	34.9
Foreign university	36.8	35.4
Religious (%)	86.2	74.1
Mean monthly income, £ (equivalised)	1648	1752
Health problem (%)	15.5	19.7
Difficulty speaking English (%)	16.2	13.9
Number of friends	3.4	3.9
Socialises (%)	82.2	84.1
Belonging in neighbourhood	3.7	3.7
Time since arrival (at Wave 1):		
less than 5 years	30.0	32.3
5 to 9 years	36.1	30.4
10 to 19 years	18.7	19.2
more than 20 years	15.2	18.2
Region of origin (%)		
Europe	18.9	44.8
USA/Canada/Australia/NZ	3.7	7.6
South Asia	40.3	19.5
Africa	20.9	15.6
Other	16.2	12.5
Commonwealth country (%)	57.0	39.6

Note: figures are means unless otherwise indicated as %. Values for time-varying variables are taken from Wave 1

is also apparent in a model that includes control variables typically included in models of life satisfaction (Model 2), where an odds ratio very close to one suggests equality of life satisfaction between naturalizers and non-naturalizers.

This core result persists when variables that might “intervene” in the relationship between citizenship status and life satisfaction are omitted. For example, if gaining citizenship improves one’s employment prospects and one’s income (which is evidently associated with life satisfaction), then including unemployment and income in the model might obscure an impact of gaining citizenship that works “through” those variables (see Berk, 2004 for the general point). Model 3 explores possibilities along these lines by omitting unemployment, income, partnership status, religiosity, having a health problem, number of friends, socializing, belonging to the neighbourhood, and difficulty with English – but here as well there is no evidence of gaining citizenship having an impact on life satisfaction. No indication of anything approaching a statistically significant coefficient for the citizenship variable was apparent in any model attempted. Strictly speaking, insofar as one relies on hypothesis tests for a conclusion of that sort, one should speak in terms of “failing to reject the null hypothesis” instead of asserting that there is “no difference” or “no impact” (after all, with a larger sample the conventional threshold of $p=0.05$ might have been reached). The results from analysis of these data, however, indicate plausibility for a more definitive statement.

TABLE 2
RANDOM-EFFECTS ORDERED LOGISTIC REGRESSION OF LIFE SATISFACTION

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	odds ratio	s.e.	odds ratio	s.e.	odds ratio	s.e.
Naturalization	0.94	0.146	1.01	0.153	1.04	0.163
Female			1.19	0.144	1.19	0.161
Unemployed			0.70	0.218		
Partner			1.42*	0.206		
Age			0.90**	0.030	0.94*	0.030
Age-squared/100			1.12**	0.041	1.06	0.037
Education (ref: primary):						
UK secondary school			0.37	0.195	0.79	0.381
UK university			0.67	0.282	2.24*	0.794
Foreign secondary school			0.59	0.237	1.12	0.384
Foreign university			0.69	0.281	2.05*	0.692
Religious			0.90	0.133		
Income (equivalised)			1.86***	0.181		
Health problem			0.51***	0.080		
Difficulty speaking English			0.73	0.137		
Number of friends			1.05	0.027		
Socializes			1.92***	0.323		
Belonging in neighbourhood			1.56***	0.115		
Time since arrival (at Wave 1; reference category: < 5 years):						
5 to 9 years			1.12	0.182	1.01	0.176
10 to 19 years			0.75	0.141	0.61*	0.124
more than 20 years			0.82	0.203	0.88	0.240
Region of origin (ref: Europe)						
USA/Canada/Australia/NZ			1.87**	0.417	1.97**	0.470
South Asia			1.29	0.354	0.94	0.288
Africa			1.08	0.249	0.75	0.203
Other			0.70	0.154	0.62	0.155
Commonwealth country			0.79	0.172	0.95	0.230
/cut1	-4.60	0.243***	-4.40	0.901	-5.61	0.873
/cut2	-3.33	0.178***	-3.21	0.917	-4.34	0.886
/cut3	-2.38	0.135***	-2.17	0.902	-3.39	0.875
/cut4	-1.47	0.111***	-1.26	0.897	-2.48	0.869
/cut5	-0.14	0.090***	0.10	0.892	-1.14	0.862
/cut6	2.85	0.168***	3.08	0.905	1.83	0.878
Variance(u)	2.00		0.94		1.70	
Standard error of variance(u)	0.39		0.28		0.36	
Wald Chi ²	0.17		214.23		64.43	
Prob > Chi ²	0.68		0.000		0.000	

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

The assumptions of random-effects models are quite restrictive.⁶ In practice, this means that rejecting a null hypothesis is perhaps too easy with these models (e.g. because the assumptions do not in fact hold). Given that a null hypothesis for impact of naturalization is not rejected in the results reported above, use of random-effects is very unlikely to lead to an unfounded conclusion in this context. Even so, the question is also explored via a (“nearest-neighbour”) matching analysis (Abadie et al., 2004) rooted in a counterfactuals framework. This approach poses the question: if those who had become citizens had instead *not* become citizens, what change (if

any) would we have seen in their life satisfaction? The analysis matches naturalizers to non-naturalizers via similarity on variables that predict naturalization and calculates the average difference in life satisfaction; a significant difference might then be interpreted as representing change among the naturalizers.

A prior step is to determine which variables should be included for matching. A logistic regression model of citizenship status at Wave 6 is constructed (results not shown), using potential predictor variables at Wave 1. We explored a range of variables, including sex, age, economic status, income, education, time since migration, language ability, place of origin, home ownership, and presence of children (as suggested by previous research e.g. Diehl and Bloem, 2003; Chiswick and Miller, 2009). The results suggested that only three variables were significant: place of origin, home ownership, and time since arrival.

A matching analysis (nnmatch, with 8 matches and “average treatment for the treated” specification) using these variables reinforced the regression findings: there is no support for the notion that becoming a citizen is associated with life satisfaction. The citizenship variable was not significant in any model, including models with a wider range of variables included.

One issue to consider beyond the initial result is the possibility that the overall finding of “no difference” for the sample as a whole masks different effects pertaining to different groups of immigrants. For example, perhaps immigrants from, say, Europe and/or the “white” settler societies (North America, Australia, New Zealand) derive some sort of benefit from the citizenship process, while immigrants from the so-called “New Commonwealth” (a euphemism for former UK colonies where the population is mostly non-white) experience negative effects.

This possibility was explored via a model that includes interaction terms between the regions and the citizenship variable (Table 3). Here we see (in Model 1) an indication that gaining citizenship is significantly associated with lower life satisfaction among immigrants from North America, Australia and New Zealand. Immigrants from these countries are generally more satisfied with their lives – but that advantage is reversed among those who become citizens. The coefficient of 0.93 in Model 1 leads to an odds ratio of 2.54, suggesting that people from these origin countries who are not UK citizens are more than twice as likely to report a higher level of satisfaction than immigrants from Europe (the reference category) who are not citizens. But the coefficient for the corresponding interaction term (–2.20) is then subtracted from the 0.93 to give the effect of naturalization for people from these countries (so, for this group $b = -1.27$, equivalent to an odds ratio of 0.28). Naturalization is therefore associated with a significant decrease in life satisfaction for people in this group. Note that the interaction term becomes insignificant in Model 2, which excludes variables that might intervene between naturalization and life satisfaction. Further investigation, however, suggests that immigrants from North America etc. who became naturalized citizens experienced a disproportionate decrease in their life satisfaction, relative to those who remained non-citizens (Table 4). Of those who became citizens, almost 43 per cent reported lower life satisfaction in Wave 6, relative to their Wave 1 score; for non-citizens the figure was just over 16 per cent. A similar extent of decrease is evident among immigrants from African countries who became citizens – but for this group the difference between naturalizers and non-naturalizers (43.6 per cent vs. 32.9 per cent) is not nearly as large as for the North Americans etc.

CONCLUSION

Participating in the “citizenship process” does not appear to enhance immigrants’ subjective wellbeing – nor does it appear to harm it across the broad range of immigrants groups in the UK. The UK government might have hoped to see a positive impact; the concerns of critics would have been significantly reinforced if there had been a negative impact. The policy requirements no doubt

TABLE 3
RANDOM-EFFECTS ORDERED LOGISTIC REGRESSION OF LIFE SATISFACTION

	Model 1		Model 2	
	b	s.e.	b	s.e.
Naturalization (Europeans)	0.41	0.409	1.26	0.23
Region of origin (non-citizens), Europeans ref. category				
USA/Canada/Australia/NZ	0.93***	0.619	2.35**	0.85
South Asia	0.28	0.387	0.97	−0.03
Africa	0.35	0.343	0.93	−0.07
Other	−0.20	0.207	0.67	−0.40
Interaction terms (naturalization among those from beyond Europe)				
Citizen * USA/Canada/etc.	−2.20**	0.085	0.19	−1.66
Citizen * South Asia	−0.28	0.289	0.89	−0.12
Citizen * Africa	−0.87	0.204	0.50	−0.69
Citizen * other	−0.18	0.377	1.32	0.28
Female	0.09	0.147	1.14	0.14
Unemployed	−0.34	0.230	0.95	−0.05
Partner	0.36*	0.221	1.05	0.05
Age	−0.10**	0.031		
Age-squared/100	0.11**	0.043		
Education:				
UK secondary school	−1.13*	0.162	0.92	−0.09
UK university	−0.44	0.267	2.74**	1.01
Foreign secondary school	−0.61	0.203	1.25	0.22
Foreign university	−0.52	0.229	2.20*	0.79
Religious	−0.08	0.143		
Income (equivalised)	0.66***	0.195		
Health problem	−0.72***	0.083		
Difficulty speaking English	−0.22	0.183		
Number of friends	0.05*	0.027		
Socializes	0.61***	0.312		
Belonging in neighbourhood	0.44***	0.128		
Time since arrival (at Wave 1; reference category: < 5 years):				
5 to 9 years	0.12	0.199	1.04	0.04
10 to 19 years	−0.36	0.136	0.59*	−0.53
more than 20 years	−0.27	0.195	0.83	−0.18
Commonwealth country	−0.26	0.161	0.99	−0.01
/cut1	−4.61	0.960	−5.47	0.997
/cut2	−3.29	0.963	−4.02	0.995
/cut3	−2.18	0.951	−2.99	0.986
/cut4	−1.29	0.946	−2.08	0.980
/cut5	0.07	0.937	−0.72	0.975
/cut6	3.15	0.957	2.44	1.001
Variance(u)	0.94		1.96	
Standard error of variance(u)	0.31		0.39	
Wald Chi ²	211.15		66.32	
Prob > Chi ²	0.000		0.000	

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

do impinge on people's experiences – those of the people who meet the requirements and of the people who are excluded from citizenship because of not meeting them – but any impact does not rise to the level of affecting their overall life satisfaction. Previous research indicates that

TABLE 4
CHANGE IN LIFE SATISFACTION FROM WAVE 1 TO WAVE 6 (PER CENT)

	Europe	N. America, Australia/NZ	Asia	Africa	other	Total
Non–naturalizers						
Decrease	26.3	16.3	32.1	32.9	38.2	28.9
No change	46.5	65.1	33.3	32.9	38.2	42.7
Increase	27.2	18.6	34.5	34.3	23.6	28.4
Naturalizers						
Decrease	26.6	42.9	39.8	43.6	26.0	35.3
No change	48.4	35.7	26.2	30.9	26.0	32.5
Increase	25.0	21.4	34.0	25.5	48.0	32.2

citizenship status in European countries is not significantly associated with immigrants’ life satisfaction (Kirmanoğlu and Başlevent, 2014); the analysis here suggests that Britain is not a special case in this regard, distinct via an association that arises specifically from the requirements it imposes on naturalization.

The only finding that seems to depart from this more general conclusion is the fact that life satisfaction declines among the relatively advantaged group of immigrants from North America, Australia and New Zealand who become citizens. Life satisfaction is already comparatively high among this group of immigrants, at least prior to naturalization – but gaining citizenship via meeting the requirements for tests and ceremonies results in a decrease in their life satisfaction. One might speculate that their advantages in general (including a greater security of status, certainly for those from the Commonwealth countries) allow them the luxury of experiencing significant annoyance at having to jump through these particular hoops (an idea that could be tested only via a qualitative approach to research on this question). If so, perhaps that impact is likely to fade over time. For others, gaining citizenship is arguably more central to the goal of securing one’s status and rights, and in particular minimizing the risk of deportation.

The legitimacy of citizenship tests (and associated requirements) have divided observers and will no doubt continue to do so. For some, the requirement is compatible with liberalism as long as applicants are not coerced into professing beliefs they do not actually hold; if they are confined to cognitive matters, the tests are arguably a legitimate remedy for a component of education that adult immigrants did not receive as children (Joppke, 2010b). The tests might even give new citizens a sense of accomplishment and entitlement for having passed (Hansen, 2010). Others hold concerns about differential impacts (Groenendijk and van Oers, 2010); for some, the entire exercise (separate from the specific content of test questions) is a violation of liberal principles of equality (Kostakopolou, 2010b; Carrera and Gould, 2010). The differences in pass rates by country of origin (Ryan, 2008) are a significant concern.⁷ The fact that some individuals (regardless of background) end up excluded from citizenship is troubling; naturalization might add only the right to vote (to the rights already enjoyed by permanent residents), but that form of exclusion arguably stands in tension with the core liberal value of individual equality.

This article set out to consider not matters of principle but of consequence, for the people who are subject to these requirements. The core result again is that in the UK the requirements have no broad average impact (positive or negative) rising to the level of individuals’ overall subjective wellbeing. One might bear in mind the fact that the UK version of these requirements is relatively liberal (Michalowski, 2011; cf. Hansen, 2008); future research might productively evaluate consequences of this sort in contexts where the requirements are more onerous and stringent.

NOTES

1. The requirement was subsequently extended to applications for indefinite leave to remain, a prerequisite for naturalization.
2. Attrition following Wave 1 (which could include emigration) is addressed via use of longitudinal sampling weights (Lynn and Kaminska, 2010).
3. One might have wished to include information on the timing of citizenship acquisition, to consider the evolution of life satisfaction in anticipation of naturalization and immediately afterwards. The data do not enable this sort of exploration; we are limited to the cruder comparison between Wave 1 and Wave 6. It is likely that naturalization is spread evenly across this period, so that the results reported here are not distorted by failure to consider more fine-grained patterns.
4. The survey also includes a question on happiness, but the form of the answers (e.g. ‘more so than usual’, ‘much less than usual’) leads respondents to consider a short-term mode of response that is not suited to our purposes here.
5. Models are constructed with due regard to the complex nature of the sample design, e.g. standard errors robust to clustering within primary sample units.
6. In principle, one could test for the appropriateness of random-effects models via the Hausman test. But this test requires a plausible equivalent fixed-effects model, and as noted above the data and variables used here do not facilitate a fixed-effects analysis.
7. It does not follow that these differences emerge from directly racist intent. Immigrants from Canada who are “visible minorities” are likely to have pass rates similar to those of white Canadians; the central factor is probably language abilities. (I am grateful to a reviewer for suggesting that point.)

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