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Atlanta's Potential Immigrant Voters: Where Are They, Who Are They, and How Is Their English?

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Introduction

During the 2016 Presidential election campaign many candidates made immigration a key issue. The positions taken by major candidates on topics such as deportation versus amnesty for immigrants residing in the U.S. illegally, the need for more or fewer immigrants with certain occupational skills, the desirability and/or legality of seeking to reduce Muslim immigration, and the wisdom of building a wall between the United States and Mexico have made national headlines. In addition, the roles and potential influence of immigrants as voters, political activists, and candidates for office have been widely discussed.

Closer to home, in Georgia people asked questions such as: How large will “the immigrant vote” be? Is it predominantly Latino? Will it be a larger factor in city or suburban elections? Does “the immigrant vote” lean overwhelmingly towards the Democratic Party, and if so, will it shift Georgia to become a “blue” or “purple” state? Often, unfortunately, voting analysts tried to answer these questions by referring simply to the number of Latinos in a jurisdiction, or the number of immigrants in a jurisdiction (or their percentage of its population). This can be misleading because many Latinos are not immigrants, but instead are native-born second, third generation, or higher generation U.S. citizens, or because many immigrants in a jurisdiction are either not naturalized U.S. citizens or are not yet registered to vote.

The goal of this paper is to focus on the foreign-born population (especially those who are naturalized U.S. citizens age 18 and over) in key parts of metropolitan Atlanta, to see where and how much of an impact these “potential voters” may have. In addition, since a formal request has been made (by the Georgia Association of Latino Elected Officials and by Latino- Justice) for Gwinnett and Hall counties to provide electoral material in Spanish, we also examine data on immigrants’ ability to speak English (Wickert 2016a, 2016b). This is important because section 203 of the Voting Rights Act stipulates that if more than 10,000 of the voting age citizens from a single-language group do “not speak or understand English adequately enough to participate in the electoral process” and have a higher illiteracy rate than the general voting public, then information pertinent to the electoral process (e.g., voter registration material, dates of elections, voting locations, voting forms and instructions, election ballots) must be provided to them in their native language in addition to the standard English information.

The next section describes the data sources and methodology used in this study. After that the substantive findings are divided into sections on (a) the spatial distribution of immigrants and potential immigrant voters across metropolitan Atlanta; (b) their sex, arrival cohorts, and nationalities; and (c) their

English-speaking ability. The paper concludes by discussing implications of the findings, limitations of the data and analysis, and suggestions for further research on this topic.

Data and Methods

This study is based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), specifically its "five-year estimate" compiled from surveys done in years 2010 through 2014. These ACS data were accessed via the Social Explorer software program, which provides numerous data tables on the foreign-born population aggregated at various geographic levels (e.g., states, counties, metropolitan areas, census tracts). Some of these ACS data tables classify the foreign-born population by age, sex, year of entry into the U.S., nationality, language ability, and citizenship status. However, unfortunately, they do *not* provide tables containing data on other important characteristics of the foreign-born (e.g., legal/illegal status, refugee/immigrant status, occupation, education, income, renter/home-owner), so little or nothing can be said about their socioeconomic situation or certain other key characteristics. The data presented in the tables of this paper were taken from tables in Social Explorer's ACS five-year estimate (2010-2014), and the tables from Social Explorer that were used to create the tables in this paper are identified in each table.

In this paper, as in many studies of U.S. immigration, the category "foreign-born" is used as a proxy for "immigrant." Technically, "foreign-born" is a broader category because it includes some types of people who are not usually defined as immigrants (i.e., foreign students, foreign diplomats or tourists, and temporary foreign workers are classified by the U.S. government as "foreign-born" but not as "immigrant"). Researchers do regard "foreign-born" as a good measure of the immigrant population for most purposes, so it is used in this paper.

In this paper, the term "*potential immigrant voters*" refers to foreign-born persons who are of voting age (at least 18 years old) and who have become naturalized U.S. citizens. Technically, one is not really a "potential voter" unless one has registered to vote in his/her Georgia county of residence, but since ACS data do not contain information on whether or not people are registered voters we have to use the numbers naturalized and of voting age as an approximation of the potential immigrant vote.¹

¹ Data from the Georgia Secretary of State's office do not help here, since they show numbers of registered voters who are white, black, Hispanic/Latino, or Asian, but they do not distinguish foreign-born (immigrant) registered voters from U.S. native-born registered voters. Several organizations currently are working to increase the number of immigrant U.S. citizens who become registered to vote.

The meaning of variables used in this paper to describe or classify the foreign-born is based on Census Bureau definitions, as used in the ACS. For instance, an immigrant's "nationality" is defined as the country in which s/he was born (which, conceivably, might be different than their parents' country of birth or the country from which they emigrated). The ACS measure of "English language ability" is admittedly crude and based simply on the respondent's self-evaluation or opinion of his/her English ability. Question 14 in the ACS asks, "Does this person speak a language other than English at home?" For those who reply "yes," there are two follow-up questions. First, "What is this language?" with space to write in the name of a language. Second, "How well does this person speak English?" with check-boxes for "very well," "well," "not well," and "not at all." The ACS tables in Social Explorer provide a collapsed classification of the language proficiency responses for people over age 5: it gives the number who speak English "*very well*" and the number speaking English "*less than very well*."

The spatial area examined in this study is metropolitan Atlanta's five "core counties" (Fulton, DeKalb, Cobb, Clayton, and Gwinnett) plus Hall County. In terms of numbers of foreign-born residents, these are the six highest ranking counties in Georgia. The five core counties comprised 64% of the 2010 total population of metro Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta Metropolitan Statistical Area (defined by the Bureau of Management and Budget as a 28 county area²) and 82% of the region's foreign-born population. Hall County (which is in the Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Gainesville Combined Statistical Area) is included in this study because immigrants comprise a large enough percentage of its population to raise questions about their potential political impact and voting rights issues. Some of the tables in this paper provide data on immigrants in the City of Atlanta as well as in the six counties named above. Since the City of Atlanta is located mainly in central Fulton County, to avoid double counting immigrants the numbers presented for Fulton County are actually for Fulton County residents who live outside the boundaries of the City of Atlanta (i.e., in northern and southern Fulton County).³

Where Are Metro Atlanta's Immigrants?

Atlanta is known for being a highly suburbanized metropolitan area; it has even been called the "posterchild for suburban sprawl" (Bullard, Johnson & Torres

² Based on data from the 2010 Census the Atlanta MSA was later increased to a 29 county area.

³ A small portion of DeKalb County is within the City of Atlanta's boundaries and the dataset used here does not enable residents of that area to be disaggregated. So a small number of immigrants are double-counted as residing in both the City of Atlanta and DeKalb County, but this does not distort the overall results presented here.

2000; Squires 2002). In previous eras, immigrants tended to be more heavily concentrated in cities than in suburbs, while suburbia was more the domain of the native-born. However, since the 1990s the growing presence of large numbers of immigrants in suburban towns, such as Monterey Park, CA (Fong 1994; Horton 1995) led social scientists to coin new terms, like “ethnoburb,” (Li 1998) to highlight the fact that immigrant enclaves are no longer limited to central city neighborhoods, but have also emerged in the suburbs. Using the Census Bureau’s very broad definition of metropolitan Atlanta (28 counties) and data from the 2004 ACS, Mary Odem (2008:110) made a surprising discovery – almost 96% of metro Atlanta’s foreign-born population was living in the suburbs (i.e., outside the boundaries of the City of Atlanta), though she did not compare that to the percentage of native-born Atlantans in the suburbs. Odem also found that the largest numbers lived in northern DeKalb County and Gwinnett County. What we examine in this section, with more recent data and for a smaller portion of metro Atlanta, is: (a) whether or not immigrants are more suburbanized than native-born Atlantans, (b) which counties immigrants are most numerous in, and (c) which counties have the most immigrant potential voters.

The City of Atlanta’s leaders began calling it an “International City” in the 1970s, and highlighted immigrants’ commercial and cultural contributions (Dameron & Murphy 1996). In 1988 the Montreal-based Institute for the Study of International Cities designated Atlanta an “international city,” and one of its criteria was a sizable foreign-born population (Saporta 1988). More recently, Mayor Reed urged immigrants to move into the City of Atlanta, when he said, “. . . a lot of our foreign-born population lives in rural areas in the region, and I am telling those folks, I think you are better off being inside the city limits” (Redmon 2015). To assist the city’s immigrant residents, Mayor Reed, in 2015, established an Office of Immigrant Affairs in the city government, which is affiliated with the immigrant-friendly “Welcoming Atlanta” program. Beyond that, Mayor Reed has been outspoken in support of President Obama’s executive actions on behalf of immigrants (to suspend deportation of some undocumented immigrants) and he opposed Governor Deal’s efforts to prevent refugees from Syria from coming to Georgia. All this might lead one to believe that the City of Atlanta has an immigrant population of significant size. On the other hand, during the two most recent Atlanta mayoral elections (2009 and 2013) the candidates’ campaign appeals for votes did little to target immigrant citizens; instead candidates’ election campaigns segmented the electorate in other ways: blacks and whites, LGBTs and straights, males and females. This lack of attention given to immigrant voters in Atlanta City elections would suggest a population of relatively small size. The data in Table 1 and Table 2 shed light on this matter.

Table 1. Total Population and Foreign-born (Immigrant) Population in Metropolitan Atlanta.

Source: American Community Survey: 5-Year Estimates (2010-14): Social Explorer Table T133

	City of Atlanta	Clayton	Cobb	DeKalb
Total Population	440,641	264,221	708,920	707,185
Foreign-born Population	33,371	39,791	107,889	115,404
FB % of County Total	7.6%	15.1%	15.2%	16.3%
	Fulton w/o City of Atlanta	Gwinnett	Hall	6 County Total
Total Population	526,459	842,091	185,318	3,674,835
Foreign-born Population	88,057	206,816	29,320	620,648
FB % of County Total	16.7%	24.6%	15.8%	16.9%

The City of Atlanta's immigrant population actually is relatively small; its 33,371 foreign-born residents comprise less than 8% of the City's total population (Table 1). In each metro Atlanta county listed in Table 1, immigrants constitute a larger percentage of the population than they do in the City of Atlanta. By far, the most immigrants reside in Gwinnett County, whose 206,816 immigrants make up about 25% of its total population. In the other counties, immigrants comprise 15% or 16% of their populations. As Odem (2008) found earlier, immigrants in metro Atlanta are highly suburban; looking just at the five core counties (Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Fulton, and Gwinnett), only 5.6% of the foreign-born live in the City of Atlanta, the remaining 94.4% reside beyond the city limits in those five suburban counties. Moreover, Atlanta's immigrants' suburbanization is substantially greater than that of its native-born residents: 14.0% of the native-born population lives in the City of Atlanta, and 86.0% reside outside the city in the five core counties. Clearly, the old pattern of immigrants clustering

residentially in inner city enclaves and not venturing into the suburbs is no longer the case in Atlanta. Reasons for this new spatial pattern are presented below in the concluding section.

Table 2. Potential Immigrant Voters: Foreign-born Naturalized U.S. Citizens (age 18 and over) in Metropolitan Atlanta.

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2010 – 2014; Tables B05003 and B16008.

	City of Atlanta	Clayton	Cobb	DeKalb
# Naturalized Foreign-born (18 yrs. old & over)	9,900	15,226	41,859	40,512
Total US Citizens age 18+ in area	335,945	167,502	472,509	474,711
% of U.S. Citizens age 18+ who are naturalized foreign-born	2.9%	9.1%	8.9%	8.5%
Total # Foreign-born age 18+ (naturalized + non-citizens)	31,748	36,711	100,640	104,927
% of FB age 18+ who are naturalized US citizens	31.2%	41.5%	41.6%	38.6%
	Fulton w/o City of Atlanta	Gwinnett	Hall	6 County Total
# Naturalized Foreign-born (18 yrs. old & over)	34,008	83,975	6,600	232,080
Total US Citizens age 18+ in area	335,893	493,919	114,191	2,394,670
% of U.S. Citizens age 18+ who are naturalized foreign-born	10.1%	17.0%	5.8%	9.7%
Total # Foreign-born age 18+ (naturalized + non-citizens)	80,425	192,821	27,243	574,515
% of FB age 18+ who are naturalized US citizens	42.3%	43.5%	24.2%	40.4%

As for Atlanta's *potential immigrant voters* (i.e., naturalized immigrants who are at least 18 years old), Table 2 shows that the City of Atlanta has a smaller number (9,900) than any other jurisdiction except Hall County (6,600). Moreover, potential immigrant voters are a smaller percentage of the total electorate (U.S. citizens age 18 or over) in the City of Atlanta (2.9%) than in any of the six counties studied here. Again, Gwinnett County ranks highest, where it has almost 84,000 potential immigrant voters, who constitute 17% of the county's citizens of voting age. That is a sizable segment of the electorate, and who they are and whether they form a single bloc of voters is discussed below. For Clayton County, Cobb County, DeKalb County, and Fulton outside of the City of Atlanta, potential immigrant voters constitute about 9% of all potential voters. The low number in the City of Atlanta helps explain why immigrants and immigration issues have played such a minor role in the City's politics and elections. It remains to be seen whether Mayor Reed's recent efforts to attract immigrant residents will change this. Gwinnett County's high numbers of potential immigrant voters, compared to the other counties, helps explain why Gwinnett's immigrants have been the most successful in winning elected office (discussed below).

Comparison of the percentages in Tables 1 and 2 reveals that in all jurisdictions, potential immigrant voters constitute a much lower percentage than do immigrants in general. For example, in Cobb County the foreign-born are 15.2% of Cobb's total population, but only comprise 8.9% of Cobb's potential voting population. This is because a large number are ineligible to vote for one of three reasons. First, many have not become naturalized U.S. citizens because they are too young,⁴ have not legally lived in the U.S. long enough,⁵ have not met the English language requirement,⁶ or have not passed the test for knowledge of U.S. civics.⁷ Second, some have lived in the U.S. long enough and could pass the exams for English and civics, but have not yet decided to begin the process of naturalization to U.S. citizenship (e.g., due to its expense,⁸ or lack of a good reason to change citizenship). Third, a sizable but unknown portion of the immigrant population is ineligible for U.S. citizenship because they are not legally residing in this country (either entered illegally or have overstayed a legal entry visa). For those in the first two of these categories, conditions can change and they could become U.S. citizens with the right to vote. But for immigrants in

⁴ A person must be 18 or over to become a naturalized U.S. citizen.

⁵ The requirement is 5 years of legal residence in the U.S., but only 3 years if one is married to a U.S. citizen.

⁶ Exams for reading, writing, and speaking English are part of the naturalization process.

⁷ The civics exam is a test covering U.S. government and history.

⁸ The naturalization fee is currently \$725 per person (\$640 application fee plus an \$85 biometric fee).

the third category, they are unable to become potential voters unless federal law is changed to create a “path” towards legal resident status (e.g., “amnesty” as provided in the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act; or the steps for legal status stipulated in the 2013 immigration reform bill that was passed in the Senate but stalled in the House of Representatives) and then follow the steps of the naturalization process. Of course, naturalization to U.S. citizenship alone does not, by itself, allow a person to vote – the final step is to actually register to vote in one’s state of residence, and some immigrant citizens (as well as some native-born U.S. citizens, especially racial/ethnic minorities) are not yet registered or face hurdles in registering (e.g., lack of driver’s license or accepted photo ID).

Who Are Metro Atlanta’s Immigrants?

The first point to make in this section concerns the numerical balance between men and women in metro Atlanta’s immigrant population. In earlier eras, many more males than females immigrated to America, especially in the early waves and in less popular areas of destination. This is less true today. In metro Atlanta, foreign-born males outnumber females by only a small margin: 51.1% of metro Atlanta’s immigrants are male, compared to 48.9% female (ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010-2014, Table B05013). What is interesting, however, is that among *potential immigrant voters* (i.e., immigrants who have become naturalized U.S. citizens and are at least 18 years old), the numbers of males and females reverses. Women constitute more than half (52.8%) of Atlanta’s potential immigrant voters, and men comprise 47.6% (ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010-2014, Table B05003). Reasons why women are more likely to become potential immigrant voters are related to findings researchers have discovered about gender and immigration. For instance, immigrant women often are more likely than men to want to remain in the U.S. rather than return to their homeland (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1995), especially because U.S. gender norms allow them more freedom (Hirsch 2000). Additionally, some research suggests that women immigrants have jobs or interaction networks that enable them to learn English more readily than immigrant men (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003). These factors would make women more willing and able to become naturalized U.S. citizens and account for the odd fact that although male immigrants outnumber females in metro Atlanta, more naturalized U.S. citizens of voting age are women than men.

A second fact about metro Atlanta’s immigrants is that a large percentage of them have arrived in the U.S. fairly recently: 46% have entered since the year 2000, while only 24% came before 1990. In comparison, in metro areas that have historically attracted many immigrants, such as Chicago or Miami, about 35% entered since 2000 and about 38% entered before 1990 (Social Explorer Table T134). Research shows that immigrants who live in the U.S. for longer lengths of time are the most likely to become naturalized citizens (Jaret & Kolozsvari-

Wright 2011; Portes & Rumbaut 2014). So the high amount of newcomers in Atlanta contributes to the low number of potential immigrant voters here (i.e., because many of them have not had enough time to meet the naturalization criteria or have not yet made a firm decision about becoming a U.S. citizen). In the parts of metropolitan Atlanta studied here, the City of Atlanta is comprised of the highest percentage of recently arrived foreign-born residents: 57% entered the U.S. since 2000 (16% since 2010) and only 21% arrived before 1990. Many of them are probably students from other countries who attend universities located in the city (discussed below). DeKalb County ranks second in terms of its percentage of recently arrived immigrants. On the other hand, perhaps surprisingly, Gwinnett, Hall, and Cobb counties are the ones with the highest percentages of immigrants who have been in the U.S. the longest (about 60% arrived before 2000; about 25% arrived before 1990).

National origin is another key aspect of who Atlanta's immigrants are. Table 3 shows the six largest foreign-born groups in the City of Atlanta and metro counties. In each jurisdiction Mexicans are the largest group; in most cases they are more than twice the size of the next largest group. About 150,000 Mexicans reside in the six county area as a whole, making up about a quarter of the total immigrant population, a much higher number than the next largest group, Asian Indians (45,873). Immigrants from India are the second largest group in Cobb, the City of Atlanta, the rest of Fulton County, and third largest in DeKalb and Gwinnett.

While recognizing that Mexicans are consistently the largest immigrant group in all parts of metropolitan Atlanta, it is important to see that each county is, in some way, quite distinct in its immigrants' national origins. For example, Hall is the only county in which over half of its immigrants are from Mexico; Hall is also unique in that almost all of its other main groups of immigrants are other Latinos (from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, or Colombia). DeKalb has the largest Jamaican population and is the only county in which Ethiopians are one of the six largest immigrant groups. Cobb's sizable Brazilian population coupled with having over 8,000 Central Americans and almost 3,000 immigrants from both Kenya and Jamaica give it a unique mix. Aside from its very large Mexican immigrant population, Gwinnett is home to, by far, the largest Korean immigrant community as well as many immigrants from India and Vietnam. The City of Atlanta and rest of Fulton County are the only parts of metro Atlanta in which Indians, Koreans, and Chinese combine to form more than 20% of the foreign-born residents. Finally, only Clayton County has a diverse and distinct immigrant population in which Haitians, Nigerians, and Laotians are among the six largest foreign-born groups.

Table 3. Nationality of Six Largest Foreign-Born Groups in City of Atlanta and 6 Metro Counties.

Source: American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimate, 2010-2014; Social Explorer Table T139.

City of Atlanta			Clayton County			Cobb County			DeKalb County		
Mexico	6,529	19.6%	Mexico	13,083	32.9%	Mexico	26,057	24.2%	Mexico	22,300	19.3%
India	3,163	9.5	Vietnam	5,926	14.9	India	9,296	8.6	Jamaica	9,383	8.1
So. Korea	2,128	6.4	Haiti	2,280	5.7	El Salvador	4,273	4.0	India	7,079	6.1
China	2,040	6.1	Jamaica	1,964	4.9	Guatemala	4,041	3.8	Ethiopia	6,328	5.5
Jamaica	1,141	3.4	Nigeria	1,845	4.6	Brazil	3,586	3.3	Guatemala	4,339	3.8
Unit. Kingdom	1,041	3.1	Laos	1,074	2.7	Kenya & Jamaica	2,930	2.7	China	3,917	3.4
Total Foreign-born	33,371		Total Foreign-born	39,791		Total Foreign-born	107,889		Total Foreign-born	115,404	
Fulton Co. w/o Atlanta City			Gwinnett County			Hall County			6 County Total		
Mexico	18,173	20.6%	Mexico	45,537	22.0%	Mexico	18,442	62.9%	Mexico	150,121	24.2%
India	12,335	14.0	So. Korea	16,958	8.2	El Salvador	2,539	8.7	India	45,873	7.4
China	4,897	5.6	India	13,021	6.3	Colombia	1,275	4.3	So. Korea	30,126	4.9
So. Korea	4,499	5.1	Vietnam	11,976	5.8	Honduras	1,271	4.3	Vietnam	27,014	4.4
Jamaica	2,756	3.1	El Salvador	9,696	4.7	Vietnam	1,105	3.8	Jamaica	26,465	4.3
Brazil	2,091	2.4	Jamaica	8,122	3.9	Canada & Guatemala	380	1.3	China	20,533	3.3
Total Foreign-born	88,057		Total Foreign-born	206,816		Total Foreign-born	29,320		Total Foreign-born	620,648	

As noted above, many of metro Atlanta's immigrants are not "potential voters" because they are not naturalized U.S. citizens. The ability and propensity of immigrants of different nationalities to become naturalized varies dramatically across national origin groups for several reasons. These include differences in percentages of immigrants with lawful resident status, differences in percentages of recently arrived residents, and differences in percentages with settler rather than sojourner orientation. Table 4 reveals stark contrasts among immigrant groups' percentages who have become naturalized citizens. The tabulated American Community Survey data from Social Explorer do not show individual countries (except for Mexico), so Table 4 shows the numbers and percentages of immigrants by regions of origin rather than individual countries of origin. Table 4 only includes immigrants who arrived in the U.S. before the year 2000. This means it excludes recent immigrants and instead shows naturalization rates for immigrants who have lived here for a substantial number of years, which gives them time to qualify for residential requirements, learn English, and think about whether or not U.S. citizenship is something they want.

Table 4. Numbers and Percentages of Pre-2000 Immigrants in Metro Atlanta Who Have Become Naturalized U.S. Citizens, by Region of Origin.

Source: American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates 2010-2014, Table B05007.

Region of Origin	# Naturalized (pre-2000 entry)	# of Foreign-born (pre-2000 entry)	% Naturalized in Each Region of Origin Group
Asia	77,202	101,261	76.3%
Europe	23,458	32,002	73.3%
Caribbean	31,763	44,859	70.8%
Other Areas	24,125	35,455	68.0%
South America	13,889	21,151	65.7%
Central America	9,006	27,712	32.5%
Mexico	13,826	74,980	18.4%

Table 4 clearly shows immigrants from Asia, Europe, and the Caribbean have naturalized at the highest rate. Of the over 100,000 Asian immigrants who entered before 2000, over 75% (77,202) in the six county Atlanta metro area had

become naturalized U.S. citizens by the 2010 to 2014 period studied here. Much smaller numbers and slightly lower percentages of immigrants from Europe (73%) and the Caribbean (71%) naturalized. The “Other Areas” in Table 4 mainly consists of immigrants from Africa, and they too have fairly high levels (68.0%) of naturalization. Immigrants from Latin America are less likely to become naturalized U.S. citizens. While this difference is slight for those from South America (almost two-thirds of those who entered pre-2000 naturalized by 2010-2014), it is a huge difference for the Central American and Mexican immigrants. Only one-third of the former, and less than 20% of the latter became naturalized U.S. citizens. In terms of raw numbers of naturalized immigrant citizens, Table 4 shows that among metro Atlanta’s pre-2000 immigrants, 77,202 Asians became naturalized U.S. citizens. If the three Latin American categories are added together (South America + Central America + Mexico) only 36,721 Latino immigrants became naturalized U.S. citizens (less than half the number of Asians). This fact hints at one of our most unexpected and important findings: contrary to news media and commentators’ depictions of immigrant voters as primarily Latinos, there are actually many more Asian immigrant voters in metro Atlanta than there are Latino immigrant voters.

Data in Table 5 reinforce and expand this important finding about who Atlanta’s potential immigrant voters are. On the left side, for Gwinnett County (the jurisdiction with by far the largest number of potential immigrant voters), Table 5 shows the number of naturalized U.S citizens from different parts of the world and the percentage they comprise of all (86,882) naturalized immigrants in Gwinnett. Asians clearly constitute the largest bloc of potential immigrant voters: their 38,613 naturalized U.S. citizens represent 44.4% of Gwinnett’s total naturalized immigrants. Adding together the three Latin American categories in Table 5 shows they comprise only 20.3% of naturalized U.S. citizens residing in Gwinnett. Immigrants from the remaining world regions are split fairly evenly, with each comprising roughly 11% to 14% of Gwinnett’s potential immigrant voters. The right side of Table 15 shows similar data for the entire six county Atlanta metro area. Naturalized Latino immigrants are 19.0% of metro Atlanta’s naturalized citizens, but Asian immigrants are double that percentage (38.5% of the region’s total naturalized), while those from the Caribbean, “Other Areas,” and Europe are 15%, 15%, and 12%, respectively.

Thus, data in Table 5 (like Table 4) contradict the news media’s portrayal of immigrant voters as largely Latino; in reality, metro Atlanta’s potential immigrant voters are more likely to be Asian than Latino. Three important related points should be made here, and will be expanded on below in the discussion section. First, although Asian immigrants form metro Atlanta’s largest regional-origin category of potential immigrant voters (38.5%), they constitute a plurality,

Table 5. Numbers and Percentages of Naturalized U.S. Citizens Who Are of Asian, Latino, and Other Nationalities in Gwinnett County and in Six-County Metro Atlanta Area.

Source: American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimate, 2010-2014. Table B05007.

Region	Gwinnett # Naturalized	% of all Gwinnett's Naturalized US Citizens	Region	6 ATL Metro Counties # Naturalized	% of all 6 Metro ATL Counties Naturalized US Citizens
Asian	38,613	44.4%	Asian	93,227	38.5%
Caribbean	11,947	13.8%	Caribbean	36,782	15.2%
European	9,596	11.0%	Other Areas	36,770	15.2%
Other Areas	9,155	10.5%	European	29,343	12.1%
South America	7,718	8.9%	South America	18,372	7.5%
Mexico	5,952	6.9%	Mexico	17,154	7.1%
Central America	3,901	4.5%	Central America	10,637	4.4%
Total	86,882	100%	Total	242,285	100.0%

not a majority, of Atlanta's potential immigrant voters. In other words, no single national-origin or regional-origin immigrant group makes up more than half of Atlanta's naturalized U.S. citizens. Instead, Atlanta's potential immigrant voters are a fragmented rather than a monolithic pool of political constituents. The second important point reinforces the first one: it is wrong to assume that "Asian" naturalized U.S. citizens represent a highly homogeneous bloc of potential immigrant voters. Instead, this category includes people from many different countries (with different languages, religions, and economies) and who are of diverse socio-economic status. Likewise, the "Caribbean," "European," "Latino," and "Other" regional categories are each internally heterogeneous, and to assume or conclude that they all have common political interests that unite them would be a mistake. In particular, the notion that in recent elections "the immigrant vote" in Atlanta has gone, or will go, overwhelmingly to Democratic candidates is rather dubious. Some of the diverging political leanings of immigrant voters, and some unifying interests, are described below. The third important point to remember is that, except in Gwinnett County, potential immigrant voters comprise a very small percentage of the total eligible electorate. In most Atlanta countywide elections, their small numbers would make immigrant voters a potentially significant swing-vote in a very close election, but, as previously noted, it may be difficult to get them to support the same candidate.

Before moving to the topic of immigrants' English language ability we should explain why it is so widely, but incorrectly, thought that most potential immigrant voters are Latinos. Simply put, the reason is that most people do not realize that a large percentage of Latinos in the U.S. are native-born rather than immigrants, and they do not know how low the naturalization rates are among foreign-born Latinos (as shown in Table 5).

Data in Table 6 clarify this matter. Line C shows the numbers of Latinos and Asians age 18 and over in the six county Atlanta metro area -- there are more than twice as many Latinos than Asians (485,026 vs. 240,332). However, although people often think these Latinos are predominantly foreign-born, in reality, as lines D and E of Table 6 show, Latinos are split almost equally between those who were born in the U.S. ("native-born") and those born in some other country. In fact, of the 485,026 Latinos in metro Atlanta, slightly more Latinos are native-born (243,351 or 50.2%) than immigrant (241,675 or 49.8%). Lines D and E show the situation for Asians is very different -- most of the 240,332 Asians in metro Atlanta are foreign-born (170,352 or 70.9%) and only 29.1% (69,980) were born in the United States. So, while there are 244,694 more Latinos than Asians in metro Atlanta, among those who are immigrants there are only 71,323 more Latinos than Asians. As previously seen (Table 5), Asian immigrants have a much higher rate of naturalization than do Latino immigrants. As a result, as

shown in Table 6 line G, among immigrants in Atlanta, there are almost twice as many Asian naturalized U.S. citizens age 18 and over (80,434) than Latino naturalized U.S. citizens age 18 and over (44,539). Of course, native-born Latinos and Asians (age 18 and over) are citizens with the right to vote, and metro Atlanta has many more U.S.-born Latinos than U.S.-born Asians (83,349 vs 25,622, line H of Table 6). So to sum up this matter: yes there are more Latino than Asian potential voters in metro Atlanta (Table 6 line I), but that is due to the larger number of native-born Latinos in the Atlanta region; if, however, the focus is just on the foreign-born, then there are many more Asian than Latino immigrant potential voters (Table 6 line G).

Table 6. Latino, Asian, and Immigrant Potential Voters in Six Metro Atlanta Counties (Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Fulton, Gwinnett, and Hall).

Source: American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimate 2010-2014. Tables B05003D and B05003I.

A	6 County Metro Area's Total Population	3,674,835	
B	6 County Metro Area's Total US Citizen Population Age 18 & over ("potential voters")	2,394,670	
		Latinos	Asians
C	Area's Latino and Asian Populations (Native-born & Foreign-born)	485,026	240,332
D	# Native-born Latinos and Asians	243,351	69,980
E	# Foreign-born Latinos and Asians	241,675	170,352
F	# Naturalized U.S. Citizens (Latinos and Asians)	46,815	83,135
G	# Naturalized US Citizens Age 18+ (Latino and Asian)	44,539	80,434
H	# Native-born Age 18+ (Latino and Asian)	83,349	25,622
I	# Potential Voters (lines G + H) (Latino & Asian)	127,888	106,056

Immigrants and English Language Ability

Immigrants' English-speaking ability varies dramatically across the Atlanta metro area and from one immigrant group to another. Table 7 shows, for the City of

Table 7. English Language Ability of Foreign-born Population in Metro Atlanta: Percent Who Speak *Only* English Plus Percent Who Speak English *Very Well*.

Source: American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimate 2010-2014. Table B06007.

	City of Atlanta	Clayton	Cobb	DeKalb
Foreign-born Population age 5 yrs. old & over	33,160	39,673	107,174	113,774
# and % of F-b who speak <i>only</i> English + F-b who speak English <i>Very Well</i>	21,999 66.3%	18,109 45.6%	63,496 59.2%	59,115 52.0%
	Fulton w/o City of Atlanta	Gwinnett	Hall	6 County Total
Foreign-born Population age 5 yrs. old & over	87,122	206,009	29,142	616,054
# and % of F-b who speak <i>only</i> English + F-b who speak English <i>Very Well</i>	54,672 62.8%	101,506 49.3%	10,192 35.0%	329,089 53.4%

Atlanta and six metro counties, the percentage of immigrants (age 5 and over) who are *very fluent* in English (i.e., they either speak only English or speak English very well). In the six county area as a whole, slightly more than half (53.4%) speak English very well or speak English only, but there is tremendous county to county variation. High English fluency ranges from only 35.0% of immigrants in Hall to a high of 66.3% in the City of Atlanta. In Clayton County,

immigrants' ability to speak English very well or speak only English is low (45.6%), but not as low as Hall County, and in Cobb it is high (59.2%), but not as high as either the City of Atlanta (66.3%) or the rest of Fulton County (62.8%). DeKalb (52.0%) and Gwinnett (49.3%) are intermediate in their percentage of immigrants who speak only English or speak English very well.

Much of this variation in English language fluency from one jurisdiction to another can be explained by two related facts: (1) each of these parts of Atlanta contain a fairly distinct mix of immigrants from different parts of the world (as was shown in Table 3), and (2) immigrants from different parts of the world vary greatly in their English language ability (see Table 8).

Table 8. English Language Ability of People in Households in which Other Languages Are Spoken: 6 County Atlanta Area

Source: American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimate 2010-2014. Table B16001.

Language Spoken in Home	# People (age 5+) in Homes Where a Language Other than English is Spoken	# and % Who Speak English "<u>Very Well</u>"	# and % Who Speak English "<u>Less Than Very Well</u>"
French, Patois, or Creole	37,444	29,063 77.6%	8,381 22.4%
Hindi/Gujarati	28,358	21,824 77.0%	6,534 23.0%
Arabic	10,526	7,609 72.3%	2,917 27.7%
African Languages	42,317	30,330 71.7%	11,987 28.3%
Russian	10,585	6,672 63.0%	3,913 37.0%
Spanish	408,690	213,070 52.1%	195,620 47.9%
Chinese	33,768	16,623 49.2%	17,145 50.8%
Korean	33,077	13,587 41.1%	19,490 58.9%
Vietnamese	32,169	11,202 34.8%	20,967 65.2%

Note: Unlike Table 7, this table does not include only the foreign-born, it also includes their U.S.-born children living with them.

Metro Atlanta's immigrants and their children usually live in households in which a language other than English is spoken. Table 8 classifies these immigrants and their children (age 5 and over) by the language spoken in their home (only those languages with 10,000 or more speakers are included). These language groups are listed by the percentage of speakers who (in addition to speaking their "mother tongue") speak English *very well* (ranked from highest to lowest).

Spanish, by far, is the most widely spoken foreign language, but only slightly more than half (52.1%) of those in households where it is spoken are also able to speak English very well. People in households where Chinese is spoken are a little less competent in English (49.2%), and immigrants or their children in homes in which the "mother tongues" are Korean and Vietnamese are much lower in their ability to speak English very well (41.1% and 34.8%, respectively).

Ability to speak English is quite high in households of some other language groups. In two groups more than three-quarters of them speak English very well: 77.6% of those who are from French-speaking parts of the world⁹ speak English very well; and 77.0% of those from India who speak Hindi and/or Gujarati also speak English very well. The high English language capability of immigrant households from India is not surprising, since English is one of India's official languages. More surprising, perhaps, is the fact that Arabic-speaking immigrant households have high percentages that speak English very well (72.3%), as do those in homes in which an African language is spoken (71.7%). Finally, speaking English very well is a little less common in households where Russian is spoken (63.0%).

Voting Rights Act and English Ability

Section 203 of the 1965 Voting Rights Act (as amended in 1975 and later years) requires that, under certain circumstances, local jurisdictions (e.g., county governments) must provide speakers of minority languages with election materials (e.g., voting notices, forms, instructions, ballots) in their native language. The Director of the Census Bureau is charged with the responsibility of identifying the political jurisdictions that meet the criteria specified in section 203 for minority language assistance related to voting. The Census Bureau's list (dated 10/13/2011, Federal Register) of places that qualify, for the 2016 election, under section 203 did not include any counties in Georgia. Some immigrant voting rights advocates contended that a review of more recent data would show

⁹ They are listed by the Census Bureau as speaking French, Patois, and/or Creole. This language category is an odd mix consisting mainly of people from Haiti, but also includes immigrants from France, the Canadian province of Quebec, and possibly even a few internal migrants from Louisiana who might speak Creole.

that the Spanish-speaking populations in Gwinnett County and Hall County did meet section 203 eligibility criteria and, therefore, election material in Spanish must be provided for Spanish-speaking voters in those two counties. They filed a law-suit seeking to have this done, but voting commission officials in both counties denied those claims and did not provide voting material in Spanish for the 2016 election.

The 2010-2014 ACS data will be used to evaluate the section 203 claim, but first we should indicate what minority population and minority language criteria are specified in section 203. Then we can evaluate whether or not Gwinnett and Hall counties meet those criteria. Section 203 lists several circumstances under which a county qualifies for the minority language requirement, but the most relevant one for this discussion is:

A county must provide language assistance to voters if [a] “more than 10,000 of the voting age citizens [who] are members of a single-language minority group do not ‘speak or understand English adequately enough to participate in the electoral process,’¹⁰ and [b] the rate of those citizens (specified in criteria [a]) who have not completed the fifth grade is higher than the national rate of voting age citizens who have not completed the fifth grade” (Federal Register 2011:63602).

The only “single-language minority group” in metro Atlanta that has more than 10,000 citizens residing in one county who have limited English proficiency are Spanish-speakers (see Social Explorer ACS 2010-2014 Table B16001). So speakers of other languages are not currently eligible for section 203 minority language assistance. Table 9 shows which metro Atlanta counties meet criteria [a] above for Spanish-speakers. The row showing the number of voting age Latino U.S. citizens with limited English proficiency indicates that only Gwinnett County, with 11,078 (U.S. native-born plus foreign-born) exceeds the criteria [a] required number (10,000 or more). Cobb County has the next largest number (6,046), but is well short of the amount required, as is Hall County (3,165). Despite Hall County’s large number of Latino immigrants, the very low percentage of them who have become naturalized U.S. citizens (noted above) means that they do not meet the section 203 criteria for minority language assistance with election materials.¹¹

¹⁰ The ACS question on ability to speak English is used to determine this; specifically, it is the number of voting age citizens who speak a foreign-language and speak English less than “very well.”

¹¹ Table 9 also contains a row showing the *percentage* of all U.S. citizens of voting age in a county who are Latinos with limited English proficiency. If any county has a percentage greater than 5%

Table 9. Extent of Limited English Proficiency Among Voting Age Latino U.S. Citizens in Metro Atlanta Counties.

Source: American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimate 2010-2014. Table B16008 and Special Census Bureau Tabulation.

	Clayton	Cobb	DeKalb
Total US Citizens 18+ yrs. old (all races/ethnicities)	167,502	472,509	474,711
# Latino Voting Age US Citizens	8,325	25,960	14,675
# Voting Age Latino Citizens with Limited English Proficiency	1,081 nb 1,423 fb 2,504 total	2,553 nb 3,493 fb 6,046 total	1,816 nb 1,569 fb 3,385 total
% of all US Citizens 18+ who are Latinos with Limited English Prof.	1.5%	1.3%	0.7%
	Fulton	Gwinnett	Hall
Total US Citizens 18+ yrs. old (all races/ethnicities)	671,838	493,919	114,191
# Latino Voting Age US Citizens	23,005	45,265	10,655
# Voting Age Latino Citizens with Limited English Proficiency	3,309 nb 2,389 fb 5,698 total	3,458 nb 7,620 fb <i>11,078 total</i>	1,089 nb 2,076 fb 3,165 total
% of all US Citizens 18+ who are Latinos with Limited English Prof.	0.8%	2.2%	2.8%

Only Gwinnett County's Spanish-speaking population meets section 203's criteria [a], but does it also meet criteria [b]? Gwinnett County would meet this criteria if its Latino citizens (age 18 and over) with limited English proficiency contains a higher percentage of people with less than five years of schooling than does the total US citizen population age 18 and over. Unfortunately, the Social Explorer ACS data tables do not contain information that allows an exact comparison of the educational attainment of these two specific populations. However, it does provide data that permit a tentative conclusion to be drawn.

that would be an alternative way of meeting criteria [a], but no county in metro Atlanta reaches the 5% level.

First, with regard to percentages of people (age 25 and over) with less than five years of education: for the total U.S. population the rate is 2.2%, and for the total Gwinnett County population the rate is 2.5% (Social Explorer Table B15003). It is very likely that the percentage of U.S. *citizens* with less than five years of schooling (as specified in criteria [b]) is *lower* than the 2.2% found for the total U.S. population (which includes non-citizen immigrants and temporary workers residing in the U.S.). On the other hand, it is quite likely that in Gwinnett County the percentage of *Latino* U.S. citizens with limited English proficiency who have less than five years of schooling is higher than 2.5% (i.e., the percentage of Gwinnett's *total* population that has less than five years of education). If that is true, then criteria [b] of section 203 is met.

An additional educational attainment comparison between the general U.S. population and Gwinnett County's Latinos is useful, but it is based on the percentage of people with less than a high school degree rather than percentages with less than five years of education. In the total U.S. population (age 25 and over), 13.7% has less than a high school education (Social Explorer Table T25). In contrast, 40.7% of Gwinnett County Latinos (age 25 and over) have less than a high school education (Social Explorer Table C15002I). Clearly, Gwinnett County Latinos have lower educational attainment than the general U.S. population has. While that does not definitively prove that Gwinnett meets criteria [b] of section 203 (which requires the percentage without a fifth grade education to be higher among Gwinnett's Latino citizens with limited English ability than it is among U.S. citizens in general), it suggests that it is quite likely that Gwinnett meets criteria [b].

As a post-script to this section, in December 2016 (two months after this paper was submitted for review and one month after the 2016 elections), the Census Bureau announced that Gwinnett County (but not Hall County) did meet Voting Rights Act section 206 criteria that require local governments to provide voting materials in Spanish in future elections (Estep 2016; Federal Register 2016). This validates the analysis provided in the preceding paragraphs.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this section we summarize and expand on the main points presented above. Our first finding was that despite the City of Atlanta's claims about being an international city and Mayor Reed's welcoming words to immigrants, the City's foreign-born population is relatively small (only about 8% of the City's total population). Most immigrants, by far, live in suburban areas. In fact, the foreign-born population is more suburbanized than is the native-born population. Moreover, potential immigrant voters in the City of Atlanta are a smaller percentage (only 2.9%) of the total electorate (U.S. citizens age 18 or over) than

in any of the six counties studied here. In contrast, Gwinnett County has the largest number of immigrants and in Gwinnett they comprise the highest percentage of any county's potential voters (17.0%).

This pattern is not unique to Atlanta. Larger immigrant populations in suburbs is a growing trend in many U.S. metropolitan areas (Waldron 2006; Wilson & Svajlenka 2014). Researchers contend that the reasons are the availability of lower-cost housing in the suburbs and the closer proximity (or better access) to jobs that suburban areas provide. In Atlanta's case, within the city limits two housing trends (both related to ongoing gentrification) are hurting low- and moderate-income immigrants' chances of finding affordable housing. The first is the tearing down of old apartment complexes with low rents that were being lived in by immigrants. Perhaps the best example is the demolition of over a thousand apartments around the Lindbergh MARTA station. Many Latino immigrants had been living there, but the new apartments and condominiums built there are too expensive for them. A second, and related, trend is that in the City of Atlanta most developers have shown a strong preference for building high cost housing. A recent study finds the number of low-cost housing units in the City of Atlanta has been declining by about 4% per year and over 90% of the apartment units built from 2012 to 2014 have been luxury units (Immergluck 2016). These housing cost trends make it hard for any immigrants except those with high incomes to live in the City of Atlanta.

Based on the data presented here, what seems apparent (but has not been recognized by researchers or city officials) is that a substantial portion of the City of Atlanta's foreign-born population consists of students attending its universities (e.g., Georgia Tech, Atlanta University, Georgia State University). They can avoid the lack of affordable housing in the City's private market by living in dorms or other student housing, or by going in with several roommates to split the rent of more expensive apartments or houses. The fact that the City of Atlanta has the highest percentage of foreign-born who are highly proficient in English (Table 7) supports the idea that many of them are university students, as does the very low naturalization rate of the foreign-born in the City of Atlanta. Moreover, a low percentage of the City of Atlanta's foreign-born have lived in the U.S. for ten years or more and a high percentage have lived here only since 2010, which is consistent with the idea that many of these foreign-born residents are cohorts of students who arrive, spend several years attending the universities in the city, then graduate and either move back home or migrate to areas outside the City of Atlanta.

We also found that Mexicans, by far, are the largest immigrant nationality group in metropolitan Atlanta, with Asians Indians a distant second. But several counties do have rather distinct profiles of immigrant nationalities. For instance,

the largest foreign-born nationalities in Clayton (Mexico, Vietnam, Haiti, Jamaica, and Nigeria) are very different from those of Cobb (Mexico, India, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Brazil), and Gwinnett is unusual in having such a large Korean immigrant community (almost 17,000).

Focusing on “potential immigrant voters,” we find only in Gwinnett County is there currently a large number and percentage of foreign-born naturalized citizens of voting age (specifically 83,975, or 17% of Gwinnett’s total citizens of voting age). The numbers and percentages for Gwinnett and other Atlanta metro counties will rise as more immigrants become naturalized, but for now our findings imply that immigrant political candidates and activists cannot rely just on immigrant voters to be successful, they also need to appeal to and gain support from many non-immigrants. Researchers should monitor the success of those efforts. In addition, two other relevant and highly charged political issues for activists and researchers in the future are: (a) what causes (or discourages) immigrants to register to vote (and which political party do they sign up with in greatest numbers when they register)?; and (b) in which voting districts do the largest numbers of immigrant voters live, and are voting district boundary lines aligned (or modified) in a way that maximizes or minimizes the ability of immigrant voters to make a meaningful impact on the election?

With regard to item (a), during the intensely partisan 2016 Presidential campaign (in which immigration has been a high priority issue) racial/ethnic minority citizens (including naturalized immigrants) have registered to vote at a higher rate than whites, especially in metropolitan Atlanta counties. In October 2016, minority registered voters had increased by about 30% in Gwinnett and Cobb, by almost 22% in DeKalb, and by 24% in Fulton and Clayton compared to October 2015. In comparison, newly registered white voters rose by less than 20%. Hispanic voter registration has been especially high. For example, in Cobb County their number of registered voters is 46% higher in October 2016 than it was in October 2015. Much of that is attributed to Hispanics’ anger over Republican nominee Donald Trump’s campaign statements. There was speculation that if they vote as a bloc they might defeat Cobb County’s incumbent Sheriff (Republican Neil Warren) whose support of the 287g program¹² is unpopular with many Hispanics (Wickert 2016c; Lutz 2016). However, as noted above, while there is some overlap among “Hispanic voters,” “minority voters,” and “immigrant voters,” we should not equate or confound these three categories.

¹² 287g is a voluntary program in which local police or sheriff departments agree to cooperate with the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency, usually by checking the legal status of people they arrest, detaining those in the U.S. illegally and notifying ICE to take them into custody (possibly to initiate the deportation process). President Trump’s executive orders issued in January, 2017 call for this program’s expansion.

While a majority of each leans towards the Democratic Party, there are issues that divide them and a significant number of immigrant candidates and voters support the Republican Party. We elaborate on this below.

In regards to item (b), in August 2016 minority rights organizations¹³ brought a lawsuit against Gwinnett County. They contend the county School Board's voting district boundary lines and the County Commission district boundaries violate the Voting Rights Act because they divide minority voters into several districts in which they are small in number, thereby making it difficult for them to elect a representative of their choice. The plaintiffs note that although Latinos, Asians, and Blacks make up over half of Gwinnett County's population, no one from those groups has been elected to a seat on the County Commission or the School Board (about a dozen candidates from those groups have run for those offices, but none have been successful). They propose that boundary lines be redrawn so that racial-ethnic minorities comprise a numerical majority in one or more of these districts in order to make a candidate of their preference more "electable" (Wickert 2016d, 2016e). The plaintiffs' coalition is broader than just immigrants, but it does support and advocate on immigrants' behalf on several issues. This illustrates the point that if immigrants in Gwinnett County (where they comprise a larger number of potential voters than any other county) must ally with other sympathetic groups to benefit politically, then the need to work for the support of other non-immigrant voters is even more necessary for immigrants in other metro Atlanta counties.

Another important finding presented above was that despite the widespread impression that most potential immigrant voters in metro Atlanta are Latinos, actually there are about twice as many Asian potential immigrant voters as Latino potential immigrant voters. While the media focus on a recent sharp surge in the number of Latino registered voters and describe it as a counter-response to Donald Trump's anti-Mexican and anti-immigrant statements (Lutz 2016; Wickert 2016f), we should recognize two things. First, many of the newly registered Latino voters are native-born U.S. citizens of Latino ancestry rather than immigrants. Second, less well-publicized efforts to encourage Asian Americans (immigrants and native-born U.S. citizens) to register to vote have been fairly successful (in metro Atlanta the group Asian Americans Advancing

¹³ The lawsuit against Gwinnett County is being brought by the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law on behalf of the Georgia State Conference of the NAACP and the Georgia Association of Latino Elected Officials (GALEO).

Justice-Atlanta and the Center for Pan-Asian Community Services have taken the lead on this).¹⁴

The racial-ethnic and national-origin diversity of potential immigrant voters suggests there will be no monolithic “immigrant vote” and that a variety of political ideologies and candidates will receive immigrant support. For instance, immigrants’ differing religions may lead them to support different candidates. This was the case in Clarkston’s 2013 mayoral election, where an Asian refugee said she is Christian and would not vote for the Somali refugee candidate who is Muslim (PBS 2014). Also, as is the case with native-born citizens, differences in occupational careers shape political leanings. Many immigrants in Atlanta own and operate businesses and these commercial entrepreneurs tend to be conservative and support the Republicans.¹⁵ They might favor a candidate like Victor Armendariz (U.S.-born child of a Mexican immigrant), a Republican who ran against African American Democratic incumbent Hank Johnson for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives (district 4, covering parts of DeKalb, Rockdale, and Henry counties). However, Armendariz lost by a wide margin (24% to 76%). On the other hand, a substantial number of immigrants work in health and social service careers. They are often more liberal and support Democratic candidates. So do many other immigrants who support Democratic proposals to provide undocumented immigrants with paths to legal status and citizenship. But, as noted above, immigrants running for political office in metro Atlanta must seek broader support than just their immigrant communities (with the possible exception of Clarkston¹⁶) and find ways to build coalitions across group lines.¹⁷

This can be demonstrated by looking at the three immigrants who, for the past few election cycles, have won election to the House of Representatives in Georgia’s state legislature (General Assembly). All three are from Gwinnett County districts. One is David S. Casas (district 107), who was born in Spain to Cuban parents; his parents and he became U.S. citizens in 1985 and he was

¹⁴ Although the voter registration drive was successful (several thousand newly registered), actual voter turnout on election day 2016 by the newly registered was lower than what was expected.

¹⁵ As owners of small or medium sized businesses they favor open international trade policies, low taxes, and oppose policies that put more regulations or higher costs on their businesses (e.g., higher minimum wage, Affordable Care Act).

¹⁶ Recently Clarkston’s immigrants and refugees have gone from almost entirely apolitical and uninvolved to quite active both as voters and candidates. In 2013, refugees ran for political offices in Clarkston for the first time. Ibrahim Sufi (Somalian) ran for mayor, but lost, while Ahmed Hassan (also Somalian) won a seat on the Clarkston City Council. In 2015 two more immigrants ran for seats on Clarkston City Council, with Awet Eyasu (Eritrean) winning and Birendra Dhakal (Bhutanese) narrowly losing.

¹⁷ For information on efforts at building coalitions between Latinos and African Americans, see Alvarado & Jaret (2009).

elected in November 2002. The second is Pedro “Pete” Marin (district 96) also elected in November 2002 (but since he was born in Puerto Rico he has always been a U.S. citizen, so officially he is not an immigrant, though he has been very supportive of immigrant rights legislation and socially many people view him as one). The third is B.J. Pak (district 108), who emigrated from South Korea at age 9 and was elected in November, 2010. Contrary to the widespread belief that immigrants active in politics all are in the Democratic Party, two of these three (Casas and Pak) are Republicans. In each case, however, these politicians have not campaigned simply as “immigrant candidates.” Instead they have taken an interest in a range of public issues, and while both immigrant Republicans espouse conservative positions, they have avoided ideological extremism and gained fairly broad constituent support.

Like Casas and Pak, other immigrants active in Georgia Republican politics are *not* in its most ideologically conservative or partisan wing (e.g., Tea-Party). The situation of Baoky Vu, an immigrant from Vietnam, now living in DeKalb County, is illustrative. An active Republican, Mr. Vu was selected to be a GOP elector in the 2016 Electoral College (pledged to vote for the Republican Presidential candidate). But Vu found Donald Trump so distasteful a candidate that he said he would write in another person’s name instead of voting for him. He was harshly criticized as disloyal by Trump supporters and, under pressure, he resigned from his role as a Republican elector for the Electoral College (Galloway 2016).

In 2016 Rep. Pak decided, after serving for three terms, not to run for reelection. His departure caused the Georgia House’s immigrant representatives to swing to the Democratic side. Tokhir Radjabov (an immigrant from Russia who came to the U.S. at age 15), ran for Pak’s seat in district 108, and he is a Democrat. He faced a strong Republican candidate in Clay Cox, and lost a close election 47% to Cox’s 53% (by less than 1,200 votes). Republican incumbent David Casas was unopposed for his seat representing House district 107 in Gwinnett. However, in 2016 another immigrant was elected to Georgia’s House of Representatives. Brenda Lopez (who immigrated at age 5 with her family from Mexico) was the Democratic candidate in Gwinnett’s district 99 (currently the only majority Latino district in Georgia) and she ran unopposed. She is the first Latina ever elected to Georgia’s General Assembly. Pete Marin, the Democratic incumbent in House district 96 was re-elected by a wide margin (65% to 35%). Also of note, in the November 2016 election, Samuel Park, who is the son of Korean immigrants narrowly beat Republican incumbent Valerie Clark by 460 votes (51% to 49%) in House district 101 (Gwinnett County), and he is the first openly gay man to be elected to the General Assembly. Analyzing Atlanta’s immigrant (and second generation) politicians and their stances on public issues

(as well as those of their supporters) is an interesting and important topic for future research.

Finally, in looking at the English language proficiency of immigrants in Atlanta, we noted that the ACS data (based only on self-reported ability to speak English) are very limited, if not inadequate for the purposes they are often used. Future research should strive to obtain better data on English language ability. While acknowledging these data limitations, clearly some immigrant groups as a whole are doing much better than others in terms of English competency. Specifically, those from French-speaking places, from India, and from Arabian and African countries have the best English speaking proficiency. Lastly, in checking to see if the Voting Rights Act's section 203 applies to any minority language group in metro Atlanta, the data suggest that Spanish-speakers in Gwinnett County do meet section 203 criteria, and recent affirmation of this by the U.S. Census Bureau strengthens the claim that they should be provided with election materials in their native language.

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