

# New Americans and the Quest for Political Office

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*Objective.* Record numbers of first- and second-generation immigrants have won elected office over the last few electoral cycles, yet we find immigrants are still underrepresented at all levels of government. What are the perceived barriers to entry into political life among these New Americans? *Method.* Using a unique survey data set that includes an oversample of first- and second-generation immigrants who have enrolled in civic leadership trainings, we examine the similarities and differences between immigrant and nonimmigrant leaders. *Results.* We find that immigrants are in many ways similar to their nonimmigrant counterparts in that access to structural resources help shape their political ambition. Yet immigrants, unlike their nonimmigrant counterparts, often have less of these resources and perceive their ability to capitalize on these resources as less feasible. *Conclusions.* We find that the traditional barriers to office—lack of professional and political experiences, finances, and monied networks—all contribute to lower self-perceived qualifications for office among both immigrants and nonimmigrants. Yet, the New American leaders who are highly politically involved, deeply rooted in their communities, and well-positioned to run for office face the additional psychological barriers posed by their race and ethnicity, immigrant identity, citizenship status, language ability, and acculturation, barriers that are often offered in open-ended essays as self-evident and crippling. Leadership training programs play a crucial role in providing training and instilling confidence in would-be immigrant candidates.

One of the most significant challenges facing the American political system in the 21st century will be adaptation to the steady transformation of the American populace. By 2042, the United States is expected to reach a majority–minority milestone, and this transformation is being fueled by New Americans (first- and second-generation immigrants). Between 1990 and 2010, the foreign-born immigrant population in the United States doubled to 40 million (U.S. Census, 2012). This burgeoning population has not gone unnoticed by political scientists, and a large scholarship has developed around immigrant incorporation at the *mass level*: as traditional participants in politics (voters), as well as participants in nontraditional politics, such as protests, social movements, and activism (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb, 1986; Barreto and Munoz, 2003; Martinez, 2005).

Much less attention has been paid to what some have called the “gold standard” of incorporation: attaining elected office. Looking to the extant scholarship on minority descriptive representation, we know that electing “one of your own” has both substantive and symbolic importance. Research finds positive effects on policies impacting minority constituents, such as increased bilingual education programs, additional bureaucratic representation, and increased budgeting toward education and welfare (Grose, 2011; Hero and Preuhs, 2010; Rouse, 2013). In addition, minority candidates bring voice to their constituents (Griffin

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and Newman, 2008; Mansbridge, 1999) and change how marginalized groups feel about politics (Merolla, Sellers, and Fowler, 2013; Pantoja and Segura, 2003a, 2003b; Barreto, 2007). As Alba and Foner conclude, the election of minority members of the electorate is “an indication of a reduction, however modest, in the differentials in life chances between the majority and minority” (2015:149).

While the scholarship on racial/ethnic minority incorporation informs our understanding of immigrant incorporation, the New Americans have additional challenges to overcome, based in racial and ethnic identity, language, citizenship status, and generational acculturation. In this article, we provide one of the first glimpses into how these challenges influence New Americans and their political ambitions. Moving away from immigrants as potential voters, we focus on immigrant political incorporation at the *elite level*: as candidates for political office. In particular, we build upon recent scholarship that suggests one of the largest barriers to minority representation is simply a lack of nonwhite candidates on ballots (Juenke and Shah, 2016; Shah, 2014). This research shifts our focus from structural barriers to nascent political ambition and candidate emergence among racial and ethnic minorities (Barreto, 2007; Bejarano, 2013; Casellas, 2009; Lawless, 2012). If gaps in representation are largely due to lack of immigrant candidate supply, then understanding the individual-level determinants and perceived barriers to entry into political life among America’s rapidly expanding immigrant population is urgently needed.

Using a unique data set of individuals enrolled in civic leadership training programs, with a large oversample of first- and second-generation immigrants, we examine the similarities and differences among immigrant and nonimmigrant potential candidates in an attempt to understand why so few immigrants become candidates for elected office. We find that, first, New American leaders are very similar to their nonimmigrant counterparts. Many of the same factors found to be consequential for other groups—access to resources and the political opportunity structure—influence the likelihood of an immigrant-origin leader considering political office. Because immigrants have fewer resources and fewer opportunities to run for office than their nonimmigrant counterparts, fewer throw their hats in the electoral ring. Second, and perhaps more interestingly, we also find that even among those who possess the resources needed to run for office, immigrant-origin candidates’ estimates of their own personal and professional resources inhibit their likelihood of running for office. In other words, their perceptions of how their racial and immigrant identity will influence their electoral run often depress their ambition.

We explore the causal mechanism between immigrant status and political ambition more closely using data from open-ended survey questions. How do aspects of racial and immigrant identity influence their strategic decisions? A convincing narrative emerges from a qualitative analysis of our data—real and perceived barriers to elected office posed by “other” status depress political ambition and condition traditional determinants of candidacy. Immigrant status, racial and ethnic identity, citizenship status, generational acculturation, and English as a second language all negatively impact perceptions of electability and viability. Quite simply, many of our respondents are acutely aware that being “American,” and particularly part of an elite class of lawmakers and elected officials, is a status historically awarded overwhelmingly to native-born white males. We conclude with the implications of our findings for the political inclusion of the New Americans.

### **Nascent Political Ambition**

Nascent political ambition is defined as the “embryonic or potential interest in office seeking” (Lawless, 2012:5), and is seen as an important precursor to an analysis of the

macro-level demographic, political, and electoral barriers to office. The extant research on nascent political ambition suggests that individual factors, such as resources and experience, contribute more to the decision to run than contextual factors, such as open seats, partisan or racial composition of electoral districts, or term limits, for example. Therefore, we focus our attention to the individual-level factors that play a key role in the decision to run for elected office, including professional experiences, money, political knowledge, political experience, attitudes, and perceptions of political opportunities.

While Lawless and Fox (2005, 2008) and Lawless (2010, 2012) have made strong contributions to the field with their work on political ambition among women, they offer little in the way of theorizing on the political ambitions of other minority groups. Using Lawless and Fox's research as a guiding framework, we paint a more comprehensive picture of political ambition among first- and second-generation immigrants. We start by reviewing the literature on the most important mediators of nascent political ambition. We then examine the comparative literature on immigrant office-holding from Canada and Europe. Pulling these literatures together, we hypothesize that the unique minority status of first- and second-generation immigrants that crosses race, nativity, and language discrimination not only influences access to key resources but also amplifies the structural and psychological barriers to access they face in gaining electoral power.

### *Traditional Mediators of Political Ambition*

Much research on political participation and ambition focuses on what Bloemraad and her colleagues (2013) call "structural resources"—educational qualifications, income, and occupational status (Bloemraad et al., 2013; see also Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995). In addition to being newcomers to political institutions and norms, immigrants lack many of the structural resources that are correlated with political ambition. In particular, immigrants tend to have fewer professional experiences, less income, and weaker monied networks, as well as less political knowledge and experience, and are encouraged less to run. Next, we highlight how these professional and political resources may influence nascent political ambition.

***Professional Experiences, Income, and Networks.*** There are certain professional careers that act as springboards into political life, most notably law and business (Moncrief, Squire, and Jewell, 2000; Lawless, 2012). Indeed, work by Carnes (2013) sheds light on how unlikely it is to see working-class individuals in elected office. As of January 2014, more than half of all U.S. congressmen had a net worth of at least a million dollars and more than 50 percent of each chamber comprises businessmen or lawyers (Open Secrets, 2014; Carnes, 2013).

What is it about law and business that primes these professionals to enter politics? To begin, elite professions confer money and establish networks among individuals, increasing feelings of efficacy and perceived qualifications for office. The financial well-being and monied networks associated with professional careers advantage certain potential candidates over others. In 2002, Hogan interviewed state legislative candidates, asking about campaigns and political ambition, and found that resources were the most important factor in their campaigns. And money is even more important in bids for high-status offices like U.S. Congress or governor. Lawyers and businessmen, in particular, are both financially well-situated and connected to high-powered, often well-connected, and wealthy networks of other professionals who can easily open the checkbook to donate to political campaigns.

Further, given the proximity of law and business to politics, white-collar professionals might feel more accomplished in their careers, see themselves as more qualified to run for elected office, exist in social networks where politics is a common topic of conversation, and be more likely to possess civic skills crucial for political participation more generally (Hain and Pierson, 1975; Verba, Scholzman, and Brady, 1995). Simply put, the lack of money or deep-pocketed networks is a serious barrier to office. Campaigning involves significant investments of time, personal financial sacrifice, and fundraising.

When we look broadly at the aggregate immigrant community, the results are mixed, with the educational attainment and occupations of foreign-born Latinos at the bottom and Asians at the top. Given America's mix of skilled and unskilled immigrants, the educational distribution of new immigrants has very heavy tails at the upper and lower ends of the distribution. For example, nearly 72 percent of foreign-born Latinos do not have a college education, compared to 30 percent for whites and 26 percent for foreign-born Asians. Forty-eight percent of Asians hold professional occupations, whereas only 13.7 percent of Latinos do (compared to 45.8 percent of whites) (Princeton University, 2003).

Because first- and second-generation immigrants are less likely to be employed in high-powered professional positions, they will therefore have fewer ties to networks of influence and wealth, perhaps feel less potential political efficacy and less qualified to run for office, and, finally, have less wealth to draw from that will give them the freedom to take a leave from work to run a political campaign. In sum, then, immigrants will have access to fewer of the financial and social resources that propel nonimmigrant natives into candidacy for elected office.

***Political Knowledge, Experience, and Attitudes.*** As Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) find, all other things being equal, the more civic knowledge citizens possess, the more likely they are to participate in political matters. Running for office, perhaps the highest form of political participation, is no exception. Those with little knowledge of the political system will likely not even vote, let alone run for political office.

Similarly, running for office and offering yourself (and often your family) over to the scrutiny of the press, voters, and political opponents can be a frightening and potentially humiliating process. Therefore, experience in politics can go a long way toward lowering perceived barriers to participation. Political attitudes and feelings of belonging or alienation can also affect participation, and ultimately political ambition. Cynicism, powerlessness, distrust, estrangement, and normlessness all depress political participation. Individuals are more likely to run for office and engage with the political system when they trust government and view it as an effective mechanism for change (Hiringer, 1992; Wilson, 1991; Conway, Steuarnagel, and Ahern, 1997; King, 1997; Piven and Cloward, 1997).

Much like professional experience, political experience occurs on a spectrum. Where do first- and second-generation immigrants fall? In Schildkraut's focus groups with Latinos, she found an "overwhelming cynicism . . . displayed when noting how 'the people' in general and immigrants in particular are ignored by politicians," and called for elected officials who tackled not just generic policies like education, crime, or the economy, but immigrant-specific policies "such as earned legalization [and] increased educational opportunities for immigrants, among many other things" (2011:21). For immigrants who are attuned to political matters, and have the strongest sense of perceived group discrimination, this distrust and cynicism might be particularly acute, potentially increasing alienation in racial minorities and immigrants (Michelson, 2003; Lien, Conway, and Wong, 2004; Weitzer and Tuch, 2004; Schildkraut, 2005) and depressing political ambition.

***Recruitment and Encouragement.*** Colloquially, political pundits have often surmised that candidates run because they were “asked.” Further, both parties engage in extensive recruitment, particularly for higher office. Broockman (2014) argues that being encouraged to run increases the likelihood of running because it influences feelings of political efficacy. Given the role political parties in particular play as strategic gatekeepers (Sanbonmatsu, 2006; Norris, 1993, 1997) and in signaling candidate viability (Sanbonmatsu, 2006), one question is: Who gets asked to run for office? During the early 20th century, political parties identified new immigrants as crucial new voters (Erie, 1988; Sterne, 2001), but more recent studies on contemporary Latino and Asian immigrant groups have found that parties frequently identify naturalized citizens as low propensity voters (De la Garza and DeSipio, 2005). Very little is known of how and when parties recruit native-born or immigrant minorities, but we know that outreach for Hispanic and Asian candidates is almost nonexistent. Indeed, the Republican Party just established its first Hispanic-candidate recruitment program, the Future Majority Leaders Project, and the Democratic Party has yet to establish any similar program. NGOs and labor unions are slowly starting to fill this void, but until the parties build up a crucial minority-candidate recruitment infrastructure, little progress will be made. Lawless’s research concludes that “recruitment increases the likelihood of considering a run for office . . . [and] can also partially close the gender gap and race gap in political ambition” (2012:155).

In sum, immigrants have less access to the crucial structural resources—education, income, professional networks, knowledge, and experience—and encouragement that help propel many nonimmigrants into elected office. The representation “gap,” we hypothesize, is explained in part by a traditional resource argument.

### ***Specific Mediators: Immigrant Identity and “Otherness”***

While there is a dearth of research on immigrant political ambition in the U.S. context, scholars have analyzed immigrant participation and representation in Canada and Western Europe (Givens and Maxwell, 2012; Bloemraad, 2006; Hochschild et al., 2013). To begin, these studies find that many of the factors noted above, specifically income, education, and employment status, influence political participation and representation among immigrants (see also Bird et al., 2011; Bloemraad and Schonwalder, 2013). However, they also suggest that for immigrant candidates, another set of factors influence their ambition and success.

Dancygier et al.’s (2015) exploration of the Swedish context finds, for example, that the general differences in distribution of these characteristics between immigrants and nonimmigrants do not alone account for the representation gap. Rather, immigrants also suffer a smaller “return” on these resources. That is, even politically active immigrants who possess high levels of education and income are often less likely to run for office (Garbaye, 2005). Similarly, within the U.S. context, scholars have found that women and racial/ethnic minority candidates perceive themselves as less qualified than their white, male counterparts even when their credentials are as good or better (see, e.g., Lawless and Fox, 2005).

Why do immigrant candidates question their qualification and experience to be elected officials? We hypothesize that for immigrant-origin candidates in the United States, *racial, ethnic, and immigrant identities* condition the effects of opportunity structures, electoral institutions, and recruitment. Immigrants in the United States, particularly those of non Western European ancestry, have been discursively constructed as “others” who do not

belong (Higham, 1955; King, 2010; Huntington, 2005; HoSang, 2010; Santa Ana, 2002). Legal and political discourse have established and privileged an “Anglo-Saxon conception of U.S. identity . . . [that] reconfirmed the problematic place of nonwhites in the U.S. polity’s conception of membership” (King, 2010:3). More recent immigrants, Latinos and Asian Americans in particular, have been triangulated within the American racial order according to two axis of racial positioning—foreigner/outsider and superior/inferior—with white Americans on the top, African Americans on the bottom, and Latinos and Asian Americans in between (Kim, 1999; Masuoka and Junn, 2013). In essence, Asian Americans, and to a lesser extent, Latinos, have been classified as not fully belonging in America, as being permanently foreign, a status only further heightened when language issues arise in public discourse.

Nonwhite immigrant activists are acutely aware of the legacy of American racial politics, their community’s location within the American racial hierarchy, and the prevalence of anti-transformative actors serving as elected officials in the United States today (King and Smith, 2005). In fact, many immigrant activists today have devoted their lives to fighting for political power and positive change, often within the context of the discriminatory laws being passed by elected officials in their communities, states, and in Washington, DC (see Campbell, 2011, for example).

It is this acknowledgment of their location within the American racial order, and the restraints posed by this uneasy sense of not belonging, that we hypothesize depresses nascent political ambition among immigrant-origin candidates. We expect immigrant-origin candidates to cite the long history of racial politics in America, and particularly the discrimination they face as immigrants and racial and ethnic minorities in America, as barriers to political office. We examine these mechanisms in more detail in our qualitative analysis below.

## **Data and Methods**

This project offers a rare glance at the political ambitions of first- and second-generation immigrants. The data come from surveys completed by participants of two national candidate development organizations, including one that specifically trains first- and second-generation immigrants to run for office. The survey is based partially on Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox’s Citizen Political Ambition Study (CPAS), and includes measures of the potential candidates’ political awareness, community involvement, political involvement, political attitudes, issue positions, specific desire to run, racial and ethnic attitudes, and a number of demographic variables.

In total, the data include responses from 512 applications from potential leaders, over two-thirds of whom are first- and second-generation immigrants. To our knowledge, this is the first data set compiled measuring nascent political ambition among immigrants. Given the recruitment model utilized to generate the data, however, there are a number of limitations. First, the data are not representative of the general immigrant population or of the nonimmigrant population as a whole. However, like Lawless and Fox (2005), we are aware that obtaining a representative sample with enough respondents who express nascent political ambition would be infeasible. Therefore, we focus our data collection efforts on those who are most likely to run for office—individuals who have attended candidate-training programs across the country. The results of our analysis are only generalizable to those who have expressed some nascent political ambition. Because our sample is one that is already politically engaged, however, our findings with this sample will be conservative

TABLE 1  
 Characteristics of Leaders, by Immigrant Generation and Status

	First-Generation Leader	Second-Generation Leader	Nonimmigrant Leader
Age (mean)	34	32	42
Income ≤ \$47k/year	79%	86%	53%
Income > \$47k/year	21%	14%	47%
BA or advanced degree	37%	39%	53%
Parent	37%	36%	24%
Unemployed	6.2%	6.4%	2.2%
Household > 3 ppl	37%	41%	16%
N	225	108	98

NOTE: Cells show percent of respondents who fall into each demographic category broken down by immigrant generation and status.

relative to the population of interest—immigrants. The perceived barriers to office in our sample are likely to be even more severe and numerous among the general immigrant population in the United States.

Second, the data were collected over the span of about four years, during which the candidate development organizations added questions to the survey. We merged the various surveys for our analysis, resulting in some questions of missing cases. Because much of our analysis relies on these newer questions, our sample size varies for different analyses. However, given that the recruiting methods of the candidate development organizations stayed the same over the entire span of the data collection, we have no reason to believe that any subset of the sample is unique and therefore our inferences should not be biased by smaller sample sizes for certain analyses.

Our analysis is largely descriptive and nonparametric, relying primarily on cross-tabulations and analysis of textual data. Given our findings, and that this is one of the first studies of political ambition among first- and second-generation immigrants, our study both contributes to a nascent but growing literature on immigrant and minority candidate emergence and offers a great starting point for more advanced parametric analyses and experiments.

## Results

### *Who Are the New Americans?*

We begin by describing the demographic characteristics of our respondents, comparing first- and second-generation immigrants with nonimmigrant (third-generation-plus or native-born) leaders. A number of points are noteworthy. First, we compare access to structural resources between immigrants and nonimmigrants. As shown in Table 1, immigrant leaders in general have less access than nonimmigrant leaders to the structural resources that help foster political ambition.

Nonimmigrant leaders tend to be a bit older, wealthier, and better educated than the first- or second-generation immigrants in our sample. In addition, immigrants in our sample are more likely to have children, more likely to be unemployed and looking for work, and more likely to live in a larger household. Taken together, all of these demographic

TABLE 2

Percent of Respondents Who Said They Follow Politics “Very Closely” or “Somewhat Closely,” by Immigrant Generation and Status

	First-Generation Leader	Second-Generation Leader	Nonimmigrant Leader
National politics	42% ( <i>n</i> = 95)	36% ( <i>n</i> = 39)	85% ( <i>n</i> = 83)
State politics	41% ( <i>n</i> = 92)	37% ( <i>n</i> = 40)	86% ( <i>n</i> = 82)
Local politics	45% ( <i>n</i> = 101)	45% ( <i>n</i> = 49)	79% ( <i>n</i> = 75)

NOTES: Cells show percent of respondents who said they follow politics “very closely” or “somewhat closely,” by immigrant generation and status. None of the differences between first- and second-generation leaders are statistically significant at conventional levels. The difference between nonimmigrant leaders and immigrant leaders are all significant at *p* < 0.05.

indicators should both decrease political participation as well as moderate ambition for political office among New Americans. These immigrants simply do not have the same access to the resources needed to mount a run for political office as nonimmigrants.

**Political Knowledge and Participation.** We next examine political knowledge and interest. Building upon previous research, we expect less political knowledge and levels of general participation to temper ambition for political office. Table 2 displays the percentage of each group who answered that they follow different levels of politics “very closely” or “somewhat closely.”

We find that nonimmigrants in our sample pay much closer attention to politics than immigrants (*p* < 0.01 for all three types of politics).<sup>1</sup> Yet, there are interesting differences among level of office: immigrants tend to pay closer attention to state and local politics than national politics, while nonimmigrants pay more attention to national politics (though this difference is not statistically significant for any of the groups). We revisit these findings below when we examine the interest in different levels of office.

If we calculate the percentage of each group that pay close or very close attention to all three, the same pattern holds: first generation (43 percent), second generation (36 percent), and nonimmigrant (84 percent). The small dip in political interest among second-generation immigrants is interesting, and is supported by segmented assimilation theory and second-generation decline theses (Portes and Zhou, 1993; Rumbaut, 1997). Together, these findings thus point to another culprit of lower political ambition among New Americans: less general interest in politics.

Last, we investigate differences in political participation. We begin with voting behavior, and in Table 3 report respondents’ self-reported voting behavior in presidential, midterm, and state and local elections. Given citizenship requirements for voting, it is not surprising that first-generation immigrants voted less than those who have been here longer or native-born respondents. Contrary to the dip in attention, here we find that across the board, second-generation immigrants participate more in presidential (*p* = 0.002), midterm (*p* = 0.006), and local elections (*p* = 0.02) than first-generation immigrants. Further, nonimmigrant leaders are more politically active than first-generation (presidential *p* < 0.001, midterm *p* = 0.02, and local *p* < 0.001) and second-generation leaders (presidential *p* = 0.392, midterm *p* = 0.327, and local *p* = 0.01), though the difference is only significant for state and local elections for the comparison with second-generation immigrants.

<sup>1</sup>Because our variables are dichotomous and our sample sizes are small, we use the nonparametric Mann-Whitney *U*-test to assess differences in means between groups of leaders.

TABLE 3

## Self-Reported Voting Behavior, by Immigrant Generation and Status

	First-Generation Leader	Second-Generation Leader	Nonimmigrant Leader
Presidential	71% ( $n = 161$ )	87% ( $n = 94$ )	91% ( $n = 89$ )
Midterm	62% ( $n = 139$ )	77% ( $n = 83$ )	86% ( $n = 19^*$ )
State/local	72% ( $n = 163$ )	84% ( $n = 91$ )	96% ( $n = 88$ )

NOTE: Cells correspond to self-reported participation in different elections across immigrant groups.

\*Note that the sample size for nonimmigrant leaders' self-reported participation in the 2010 midterm elections is so small because the question was not asked on one survey. We test the significance of the differences using Mann-Whitney  $U$ -test.

In addition to voting behaviors, the surveys also asked about other forms of political participation: whether the respondents had written a letter to the newspaper, participated in a political interest group, sent an e-mail or made a phone call to the office of an elected official, donated money to a candidate's campaign, worked as a volunteer for a political campaign, joined or volunteered for a local community group, and/or attended a city council meeting in the last year. We created a general participation scale<sup>2</sup> and found few differences between the average number of activities engaged in by immigrants, but interesting differences between immigrants and nonimmigrants. Specifically, the mean on the participation scale is: first generation (0.65), second generation (0.68), and nonimmigrant (0.75). The nonimmigrant mean is significantly larger than that of first-generation immigrants ( $p = 0.003$ ) and second-generation immigrants ( $p = 0.032$ ).<sup>3</sup> In other words, the nonimmigrant leaders participated in more of these activities than the nonimmigrant leaders.

Looking at each activity separately, however, we find qualitative differences in the types of activities immigrant and nonimmigrant leaders participate in. We see that immigrant leaders are more likely to be engaged at the local level as a volunteer for a campaign or community group or attending city council meetings. Nonimmigrants, by contrast, are more likely to write letters to newspapers and elected officials, take part in political interest groups, and donate money to candidate campaigns. Together with other work that has found that immigrants are more likely to get involved in community-level politics (Bloemraad, 2012), our findings further highlight the importance of building a pipeline of immigrant leaders at the local level and help explain the larger gaps in minority descriptive representation at higher levels of government.

***Political Ambition and Recruitment.*** Turning now to political ambition, respondents were asked if they were to run for office, which office they would choose. We display the responses in Table 4. Immigrants overwhelmingly chose local offices: 18.2 percent of first-generation and 16.7 percent of second-generation immigrants expressed an interest in running for school board, compared to 6.1 percent of nonimmigrants. Similarly, 14.6 percent of first-generation and 16.7 percent of second-generation immigrants chose city council, compared to 8 percent of nonimmigrant respondents. Nonimmigrants were more likely to express an interest in higher-level offices: 21.9 percent expressed an interest

<sup>2</sup>We created an aggregate scale of the number of behaviors completed by respondents that ranges from 0 to 1 with a mean of 0.68 and a  $SD$  of 0.28. The scale has fairly high internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.69$ ).

<sup>3</sup>Because these scales are continuous and approximately normally distributed we use Welch's two-sample  $t$ -test to establish statistical significance of the differences in means.

TABLE 4

If You Were Running for Office Today, Which Office Would You Choose? By Immigrant Status and Generation

	First-Generation Leader	Second-Generation Leader	Nonimmigrant Leader
School Board	18.2% ( <i>n</i> = 41)	16.7% ( <i>n</i> = 18)	6.1% ( <i>n</i> = 7)
City Council	14.7% ( <i>n</i> = 33)	16.7% ( <i>n</i> = 18)	7.9% ( <i>n</i> = 9)
Lower Assembly	4.4% ( <i>n</i> = 10)	1% ( <i>n</i> = 1)	21.9% ( <i>n</i> = 25)
Upper Assembly	3.6% ( <i>n</i> = 8)	1.9% ( <i>n</i> = 2)	7% ( <i>n</i> = 8)
County	1.8% ( <i>n</i> = 4)	0 ( <i>n</i> = 0)	6.1% ( <i>n</i> = 7)

NOTE: Cells correspond to self-reported desire to run for various levels of elected office broken out by immigration status and generation with each cell size in parentheses.

in running for state assembly, 7 percent for state senate, and 6.1 percent for county-level positions. Given the differences in immigrant and nonimmigrant leaders' attention to local and national politics, this is perhaps not surprising. The results also point to the role strategic decision making may play. Immigrant leaders may see local offices as more winnable, more approachable, and less resource intensive. These differences, to the extent they are driven by perceptions of viability, could be indicative of lower levels of ambition or a perceived lower return on structural resources among immigrants.

The literature suggests that recruitment is important in motivating traditionally marginalized communities to run for office. The survey asked respondents a battery of questions about their likelihood of running for office if they were encouraged by a variety of individuals or if they were afforded additional resources. As Table 5 displays, across every question, immigrants were far more likely than nonimmigrants to say that they would be more likely to run if given the proper encouragement from their employers, party officials, friends, and family (all differences are significant at  $p < 0.001$ ). The potential role of encouragement in moving an immigrant leader from potential candidate to actual candidate is indeed quite stark.

On the other side of the spectrum, we find immigrant leaders identifying many more barriers to office than nonimmigrant leaders (all differences between immigrants and nonimmigrants are significant at  $p < 0.001$ ). Resources like time and money place a greater burden on immigrants, and they perceive themselves as being less qualified and needing additional support. These findings suggest that organizations that are recruiting immigrant-origin candidates play a vital role in adding immigrants to the potential pipeline, and that leadership programs should focus their trainings on resource management and encouragement.

**Discrimination.** Studies of minority representation conclude that discrimination is a two-edged sword when it comes to political participation. On the one hand, it can lead to political apathy, as racial/ethnic minorities become less engaged and interested as a result of discrimination. On the other hand, being discriminated against can compel individuals to participate against the individuals and institutions responsible (Schildkraut, 2005; Perez, 2015). We investigate these two hypotheses more closely in the open-ended responses, but first report the levels of discrimination faced by the first-generation, second-generation, and nonimmigrant leaders, and the causes of this discrimination (Table 6).

Unlike the nonimmigrant leaders, Table 6 shows that nearly the entire immigrant sample has experienced discrimination at some point in their lifetime, though this question was

TABLE 5

## Encouragement, Resources, and Training Effects by Immigrant Status and Generation

	First-Generation Leader	Second-Generation Leader	Nonimmigrant Leader
Would you be more likely to run if . . . suggested you run?			
Someone from work	57% ( <i>n</i> = 43)	56% ( <i>n</i> = 36)	15% ( <i>n</i> = 14)
Party official	88% ( <i>n</i> = 67)	88% ( <i>n</i> = 57)	43% ( <i>n</i> = 38)
Friend	59% ( <i>n</i> = 45)	65% ( <i>n</i> = 42)	18% ( <i>n</i> = 16)
Professional	83% ( <i>n</i> = 63)	86% ( <i>n</i> = 56)	27% ( <i>n</i> = 25)
Spouse	65% ( <i>n</i> = 50)	62% ( <i>n</i> = 40)	22% ( <i>n</i> = 20)
Would you be more likely to run . . .			
If you had public financing for campaign	88% ( <i>n</i> = 67)	92% ( <i>n</i> = 60)	65% ( <i>n</i> = 56)
If you had more public speaking experience	82% ( <i>n</i> = 62)	80% ( <i>n</i> = 52)	20% ( <i>n</i> = 19)
If you had more training	97% ( <i>n</i> = 74)	97% ( <i>n</i> = 63)	24% ( <i>n</i> = 23)
If you had more experience	83% ( <i>n</i> = 63)	88% ( <i>n</i> = 57)	21% ( <i>n</i> = 20)
If you had more support for your candidacy	92% ( <i>n</i> = 70)	92% ( <i>n</i> = 60)	59% ( <i>n</i> = 51)
If you had fewer family responsibilities	66% ( <i>n</i> = 50)	64% ( <i>n</i> = 41)	24% ( <i>n</i> = 23)
If money were not an issue	88% ( <i>n</i> = 67)	91% ( <i>n</i> = 59)	43% ( <i>n</i> = 38)
If you had more time	82% ( <i>n</i> = 62)	88% ( <i>n</i> = 57)	35% ( <i>n</i> = 32)

NOTE: Cells correspond to likelihood of running if encouraged or if barriers were not an issue broken out by immigration status and generation with each cell size in parentheses.

TABLE 6

## Percent Respondents Reporting Discrimination, by Immigrant Generation and Status

	First-Generation Leader	Second-Generation Leader	Nonimmigrant Leader
Race	88% ( <i>n</i> = 21)	84% ( <i>n</i> = 26)	14% ( <i>n</i> = 11)
Country of origin	71% ( <i>n</i> = 17)	33% ( <i>n</i> = 10)	7% ( <i>n</i> = 6)
Language	63% ( <i>n</i> = 15)	35% ( <i>n</i> = 11)	5% ( <i>n</i> = 4)
Gender	71% ( <i>n</i> = 17)	59% ( <i>n</i> = 18)	31% ( <i>n</i> = 15)

NOTE: Cells correspond to self-reported perceptions of discrimination broken out by immigration status and generation with each cell size in parentheses.

only asked of a much smaller subset of the sample.<sup>4</sup> Discrimination due to race affected first- and second-generation immigrants equally. Country of residence and use of language affected, as expected, first-generation immigrants more than second-generation immigrants. Even the immigrant sample experienced gender discrimination at much higher rates than

<sup>4</sup>As mentioned above, the data were collected on a rolling basis as candidates applied to candidate development trainings. The nonprofit organization we worked with added new questions over time, leading to smaller samples for certain questions. For example, the discrimination questions were only asked to respondents who applied to trainings after February 2015.

the native sample, confirming what other scholars have found with “double disadvantage” of gender and race/ethnicity (Prestage, 1977; Hancock, 2007; Junn and Brown, 2008).

To sum, we have found support for our first hypothesis: that immigrant leaders have fewer structural resources, which depress attention paid to politics, political engagement, and political ambition. We also find that encouragement and recruitment are particularly salient for immigrant potential leaders. But is this the whole story? Table 6 suggests that experiences as disadvantaged groups in the United States, particularly discrimination, may play an important role in moderating perceptions of electability and thus political ambition among immigrant leaders. We next examine the specific barriers that immigrant candidates identify as keeping them from running for office. As we show, immigrants actually perceive their racial, ethnic, and immigrant identities and statuses as greater barriers than structural resources.

### Immigrant Identity and “Otherness”

To examine the relationship between racial, ethnic, and immigrant identities and perceived barriers to office more closely, we analyze the open-ended survey questions that were asked of the immigrant sample. In this analysis, we focus specifically on how “otherness” or minority status influences political ambition. Open-ended questions provide a direct look into the mind of the respondent (Repass, 1971) and are less likely to prime respondents and bias their answers (Iyengar, 1996). In particular, we focus on responses to the question: “In 200 words or less, discuss the barriers you feel you will face running for office and how you hope to overcome them.” The broad nature of this question allows us to assess the extent to which race or ethnicity is perceived as a barrier to office without specifically priming the respondent’s race or ethnicity. The answers below provide contextual support for the survey responses above.

We parsed the essays into sentences grouped by respondent, and then split these sentences further into individual words if one sentence has more than one “barrier” in it before hand coding them.<sup>5,6</sup> Our first pass through the data revealed a fairly long list of 19 barriers.<sup>7</sup> In our second pass, we collapsed those into five categories that included personal reasons (age, family, work, gender, education, sexual orientation, religion, lack of interest, and poor time management), finances and fundraising (both personal and campaign related), inexperience with campaigning and politics, networks, race or foreignness (race, immigration status, feeling of foreignness), and political networks. We display the raw count of each sentiment in Table 7. We find initial support for our second hypothesis: even when unprompted to talk about their race or ethnicity, first- and second-generation immigrants are more likely to perceive their race, ethnicity, immigration status, or immigrant identity as a greater barrier to office than any of the other traditional barriers that impede political ambition among nonimmigrant or nonminority leaders.

Below, we analyze the open-ended essay text to show how both traditional concerns (personal, financial, experiential, and network) wove their way through respondents’

<sup>5</sup>We coded the content of each sentence twice. On the first pass, we let the categories emerge naturally and discussed their validity, eventually developing a framework for coding. We then hand coded them again, eventually collapsing our categories into eight cleaner categories for analysis. We assessed intercoder reliability and found that we agreed on 88 percent of cases, indicating high intercoder reliability.

<sup>6</sup>For example, the sentence: “The barriers I will likely face as an immigrant policy professional and politician are that: (1) I was not born in America; (2) I do not have unlimited dollar amounts to have a strong political campaign; and (3) I do not have an extensive political network system” would be coded as having three topics—race/foreignness, financial barriers, and lack of networks, and therefore split across three lines to be coded individually.

<sup>7</sup>We include the full list of categories in the Appendix.

TABLE 7  
Barriers to Office Identified by New Americans Leaders

Sentiment	Percentage (Number)
Race/foreignness	35.7 ( <i>n</i> = 127)
Personal	26.7 ( <i>n</i> = 95)
Financial	17.4 ( <i>n</i> = 62)
Inexperience	12.6 ( <i>n</i> = 45)
Networks	7.6 ( <i>n</i> = 27)

NOTE: Table displays raw count and percentage (where denominator is all sentences in essays by first- and second-generation immigrants) of sentences in essays pertaining to perceived barriers to office.

perceived barriers to office. We focus primarily, however, on the specific impact of feelings of otherness or minority status. In the interest of space, we choose quotes that best illustrate the themes that emerged during coding. We then, to the extent we can, break out concerns by gender, immigrant generation, and race to analyze how these perceived barriers to office vary across subgroups.

First, with regards to perceived barriers faced due to lack of professional experience, income, or networks, many respondents expressed standard concerns that are not unique to any one group:

I do not have unlimited dollar amounts to have a strong political campaign.

Unfortunately I do not have an expendable bank account.

I don't come from a rich background, nor am I CEO of a company.

There seems to be a deep understanding of the central role of money in campaigns: "As for financial barriers, politics is money." In addition, we find a conditioning effect of "otherness" for most of the responses:

I don't like asking for money, especially in a community that is already facing socioeconomic barriers and hardships.

[Latinos] may not contribute to the campaign due to their lack of knowledge and what they will gain as a community.

[It] . . . can be tougher for minority candidates because the income of minorities or persons of color is generally lower than their white counterparts so can be more difficult to obtain the same amount of campaign donations [as] a white candidate.

Second, immigrant leaders often tie their fear of losing and inadequacy to the issues of their communities. For instance, many pointed out that Latinos and other racial minorities do not participate at rates comparable to whites or African Americans.

Latinos are difficult to get out to vote.

Most Latinos are not registered, and [my winning] is contingent on the ability to get out the minority vote . . . it takes a worthy candidate to fire up the Latino base.

Others perceived future difficulties with cross-racial coalition building, and the political reality of racial bloc voting:

[There is] generally low Latino and Democratic voter registration and participation, [and the] splitting of the Latino and/or Democratic vote.

There may be pushback from the API [Asian Pacific Islander] community about an API Democratic candidate if I were to run, because most API folks in CA are registered Republicans.

And some feared push back from the established nonimmigrant power base:

I am sure I would face barriers from people who don't want to see the community empowered.

Even if an immigrant is professionally successful, wealthy, and professionally connected, there are still concerns that the immigrant community will not be there to support his or her candidacy or might not have the resources to do so. Perceived barriers for immigrants are deeply tied to the realities of being a racial minority and immigrant in America.

Third, there was a pervasive general perceived feeling that being born in another country severely hindered a candidacy. Being born abroad opens a candidate up to questions of loyalty and belonging. Among this group of highly race-conscious New American leaders, race mattered, and it mattered the most.

Some simply pointed out their foreign birthplace and immigrant status as a barrier in and of itself, or the more straightforward "nationality" and "xenophobia."

I was not born in America.

My name is not American, I was born in Vietnam.

I came from Bangladesh.

I am Iranian-American.

Others more explicitly predicted that they would be more highly scrutinized because of their immigrant status and that their loyalty would be questioned:

My country of origin [would be a barrier]; with Americans constantly scrutinizing immigrants and their loyalty to the country I believe that it will be a major issue.

I will have to overcome those who challenge how American I am because I was not born here.

In light of my immigrant background and no matter what my allegiance may be, the fact that I was born a Japanese and not an American citizen is what I would identify to be major barrier in becoming an elected official.

I imagine that my ability to lead and my loyalty to the nation would be questioned by the electorate.

[They] would questions my American-ness.

I think the overall anti-immigrant sentiment is a barrier for many Latino candidates in the U.S.

Immigrant status is often compounded by perceptions of racial and religious barriers to office. Some simply pointed out their race, ethnicity, or religion as self-evident barriers:

I am Arab.

I am Muslim.

I am African American.

That I am an Asian American.

TABLE 8

## Barriers to Office by Category and Gender for New Americans Leaders

	Women	Men
Race/foreignness	32.5% ( <i>n</i> = 63)	39.2% ( <i>n</i> = 62)
Personal	30.9% ( <i>n</i> = 60)	20.9% ( <i>n</i> = 33)
Financial	17.5% ( <i>n</i> = 34)	17.7% ( <i>n</i> = 28)
Inexperience	11.9% ( <i>n</i> = 23)	13.9% ( <i>n</i> = 22)
Networks	7.2% ( <i>n</i> = 14)	8.2% ( <i>n</i> = 13)

NOTES: Table displays raw count and percentage of all sentences in essays pertaining to perceived barriers to office broken out by gender. Note that the percentages are calculated by dividing the number of coded barriers in each category by the number of total barriers by group.

Others highlighted their skin color as the barrier:

Another problem I face is that I am black, I believe that society has subliminally degraded and marked me down for the color of my skin.

The biggest barrier I will face in AZ . . . is that I am brown.

As a person of color, I feel like the system is stacked against my people and me through rules that are intended to dis-empower us.

All of these perceived disqualifications for office are rooted in the idea that, as a candidate, each will be discriminated against and judged merely by the color of their skin and/or country of their birth. This reality gives white, native-born candidates a large advantage that so far has been overlooked in the literature on political ambition and candidacy for elected office.

I believe that some of the biggest barriers that I will face will be my race just because I am a Latino for many people that automatically puts me in a category that they don't pick from.

I will face the usual barriers that individual deal with such as discrimination, racial tension.

Others are worried about the "racial slurs and demeaning comments" they would face, particularly if they were not as confident with their grasp of the English language. As one pointed out:

The language barrier is my major downfall.

These perceived barriers of race, ethnicity, and immigration status were confirmed as major barriers to office in our survey questionnaire as well, with only 6 percent of the sample agreeing that it is "easy for a foreign-person to be elected to public office," and 95 percent agreeing that "discrimination is still a big issue facing racial and ethnic minorities in this country."

In sum, we see that first- and second-generation immigrants face not only the traditional structure resource barriers to office perceived by all Americans: lack of experience, lack of resources, lack of politically connected networks, and lack of financial resources, but also the perceived barriers to office that stem from their race, ethnicity, immigration status, and immigrant identity. In fact, open-ended essay responses reveal that racial or ethnic perceived barriers to office are the most prominent perceived barriers among first- and second-generation immigrants. The reality of their position as minorities in the United States is an ever-present influence on their lives, further reducing political ambition.

TABLE 9

Barriers to Office by Category and Immigrant Generation for New American Leaders

	First Generation	Second Generation
Race/foreignness	37.3% ( <i>n</i> = 81)	33.1% ( <i>n</i> = 46)
Personal	25.8% ( <i>n</i> = 56)	28.1% ( <i>n</i> = 39)
Financial	17.1% ( <i>n</i> = 37)	18% ( <i>n</i> = 25)
Inexperience	14.7% ( <i>n</i> = 32)	9.4% ( <i>n</i> = 13)
Networks	5.1% ( <i>n</i> = 11)	11.5% ( <i>n</i> = 16)

NOTES: Table displays raw count and percentage of all sentences in essays pertaining to perceived barriers to office broken out by immigrant generation. Note that the percentages are calculated by dividing the number of coded barriers in each category by the number of total barriers by group.

TABLE 10

Barriers to Office by Category and Race for New American Leaders

	Latino Leaders	Asian Leaders
Race/foreignness	32.9% ( <i>n</i> = 74)	35.5% ( <i>n</i> = 27)
Personal	27.1% ( <i>n</i> = 61)	21.1% ( <i>n</i> = 16)
Financial	17.3% ( <i>n</i> = 39)	23.7% ( <i>n</i> = 18)
Inexperience	15.1% ( <i>n</i> = 34)	7.9% ( <i>n</i> = 6)
Networks	7.6% ( <i>n</i> = 17)	11.8% ( <i>n</i> = 9)

NOTES: Table displays raw count and percentage of all sentences in essays pertaining to perceived barriers to office broken out by race. Note that the percentages are calculated by dividing the number of coded barriers in each category by the number of total barriers by group.

Finally, we assess the differences in perceived barriers split out by relevant subgroups. We first look at gender, then generation of immigrant, and finally race. In Table 8, we display the raw count and proportion of perceived barriers in each category for both men and women. We find that men see their race as a slightly larger barrier than women, consistent with Bejarano (2013). Women, on the other hand, see personal issues, which include time, education, and familial expectations, as a larger barrier to office than men. There is little difference across financial, experiential, and network barriers.

In Table 9, we display results broken out by generational status of immigrant. We find first that generational status and assimilation result in somewhat different perceptions of what keeps people like them out of elected office. The influence of racism and nativism declines between the first and second generation, but in both cases is listed as the most significant barrier. Second, inexperience declines in importance between generations, as understanding the impact of networks on electoral success goes up. And last, we find no difference between groups with regards to financial or personal barriers.

Finally, in Table 10, we display perceived barriers to office by race, broken out between Latino and Asian-leaders. At this point, the sample of immigrants contains small numbers of African-American and Arab respondents, but these subgroups are too small to analyze independently, and so we only focus on Latino and Asian-American leaders. Though differences are small overall, we again find that race and foreignness are concerns the majority of immigrant leaders face, regardless of country of origin.

### Conclusion and Discussion

As the nation approaches a majority-minority future, questions of gaps in representation only become more urgent. While demographic, political, and structural factors all play

important roles in minority candidate success, some are now focusing on the supply side of minority representation (Shah, 2014), suggesting that lack of representational parity is partly due to lack of candidate emergence in minority communities. Instead of asking why voters don't vote for minority and immigrant candidates, we ask: Why don't immigrant-origin candidates run?

Our study offers the first glance at political ambition among New American leaders. Using Lawless's study of nascent political ambition as a framework, we find that the traditional barriers to office—lack of professional and political experiences, finances, and monied networks—work similarly among immigrant and nonimmigrant leaders. That is, strategic candidates understand what it takes to successfully run for office, and are hesitant to do so when they lack resources. Moreover, we find that immigrant-origin leaders have lowered self-perceptions of their qualifications for office, precluding their ambition. The first- and second-generation immigrants in our sample, the New American leaders, who are highly politically involved, deeply rooted in their communities, and well-positioned to run for office, face the additional psychological barriers posed by their minority statuses, a barrier that is most frequently offered in open-ended essays as self-evident and crippling.

We find that there is a deep understanding among New American leaders of America's racial hierarchies and history. Despite gains, many Latinos and Asian Americans simply do not think that they can be elected to public office because they do not want to fundraise in communities that are already struggling financially, they do not have deep-pocketed friends, neighbors, and colleagues who can help bankroll a campaign, they do not see people like them in office and fear that white voters will not accept them as legitimate candidates for either being born in another country or for the colors of their skin. In sum, race continues to play an outsized role in tempering political ambition among America's minority leaders who are well qualified to run for office and remedy the representation gap.

With the increase in second-generation immigrants, the political opportunities created by redistricting, and the efforts by nonprofits and community organizations to engage more immigrant voters and train leaders, the number of individuals from immigrant communities serving elected office is bound to increase each election cycle. We draw attention to the factors that constrain immigrants from seeking a bid for elected office in hopes that nonprofits, party organizations, and others will focus more on recruiting, training, mentoring, and fostering leaders who can occupy a strong pipeline of minority candidates and begin closing the representation gap. As the New Americans become "political insiders," we hope to continue to research their political fortunes as political candidates and elected officials.

## Appendix

TABLE A1  
Barriers to Office Essays Parsed by Sentence and Hand Coded

Barriers	Percentage	N
Race/ethnicity	0.174	58
Fundraising	0.150	50
Inexperience	0.135	45
Foreignness	0.117	39

(Continued)

TABLE A1

Continued

Barriers	Percentage	N
Gender	0.087	29
Networks	0.081	27
Age	0.054	18
Family	0.045	15
Religion	0.045	15
Personal finance	0.036	12
Public speaking	0.036	12
Immigration status	0.033	11
Constituency issues	0.027	9
Education	0.015	5
Sexuality	0.014	4
Not interested	0.012	4
Time management	0.008	2
Work issues	0.004	2
Unsavory past	0.004	1
Total		333

NOTES: Table shows raw count and percentage of sentences pertaining to perceived barriers to office in respondent essays. Respondents were asked: "In 200 words or less, discuss the barriers you feel you will face running for office and how you hope to overcome them."

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