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The Legal Mexican Immigrant's Path to United States Citizenship

Esther G. Herrera Martinez
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Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

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Esther G. Herrera Martínez

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

The Legal Mexican Immigrant's Path to United States Citizenship

by

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MPhil, Walden University, 2021

MPA, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, 2012

BA, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy & Administration

Walden University

May 2024

Abstract

Economic instability and social conditions faced by immigrants from Latin American countries, including Mexico, lead them to immigrate to the United States. However, in the United States, Latin American immigrants encounter conditions that prevent them from effectively participating in society. Although most legal immigrants in the United States are from Mexico, Mexicans naturalize at slower rates than legal immigrants from other countries around the world. Using the social exclusion theory and the modern democracy theory of equal rights, this phenomenological qualitative approach sought to explore the lived experiences of Legal Permanent Residents of Mexican origin that influenced their decision to pursue United States citizenship. Purposeful and convenient participant interviews of legal Mexican immigrants seeking citizenship services at a nonprofit organization in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas were used to shed light on the barriers and facilitators that led them to seek, or not seek, U.S. citizenship. Data saturation was reached after conducting 16 open-ended interviews. Themes and codes that emerged from the data analysis confirmed the literature identifying limited English proficiency and low social economic status as the most significant barriers to naturalization. The data also confirmed the vital role non-profit organizations play in facilitating the naturalization journey. The data further identified the need for more resources to turn barriers into facilitators for seeking U.S. citizenship. Supporting the U.S citizenship journey has several implications for positive social change including a sense of security against deportation and discrimination, increased civil rights and benefits, and a diverse labor force.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to the 11 million undocumented in the United States who are still waiting for a pathway to citizenship. I hope this work sheds light on the intricacies of the broken immigration system we have in the United States and inspires others to advocate for inclusive systemic policy change.

I also dedicate this work to the many people- family, friends, and the staff of La Union del Pueblo Entero, LUPE- who guided and supported my own process in seeking U.S. citizenship. I am grateful for the privilege of being a naturalized United States citizen, born in Mexico.

Lastly, I dedicate this work to my strong maternal figures -mom, tías, mentors- who have nursed my lifelong pursuit of higher education. It takes a village to succeed, and I am extremely grateful for those who have been part of my doctoral degree journey.

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I would also like to acknowledge and thank the staff and members at ARISE Adelante (ARISE) not just for agreeing to participate in my research project, but for allowing me to learn more about myself and my community over the past several years. It is an honor and privilege to work with and alongside a group of people so committed to improving the living conditions of low-income, immigrant, and often disenfranchised communities.

Lastly, all the glory be to God who continues to provide me with the tools to carry out the purpose He has for my life.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

As per Yep et al. (2014), “naturalization” is the process by which foreign-born individuals become United States citizens (p. 272). Passel (2007) identified that naturalization comes with many civic, social, economic, and political rights, including voting, running for public office, eligibility for all state and federal employment, and accessing public benefits (p. 1). Yep et al. further identified that naturalization secures an individual’s right to live in the United States, travel freely to other countries, and sponsor family members to live in the United States. Applying for citizenship, as per Woroby and Osborn (2015), is not required by immigrants seeking legal permanent resident status in the United States (p. 1). In fact, naturalization is a legal immigrant’s voluntary decision once they become eligible for citizenship. However, Woroby and Osborn further identified that legal permanent residents (LPR) in the United States, especially those of Mexican origin, historically naturalize at lower rates than immigrants from other countries (p. 3).

This study presents a phenomenological qualitative research plan to explore and discover the lived experiences of LPRs from Mexico as they decide to become, or not become, U.S. citizens. The study focused on a group of people who are members of ARISE Adelante (ARISE) located in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV), Texas.

The following section includes some studies that have examined the experiences faced by legal immigrants of Mexican origin who sought United States citizenship. The literature review in Chapter 2 includes other studies in more detail.

Passel (2007) identified several possible explanations for the differences in naturalization rates among different legal immigrant groups (p. 10). As per Passel, the rate of naturalization of LPRs is affected by the country and region of their origin; their race and ethnicity; English language proficiency; educational levels; gender; and income and poverty levels (pp. 10-13). Similarly, Gonzalez-Barrera et al. (2013) found that 26% of those who have not sought naturalization identified lack of English proficiency, and other personal barriers, as contributing factors; and an additional 18% identified the financial cost of naturalization and other administrative barriers as factors (p. 6). Gonzalez-Barrera et al. further identified that 93% of Mexican immigrants eligible to naturalize would if they did not experience barriers (p. 6).

The literature found was predominantly quantitative, and primarily focused on Latin Americans as a whole, and/or areas where there is not a predominantly Mexican population. Nonetheless, the various sources found helped formulate the research study, questions, and interview tools. The next section will provide more detail on the research problem being examined, the importance of addressing it, and the implications for positive social change.

Background of the Problem

This section includes an overview of the studies that have identified barriers experienced by LPRs seeking U.S. naturalization, a discussion on the evolution of U.S. naturalization laws, and definitions for the terminology used in this study.

Factors Affecting Naturalization

Woroby (2015) argued that there have been attempts to measure the determinants of naturalization rates in the United States (p. 443). Such attempts looked at personal characteristics such as age, gender, and marital status; socioeconomic characteristics such as occupation, years of schooling, and knowledge of the receiving country's language; country of origin; and structural and institutional factors such as recognition of dual citizenship as determinants of naturalization.

Gonzalez-Barrera et al. (2013) through a nationwide survey of legal Hispanic immigrants conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center, identified that most foreign-born naturalized citizens were from Mexico, accounting for roughly 15% of all naturalizations since 2000 or 3.9 million out of 12.0 million (p. 5). However, Woroby and Osborn (2015) found that about 33% of all legal immigrants in the United States were naturalized in 1970, while that rate has fallen below 50% in 2018 (p. 3). According to Gonzalez-Barrera et al., of the 5.4 million legal immigrants from Mexico who are eligible for naturalization, 36% seek naturalization, compared to 61% of legal immigrants from other Latin American and Caribbean countries, and 68% for all non-Mexican legal immigrants during the same period (p. 7).

Passel (2007) identified several possible explanations for the differences in naturalization rates among legal immigrant groups (p. 10). According to Passel, the rate of naturalization of LPRs is correlated to the country and region of their origin; race and ethnicity; English language proficiency; educational levels; gender; and income and poverty levels (pp. 10-13). As per DeSipio (2011), those who naturalize tended to be

older, have higher levels of education, higher levels of income, and were able to speak, read, and write English (p. 1197).

According to DeSipio (2011), legal immigrants from countries closer to the United States were slower to naturalize than legal immigrants from countries that were more distant (p. 1197). In fact, Gonzalez-Barrera et al. (2013), identified that the geographic proximity of Mexico to the United States contributed to Mexican legal immigrants' maintenance of close ties to their home country than legal immigrants from other countries and thus created a reluctance to naturalize (p. 12). Additionally, Gonzalez-Barrera et al. identified that not all legal Mexican immigrants were aware that dual citizenship is allowed in the United States since 1998 (p. 12). Woroby and Osborn (2015) suggested that a large network, or clustering, of legal immigrants in an area affected naturalization rates (p. 17). Woroby and Osborn further argued that clusters of Mexican-born immigrants negatively affected the rate of legal immigrants seeking citizenship (p. 17). Woroby and Osborn's finding is consistent with Gonzalez-Barrera et al. in that naturalization rates continue to be the lowest among legal Mexican immigrants in the United States (p. 17).

Most Significant Barriers

Most of the literature identified limited English proficiency and low economic status as the most significant barriers to naturalization. Similarly, a survey of LPRs in Texas conducted by Freeman et al. (2002, as cited in Pastor et al., 2013, p. 2) found that 20% of LPRs who had not yet sought naturalization identified cost as a prohibitive factor.

Freeman et al.'s study also found that about 16% identified the lack of English proficiency (p. 2).

Yep et al. (2014) identified that the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) altered the naturalization exam (p. 272). As per Yep et al., the assessment goals of the naturalization exam shifted from memorization of facts to acculturation and assimilation including increased mastery of the English language (p. 272). Pickus (2014) argued that the language requirements for naturalization are relatively minimal (p. 160). Pickus further identified that the exam requires 6 out of 10 questions to be answered orally from a list of 100 questions, and 4 out of 10 to be answered in written form (p. 160). Woroby (2015) however, argued that proving language proficiency through the written exam had a high failure rate (p. 443).

As Pickus (2014) further pointed out, the United States did not require, nor provide, civic courses for naturalization preparation (p. 160). As per DeSipio (2011), the United States did very little to promote naturalization and left the decision to naturalize to individuals (p. 1195). Pickus suggested that any broader strategy for assisting those seeking to naturalize was largely dependent on the work of local governments and nonprofit agencies (p. 160).

As per Pastor et al. (2013), the large increase in fees for immigration services in 2007 had a negative impact on the rate of naturalization, especially among low-income LPRs (p. 1). Pastor et al. further identified that new programs promptly emerged to address this barrier, including innovative micro-loans programs to help low-income legal immigrants (p. 1). Pastor et al. further suggested that the ultimate way to encourage

increased naturalization rates was through absolute fee reductions, or changes in the immigration service fees structure (p. 1).

Borrego and Johnson III (2012) identified that heavy immigration trends starting in the 1980's increased the proportions of racial minorities in the United States (p. 5). As per Gonzalez-Barrera et al. (2013), in 2012, 36% of legal immigrants from Mexico who were eligible for naturalization, did seek naturalization, compared to 61% of legal immigrants from other Latin American and Caribbean countries, and 68% for all non-Mexican legal immigrants (p. 7). This study sought to understand the lived experiences of LPRs from Mexico who reside in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, as they decided to become or not become U.S. citizens.

Rio Grande Valley (RGV), Texas

The RGV consists of 4 counties including Hidalgo, Cameron, Starr, and Willacy Counties, Texas, and a population of over 1.3 million (Rio Grande Valley of Texas, 2016). According to the U.S. Census in 2008 (as cited in Rio Grande Valley of Texas," 2016), the population in the four counties is predominantly of Mexican origin, consisting of 90% in Hidalgo County, Texas; 86% in Cameron County, Texas; 97% in Starr County, Texas; and 86% in Willacy County, Texas.

ARISE Adelante

The mission of the community-based program, ARISE Adelante (ARISE) (2019a), is "to aid communities by helping residents identify life goals and providing resources to help them reach those goals on their own" (para. 1). ARISE has four centers located in the Hidalgo County, Texas colonias of Las Milpas, South Tower, Muñiz and

Hargill in South Texas (para. 3). Each ARISE center responds to the specific needs of the community with the support of the Catholic Sisters of Mercy of South Central and the Catholic Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word (ARISE, 2019a, para. 1). ARISE (2019b) community members and staff identified adult programs as an area of high interest (para. 4). ARISE provides community members the opportunity “to learn to drive, make crafts, prepare for citizenship exams, and learn to live healthier lives” (para. 4). ARISE (2019a) does not charge for participation in their programs but simply ask the women participants “to do *servicio contribuido* (contributed service) once a week (para. 3). The participation in the programs ARISE (2019b) offers helps women facilitate communication and social skills (para. 4) and provides them (2019a) a sense of dignity that they are not just receiving charity but also contributing to the change in their community (para. 3).

Problem Statement

In the United States, Latin American immigrants, including Mexicans, encounter conditions that prevent them from effectively participating in society. Although most legal immigrants in the United States are from Mexico, Mexicans naturalize at slower rates than legal immigrants from other countries around the world. These factors describe the problem researched and explored in this study.

Behrman et al. (2003, as cited in Velazquez, 2013, p. 67) argued that the economic instability faced by immigrants from Latin American countries, including Mexico, creates “social exclusion” in their home country. Queen and Gruener (2001, as cited in Velazquez, 2013, p. 69) further argued that social conditions do not change for

many Latin American and Mexican immigrants when they immigrate to the United States. In fact, Queen and Gruener further argued that Latin American and Mexican immigrants encounter conditions that prevent them from effectively assimilating into American society. Behrman et al. defined “social exclusion” as “the denial of equal access to opportunities imposed by certain groups of society upon others.” Behrman et al. further identified that, “social exclusion” occurs under two conditions: “(1) social relations occur within groups; and (2) access to opportunities for socioeconomic advancement is contingent upon group association.” Behrman et al. identified group association can include several key characteristics, including “religious beliefs, geographic location, ethnic origin, race, nationality, socioeconomic or legal status.” Legal Mexican immigrants residing in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, face various facets of social exclusion contingent to country of origin, socioeconomic status, and geographic location.

While most legal immigrants in the United States are from Mexico, Mexicans naturalize at slower rates than legal immigrants from other countries around the world. As stated earlier on page 3 of this study, Gonzalez-Barrera et al. (2013), through a nationwide survey of legal Hispanic immigrants conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center, identified that most foreign-born naturalized citizens were from Mexico, accounting for roughly 15% of all naturalizations since 2000, or 3.9 million out of 12.0 million (p. 5). Gonzalez-Barrera et al., further identified of the 5.4 million legal immigrants from Mexico eligible for naturalization, only 36% seek naturalization, compared to 61% of

legal immigrants from other Latin American and Caribbean countries, and 68% for all non-Mexican legal immigrants (p. 7).

Majma et al. (2019) argued that many recurring barriers to naturalization included: “cost, difficulty in mastering the English language, the information gap between the complex requirements and legal immigrants’ understanding of them, and concern over losing country of origin citizenship” (pp. 9-10). Majma et al. (2019) further identified the increased fear of anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric produced by the Trump administration as a new barrier (p. 10). As a result, advocacy groups, state and municipal governments invested in increasing naturalization rates have taken a central role in combating the Trump administration’s policies (p. 10). These efforts include outreach to legal immigrant communities, running low-cost nonprofit-led citizenship workshops; offering free ESL classes; and working to dispel anti-immigration misinformation and fear (Majma et al., 2019, p. 10).

Purpose of the Study

Creswell (2009) identified that the purpose statement in qualitative research as something that communicates information about the phenomenon being explored, the involved participants, and the site used for the study (p. 111). The purpose of a qualitative study tends to focus on a single phenomenon and does not seek to explore the relationship between two or more variables. The phenomenon being studied in this research is “citizenship” or “naturalization”.

The purpose of this study was to increase the understanding of the lived experiences of legal Mexican immigrants as they contemplated and sought to become

naturalized citizens of the United States through the lenses of the social exclusion theory and the modern democracy theory of equal rights. A phenomenological qualitative approach of the life experiences of legal Mexican immigrants living in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, shed light on the barriers and facilitators that led them to seek or not seek citizenship.

The literature review in Chapter 2 will provide an understanding of immigration trends to the U.S. and the State of Texas, and the evolution of immigration laws. The literature review will also discuss barriers and facilitators of naturalization. Chapter 3 includes the research methods, and Appendix A includes the specific interview questions used for data collection in this research.

Theoretical Foundations of the Study

According to Creswell (2009) “theories” are an important factor in science and scholarly research (p. 49). Creswell further pointed out that while a theory is commonly used to test a common idea, it takes on a different role within quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods research approaches (p. 49). According to Grant and Osaloo (2014), the “theoretical framework” is the “blueprint” for the dissertation inquiry and serves to guide support for the study and provides the structure to define the approach to the dissertation (p. 13). Grant and Osaloo further identified that the theoretical framework is composed of a selected theory or theories that explain how the researcher understands and plans to research the topic (p. 13). The theoretical framework incorporates relevant concepts and definitions from that theory into the proposed research topic.

Creswell (2009) further identified that qualitative studies rely on “inductive theories” (p. 61). According to Creswell inductive researchers seek to give a name to recurring events or behaviors that have not yet been identified or labeled (p. 61). Creswell further identified that qualitative researchers are increasingly using a “theoretical lens” that provides an advocacy perspective on questions of gender, class, and race (p. 62.). According to Creswell, the “theoretical lens” influences how data is collected and analyzed and provides a call to action (p. 62). My study fell within the advocacy/participatory paradigm of research within the social sciences because it addressed social concerns and the marginalization of Latino immigrants, more specifically legal Mexican immigrants, from political participation. I sought to explore citizenship participation to better understand the perceived barriers and facilitators that led legal immigrants to seek, or not seek, United States citizenship. The data sought to identify actionable insights, recommendations, and tools to use at each step in the naturalization journey for other legal Mexican immigrants in the Rio Grande Valley.

The following sections will look at the social exclusion theory and the modern democracy theory of equal rights as two advocacy/participatory theories which guided my research study.

Social Exclusion Theory

Behrman et al. (2003, as cited in Velazquez, 2013, p. 67) argued that the economic instability faced by immigrants from Latin American countries, including Mexico, creates “social exclusion” in their home country. Velazquez (2013) further identified that the United States is often the destination for immigrants in search for better

living conditions even if that involves risking their lives (p. 68). Queen and Gruener (2001, as cited in Velazquez, 2013, p. 69) further argued that social conditions do not change for many Latin American and Mexican immigrants when they immigrate to the United States. In fact, Queen and Gruener found that Latin American and Mexican immigrants encounter conditions that prevent them from effectively participating in society.

Behrman et al. (2003, as cited in Velazquez, 2013, p. 67) defined “social exclusion” as “the denial of equal access to opportunities imposed by certain groups of society upon others.” Behrman et al. further identified that, “social exclusion” occurs under two conditions: “(1) social relations occur within groups; and (2) access to opportunities for socioeconomic advancement is contingent upon group association.” Behrman et al. identified group association can include several key characteristics, including “religious beliefs, geographic location, ethnic origin, race, nationality, socioeconomic or legal status.”

Velazquez (2013) identified immigration from Mexico and Latin America as a topic of current political and social debate (p. 67). Velazquez further argued the influx of cultures has developed diverse dynamics resulting from immigration to the United States society (p. 83). Velazquez also identified that the social dynamics were changing more rapidly than society’s capacity to adapt and take advantage of the opportunities presented by immigration which have the potential of negative effects (p. 83). Velazquez argued that the immigration debate was “often fueled by distorted public perception about crime, terrorism, drug trafficking, and other offenses allegedly committed by [Mexican]

immigrants” (p. 67). Velazquez further argued Mexican immigrants were often conveyed in the media as “illegal aliens who sneak into the United States to commit crime, steal jobs, and create havoc” (p. 67). Alternately, but not as commonly, Mexican immigrants were “portrayed as hard working, earnest providers for their families who are pursuing the American Dream” (p. 67). In fact, Velazquez argued that Americans were rarely exposed to images or information portraying the risks and vulnerabilities experienced by Mexicans, including Mexican Americans, legal Mexican immigrants, and undocumented Mexican immigrants living in the United States (p. 67).

Legal Mexican immigrants residing in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, face various facets of social exclusion contingent to country of origin, socioeconomic status, and geographic location. This study sought to increase the understanding of the lived experiences of Mexican immigrants, specifically legal Mexican immigrants, as they contemplated and sought U.S. citizenship. The study also sought to identify actionable insights, recommendations, and tools to use at each step in the naturalization journey. Supporting the U.S citizenship journey has several positive implications including a sense of security against deportation, increased civil rights and benefits, and the right to vote in a representative government. Velazquez (2013) urged policymakers to develop inclusive initiatives to promote legal immigrants’ integration to life in the United States (p. 84).

Modern Democracy Theory of Equal Rights

Barber (2004) identified that there were many implicit and explicit values embedded in the beliefs of modern democracy such as “equal rights,” “liberty” (freedom), and “majority rule” (pp. 3-5). According to Post (2006), the people of a

democracy are entitled to “equal” protection of their persons, possessions, and rights; have “equal” opportunity to pursue their lives and careers; and have “equal” rights of participation (pp. 27-28). As Borrego and Johnson III (2012) pointed out, at the time of the enactment of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, the proportion of minorities in the U.S. was small (p.5). However, Borrego and Johnson III identified that heavy immigration dating back to the 1980’s has increased the proportion of people of color and racial minorities in the United States (p. 5). As per Post, the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* intended to promote equality for minorities in the U.S. then, and still holds true in a modern democracy (p. 27-28).

Striving for equal rights and political participation has a long history in the United States. Cantrell (2013) attempted to remedy the failure of populist historians to document the challenges of populism in South Texas (p. 664). Cantrell also shed light on the largest insurgent political movement in U.S. history of “equal rights to all and special treatment for none” (p. 665). Cantrell analyzed the civil rights case *In re Rodriguez* which resulted in the legal affirmation of civil rights to vote of Texas Mexicans in 1897 (p. 663). Rodriguez, a native of Guanajuato, Mexico, who had lived in Texas for over ten-years, sought U.S. citizenship to vote (p. 663). While Rodriguez’s eligibility for naturalization could not be determined because he was neither “white” nor “black,” Judge Maxey, presiding in the case, affirmed that neither race nor education were determinants of citizenship, citing the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and the history of the Texas acquisition (Cantrell, 2013, p. 663-667).

Furthermore, Borrego and Johnson III (2012) also suggested that legal immigrant and minority communities mostly retained their native culture and language (p. 5). That explains the importance of culturally competent federal policies and practices. According to the United States Department of Justice (2015), President Bill Clinton signed Executive Order 13166, “Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency” on August 1, 2000 (para. 1). As per United States Department of Justice, Executive Order (EO) 13166 requires that federally-assisted agencies develop plans for providing language assistance to persons with limited English proficiency (LEP) (para. 1). Furthermore, the United States Department of Justice identified that the EO13166 sought to ensure that agencies receiving federal financial assistance provide meaningful access to their LEP applicants and beneficiaries (para. 1). The United States Department of Justice also issued a Policy Guidance Document, "Enforcement of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 - National Origin Discrimination against Persons with Limited English Proficiency" (LEP Guidance) to help federal agencies implement processes in compliance with the EO (para. 1). As per the United States Department of Justice, the LEP Guidance sets standards that ensure that federal agencies do not discriminate in granting access to services to recipients based on national origin in violation of Title VI's prohibition against national origin discrimination (para 3). As per Yep et al. (2014), the 2008 version of the citizenship exam implemented by the USCIS increased comprehension of standardized English and “American” culture in which legal immigrants must read, write, speak, and understand basic standardized English (p. 274). The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (2021) is the current federal agency

responsible for immigration functions within the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS) since 2003 (para. 4). The 2008 version of the citizenship exam directly infringes on the safeguards established by the EO 13166 and Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*.

The modern democracy theory of equal rights applies to the research problem here presented, by identifying modern-day lived experiences of legal Mexican immigrants residing in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas. The study sought to shed light on the barriers and facilitators that led legal Mexican immigrants to seek, or not seek U.S. citizenship to better understand experiences of legal Mexican immigrants and to identify actionable insights, recommendations, and tools to use at each step in the naturalization journey. Supporting the U.S citizenship journey has several positive implications including a sense of security against deportation and discrimination, increased civil rights and benefits, and the right to vote in a representative government.

Research Questions

Creswell (2009) identified that a qualitative study does not state objectives or hypotheses, but instead states research questions in two forms: “central question” and “associated sub-questions” (p. 129). Creswell defined “central question” as the broad question asked to explore the central phenomenon or concept in a study that is consistent with the literature (p. 129). Creswell suggested that several sub-questions usually follow the general question with the purpose of narrowing the focus of the study (pp. 129-130).

The research question for this qualitative study is:

- What are the lived experiences of Legal Permanent Residents of Mexican origin that influenced their decision to seek, or not seek, United States citizenship?

The sub questions are:

- What are the lived experiences of LPRs of Mexican origin that influenced their perceptions of barriers that led them to not seek United States citizenship?
- What are the lived experiences of LPRs of Mexican origin that influenced their perceptions of facilitators that led them to seek United States citizenship?
- What are the perceptions of LPRs of Mexican origin on the role of non-profits in turning barriers into facilitators to seeking United States citizenship?

Nature of the Study

The research relied upon a qualitative research design that sought to increase the understanding of the lived experiences of legal Mexican immigrants in the area known as the RGV as they contemplated and sought to become naturalized citizens of the United States. More specifically, this qualitative study relied on a phenomenological approach. Creswell (2009) defined phenomenology as a strategy that seeks to understand the essence of a lived experience (p. 13). Rudestam and Newton (2015) further identified that phenomenology involves observing a small group of participants over an extensive period to develop meanings of the human experience (p. 43). The study relied on participant interviews to answer the research questions. Rubin and Rubin (2012) identified interviewing as a method for qualitative research that allows researchers to collect data from people who have knowledge of experience with the problem being

examined (p. 3). Through interviews, as per Rubin and Rubin, the researcher can explore in detail the “experiences, motives, and opinions” of the participants and is able to understand different perspectives (p. 3). Participants targeted for this study were those who sought assistance with the naturalization process from ARISE.

Definitions

This section includes the identification and definitions of terminology used throughout the study. This study also relied on some operational definitions provided by Gonzalez-Barrera et al. (2013) which are consistent with the Pew Hispanic Center’s 2012 National Survey of Latinos.

Citizen: The U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (2020) defined “citizen” as a native or naturalized individual who owes allegiance to its government and is entitled to its protection (para. 2). “Citizenship” entails the right of freedom and assumption of responsibilities, including the right to vote and to hold public office, serve on a jury, military service, bring family members to the United States, and apply for federal student grants and scholarships (U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services, para. 3-13).

Eligible immigrant: Gonzalez-Barrera et al. (2013) defined an “eligible immigrant” as “a legal permanent resident who meets the length-of-stay qualifications to file a petition to become a U.S. citizen but has not yet naturalized” (p. 3).

Foreign-born / immigrant: Gonzalez-Barrera et al. (2013) identified that the terms “foreign-born” and “immigrant” are often used interchangeably (p. 3). Gonzalez-Barrera et al. defined “foreign-born” and “immigrant” as “persons born outside of the United

States, Puerto Rico, or other U.S. territory to parents neither of whom was a U.S. citizen” (p. 3). This term includes both authorized and unauthorized immigrants.

Latino / Hispanic: Lopez et al. (2019) identified the terms “Latino” and “Hispanic” are often used interchangeably in the United States to group together immigrants descending from Latin America (para. 12). However, Lopez et al. also identified that individuals clustered as “Latino/Hispanic” identify several distinctions between the terms “Hispanics” and “Latinos” (para. 12). “Hispanics” are those with origins from Spain and the Iberian Peninsula or Spanish speaking countries in Latin America, excluding Brazil (para. 12). “Latinos” are those originating from Latin America regardless of language, including Brazil, but excluding Spain and the Iberian Peninsula (Lopez et al., 2019, para. 12).

Legal Permanent Resident: Gonzalez-Barrera et al. (2013) defined a “legal permanent resident” as “a citizen of another country who has been granted a visa that allows work and permanent residence in the United States,” including “persons admitted as refugees or granted asylum” (p. 3).

Naturalized citizen: Gonzalez-Barrera et al. (2013) defined a “naturalized citizen” as “a legal permanent resident who has fulfilled the length-of-stay and other requirements to become a U.S. citizen and who has also taken the oath of citizenship” (p.3).

Nonprofit organization: As per Batley and Rose (2011), nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations developed from governments’ failure to provide their constituents with adequate public services to provide services and resources (p. 230). Ott and Dicke (2016) identified that nonprofits are governed by complex laws and procedures very

similar to corporations (p. 1). Ott and Dicke further identified that a non-profit is accountable to its mission and purpose as well as the people it serves, by-laws, a board of directors, state laws and codes, and the United States Internal Revenue Service (IRS) (p.1).

Phenomenology / phenomenological study: Creswell (2009) explained that phenomenology is a strategy that seeks to understand the essence of a lived experience (p. 13). Rudestam and Newton (2015) further identified that phenomenology involves observing a small group of participants over an extensive period to develop meanings of the human experience (p. 43).

Rio Grande Valley (RGV), Texas / El Valle / The Valley: The RGV consists of 4 counties with a population of over 1.3 million: Hidalgo, Cameron, Starr, and Willacy (Rio Grande Valley of Texas, 2016, para. 1). According to the U. S. Census in 2008 (as cited in Rio Grande Valley of Texas, 2016, para. 1), the population in the four counties is predominantly of Mexican origin: 90% in Hidalgo; 86% in Cameron; 97% in Starr; and 86% in Willacy. The Southern Career Institute (2019) described the RGV as “one of the fastest growing regions of the United States” (para. 1). Southern Career Institute (2019) pointed out that “*El Valle,*” or “*The Valley,*” as its residents call it, is not a valley, “but a sun-soaked floodplain” (para. 1).

Social exclusion: As per Velazquez (2013), “social exclusion” is the denial of equal access to opportunities imposed by certain groups of society (p.67).

Unauthorized immigrant: Gonzalez-Barrera et al. (2013) defined an “unauthorized immigrant” as any “citizen of another country who lives in the United States without a currently valid visa” (p. 3).

Assumptions

This study made several assumptions. For example, this study assumed participants were fully committed to completing the interview process. Furthermore, this study assumed that the individuals who participated did so willingly and truthfully in sharing their personal life experiences, perceptions, and opinions. The study also assumed that the participants would be able to understand either the English and/or Spanish language and could cognitively understand the interview questions. The research instrument I used is in both English and Spanish. However, it is possible that some of the participants may not have received a formal education and may have not fully comprehended the questions.

The study also assumed that members of ARISE that participated in my study were representative of legal immigrants from Mexico in the RGV. The RGV consists of 4 counties within the state of Texas with a total population of over 1.3 million: Hidalgo, Cameron, Starr, and Willacy (“Rio Grande Valley Texas,” 2016, para. 1). According to the U. S. Census in 2008 (as cited in “Rio Grande Valley,” 2016, para. 1), the population in the four counties is predominantly of Mexican origin: 90% in Hidalgo; 86% in Cameron; 97% in Starr; and 86% in Willacy. Similarly, the members who seek services at ARISE are predominantly of Mexican origin. Furthermore, the study assumed the

results of this study would be generalizable to other border-town areas across the United States.

Limitations of the Study

Rudestam and Newton (2015) defined limitations as restrictions within a research study in which the researcher has no control (p. 122). These restrictions can be attributed to access to a narrow segment of the population studied, or to the selected method of study. My study had several potential limitations. The literature that I reviewed was predominantly quantitative. By applying a qualitative approach, I sought to address and fill gaps in the literature left by similar quantitative studies. However, because limited qualitative studies addressed my research question and sub questions, I developed the questions for my measurement tool, relying predominantly on Moreno Saldivar's (2015) previous research study.

Another limitation of this research inquiry was that data collection and interpretation were human constructs. The researcher served as the research instrument in this qualitative study. By revealing personal experiences and biases, the researcher considered how such experiences influenced his/her positionality and interpretation of the data for the research. This required the researcher's focused attention on remaining objective and impartial in data interpretation, collection, and utilization.

Scope and Delimitations of the Study

Rudestam and Newton (2015) defined delimitations as limitations on the research design imposed deliberately by the researcher (pp. 121-122). Rudestam and Newton further identified that delimitations usually restrict generalization of the findings (p. 122).

The restrictions can be due to the lack of research about a population, or accessibility of a population. A delimitation of this research study was that it focused on participants from one specific geographic region. The focus on legal immigrants of Mexican origin residing in the RGV in the State of Texas, served as a delimitation factor. The RGV is located in the southernmost tip of South Texas, along the northern bank of the Rio Grande River. The Rio Grande River is the only natural physical boundary between the United States and Mexico.

More specifically, I sought to interview Mexican immigrants who have obtained LPR status but have not sought to pursue U.S. citizenship. I obtained a “purposive” and “convenient” sample of members who sought services to become citizens of the United States from ARISE, a nonprofit organization that provides immigration services to residents in the RGV.

Significance of the Study

Creswell (2009) stressed the importance of conveying to the reader a clear rationale for the importance of the study (p. 107). For example, a research study may contribute to scholarly research, may help improve practice, may help improve policy, or may also lead to positive social change. Positive social change, as defined by Thomas et al. (2009), identified strategies that redress the inequalities to bring about a change in the social status of historically disadvantaged groups (p. 311). Thomas et al. further explored the transformation of an advantaged group’s apathy into action to affect greater social equality (p. 310). Thomas et al. argued that feelings of guilt, sympathy, and outrage can direct an advantaged group’s apathy into positive action (p. 310).

Walden University's (2014b) mission is to develop "a diverse community" of "scholar-practitioners" to "affect positive social change" (para. 3). Walden University (2015) focuses on inspiring and celebrating students to continue to address challenges to make a difference within the community they live in (para. 1). Walden University's (2014a) vision includes committing to "working toward positive social change" through servant-leadership in preserving human rights, addressing "societal and global challenges," and trusting in "government and nonprofit institutions" (para. 3).

My qualitative research study was worth studying because it had several implications for positive social change and contribution to the field of public policy and administration. Understanding the lived experiences of LPRs of Mexican origin residing in the RGV, Texas, and helping them naturalize has several implications for positive social change. Positive social change for naturalized citizens includes obtaining protection from deportation and the right to vote. Increasing naturalization rates also contribute to the creation of jobs and a more diverse workforce, as well as an increased tax revenue and eligible members to join the military.

Velazquez (2013) identified that immigration from Mexico and Latin America is a topic of current political and social debate (p. 67). As per Velazquez, Mexican immigrants were often conveyed in the media as "illegal aliens who sneak into the United States to commit crime, steal jobs, and create havoc" (p. 67). Alternately, but not as commonly, Mexican immigrants were "portrayed as hard working, earnest providers for their families who are pursuing the American Dream" (Velazquez, p. 67). In fact, Velazquez argued that Americans were rarely exposed to images or information

portraying the risks and vulnerabilities experienced by Mexicans, including Mexican Americans, legal Mexican immigrants, and undocumented immigrants living in the United States (p. 67). This study sought to increase the understanding of the experiences of Mexican immigrants and inform the border narrative at a national scale.

Similarly, Cort (2012) studied naturalization rates in California following the passage of State Proposition 187, antiimmigrant legislation that prohibited undocumented immigrants from having access to state social services like health care and public education (pp. 483-484). While Cort pointed out that there was no research to support this legislation, it sparked naturalization rates of Latinos, especially those of Mexican origin (p. 483). As per Cort, naturalization rates in the State of California dramatically increased after the passage of the State Proposition 187 (p. 483). Cort further identified immigrant political groups mobilized to fight a growing discriminatory trend in the state and country during the passage of State Proposition 187 (p. 486). Cort further pointed out that a federal district judge filed a temporary injunction against the State of California three days after the passage of State Proposition 187, and a second federal district judge followed with a permanent injunction (p. 486). As per Cort, the upheaval motivated legal immigrants to naturalize and protect their resources; it also increased their ability to hold public officials accountable through their voting power (p. 486).

Understanding of the experiences of Mexican immigrants residing in the RGV and supporting their U.S citizenship journey can lead to an increased “minority voter pull” in the State of Texas, like what Cort (2012) identified in California. The RGV historically has a low-voter turnout and is one of the most impoverished regions in the

United States. Increasing the voter turnout increases the minority voice nationally and contributes to a more representative government. Increasing minority voter turnout also has the potential to create systemic policy changes to address minority disparities, and the better allocation public resources of public resources. Hence this study has the potential for social change and to contribute to the field of public policy and public administration.

Summary of Chapter 1

While most legal immigrants in the United States are from Mexico, Mexicans naturalize at slower rates than legal immigrants from other countries around the world. This study presented a qualitative research plan to explore the perceived barriers by LPRs from Mexico in becoming naturalized citizens of the United States. More specifically, the study used a phenomenological approach relying primarily on participant interviews. Passel (2007) is one of a few researchers who examined why Mexicans naturalize at slower rates than legal immigrants of other origins (p. 10). Passel found that the rate of naturalization of legal permanent residents was affected by the country and region of their origin; their race and ethnicity; their English language proficiency; their educational levels; their gender; and their income and poverty levels (pp. 10-13). The limited amount of literature examining the barriers for naturalization in the United States reinforced the gap in the literature and the need for the study here presented. Chapter 2 will provide a more in-depth review of the literature and justification for the research study here presented. Chapter 3 will describe the research design, including methodology, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter 4 will provide a thorough analysis of the participant interviews and discuss common codes and patterns as well as the findings of the study.

Chapter 5 will provide an interpretation of the research findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research and implications of the study for policy and social change.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Creswell (2009) suggested that the literature review accomplishes several purposes within a research study (p. 25). Creswell further identified the literature review includes the results from other studies that are like the one being proposed (p.25). As per Creswell, the literature review also provides a framework to establish the importance of the proposed study through the comparison of the results of other studies (p.25). Marshall and Rossman (2006, as cited in Creswell, 2009, p. 25) also identified that a literature review conveys the results of closely related previous studies; and it relates the current study to the broader dialogue to help bridge gaps in the literature. Rudestam and Newton (2015) further identified that the literature review demonstrates how concepts have evolved over time (p. 70). This is especially important in matters of public policy since laws and statutes constantly evolve.

The research study focused on legal Mexican immigrants currently living in the RGV, Texas, an area where the river is the only natural geographical barrier between Texas and Mexico, and where the population is 90% of Mexican origin. The literature review provided insight into the immigrant experience in the United States and identified some of the barriers and facilitators to pursuing U.S. citizenship. This chapter reviewed the relevant literature to answer the following research questions:

- What are the lived experiences of LPRs of Mexican origin that influenced their decision to seek, or not seek, United States citizenship?

Sub questions:

- What are the lived experiences of LPRs of Mexican origin that influenced their perceptions of barriers that led them to not seek United States citizenship?
- What are the lived experiences of LPRs of Mexican origin that influenced their perceptions of facilitators that led them to seek United States citizenship?
- What are the perceptions of LPRs of Mexican origin on the role of non-profits in turning barriers into facilitators to seeking United States citizenship?

The literature included an analysis of the profile of immigrants in general, trends of Mexican immigrants, the naturalization experiences of legal Mexican immigrants, and the changes of immigration laws. Chapter 2 will conclude with a discussion of some of the barriers and facilitators identified by legal immigrants of Mexican origin in their journey to becoming naturalized citizens of the United States.

Literature Search Strategy

Frankfort-Nachmias et al. (2015) identified two different types of data that may be used in research, primary and secondary (p. 262). Frankfort-Nachmias et al. defined primary data as data collected “in either an artificial (laboratory) setting or a natural (field research) setting, where the research participants may or may not be aware that they are being studied” (p. 262). Furthermore, as per Frankfort-Nachmias et al., data are collected firsthand by the researcher or by trained observers or interviewers (p.262). Secondary data analysis refers to methods for studying data collected by others. This includes census data and national surveys used to study demographic trends, migration patterns or political attitudes (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015, p.262).

I used several strategies to conduct a relevant literature review. The research courses that led up to the dissertation, faculty and students, and my dissertation committee shared recommendations and directed me to useful sources. I relied primarily on the Walden Library databases using key phrases and words like “Legal Permanent Resident,” “immigrants,” “barriers,” “citizenship,” “eligible immigrant,” and “Mexican immigrant.” Google Scholar also helped identify relevant sources for the literature review. Scholarly sources that helped me frame my research study include research studies conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center around Hispanic and Latino issues. The Pew Research Center contributed both primary data and secondary data to research about Hispanics and Latinos through the collection of national surveys to measure opinions and by analyzing voter participation trends to predict future participation. I encountered several other studies that reported findings based on primary data collected by the Pew researcher as well as secondary data reporting demographics, political views, and defined terms. The reference sections of some of the scholarly articles also helped me identify additional sources. The literature found was predominantly quantitative, and primarily focused on Latin Americans as a whole, and/or areas where there was not a predominantly Mexican population. Nonetheless, the various studies I encountered helped me formulate my research study, questions, and interview tool.

As Creswell (2009) identified, qualitative scholars investigate behavioral responses to human experiences (p. 4). Creswell further identified that qualitative research focuses on the participants’ perceptions and experiences and the way the participants make sense of their personal experiences (p. 4). A qualitative inquiry was

selected to best explain and describe behaviors, perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of Legal Permanent Residents of Mexican origin who have not sought or who have delayed their naturalization process. Creswell identified that there are several approaches to qualitative methods of inquiry including phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and narrative approach (p. 13). Creswell further identified qualitative investigations can be pursued through “qualitative interviews” in which the researcher interviews participants either face-to-face, by telephone, or in groups in an unstructured, open-ended manner (p.13). As per Creswell, an additional method for qualitative research is the collection of “qualitative documents” which include public documents such as newspapers and meeting minutes; and private documents which include letters, emails, or diaries (p. 181). One last category identified by Creswell is “qualitative audio files and visual materials” which includes photographs, videotapes, sound recordings, or art pieces (p. 181).

Defining Citizenship

A recurring principle of democracy expressed in the U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence is “citizenship.” The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (2020) defined “citizenship” as “the common thread that connects all Americans” through “the shared values of freedom, liberty, and equality” (para. 1). The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services defined “citizenship” the right of freedom and assumption of responsibilities, including the right to vote and to hold public office, serve on a jury, military service, bring family members to the U.S., and apply for federal student grants and scholarships (para. 3-13). Post (2006) argued that to the extent the

state treats citizens unequally by allowing some citizens greater freedom to participate in public discourse than others, the state loses its claim to democratic legitimacy (p. 29). Post further argued that every citizen in a democracy is entitled to equal democratic participation (p. 29). However, as Post identified, both the U.S. Constitution and the Declaration of Independence failed to define “citizen” in its contents (p.29). Post also pointed out that over the course of U.S. history, the rights of a citizen have expanded to become more inclusive (i.e., suffrage for female citizens, and freedom for slaves) (p. 29).

It was not until 1920, with the passage of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, that women were granted the right to vote. Women fought extensively for the right to vote. For example, Susan B. Anthony (1873) in her famous “Woman’s Rights to Suffrage” explained why she cast a vote in 1872 (para. 1). Anthony defended her right to cast a ballot during the 1872 presidential election as one guaranteed to her under the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution (para. 2). According to Anthony, the Preamble does not say “we the white male citizens... but we, the people... women as well as men...” (para. 4). Anthony further argued that any state law prohibiting women from voting violates the U.S. Constitution (para. 5). Anthony further argued that such law also lacks the “just powers derived from the consent of the governed,” and is an oligarchy of “wealth,” “learning,” “race,” and “sex” (para. 6).

Infringements on Citizenship

Weissart (2015) identified that the 2011 Texas Voter ID law targeted minorities and the poor who often could not afford to purchase a voter identification and thus are denied the “freedom” to equally engage in democratic participation (para. 3). According

to Weissart, a federal appeals court declared Texas' strict 2011 Voter ID law "discriminatory" to minorities and in violation of the Voting Rights Act (para. 1). However, as Weissart pointed out, as minorities continue to be targeted by similar discriminatory state laws, the issue will have to be settled by the Supreme Court of the United States (para. 6). As the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (n.d.) stated, Article III, section 1, gives the Supreme Court the power to decide on the constitutionality of laws passed by Congress, the President, or the states. As per the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Article III, section 1 also identified the Supreme Court can determine whether perceived discriminatory laws are infringing on the rights of any American citizens and in violation of the U.S. Constitution.

Immigration Trends

Borrego and Johnson III (2012) identified that heavy immigration dating back to the 1980's increased the proportion of people of color and racial minorities in the United States (p. 5). The profile of immigrants in the U.S. changed over time and so did the laws governing immigration and the pathway to obtaining legal status and citizenship. The following section will discuss how the profile of immigrants has changed in Texas and the United States the last few decades and the requirements for obtaining legal status and ultimately U.S. citizenship.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

The Historian.com Editors (2019) identified that the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the two-year Mexican American War between Mexico and the United States (para. 1). As per the Historian.com Editors, the Treaty was signed on February 2, 1848,

and put an end to the territorial dispute involving Texas (para. 1). The Historian.com Editors identified that the U.S. also gained an additional 525,000 square mile territory, including the parts of present-day Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming (para. 1). The Historian.com Editors further identified that Mexico thus gave up its claims to Texas and recognized the Rio Grande as the southern boundary with the United States (para. 1).

Profile of Naturalized Immigrants in the United States

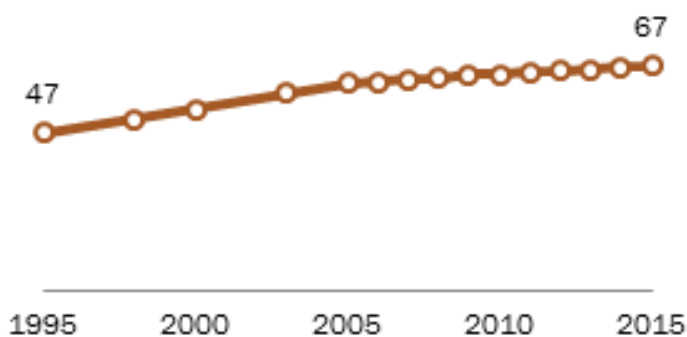
In her latest publication, Gonzalez-Barrera (2017) identified the number of LPRs seeking and obtaining U.S. citizenship reached its highest level in the last 20-years (p. 4). Gonzalez-Barrera, as shown in Figure 1 *U.S. Immigrant Naturalization Rate Reaches New High in 2015*, further identified that as per the Pew Research Center estimates, 67% or 11.9 million of the nation's 45.0 million LPRs eligible to apply for U.S. citizenship became citizens by 2015 (pp. 4-5).

Figure 1

U.S. Immigrant Naturalization Rate Reaches New High in 2015

U.S. immigrant naturalization rate reaches new high in 2015

% naturalized among immigrants eligible to become U.S. citizens



Source: Pew Research Center estimates for 2005-2015 based on augmented American Community Survey (IPUMS); for 1995-2003 based on March Supplements to the Current Population Survey. "Mexican Lawful Immigrants Among the Least Likely to Become U.S. Citizens"

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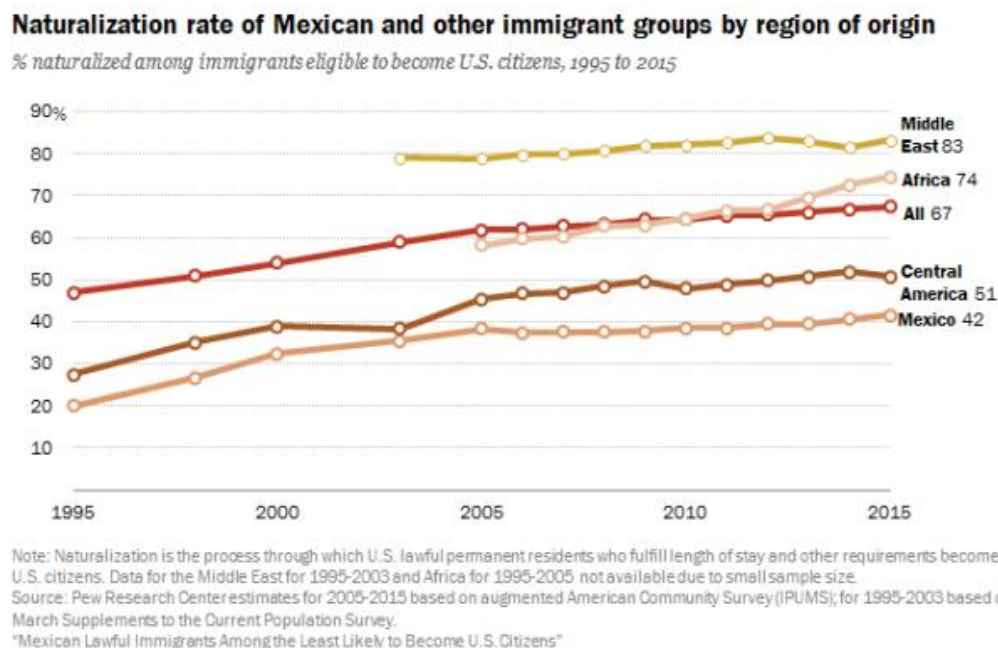
Gonzalez-Barrera, 2017, pp. 4-5.

However, Gonzalez-Barrera (2017) further identified that legal immigrants of Mexico naturalized at much slower rates than legal immigrants from any other country despite being the largest group of legal immigrants, constituting 37% of those eligible to naturalize by country of origin (p. 4). In fact, Gonzalez-Barrera, as shown in Figure 2 *Naturalization Rate of Mexican and Other Immigrant Groups by Region of Origin*, further identified that the naturalization rate of Legal Permanent Residents of Mexican origin trailed that of LPRs from the Middle East by 42%, and those from Africa by 33% in 2015 (p. 6). Gonzalez-Barrera pointed out that among Latinos, about half, 52% of LPRs who were eligible to become U.S. citizens had naturalized by 2015 (p. 8).

Gonzalez-Barrera further identified that at an 83% naturalization rate, legal Middle Eastern immigrants naturalized at the highest rate than legal immigrants from other countries of origin (p. 6). Conversely, as per Gonzalez-Barrera, Mexicans naturalized at a rate of 42%, while legal immigrants from other Latin American countries naturalized at a rate of 64%, and legal African immigrants naturalized at a rate of 74% (pp. 6-8).

Figure 2

Naturalization Rate of Mexican and Other Immigrant Groups by Region of Origin



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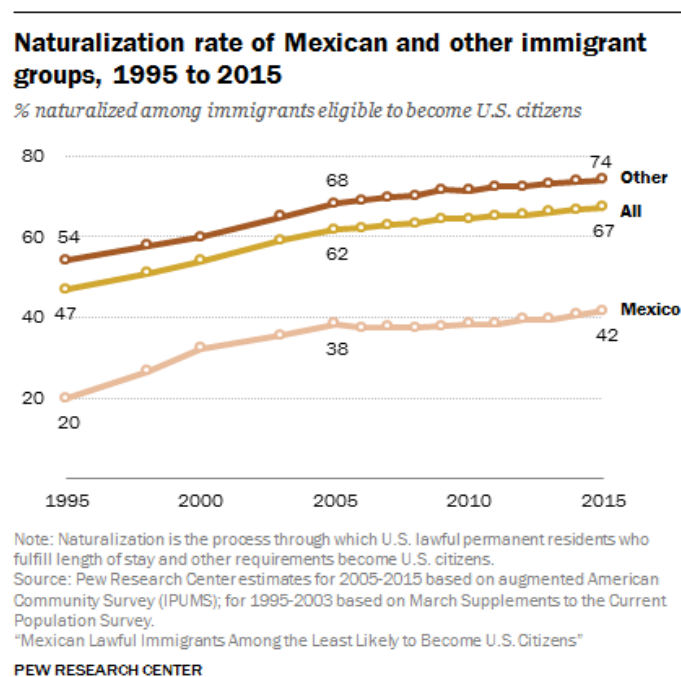
Gonzalez-Barrera, 2017, pp. 6-8.

Gonzalez-Barrera (2017) further identified the naturalization rates among all LPRs increased steadily between 1995 and 2015, as shown in Figure 3 *Naturalization Rate of Mexican and Other Immigrant Groups, 1995-2015*, increasing from 47% to 62% (p. 5). Gonzalez-Barrera also pointed out that the naturalization rate for LPRs from Mexico also increased steadily, increasing from 20% in 1995 to 38% in 2005, thus

narrowing the gap between legal Mexicans and other legal immigrants obtaining naturalization (p.5). Gonzalez-Barrera identified that the naturalization rate of Mexican LPRs remained steady between 2005 and 2010, while naturalization rates of legal immigrants from other parts of the world rose steadily (p.5). Gonzalez-Barrera pointed out that it was not until the period between 2011 and 2015 that the naturalization rate of legal Mexican immigrants largely increased at a pace higher than other legal immigrants (p.5). Additionally, as per Gonzalez-Barrera, naturalization rates jumped from 38% to 42% for Mexicans, compared to 72% to 74% for non-Mexicans (p. 5).

Figure 3

Naturalization Rate of Mexican and Other Immigrant Groups, 1995-2015



Gonzalez-Barrera, 2017, p. 5

The Immigrant Landscape in Texas

Orrenius et al. (2013) identified that Texas is one of the top destinations for immigrants coming to the United States (p.1). Orrenius et al. further identified that the number of immigrants living in Texas increased from 1.5 million in 1990, to over 4.3 million today (p. 2). In fact, Orrenius et al. identified that Texas was home to more immigrants than Oklahoma and New Mexico and similar in number to New York (p.2). As per Orrenius et al. only California had more immigrants than Texas (p.2). In fact, Orrenius et al. identified that historically, Texas's immigrants were primarily from Mexico (p.2).

Orrenius et al. (2013) also argued that although the immigrant population in Texas was becoming more diverse, most of its immigrants, about 60% continued to come from Mexico (p. 3). Orrenius et al. also identified that Texas also had a large population of immigrants from Asia and the rest of Latin America (p.3). This immigration pattern was reflective of the shared border and deep historical ties between Texas and Mexico. In fact, as per Orrenius et al., South Texas and other the border cities had the highest concentrations from Mexico, while other metropolitan cities like San Antonio, Austin, and Dallas had higher concentrations of immigrants from Asia, Europe, Canada, and Australia (p. 3).

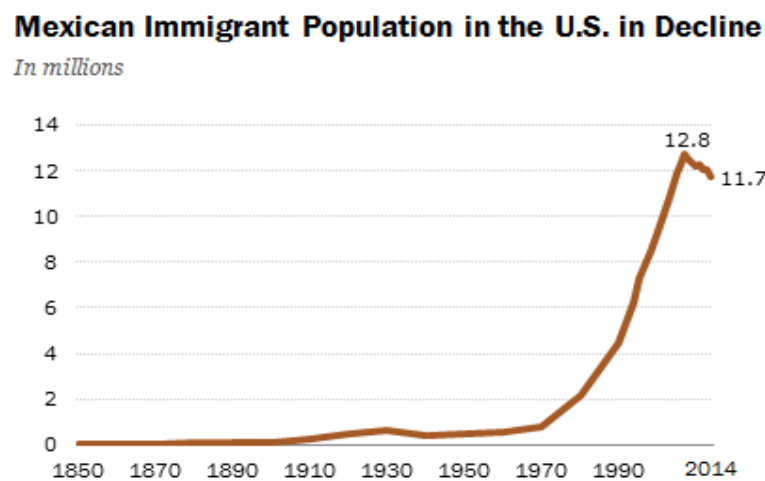
Trends in Immigration to the U.S. from Mexico

As per Gonzalez-Barrera (2015), Mexico is the largest country of origin among all U.S. foreign immigrants, constituting 28% in 2013 (p. 6). In fact, Gonzalez-Barrera identified that Mexican immigrants were center to one of the largest mass migrations to

the United States in recent history; in which more than 16 million Mexican nationals migrated to the U.S. between 1965 and 2015 (p. 6). Gonzalez-Barrera further identified, as shown in Figure 4 *Mexican Immigrant Population in the U.S. in Decline*, that fewer than 1 million Mexican immigrants lived in the U.S. in 1970, but that number grew to 9.4 million by 2000 and peaking at 12.8 million in 2007 (p. 7). Gonzalez-Barrera also pointed out that, as shown in *Figure 4*, the Mexican-born population had declined between 2007 and 2014, falling to 11.7 million, with a significant decrease of new arrivals (p. 7).

Figure 4

Mexican Immigrant Population in the U.S. in Decline



Source: For 1850 to 1980: Gibson, Campbell and Kay Jung, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850-2000," U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Working Paper No. 81, 2006; for Mexican born 1980 and 1990: Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS-USA); for 2005 to 2012: Pew Research Center estimates based on augmented American Community Surveys; for 1995-2000 and 2013-2014 Pew Research Center estimates based on augmented March supplements to the Current Population Survey and 2000 Decennial Census.

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Gonzalez-Barrera, 2015, pp. 6-7

Gonzalez-Barrera (2015) argued that Mexican immigrants living in the U.S. in 2013 were a more settled population than those living in the U.S. in the 1990s, before the large influx of authorized and unauthorized Mexicans came to the U.S. (p. 15). Also, Gonzalez-Barrera pointed out as reflected on Figure 5 *Demographic Characteristics of Mexican Immigrants, 1990 and 2013*, that Mexican immigrants in 2013 were considerably older with a median age of 39 vs. 29; were better educated with 42% obtaining a high school diploma or more vs. 24%; and had resided in the U.S. for longer, with 77% residing more than a decade (p. 15). On the economic front, Gonzalez-Barrera, as reflected on Figure 5, identified that Mexican immigrants both gained and lost ground (p. 15). Gonzalez-Barrera, as shown on Figure 5, identified that the median of personal earnings increased by \$2,700 since 1990, but the median of household income decreased by about \$1,700 between 1990 and 2013 (p. 15). Gonzalez-Barrera attributed this partly to the Great Recession (2008-2010) in the U.S. and the slow economic recovery also experienced by Mexican nationals (p. 15).

Figure 5*Demographic Characteristics of Mexican Immigrants, 1990 and 2013*

Demographic Characteristics of Mexican Immigrants, 1990 and 2013
%, unless otherwise noted

	1990	2013	Change, 1990-2013
Total (in millions)			
	4.3	11.6	+7.3
Gender			
Male	55	53	-2
Female	45	47	+2
Median age (in years)			
	29	39	+10
Age groups			
Younger than 18	15	6	-9
18 to 29	35	19	-16
30 to 39	24	26	+2
40 to 49	13	24	+11
50 to 64	9	18	+9
65 or older	5	7	+3
Educational attainment (ages 25 and older)			
Less than high school diploma	76	58	-18
High school diploma	12	24	+13
Some college or more	13	18	+5
Median household income (in 2013 dollars)			
	\$37,746	\$36,000	-\$1,746
Median annual personal earnings (in 2013 dollars)			
Employed (ages 16 and older)	\$17,292	\$20,000	+\$2,708
Years in the U.S.			
5 years or less	30	8	-22
6 to 10 years	20	15	-5
11 to 20 years	31	35	+4
More than 20 years	19	42	+23

Note: All numbers and percentages are computed before rounding. Mexican immigrants are people born in Mexico to two parents who were not U.S. citizens.

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of 1990 Census and 2013 American Community Survey data (IPUMS).

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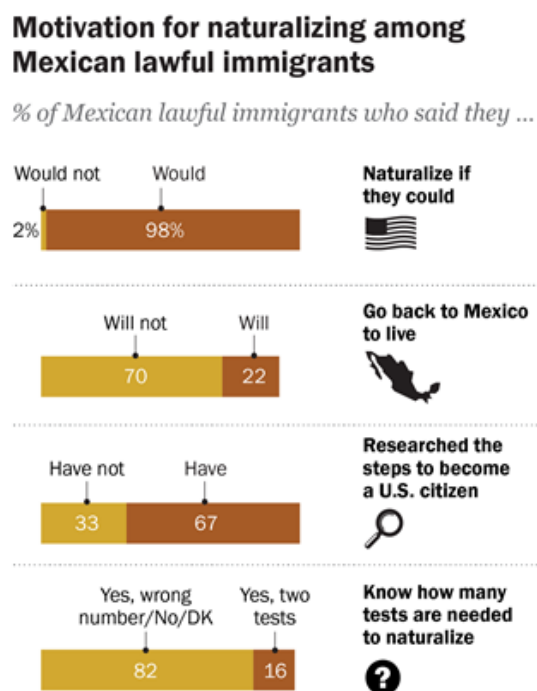
Gonzalez-Barrera, 2015, p. 15

Gonzalez-Barrera (2017) identified that the Pew Hispanic Research Center's 2015 survey of Latinos revealed, as shown on Figure 6 *Motivation for Naturalizing among Mexican Lawful Immigrants*, that 98% of LPRs of Mexican origin and 94% of LPRs of other Latin countries expressed a desire to naturalize if they could (p. 8). Similarly, as per

Gonzalez-Barrera and shown on Figure 5, 70% of Mexican LPRs and 66% of other Latino LPRs expressed plans to continue to reside in the U.S. and not return to their native country (p. 8). Despite their desire to seek U.S. citizenship, many Latino LPRs did not know the process for U.S. naturalization (p. 8). In fact, Gonzalez-Barrera further identified, as shown on Figure 6, that only 16% of Mexicans and 21% of other Latinos correctly acknowledged the U.S. naturalization process requires taking two separate exams (p. 8).

Figure 6

Motivation for Naturalizing Among Mexican Lawful Immigrants



Note: Refused not shown for all categories. Don't know not shown for the top three categories.

Source: National Survey of Latinos conducted Oct. 21-Nov. 30, 2015.

"Mexican Lawful Immigrants Among the Least Likely to Become U.S. Citizens"

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Gonzalez-Barrera, 2017, p. 8

Green Card Eligibility

As per the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (2018a) legal immigrants are eligible for a green card under the following categories: family, employment, special immigrant, refugee or asylum, trafficking or crime victims, victims of abuse, registry, or other categories (para. 1). Other categories for green card eligibility identified by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services include the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program; Cuban Adjustment Act; dependent status under the Haitian Refugee Immigration Fairness Act; Lautenberg parolee; Indochinese Parole Adjustment Act of 2000; American Indian born in Canada; Person born in the U.S. to a foreign diplomat; and Section 13 (para. 1). U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services further identified that a person who has resided in the U.S. since before January 1, 1972, may be eligible for a green card (para. 1). The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services identified those eligible for a green card, or Legal Permanent Residence, through family are considered “an immediate relative of a U.S. citizen, other relative of a U.S. citizen or relative of a lawful permanent resident under the family based preference categories, a fiancé of a U.S. citizen or the fiancé’s child, the widow(er) of a U.S. citizen, or VAWA self-petitioner – victim of battery or extreme cruelty” (para. 1).

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (2018a) further identified eligibility for a green card through employment as an “immigrant worker, physician national interest waiver, or as an immigrant investor” (para. 3). U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services further identified that eligibility for a green card as a special immigrant include: “Religious worker, special immigrant juvenile, an Afghanistan or Iraq

national, an international broadcaster, or an employee of an international organization or family member or NATO-6 employee or family member” (para. 3).

Asylees and refugees, according to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (2018a) are eligible for a green card after being granted asylum or refugee status for at least a year (para. 4). U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services further identified that victims of human trafficking and crimes are eligible for Legal Permanent Residency once they have had either refugee or asylum status for at least a year (para. 4). U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services further identified that victims of abuse are eligible for Legal Permanent Residency as a VAWA self-petitioner, a victim of battery or extreme cruelty; an abused spouse or child under the Cuban Adjustment Act; an abused spouse or child under Haitian Refugee Immigrant Fairness Act (HRIFA); or as a special immigrant juvenile (para. 4).

Naturalization Eligibility

Gonzalez-Barrera (2017) identified that Legal Permanent Resident must meet the following criteria for citizenship eligibility:

- “Be at least 18 years old;
- Have lived in the U.S. continuously for five years;
- Be able to speak, write, read and understand basic English;
- Answer questions that demonstrate knowledge of U.S. government and history;
- Undergo a successful background check;
- Demonstrate attachment to the principles of the U.S. Constitution;

- Take the oath of citizenship swearing allegiance to the U.S.” (p. 11).

Gonzalez-Barrera (2017) further identified that some groups of Legal Permanent Residents are eligible for exceptions to the criteria listed above (p. 11). For example, as per Gonzalez-Barrera, Legal Permanent Residents who were sponsored by their U.S. citizen spouse can naturalize after three years if the sponsoring spouse has been a U.S. citizen during those three years (p. 11). Additionally, Gonzalez-Barrera further identified that foreign-born minor children obtain citizenship when their parents do, and foreign-born minor children adopted by U.S. citizens obtain citizenship upon arriving at the U.S. (p. 11).

The Evolution of U.S. Immigration Laws

Yep et al. (2014) identified that the laws for naturalization in the United States evolved (p. 274). As per Yep et al., the regulation of immigration to the United States during the colonial period between the early 1600s and 1776 did not exist (p. 274). Instead, Yep et al. identified that the United States relied on incentives such as land, work, and immediate citizenship to attract white European immigrants (p. 274). Yep et al. further identified that it was not until 1790 that Congress acted on immigration and naturalization proceedings by passing a law allowing white men to become American citizens (p. 274). Yep et al. also pointed out that non-Whites remained in-eligible for citizenship until African Americans could acquire citizenship in 1870, during which tests to assess an applicant’s worthiness emerged (p. 274).

Immigration Act of 1917

The Office of the Historian (2018a) identified that the U.S. Congress enacted its first widely restrictive immigration law in 1917 (para. 2). The Office of the Historian further identified that the aftermath of the first World War paved the way for Congress to pass several important provisions within this legislation and others followed (para. 2). As per The Office of the Historian, the Immigration Act of 1917 implemented a literacy test requiring all legal immigrants over the age of 16 years to demonstrate basic reading comprehension; increased the tax rate for legal immigrants entering the country; and gave immigration officials the authority to exercise more discretion over whom to exclude from entering the country (para. 2). Furthermore, the Office of the Historian identified the Act barred any legal immigrant coming from the “Asiatic Barred Zone” from entry into the U.S. (para. 2). The list of immigrants excluded from immigrating to the U.S., as per the Office of the Historian, included legal immigrants from Japan, the Philippines, and China (para. 2). The Office of the Historian further identified that the Japanese Government limited Japanese immigration to the United States through the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907 (para. 2). During this era, as the Office of the Historian identified, the Philippines was a U.S. colony, and its residents were U.S. citizens who were free to travel the continental United States (para. 2). The Office of the Historian further identified the Chinese Exclusion Act denied immigration visas to immigrants from China (para. 2).

Immigration Acts of the 1920s

As per the Office of the Historian (2018a), to further restrict immigration to the United States, Immigration expert and Republican U.S. Senator William P. Dillingham,

introduced an Act to create immigration quotas in the 1920s (para. 3). The Office of the Historian identified that the proposed quota system would allow only three percent of the total population of the foreign-born of each nationality reflected in the 1910 U.S. Census, to obtain visas to enter the U.S. (para. 3). The Office of the Historian described that the proposed quota would only allow a total of 350,000 visas to be issued to new immigrants per year (para. 3). However, the Office of the Historian identified that the system did not set quotas for immigrants arriving from the Western Hemisphere (para. 3). The Office of the Historian pointed out that President Woodrow Wilson opposed the proposed restrictive Act and invoked the pocket veto to prevent its passage (para. 3). However, the Office of the Historian, further pointed out that upon taking office in 1921, President Warren Harding called a special Congressional session to pass the immigration quota law the Wilson administration had rejected (para. 3). The Office of the Historian identified that because of President Harding's actions, the Act was renewed in 1922 to continue an additional two years (para. 3).

Immigration Act of 1924

As per the Office of the Historian (2018a), the quota system was so embedded in U.S. culture by the beginning of the 1924 immigration debate that Congress failed to consider whether to maintain it, but rather devised ways to adjust it (para. 4). The Office of the Historian identified that although there were advocates on both sides of the debate, the quota system was amended to become more restrictive (para. 4). The Office of the Historian further identified that the quota dropped from granting visas to three percent of the foreign-born nationals to two percent (para. 4). The Office of the Historian pointed

out that the quota also relied on the 1890 U.S. Census instead of the 1910 version (para. 4). The Office of the Historian further identified that calculations for the quota had been determined based on the total number of foreign-born immigrants by nationality, but the 1924 Act would change that to origins of all people living in the U.S., including natural-born citizens (para. 5). The Office of the Historian pointed out that this immigration quota greatly favored legal immigrants from the British Isles and Western Europe and limited legal immigrants from other countries including Southern and Eastern Europe, and Asia (para. 5). The Office of the Historian further identified that laws dating back to the 1790s and 1870s excluding people of Asian descent from obtaining U.S. citizenship were enforced through the Immigration Act of 1924, thus disallowing immigration from Japan and other Asian countries (para. 5).

In summary, as identified by the Office of the Historian (2018a), the main goal of the Immigration Act of 1924 was to “preserve the ideal of U.S. homogeneity” (para. 6). The Office of the Historian further pointed out that it was not until 1952 that Congress revisited and revised the immigration policies of the U.S. (para. 6).

Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952

According to the U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services (2018b), the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, or INA, revised and reorganized many existing immigration laws (para. 1). As per the Office of the Historian, the INA of 1952 upheld the controversial quota system for selecting legal immigrants (para. 1). The Office of the Historian further identified that the INA also put an end to the Asian bar and established a visa system based on skills and family reunification (para. 2). The Office of the Historian

pointed out that President Harry Truman considered the provisions of maintaining the national origins quota system and established racially constructed quotas for Asian countries to be discriminatory (para. 7). In fact, as per the Office of the Historian, President Truman vetoed the INA, but it had enough support in Congress override his veto (para. 7).

The Office of the Historian (2018b) identified that the INA used the 1920 Census to determine the number of visas to allot based on national origin, a method that continued to favor legal immigrants from Western Europe (para. 4). The Office of the Historian further identified that the INA only created “symbolic opportunities for Asian immigration” (para. 5). Office of the Historian identified that this new discriminatory law allotted each Asian nation a minimum quota of 100 visas each year, but it also based these quotas on race, instead of nationality (para. 5). As per the Office of the Historian, in practice, a legal immigrant with one or more Asian parents, born anywhere in the world, and possessing citizenship from any nation, would qualify for a visa under the national quota of the Asian nation of his or her ethnicity (para. 5). The Office of the Historian identified that these quota speculations continued to limit immigration from Asian countries (para. 5).

The Office of the Historian (2018b) further identified that the INA created a “preference” system to help American Consulates abroad address the overwhelming petitions from certain countries (para. 6). The preference system, as per the Office of the Historian, gave visa priority to immigrants with special skills or family members legally living in the United States (para. 6). The Office of the Historian also identified that the

INA also gave non-quota status to the husbands of U.S. citizens and created a labor certification system to ensure legal immigrants did not displace U.S. workers (para. 6).

According to the U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services (2018b), the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 has seen many revisions, but is still the immigration law that prevails today (para. 1). The Office of the Historian identified that this preference system has survived amendments to the immigration policies that are currently in use (para. 6).

The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965

History (2018) identified that the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 did away with the quota system and replaced it with immigration policies focused on family reunification and skilled labor (para.1). Consequently, as per History, legal immigrants increasingly came to the United States from countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, as opposed to Europe, and greatly changed the demographic profile of America (para. 1).

History (2018) also argued that the rise in the civil rights movement in the early 1960s called for a reformation of the U.S. immigration system (para. 2). History further argued that the civil rights movement called for “equal treatment regardless of race or nationality,” and President John F. Kennedy agreed to abolish the “intolerable” quota system (para. 2). History further identified that following President Kennedy’s assassination, Congress debated and passed the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, and President Lyndon B. Johnson signed it into law (para.3). History further

identified that many experts and advocates of the Act testified that it was “a matter of principle to have a more open [immigration] policy” (para. 3).

History (2018) further identified that the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 upheld the preferences system established by the INA of 1952 and established categories, such as “relatives of U.S. citizens or permanent residents, those with skills deemed useful to the United States or refugees of violence or unrest” (para. 4) by which individuals could immigrate to the United States. History also argued that the preference system did place limits on how many legal immigrants to allow per country and through each category (para. 4). History identified that family reunification was given priority and increasingly allowed entire families reestablish themselves in the United States (para. 4).

The Post-Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965

History (2018) identified that more than 18 million legal immigrants have come to the United States in the thirty years following the enactment of the 1965 Act (para. 5). During this era, History identified that the highest number of legal immigrants, 4.3 million, to the U.S. came from Mexico; some 1.4 million came from the Philippines; and between 700,000 and 800,000 came from Korea, the Dominican Republic, India, Cuba, and Vietnam (para. 6).

History (2018) also identified that the increase in illegal immigration during the 1980s and 1990s raised questions around immigration policy once again (para. 7). History further identified that Congress passed the Immigration Reform Act of 1986 to address immigration-related concerns by increasing enforcement of immigration policies

and expanding legal immigration avenues through the creation of two amnesty programs for previously unauthorized immigrants (para. 7). History further identified that more than 3 million unauthorized immigrants were granted amnesty through the Immigration Reform Act of 1986 (para. 7).

History (2018) further identified that the 1990 Immigration Act modified and expanded the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, by increasing the admission of legal immigrants from “underrepresented” countries (para. 7). As per History, this not only diversified the profile of legal immigrants coming to the U.S. but also increased the number of immigrants to 700,000 (para. 7). Fueled by the economic recession of the early 1990s, as per History, Congress passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, to increase border security and to monitor the use of social programs by legal immigrants (para. 8).

Post the 9/11 terrorist attacks, as identified by History (2018), the Homeland Security Act of 2002 was passed, creating the Department of Homeland Security, DHS (para. 9), among other broad sweeping reforms. History identified that the DHS handles many immigration services and enforcement functions that were previously the responsibility of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, INS (para. 9).

History (2018) identified that although there have been modifications to the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, it continues to be the governing authority to U.S. immigration (para. 9). History further identified that immigrants lawfully enter the United States in one of two ways, either with a temporary (non-immigrant)

admission or through permanent admission, otherwise known as lawful permanent residence eligible for citizenship after three- to five-years residency (para. 9).

Evolution of the Citizenship Exam

Yep et al. (2014) further identified that in 1917 naturalization tests required applicants to write and read a language, not necessarily English (p. 274). As per Yep et al., the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act instituted civics, standardized English, and literacy for naturalization (p. 274). DeSapio (2011) stated that the current application process requires the completion of a 10-page application form; supporting documents such as photographs and fingerprints; paying an application fee; taking a civics and history test and waiting on the processing of the application bureaucracy (p. 1197). As per Yep et al. identified, applicants must be 18 years or older and must be a legal permanent resident for five years or three years if married to a U.S. citizen and prove continuous permanent residence and proven physical presence in the U.S. (p. 274). Yep et al. also identified that the naturalization test underwent a final revision in 2008 requiring an increased comprehension of standardized English and “American” culture in which legal immigrants must read, write, speak, and understand basic standardized English (p. 274).

Gonzalez-Barrera (2017) identified that the first half of 2017 showed an increase in the naturalization rate of LPRs (p. 6). As per Gonzalez-Barrera, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Citizenship and Immigration Services revealed that there were 525,000 naturalization applications submitted during the first half of 2017, up 21% from the 435,000 applications submitted during the first half of 2016 (p. 6). Gonzalez-Barrera

further identified that the total applications for naturalization in 2016 rose 24% compared with 2015, which had experienced a peak since 2008 (p.6). Gonzalez-Barrera argued that despite the increases in citizenship applications in 2017 and 2016, these rates still trail the record numbers reached in 1997 and 2007 in which 1.41 million and 1.38 million applied, respectively (pp. 6-7). Gonzalez-Barrera also identified that the peaks in 1997 were due in large part to congressional legislation passed in the 1980's that provided a pathway to lawful permanent residency and eventually to citizenship for many undocumented immigrants (p. 7). Gonzalez-Barrera further identified that in 2007, there was a peak in naturalizations before the increase in the citizenship application fee, which rose from \$330 to \$595 on July 30, 2007 (p. 7).

Barriers to Naturalization

As per Gonzalez-Barrera (2017), the Pew Hispanic Research Center asked Mexican LPRs why they had not sought naturalization as part of a larger 2015 survey of legal Hispanic immigrants (p. 4). Gonzalez-Barrera identified that the study revealed reasons such as limited English-proficiency, lack of time or initiative, and the high cost of the U.S. citizenship application (p. 4). In fact, Gonzalez-Barrera identified that the Center's 2015 survey revealed that 35% of Mexican LPRs and 23% of other Latino LPRs identified personal barriers, such as a lack of English proficiency from not seeking naturalization (p. 9). Gonzalez-Barrera further identified that about a 31% of Mexican LPRs and 16% of non-Mexican Latino LPRs identified not having the time or initiative to naturalize (p. 9). Additionally, Gonzalez-Barrera identified that 13% of Mexican LPRs and 19% of non-Mexican LPRs identified financial and administrative barriers such as

the costs associated with naturalization (p. 9). Gonzalez-Barrera concluded that these were significant barriers to naturalization, as nearly all legal immigrants from Mexico (98%) revealed an interest in seeking U.S. citizenship someday (p. 5).

Passel (2007) identified several possible explanations for the differences in naturalization rates among legal immigrant groups (p. 10). According to Passel, the rate of naturalization of legal permanent residents is affected by the country and region of their origin; their race and ethnicity; their English language proficiency; their educational levels; their gender; and their income and poverty levels (pp. 10-13).

According to Gonzalez-Barrera et al. (2013), the geographic proximity of Mexico to the U.S. contributed to legal Mexican immigrants' maintenance of close ties to their home country than legal immigrants from other countries and thus, their reluctance to naturalize (p. 12). Additionally, Gonzalez-Barrera et al. identified that not all legal Mexican immigrants were aware that dual citizenship is allowed since 1998 (p. 12). Woroby and Groves (2015) suggested that a significant network, or clustering, of immigrants in an area affected naturalization rates (p. 17). Woroby and Groves further suggested that clusters of Mexican-born immigrants negatively affected the rate of legal immigrants seeking citizenship (p. 17). Woroby and Groves' finding was consistent with Gonzalez-Barrera et al. in that naturalization rates continued to be the lowest among legal Mexican immigrants (p. 17).

As Passel (2007) indicated, those who identified as Hispanic made up 27% of naturalized citizens in 2005, more than 54% of the eligible population, and 42% of those soon eligible (p. 10). Passel further identified that Asians and Pacific Islanders

constituted 32% of the naturalized population, whereas non-Hispanic whites were 31% of the naturalized population, and non-Hispanic blacks constituted less than 10% of the naturalized citizens (p. 10).

Facilitators of Naturalization

As Gonzalez-Barrera (2017) concluded, the 2007 peak in LPRs seeking citizenship was due to the increase in the citizenship application fee (p.7). Similarly, as per Gonzalez-Barrera, the peak in 2016 may be due to the \$45 increase in the citizenship application on December 23, 2016 (p.7). However, as per Gonzalez-Barrera, the 2016 and 2017 peaks following the U.S. presidential election can also be attributed to anti-immigrant rhetoric associated with the then Republican Presidential candidate, Donald Trump (p. 7). Gonzalez-Barrera further identified that evidence indicated organizations assisted LPRs to submit naturalization applications during the 2016 campaign (p. 7). Similarly, Cort (2012) studied naturalization rates in California following the passage of State Proposition 187, anti-immigrant legislation that would prohibit undocumented immigrants from having access to state social services like health care and public education (pp. 483-484). Although Cort acknowledged that there was no research to prove this legislation sparked naturalization rates of Latinos, especially those of Mexican origin, naturalization rates dramatically increased after the passage of the legislation (p.483). Cort argued that legal immigrant political groups mobilized to fight a growing discriminatory trend in the state and country during the passage of State Proposition 187 and its litigation in courts (p. 486). As per Cort, during this upheaval, legal immigrants

were motivated to naturalize to protect their resources increasing their ability to hold public officials accountable (p. 486).

Characteristics of Those Naturalizing

Passel (2007) identified that regardless of an immigrants' origin or ethnicity, legal immigrants who successfully became citizens of the United States shared many of the same characteristics (p. 10). Such characteristics identified by Passel included English language skills, level of education, gender and employment, and income levels (pp. 10-13).

Passel (2007) further identified that legal immigrants' who speak English "well" were more likely to naturalize (pp. 10-11). Taylor et al. (2012) also argued that foreign-born Latinos who identified as speaking English "very well" or "pretty well" were more likely motivated to naturalize in comparison to those who spoke English "just a little" or "not at all" (p. 18). In fact, Passel further identified that naturalized citizens who were limited English only accounted for 40% of naturalized citizens (p. 11). As per Passel, the percentage for naturalized citizens of Mexican origin was a lot larger at 58%. (p. 11). Furthermore, Passel identified that among those who had not naturalized yet, most were limited English proficient (p. 11).

Passel (2007) also identified that legal immigrants who were more educated were more likely to naturalize (p. 12). Passel further identified that most legal immigrants between the ages 25 and 64 with a college education had naturalized, while those without a high school degree had not (p. 12). In fact, as per Passel, 37% of naturalized citizens held at least a college degree, and 15% had not graduated from high school (p. 12). Passel

identified that compared to legal immigrants from other countries of origin, legal immigrants from Mexico were far less likely to be college educated or to have completed high school (p. 12). Of those eligible to naturalize, as identified by Passel, more than 60% of legal Mexican immigrants had not completed high school in comparison to 40% of other legal immigrants (p. 12).

Passel (2007) also identified that 53% of naturalized citizens were female and were more likely to be employed (p.12). Passel identified that among female naturalized immigrants, 63% were employed, compared with 48% who were not employed (p. 12). Additionally, Passel identified that women who were employed were more likely to be English proficient and college educated in comparison to women who did not hold employment (p. 12).

Passel (2007) also identified that legal immigrants with low economic status were less likely to naturalize than those with higher economic status (p. 12). In fact, as per Passel, 14% of naturalized citizens lived below the poverty line, whereas 35% of naturalized citizens had a higher income (p. 12). As identified by Passel, of the LPRs who were eligible to naturalize, 24% of them were of lower income while 22% of them were of higher income (p. 12). Overall, Passel identified that low-income legal immigrants who had recently naturalized accounted for only 38% of all those who had naturalized (pp. 12-13).

Synthesis of the Literature

Previous studies exploring citizenship participation were quantitative in nature and identified a lack of English proficiency, low socioeconomic status, and limited

knowledge of the process as factors that influenced whether a legal immigrant seeks or does not seek citizenship. Those studies focused on different demographics, grouping Mexican immigrants with Latinos from other countries. The studies also focused on various states with large immigrant populations, but none near the United States-Mexico border. Furthermore, no studies focused on the southernmost region of the United States where the population is 90% Mexican-origin. My study relied on a phenomenological qualitative method explore citizenship participation of the LPRs of Mexican origin in the RGV, Texas. More specifically, my study sought to understand the lived experiences of legal Mexican immigrants as they decided to become or not become U.S. citizens. This qualitative study sought to identify social, cultural, and behavioral factors that identify with citizenship participation of the legal Mexican immigrant specifically living in the RGV, Texas. Additionally, the study sought to identify actionable insights, recommendations, and tools to use at each step in the naturalization journey.

Social Exclusion Theory

Behrman et al. (2003, as cited in Velazquez, 2013, p. 67) argued that the economic instability faced by legal immigrants from Latin American countries, including Mexico, creates “social exclusion” in their home country. Velazquez (2013) further identified that the United States often becomes the destination for in search for better living conditions, many risking their lives (p. 68). Queen and Gruener (2001, as cited in Velazquez, 2013, p. 69) further argued that social conditions do not change for many Latin American and Mexican immigrants when they immigrate to the United States. In

fact, Queen and Gruener argued that Latin American and Mexican immigrants encounter conditions that prevent them from effectively participating in society.

Behrman et al. (2003, as cited in Velazquez, 2013, p. 67) defined “social exclusion” as “the denial of equal access to opportunities imposed by certain groups of society upon others.” Behrman et al. further identified that, “social exclusion” occurs under two conditions: “(1) social relations occur within groups; and (2) access to opportunities for socioeconomic advancement is contingent upon group association” (2003). Behrman et al. identified group association can include several key characteristics, including “religious beliefs, geographic location, ethnic origin, race, nationality, socioeconomic or legal status” (2003, as cited in Velazquez, 2013, p. 67).

Velazquez (2013) identified immigration from Mexico and Latin America as a topic of current political and social debate (p. 67). Velazquez further argued the influx of cultures developed diverse dynamics resulting from immigration to the United States (p. 83). Velazquez also identified that the social dynamics were changing more rapidly than society’s capacity to adapt and take advantage of the opportunities presented by immigration which have the potential of negative effects (p. 67). Velazquez argued the immigration debate was “often fueled by distorted public perception about crime, terrorism, drug trafficking, and other offenses allegedly committed by [Mexican] immigrants” (p. 67). Velazquez further argued Mexican immigrants were often conveyed as “illegal aliens who sneak into the United States to commit crime, steal jobs, and create havoc” (p. 67) in the media. Alternately, but not as commonly, as per Velazquez, Mexican immigrants were “portrayed as hard working, earnest providers for their

families who are pursuing the American Dream” (p. 67). In fact, Velazquez argued that Americans were rarely exposed to images or information portraying the risks and vulnerabilities experienced by Mexicans, including Mexican Americans, legal Mexican immigrants, and undocumented immigrants living in the United States (p. 67). This study sought to increase the understanding of the experiences of legal Mexican immigrants and inform the border narrative at a national scale.

Legal Mexican immigrants residing in the RGV, Texas, face various facets of social exclusion contingent to country of origin, socioeconomic status, and geographic location. Supporting the U.S citizenship journey has several positive implications including a sense of security against deportation and discrimination, increased civil rights and benefits, and the right to vote in a representative government. Velazquez (2013) urged policymakers to develop inclusive initiatives that promote legal immigrants’ integration to life in the U.S. (p. 84).

Modern Democracy Theory of Equal Rights

Duignan and Cranston (2020) argued the works of Jean Jacques Rousseau made great contributions to political philosophy and modern democracy (para. 4). Furthermore, as per the Abraham Lincoln Online (2020), Rousseau’s argument influenced United States President Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address definition of “democracy” (para. 5). As included in Abraham Lincoln Online, the President identified a “democracy” as “government of the people, by the people, for the people” (para. 5). According to Bertram (2010), Rousseau contributed to political philosophy through several works including *The Social Contract* published in 1762, which he declared that government could only be

legitimate if guided by the “general will” of all and applied to all (p. 9). Groeneveld and Van de Walle (2010) argued that bureaucracies in a modern democracy are “representative of the population” and provide equal opportunities to all (p. 244).

Structure of Democracy

According to the Central Intelligence Agency (2016d), the United States is a constitution-based federal republic with a strong democratic tradition and provides for universal suffrage for all its citizens over the age of 18 (para. 1). As per the Central Intelligence Agency, the federal republic of the U.S. consists of an executive branch led by a president and a vice-president (4-year terms) elected via the Electoral College; a bicameral legislative branch consisting of a Senate (6-year terms) elected by popular vote from each state, and a House of Representatives (2-year terms) elected directly by popular vote; and a judicial branch consisting of a Supreme Court with currently nine justices appointed for life (para. 1). The Central Intelligence Agency, the U.S. has two main political parties which are the Democratic Party (traditionally more liberal) and the Republican Party (traditionally more conservative) (para. 1).

Values of Democracy

Barber (2004) identified that there are many implicit and explicit values embedded in modern democracy, such as “equal rights,” “liberty (freedom),” and “majority rule” (pp. 3-5). The following discusses these concepts in more detail:

Equal Rights

According to Post (2006), the people of a democracy are entitled to “equal” protection of their persons, possessions, and rights; have “equal” opportunity to pursue

their lives and careers; and have “equal” rights of participation (pp. 27-28). Post further identified that the Civil Rights Act intended to promote equality for minorities in the U.S. then, and still holds true, in a modern democracy (pp. 27-28). As per Post, at the time of the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the proportion of minorities in the United States was small (pp. 27-28). Borrego and Johnson III (2012) also suggested that legal immigrant and minority communities mostly retained their native culture and language (p. 5). That explains the importance of culturally competent federal policies and practices.

For example, according to the U.S. Department of Justice (2015), President Bill Clinton signed Executive Order 13166, “Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency” in 2000 (para. 1). As per the U.S. Department of Justice, the EO 13166 requires that federally-assisted agencies develop plans for providing language assistance to persons with limited English proficiency (LEP) in 2000 (para. 1). The U.S. Department of Justice further identified that the EO 13166 sought to ensure agencies receiving federal financial assistance provide meaningful access to their LEP applicants and beneficiaries (para. 1). The U.S. Department of Justice issued a Policy Guidance Document, "Enforcement of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 - National Origin Discrimination Against Persons with Limited English Proficiency" (LEP Guidance) to help federal agencies implement processes in compliance with the EO (para. 3). As per the U.S. Department of Justice, the LEP Guidance sets standards that ensure that federal agencies do not discriminate in granting access to services based on

national origin in violation of Title VI's prohibition against national origin discrimination (para 3).

Liberty

Mandelbaum (2008) pointed out that “liberty,” or “freedom” developed first in economic liberty, in the form of private property, stemming from the Western European tradition modeled after ancient Rome (para. 5). In theory, the United Nations (1948) in *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* argued that people of a democratic nation should enjoy freedom from undue interference from the law, to believe, behave, and express themselves as they wish (para. 1). Accordingly, Post (2006) pointed out that democratic societies seek to guarantee their citizens certain freedoms including freedom of religion, of the press, speech, and association and assembly (pp. 26-28). Post further identified that citizens should also be granted freedom from arbitrary arrest and imprisonment and provided the freedom to work and live where and how they choose (p. 30). Post further identified citizens of a democratic nation also have the liberty to freely elect their leaders and openly express their opinions on the issues confronting the nation (p. 30). Furthermore, as per Post, free elections are held periodically, to ensure that elected officials represent the people as outlined in the U.S. Constitution (p. 30).

Majority Rule

As Toavs pointed out in Laureate Education (2014), “democracy operates on very important principles of “majority rule” and “minority rights.” Toavs stated that a majority selects elected officials and they affect public policy through free and frequent elections. However, Brink (2007) in his discussion about Mill’s view of liberalism

cautioned that the tyranny of the “majority” is a threat to democracies (para. 1). The Holocaust, as a function of World War II during the early 1940s, is an example of majority rule infringing on the rights of minorities.

Threats to Democracy

Post (2006) pointed out that to the extent the state treats citizens unequally by allowing some citizens greater freedom to participate in public discourse than others, the state loses its claim to democratic legitimacy (p. 29). Post further pointed out that every citizen in a democracy is entitled to equal democratic participation (p. 29). The United Nations (1948) in its “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” postulated that human beings “shall enjoy the freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people” (para. 2). Furthermore, as per the United Nations, the Declaration stated that everyone is entitled to rights and freedoms regardless of “race, color, sex, language, religion, political or another opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or another status” (para. 10).

The modern democracy theory of equal rights applied to the research problem here presented, by identifying modern-day lived experiences of legal Mexican immigrants residing in the RGV, Texas. The study sought to shed light on the barriers and facilitators that led legal Mexican immigrants to seek or not seek citizenship to better understand experiences of legal Mexican immigrants and to identify actionable insights, recommendations, and tools to use at each step in the naturalization journey. Supporting the U.S citizenship journey has several positive implications including a sense of security

against deportation and discrimination, increased civil rights and benefits, and the right to vote in a representative government.

Democracy is about participation. Chambers (2009) suggested oratory deliberation is best expressed through voting (p. 328). The future of the United States, the State of Texas, and the communities of the Rio Grande Valley are stronger when all citizens can participate in the decisions and processes that impact their lives. An increased voter turn-out translates into increased resources to the RGV, which is the poorest region in the United States.

Summary of Chapter 2

Chapter 2 included a review of literature to provide an understanding of the lived experiences of Legal Permanent Residents of Mexican origin as they decided to become or not become U.S. citizens. Woroby (2015) argued that there have been attempts to measure the determinants of naturalization rates in the United States (p. 443). Such attempts looked at personal characteristics such as age, gender, and marital status; socioeconomic characteristics such as occupation, years of schooling, and knowledge of the receiving country's language; country of origin; and structural and institutional factors such as recognition of dual citizenship as determinants of naturalization. Most of the literature identified limited English proficiency and low economic status as the most prominent barriers to naturalization. Those studies focused on different demographics in several states with a large Hispanic population. However, none of the studies that addressed LPRs focused on the southernmost region of the United States where the population is 90% of Mexican origin.

Chapter 2 also explored the social exclusion theory and the modern democracy theory of equal rights. Behrman et al. (2003, as cited in Velazquez, 2013, p. 67) argued that the economic instability faced by immigrants from Latin American countries, including Mexico, creates “social exclusion” in their home country which also extends to the country they emigrate to, the United States. Barber (2004) identified that there are many implicit and explicit values embedded in the beliefs of modern democracy such as “equal rights,” “liberty” (freedom), and “majority rule” (pp. 3-5). The modern democracy theory of equal rights applied to the research study here presented, because the study sought to shed light on the barriers and facilitators that lead legal Mexican immigrants to seek or not seek citizenship to better understand the lived experiences of legal Mexican immigrants and to identify actionable insights, recommendations, and tools to use at each step in the naturalization journey. Supporting the U.S citizenship journey has several positive implications including a sense of security against deportation and discrimination, increased civil rights and benefits, and the right to vote in a representative government.

Chapter 3 will describe the research design, including methodology, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter 4 will provide a thorough analysis of the participant interviews and discuss common codes and patterns as well as findings of the study. Chapter 5 will provide an interpretation of the research findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research and implications of the study for policy and social change.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The two previous chapters discussed the lived experiences of legal immigrants from Latin American countries, including Mexico, in pursuing U.S. citizenship. Legal immigrants from Mexico constitute the largest group of legal immigrants eligible to naturalize into U.S. citizens. Mexicans, however, naturalize at far slower rates than other legal immigrants from Latin American and other countries around the world. Previous quantitative studies identified lack of English proficiency, low socioeconomic status, and limited knowledge of the process as factors that influenced whether a legal immigrant sought or did not seek citizenship. Those studies focused on different demographics in various states. However, no studies focused on the southernmost region of the United States where the population is 90% Mexican-origin.

Chapter 3 outlines the qualitative methods used to explore the phenomenon of citizenship participation of the LPRs of Mexican origin in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas. The qualitative study sought to identify social, cultural, and behavioral factors that identified with citizenship participation of the legal Mexican immigrant specifically living in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas. These findings can help to find better solutions that can shape Mexican immigration to the RGV, Texas in the United States. Additionally, the study sought to identify actionable insights, recommendations, and tools to use at each step in the naturalization journey.

This study sought to explore citizenship participation of the LPRs of Mexican origin in the RGV, Texas, through a qualitative phenomenological research design.

The research question for this qualitative study was:

- What are the lived experiences of LPRs of Mexican origin that influenced their decision to seek, or not seek, United States citizenship?

The sub questions were:

- What are the lived experiences of LPRs of Mexican origin that influenced their perceptions of barriers that led them to not seek United States citizenship?
- What are the lived experiences of LPRs of Mexican origin that influenced their perceptions of facilitators that led them to seek United States citizenship?
- What are the perceptions of LPRs of Mexican origin on the role of non-profits in turning barriers into facilitators to seeking United States citizenship?

Research Design and Rationale

Rudestam and Newton (2015) identified that the goal of scholarly inquiry is to add reliable and valid knowledge to the scholarly community (p. 27). As per Rudestam and Newton, deciding between using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods depends on the problem selected and the field of study (p. 27). Rudestam and Newton identified that while there is no preferred method of inquiry in the social sciences, a qualitative approach allows the researcher more flexibility and spontaneity to explore subjects in their natural environment (p. 27).

Research Approaches

The next section will provide a brief description of qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods approaches and will subsequently provide a rationale for selecting a qualitative

research design focused on the phenomenological study research method to explore the study's research questions.

Qualitative Research Approach

Creswell (2009) identified that qualitative research seeks to explore and understand how an individual or a group of individuals explain a social problem (p. 4). As per Creswell, the data collection usually happens in a setting that is familiar and innate to the participants and the data is interpreted inductively through generating themes and making interpretations (p. 4). Creswell further argued that a qualitative study tends to be explanatory because not a lot has been written about the topic or the population studied (p. 26). Creswell further identified several other approaches to qualitative methods of inquiry including phenomenology, grounded theory, narrative approach, and ethnography (p. 13).

Quantitative Research Approach

Quantitative research, according to Creswell (2009) seeks to test objective theories through the examination of the relationship between variables (p. 4). As per Creswell, the variables are usually measured on instruments to produce numbered data that is analyzed through statistical procedures (p. 4). Creswell further identified surveys and experiments as two methods by which to conduct quantitative research (p. 145).

Mixed Methods Research Approach

Creswell (2009) identified that mixed-methods research combines the methods of both qualitative and quantitative inquiry to make the study stronger (p. 4). Despite these perceived benefits, Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) argued that mixed methods put

quantitative and qualitative researchers in competition with one another (p. 375).

Rationale for Qualitative Research Approach

As Creswell (2009) identified, the qualitative research method allows a researcher to gain in-depth knowledge of participants' behaviors and activities in an unstructured or semi-structured setting on a particular issue or topic (p. 181). Creswell further identified that qualitative scholars focus on the participants' perceptions and experiences and the way the participants make sense of their personal experiences (p. 4). This research relied on a qualitative research design to understand the lived experiences of legal Mexican immigrants and the barriers and facilitators they face as they contemplated and sought United States citizenship. The study sought to identify actionable insights, recommendations, and tools to use at each step in the naturalization journey.

Creswell (2009) identified that there are several approaches to qualitative methods of inquiry including phenomenology, grounded theory, narrative approach, and ethnography (p. 13).

Rationale for Phenomenology

Creswell (2009) explained that phenomenology is a strategy that seeks to understand the essence of a lived experience (p. 13). Rudestam and Newton (2015) further identified that phenomenology involves observing a small group of participants over an extensive period to develop meanings of the human experience (p. 43). As per Rudestam and Newton, researchers typically use interviews and extended conversations to listen, observe, and become familiarized with the phenomenon (p. 43). The phenomenon this research sought to observe were "citizenship" or "naturalization." My

study fell within the advocacy/participatory paradigm of social sciences research because it addressed social concerns and the marginalization of Latino immigrants, more specifically legal Mexican immigrants from political participation. I sought to explore citizenship participation to better understand the perceived barriers and facilitators that led legal immigrants to seek United States citizenship and to identify actionable insights, recommendations, and tools to use at each step in the naturalization journey.

Grounded theory was not an appropriate qualitative method for this research study. Rudestam and Newton (2015), identified that grounded theory inquiry studies a process, action, or interaction, and conceptualizes similarities of experiences to build a theory (p. 43). A narrative approach was also not appropriate. As per Creswell (2009), the narrative approach studies the lives of individuals through storytelling and may not trigger the participant to share their experiences to answer the sought-after research question (p. 13). Lastly, ethnography was not an appropriate research method. As Creswell identified, the ethnographic approach involves a long time for data collection of an intact cultural group in a natural setting (p. 13). An immigrant marginalized in a foreign country is not in their natural setting.

The Role of the Researcher

The role of a researcher in this qualitative study is to administer the research instruments, collect data, and analyze the data, as appropriate. The researcher was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis in this qualitative study. I personally collected the data for this study through a series of face-to-face structured interviews. I subsequently transcribed, analyzed, and reported the data collected. Face-to-face

interviews allowed me to probe the participants and to clarify unclear or ambiguous questions to the participants through a debriefing.

Researcher Bias

A qualitative researcher is undoubtedly influenced by his/her experiences including family, community, education institutions, and other socialization mechanisms in collecting and analyzing data. While researchers are required to be objective in conducting, interpreting, and reporting research, their personal experiences nonetheless trigger and reinforce their interest in the topic area and influence the research design and process. Creswell (2009) cautioned that it is important to clearly identify the role of the researcher in data collection and that a protocol be established early on (p. 178). In qualitative research, the researcher is an active participant in administering the research instruments, collecting data, and analyzing the data collected.

Several of my lived experiences presented potential risks of bias in conducting my research study. For example, I've collaborated with ARISE on several projects since 2010 and got invited to be an Executive Board member after completing my data collection in May 2023. I began my Executive Board member term on July 1, 2023. Also, I am a naturalized U.S. citizen born in Mexico, and I have lived near the border region for over thirty years.

To avoid researcher bias, I set boundaries with the research participants from the onset. I identified myself as a legal immigrant from Mexico and as a community partner of ARISE for over 10 years. While setting boundaries with the participant is necessary, it is important to also establish rapport and establish trust with the participants for

conducting a successful interview. Rapport-building begins with the initial contact with the participant. Ravitch and Carl (2016) identified that building rapport with a research participant can be done respectfully and incrementally (p. 350). Therefore, I was careful not to get “too friendly” with research participants. As Ravitch and Carl identified, it may lead to skewed or biased responses, and skewed data (p. 353).

Methodology

Rudestam and Newton (2015) identified that the goal of scholarly inquiry is to add reliable and valid knowledge to the scholarly community (p. 27). Deciding between using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods depends on the problem selected and the field of study.

Rudestam and Newton (2015) identified that phenomenology involves observing a small group of participants over an extensive period to develop meanings of the human lived experience (p. 43). As per Rudestam and Newton, qualitative researchers typically use interviews and extended conversations to listen, observe, and become familiarized with the phenomenon (p. 43). I studied legal immigrants from Mexico living in the RGV, Texas, where the population is over 90% of Mexican origin. The observations took the form of interactions through individual interviews to explore citizenship participation as a phenomenon to better understand the perceived barriers and facilitators that led legal immigrants to seek U.S. citizenship.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) identified interviewing as a method for qualitative research that allows the researcher to communicate with participants who have knowledge of, or experience with, the phenomenon being examined (p. 3). Rubin and

Rubin further identified that through interviews, the researcher can explore in detail the “experiences, motives, and opinions” of the participants and is able to better understand different perspectives (p. 3).

Research Questions

As per Maxwell (2013), a research question specifically explains what the study intends to learn or understand (p. 75). Maxwell further identified that the research question keeps the study focused and provides guidance for how to conduct said study (p. 75). Creswell (2009) identified that qualitative studies rely on central and sub questions for inquiry (p. 129). As per Creswell, the central question is broad and consistent with the methodology (p. 130). Creswell further identified that the sub questions can help narrow the focus of the study during the interview (p. 130).

This study explored citizenship participation of the LPRs of Mexican origin in the RGV, Texas, through a qualitative phenomenological research design.

The research question that guided this study was:

- What are the lived experiences of LPRs of Mexican origin that influenced their decision to seek, or not seek, U.S. citizenship?

The sub questions that guided this study were:

- What are the lived experiences of LPRs of Mexican origin that influenced their perceptions of barriers that led them to not seek U.S. citizenship?
- What are the lived experiences of LPRs of Mexican origin that influenced their perceptions of facilitators that led them to seek U.S. citizenship?

- What are the perceptions of LPRs of Mexican origin on the role of non-profits in turning barriers into facilitators to seeking U.S. citizenship?

Interview Questions

Rubin and Rubin (2012) argued that through interviews the researcher can explore in detail the “experiences, motives, and opinions” of the participants and can then understand different perspectives (p. 3). Hence, interviews were appropriate for this study to address the research question.

In reviewing the literature, I found that Moreno Saldivar (2015) provided a good qualitative methodological example for my study (p. 67). Moreno Saldivar examined the perceptions of red tape in government policies by Latinos and whether the red tape impacts their political attitudes and participation (p. 51). Incorporating Moreno Saldivar’s (2015, p. 67) interview guide of five preliminary questions, served as a foundation for my interview guide. My interview guide can be found in Appendix A.

In the literature, a Pew Hispanic Center’s 2012 National Survey of Latinos measured Latino’s attitudes across several variables, including politics, attitudes regarding immigration laws, the economy, and the legal immigrant experience in the U.S. I implemented some of the demographic questions from the Pew Hispanic Center’s questionnaire into my interview guide. My interview guide is included in Appendix A.

Participant Selection

Frankfort-Nachmias et al. (2015) identified that researchers could make precise inferences to a “population” based on a small “sample” (p. 144). As per Frankfort-Nachmias et al., the “population” is the set of all units involved about which conclusions

will be drawn (p. 145). Frankfort-Nachmias et al. identified that the “sampling unit” is a single member (person, structure, perspective, activity, or time) of the population (p. 145). As per Ravitch and Carl (2016), determining the unit-of-analysis will guide the selection of your participants or sample (p. 138).

Unit of Analysis

Participants were targeted for this study based on the following criteria:

- Legal Mexican immigrants;
- At least 18 years of age;
- Have been Legal Permanent Residents for at least 5 years;
- Currently live in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas; and
- Are currently participating in U.S. citizenship classes.

ARISE (2019a) has four centers located in the Hidalgo County colonias of Las Milpas, South Tower, Muñiz and Hargill in South Texas (para. 3). Each ARISE center responds to the specific needs of the community members by providing the opportunity “to learn to drive, make crafts, prepare for citizenship exams, and learn to live healthier lives” (para. 4).

Sampling Strategy

I used a combination of “convenience sampling” and “purposeful sampling.” As per Frankfort-Nachmias et al. (2015), researchers obtain a convenient sample by selecting whatever sampling units are conveniently available (p. 148). Obtaining a sample from ARISE members was “convenient” because ARISE is one of few nonprofits in the RGV that offers large-scale immigration services and has a strong presence in the communities

of the RGV, Texas. Collecting a sample at ARISE was convenient because I have collaborated with them since 2010, and the Executive Director readily granted me permission to collect data at its various locations.

Ravitch and Carl (2016) defined “purposeful” or “purposive” sampling as sampling in which a researcher chooses research participants for specific reasons, including having experienced something personally, having knowledge of a specific phenomenon, or residing in a specific location (p. 128). Ravitch and Carl further identified that “purposeful sampling” provides a qualitative study with “context-rich and detailed accounts of specific populations and locations” (p. 128). The sample selected from the participants of ARISE was “purposive” and representative of the population of the RGV. As per the “Rio Grande Valley Texas” (2016), the RGV consists of 4 counties with a population of over 1.3 million: Hidalgo, Cameron, Starr, and Willacy (para. 1). According to the U. S. Census in 2008 (as cited in “Rio Grande Valley Texas,” 2016, para. 1), the population in the four counties was predominantly of Mexican origin: 90% in Hidalgo; 86% in Cameron; 97% in Starr; and 86% in Willacy. Similarly, the participants of ARISE are predominantly of Mexican origin and come from all walks of life. ARISE has 4 centers in Hidalgo County.

Sample Size

Ravitch and Carl (2016) identified that there are no set rules in qualitative research for the number of participants in a study (p. 138). Patton (2002, as cited in Ravitch and Carl, 2016, p.138), argued that the sample size depends on several things, such as: “what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, and what is at stake.” As

per Patton, the sample size also depends on “what will be useful, what will have credibility,” and what is obtainable given available time and resources. Patton further identified that although qualitative findings depend on context, they can help to make important decisions and suggest applications to a broader population. I recruited the sample from this study from the citizenship classes offered by ARISE.

ARISE offers 3 English and Civics courses and 6 Spanish and Civics classes two times a year at 3 of their 5 locations. Courses are offered in the morning and in the afternoon and meet 2-3 times a week for a period of 3 months. Students enrolled in the English Civics at ARISE English and Civics courses are between the ages of 18 and 50 and have been LPRs for at least three years and speak limited to proficient English. The students enrolled in the Spanish Civics courses are at least 50 years old and have been LPRs for at least 15 years and have limited to no English proficiency. About 98% of all students enrolled in the civics courses at ARISE are of Mexican origin; roughly 2% are from other Latin American countries. Each class offered by ARISE averages 20 students for a total of 260 a year.

Miles et al. (2014) identified that it is important to note that qualitative research samples are almost exclusively small and studied in-depth (p. 31). Erickson (2011) explained that a qualitative approach seeks to discover and describe in narrative form how people conduct themselves in their daily lives (p. 43). Ravitch and Carl (2016) further identified that the goal of purposeful sampling and qualitative research is not to generalize, but to “rigorously, ethically, and thoroughly answer the research question” and achieve a multi-perspective understanding (p. 138). I initially proposed a period of 4

weeks for individual interviews, with a goal of 30 interviews total. I decided I would end the sampling process once saturation occurred.

Saturation

As per Rudestam and Newton (2015) the concepts of the data collected drive the sampling process in qualitative research (p. 124). As per Rudestam and Newton, the process involves checking and revising data collected against the theory and research questions being tested (p. 220). Rudestam and Newton further identified that saturation occurs when no new information is collected through the sampling process and said information does not yield any new coding categories (p. 220). According to Rudestam and Newton, sampling dimensions cannot viably be determined before the researcher begins to collect data (p. 125). I began my field research with a goal of 30 participant interviews. Saturation helped determine the viable sample size to answer the research questions I sought to explore.

Instrumentation

Creswell (2009) identified that a qualitative study tends to be explanatory because not a lot of writing exists about the phenomenon, or the population studied (p. 26). Chapter 2 of this research study provided the case for the urgency of engaging in my study. As per Erickson (2011), a qualitative approach to research seeks to discover and describe in narrative form how people conduct themselves in their daily lives (p. 43). Creswell further identified that qualitative research observes common patterns and draws conclusions from recurring events or behaviors that have not yet been identified or labeled (p. 61).

Rubin and Rubin (2012) identified that interviewing as a method for qualitative research that allows the researcher to talk to participants who have knowledge of, or experience with, the problem being examined (p. 3). Through interviews, as identified by Rubin and Rubin, the researcher can explore in detail the “experiences, motives, and opinions” of the participants and is able to understand different perspectives (p. 3).

As the researcher, I administered the research instrument, collected data, and analyzed the data as appropriate. I personally collected the data for the study through a series of structured in person interviews. I conducted the research interviews predominantly in Spanish to meet the participants at their own level. I subsequently transcribed and analyzed the data collected in Spanish and translated the codes and themes into English to present the results and analysis. I was able to interpret and translate the findings because I am a native Spanish speaker who grew up in the RGV, and I am also a legal immigrant from Mexico.

Data Collection

Before conducting my study, I anticipated the data collection process for this study would take several steps. The sample collected was “conveniently” and “purposefully” collected from members of ARISE. I introduced my research plan to the Executive Director and staff leading the citizenship classes and they readily agreed to allow me to collect my sample at their sites.

I anticipated that once the IRB granted me approval to begin collecting my data, I would reach out to my contacts at the non-profit ARISE. Participation in my study would be completely voluntary. To recruit participants, I proposed to work with the coordinator

and the teachers at each of the ARISE centers where English Civics and Spanish Civics classes were being offered. I also developed a flyer (Appendix B) for them to distribute in their classes to inform the participants about my study. The flyer included a brief description of my study, my contact number and email, and the timeline for conducting the interviews. For safety concerns of the research participants, the non-profit employees, and myself during the pandemic facing our nation, I provided the research participants with the options to conduct our interviews in person or via Zoom, Hangouts, or WhatsApp video conferencing or through a phone call.

After the flyers had been distributed, I proposed to coordinate to e-visit each of the English Civics and Spanish Civics classes offered by ARISE. I would briefly identify myself in my role as a researcher and describe the purpose and importance of my research. I would also allow for brief questions about my study. I would seek voluntary participation from the students and would explain that he/she could end participation at any step of the process of the study. I would ask all interested participants to provide me with their full name and contact information on a sign-up sheet. I would also ask the teacher of each class to collect a list of members interested in voluntarily participating in the interviewing process.

I anticipated that once there were at least 30 interested participants that respond to my flyers and class announcements, I would invite them to an information session. I anticipated 30 participants would engage in the interview sessions. Once I began conducting the interviews, the data collected would indicate when saturation had been reached and the interviews should cease. At the information session, I anticipated to

further describe my study, explain the research process, and go over the research questions in the language of the potential research participants' preference. I also anticipated going over the consent form and explaining that participation was voluntary and that participants could choose to opt out of the research at any point. The consent form explained that the interview consisted of 7 open ended questions and 7 demographic identifying questions. I anticipated to ask for the interviewees consent to record the interviews. I would explain that recording was preferred for accuracy in reporting. If the interested participants chose to become actual participants in my research study, they would need to sign the consent form in person or via DocuSign to ensure authenticity, and I would proceed to schedule him / her for an interview. In addition to the consent form, I would also describe how I would safeguard the participants' identity and ensure anonymity. I would let them know I would assign a number to each participant and would store the data on my personal password protected computer, which only I would have access to. I will discuss the context of the consent form in more detail in the following section as well as the measures I took to ensure the safety, confidentiality, and anonymity of research participants. The consent form is included in Appendix C.

Interview Process

Maxwell (2013) emphasized that there is no “cookbook” for qualitative methodology (p. 87). Instead, Maxwell argued that the issues studied, the context of the research, and other components will guide the research methods (p. 87). I relied on participant interviews for this phenomenological study, which sought to help understand

the research question: What are the lived experiences of LPRs of Mexican origin that influenced their decision to seek, or not seek, U.S. citizenship?

The study also attempted to answer the following sub questions:

- What are the lived experiences of LPRs of Mexican origin that influenced their perceptions of barriers that led them to not seek U.S. citizenship?
- What are the lived experiences of LPRs of Mexican origin that influenced their perceptions of facilitators that led them to seek U.S. citizenship?
- What are the perceptions of LPRs of Mexican origin on the role of non-profits in turning barriers into facilitators to seeking U.S. citizenship?

In reviewing the literature, I found that Moreno Saldivar (2015) provided a good qualitative methodological example for my study. I used Moreno Saldivar's (p. 67) survey questions and some demographic questions from the Pew Hispanic Center's 2012 National Survey of Latinos (2012) as a guide to develop my interview guide. The interview guide is included in Appendix A.

I assumed that most of the sample respondents would be more comfortable conducting interviews in Spanish. For safety concerns of the research participants, the non-profit employees, and myself during the pandemic facing our nation, I anticipated to provide the research participants with the options to conduct our interviews in person or via Zoom, Hangouts, or WhatsApp video conferencing or through a phone call.

I proposed a period of 4-weeks for conducting the individual interviews either in person or via video conference through Zoom, Hangouts, or WhatsApp. I anticipated each interview would last from 15- to 30-minutes. The interviews would be recorded, and

the audio and video files would be saved on my personal password protected computer. I anticipated inviting participants to a second 15-minute interview to allow for any final comments and to ensure accurate reporting. The interviews would be transcribed verbatim and analyzed using the secure software NVivo. All recordings of interviews would be stored in the researcher's password-protected personal computer and in an external hard-drive for back-up and kept for five years. Only I, the researcher, would have access to the participants' information. Each participant would be assigned an interview number for transcription and coding. Once the interviews were transcribed, there would be no personal identifiers. A file with each participant's name and assigned number to allow for retrieval by me, the researcher, would also be stored in my personal password-protected computer.

The following sections will delineate the process for analyzing the data collected and validating the findings.

Data Analysis

Miles et al. (2014) identified several tools qualitative researchers can use to keep from getting overwhelmed by the accumulation of data (p. 122). Frankfort-Nachmias, et al. (2015) identified that technology is needed for content analysis and coding (p. 278). Creswell (2009) further identified that the researcher can retrieve large passages, can determine the use of codes, and compare different codes (p. 188). However, Creswell pointed out that most software programs are only available on the PC platform: MAXqda; Atlas.ti; QRS NVivo; and HyperRESEARCH (p. 188). After looking into several of these software programs, I decided to rely on Microsoft Word, Microsoft

Excel, Google Docs, Youtube, and NVivo to transcribe, categorize and synthesize and subsequently analyze the obtained information from the interviews for recurring themes and perspectives.

Additionally, I anticipated using the NVivo software to develop a coding system to safeguard participant identity. Saldaña (2016) defined “code” as a word or short phrase used in qualitative research to symbolically assign a “summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute” to visual or written data (p. 4). By codifying, Saldaña further identified that a researcher creates a systematic system for data classification and categorization (p. 9). As per Saldaña, this requires a closer look at emergent patterns and human experiences and grouping them together into various categories (p. 9). Saldaña also cautioned that codes are rarely on point the first time around, and coding can involve several cycles of recoding that include one word, several words, or entire passages (pp. 10-11). Saldaña further identified that the recoding process allows for the researcher to synthesize information and refine codes and categories (p. 12).

I anticipated categorizing, synthesizing, and subsequently analyzing the obtained information from the interviews for recurring themes and perspectives. Frankfort-Nachmias et al. (2015) identified that technology is needed for content analysis and coding (p. 278). As per Frankfort-Nachmias et al., one important feature of some computer-assisted programs includes the ability to assess inter-coder reliability (p. 278). As per Creswell (2009), the computer provides an efficient way to store and locate qualitative data (p. 188). Creswell further identified that the researcher could retrieve

large passages, can determine the used of codes, and compare different codes (p. 188).

Maxwell (2013) identified the wide use of software designed for qualitative data analysis (p. 115).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Shenton (2004) identified that qualitative researchers need to employ frameworks to ensure the rigor of their methodologies to satisfy the criteria of dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability (p. 63). This section will detail the measures I took to ensure the trustworthiness of my study.

Dependability

According to Shenton (2004), meeting the “dependability” criteria in qualitative research is like meeting the reliability criteria in quantitative research (p.71). However, Shenton pointed out that meeting the dependability criteria may be more difficult for qualitative researchers because it relies on observations in the present time (p.71).

According to Shenton, qualitative researchers should strive to provide the tools to repeat the study in the future (p. 71). To ensure dependability in my study, I anticipated describing the process for collecting my data, storing, analyzing, and reporting my findings in detail so a future researcher can replicate the process. In addition, I anticipated having a follow up interview for debriefing with each research participant to ask if they had any additional information to add to our discussion. This would serve as an opportunity to discuss the key points for accuracy.

Credibility

Shenton (2004) argued that “credibility” in qualitative research is the equivalent of internal validity in quantitative research (p. 64). Shenton further identified that to address “credibility,” qualitative researchers must demonstrate they accurately recorded the phenomenon under investigation (p. 64). To ensure credibility in my study, I sought to engage in prolonged, open-ended interviews with the research participants to ensure I accurately and thoroughly captured their experiences. Additionally, I sought to provide the research participants with the opportunity to confirm and verify key points of the interview through a follow up interview. Participants would be able to notify me if any information was incorrect. I also planned to complete a thorough data analysis process with the intent to capture the true lived or perceived experiences of the research participants.

Confirmability

Shenton (2004) defined “confirmability,” of a qualitative study as the use of objective instruments versus human perception and skill (p. 72). As per Shenton, to achieve “confirmability,” qualitative researchers must demonstrate that results are based on the data and not their own perceptions (p. 63). To ensure objectivity in my findings, I would address any potential personal bias by letting the research participants know I was also an immigrant from Mexico, had to learn English and waited years for the opportunity to obtain my citizenship. I would maintain a professional relationship with the research participants and would avoid fraternizing with them. I would also ensure to use the interview guide approved by the IRB to conduct the research interviews. I sought

to use the same questions with each research participant and ensure the use unobtrusive methods in conducting the interviews. I would also engage in a detailed coding process.

Transferability

According to Shenton (2004), “transferability” in qualitative research is like external validity in quantitative research (p. 69). Shenton further identified that to allow for “transferability,” qualitative researchers are tasked with providing enough details of the context and the environment in which the research was conducted and finding can be applied (p. 69). Shenton further identified that it is difficult for a qualitative researcher to demonstrate his/her research can be applied to the larger population because qualitative research studies a small sample of a specific population (p. 69). To ensure transferability of my study, I would ensure to provide enough contextual information surrounding the population, methods, and findings to allow future researchers to “transfer” my findings to other situations. I would also intentionally attempt to identify the unique codes and themes within the research phenomenon and not engage in generalizations.

Strategies to Ensure Trustworthiness

Creswell (2009) recommended triangulating different data sources by examining the data and using it to build coherent justifications for the identified themes as a strategy for ensuring trustworthiness (p. 191). One such method, as Creswell suggested, is involving research participants in reviewing codes and analysis reports to determine accurate reporting before submitting a study for publication (p. 191). Hence, I sought to have a short follow up interview with each of the interview participants to review the discussion and allow them one last opportunity to add to any information they may have

missed during the initial interview. I would make the necessary edits and then move on to the conclusion and proposed future research.

Creswell (2009) also advised clarifying the bias brought to the research, report on negative or discrepant findings, and spending extensive time in the field (p. 192). Gibbs (2007, as cited in Creswell, 2009, p. 190) proposed checking transcripts, ensuring consistency in the definition of codes, and cross-checking the codes. I acknowledged the risk of potential bias based on my personal lived experiences that may affect the findings. I would inform research participants of my role as a Board Member of ARISE Adelante and as a legal immigrant from Mexico on the onset of the interview process. I would also ensure to rely closely on the interview guide and pay very close attention to interview transcripts in coding and data analysis. I would also maintain a professional relationship with the research participants and avoid fraternizing with them.

Ethical Considerations and Protection Measures

Creswell (2009) cautioned that researchers must anticipate ethical dilemmas and address them clearly within their research plans (p. 88). As per Creswell, the researcher must ensure the protection of human subject (a living individual) (p. 88). Creswell further argued that it is the researcher's responsibility and obligation to protect all data collected and ensure any identifiable information remains private (p. 88). Ravitch and Carl (2016) identified consulting with the IRB and ethics committees, informed consent, research relationships and boundaries, reciprocity, transparency, and confidentiality as techniques to ensure ethics in qualitative research (p. 343). The following sections will discuss the measures I would use to ensure confidentiality and consent of the research participants.

Confidentiality

Ensuring the confidentiality of research participants is key in any research study. Seiber (1992, as cited in Ravitch & Carl, 2016, pp. 363-364) identified that confidentiality involves how a research participant's privacy and how the information obtained will be shared. As per Seiber, keeping data obtained from research participants "confidential" may mean using pseudonyms, name change, or not revealing a participant's job title or unique attributes. Additionally, as per Seiber, a researcher must ensure that research participants feel safe and secure. Hence, I proposed to advise participants that I would not disclose information, that their identity would be kept confidential and that their responses to any interview question during the research process would not make them target to repercussions. I would also advise the research participants on the importance of privacy and confidentiality since it is likely they would receive help from a family member or a non-profit employee to participate in the interview in person or via Zoom, Hangouts, or WhatsApp video conferencing and in signing the consent form via DocuSign.

Anonymity on the other hand, as Ravitch and Carl (2016) differentiated, implies that there would be no way of identifying research participants identify or linking the obtained data with research results (p. 364). Ravitch and Carl further recommended removing all identifying information from interview transcripts and coding sheets to further ensure anonymity of research participants (p. 365). Anonymity results, as per Ravitch and Carl, from the analysis of aggregate data and not individualized data (p. 365). To ensure anonymity, I sought to assign a number to each participant. Additionally,

all data would be stored on my personal computer, to which only I have access. I proposed to store the data collected during the study for a period of 5 years. This would make access to my raw data readily available for future studies.

Consent Forms

Ravitch and Carl (2016) stressed the importance of obtaining consent from the research participants from which the researcher will solicit information (pp. 359-360). As mentioned earlier in the section on participant recruitment, I proposed to identify myself and the purpose of my research from the onset during my initial e-visit with the potential research participants. I sought voluntary participation from the students and to explain that he/she can end participation at any step of the process of the study. Once the potential participants indicated interest in learning more about my study, I would invite them into an information session, where I again would explain the research process and go over the consent form, included in Appendix C. I would also explain that participants could choose to opt-out of the research at any point. The consent form would explain that the interview consisted of 7 open-ended questions and 7 demographic questions which could be completed in 15-30 minutes. I would ask the interviewees for their consent to record the interviews. I would also explain that recording is preferred for accuracy in reporting. If the interested participants chose to become actual participants in my research study, they would be asked to sign the consent form in person or via DocuSign to ensure authenticity or in person, and I would proceed to schedule him / her for an interview.

I would also let the participants know that the interviews would be conducted in either Spanish or English or both Spanish and English to accommodate their preference

and comfort level. However, I would specify that the results would be reported and analyzed in English. I proposed to set boundaries with the research participants from the onset and would be transparent during the entire process.

Compensation

Lastly, Ravitch and Carl (2016) cautioned about embarking on a transactional, one-sided process, with the research participants, but instead be transparent and reciprocal (p. 356). Ravitch and Carl defined “reciprocity” as giving back to participants in “exchange” for their time (p. 356). I would provide a \$10 gift card to each research participant who participated in the interview process.

Summary

Chapter 3 described the research design, including methodology, and the processes for data collection, and data analysis. This study presented a qualitative phenomenological research plan relying on extensive participant interviews to better understand the perceived barriers and facilitators that led legal immigrants to seek or not seek United States citizenship. The study sought to identify actionable insights, recommendations, and tools to use at each step in the naturalization journey by relying primarily on participant interviews. Participants targeted for this study were legal immigrants from Mexico, at least 18 years of age, who currently live in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, and were seeking assistance with the U.S. citizenship process.

Chapter 4 will provide a thorough analysis of the participant interviews and discuss common codes and patterns as well as findings of the study. Chapter 5 will explore the implications of the study’s findings, and present recommendations for further study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Chapter 4 presents findings based on the lived experiences of legal Mexican immigrants residing in the RGV, Texas, as they contemplated naturalized citizenship of the United States. The following research question guided the study:

- What are the lived experiences of LPRs of Mexican origin that influenced their decision to seek, or not seek, U.S. citizenship?

The following sub questions were also explored:

- What are the lived experiences of LPRs of Mexican origin that influenced their perceptions of barriers that led them to not seek U.S. citizenship?
- What are the lived experiences of LPRs of Mexican origin that influenced their perceptions of facilitators that led them to seek U.S. citizenship?
- What are the perceptions of LPRs of Mexican origin on the role of non-profits in turning barriers into facilitators to seeking U.S. citizenship?

I used a phenomenological qualitative approach to explore the lived experiences of Mexican immigrants seeking citizenship services in the RGV, Texas, where the population is over 90% of Mexican origin. As Creswell (2009) identified, the qualitative research method allows a researcher to gain in-depth knowledge of participants' behaviors and activities in an unstructured or semi-structured setting on a particular issue or topic (p. 181). Creswell further identified that qualitative scholars focus on the participants' perceptions and experiences and the way the participants make sense of their personal experiences (p. 4). Rudestam and Newton (2015) identified that phenomenology

involves observing a small group of participants over an extensive period to develop meanings of the human lived experience (p. 43). As per Rudestam and Newton, qualitative researchers typically use interviews and extended conversations to listen, observe, and become familiarized with the phenomenon (p. 43). The phenomenon this research observed was “citizenship” or “naturalization.”

My study relied on individual interviews interactions to explore citizenship participation as a phenomenon to better understand the perceived barriers and facilitators that led legal immigrants to seek United States citizenship. Rubin and Rubin (2012) identified interviewing as a method for qualitative research that allows the researcher to communicate with participants who have knowledge of, or experience with, the phenomenon being examined (p. 3). Rubin and Rubin further identified that through interviews, the researcher can explore in detail the “experiences, motives, and opinions” of the participants and is able to better understand different perspectives (p. 3).

Chapter 4 also addresses the research setting, including the setting of the interview; participant demographics; the data collection process; the data analysis process; the evidence of trustworthiness; and the study results.

Setting

Following IRB approval, participants were recruited to be part of the study from their response to the study flyer posted and distributed at the four ARISE locations. Potential participants were invited to an information session where they were screened to determine whether they met the criteria to participate in my study. Of the 30 potential participants who met the criteria, only 25 expressed an interest in participating. After

being contacted to schedule their interview, only 16 were able to schedule an interview.

The other potential participants were unable to participate due to health issues and scheduling conflicts. The 16 participant interviews were recorded, transcribed, and interpreted with no technical difficulties.

Demographics

Frankfort-Nachmias et al. (2015) identified that researchers could make precise inferences to a “population” based on a small “sample” (p. 144). As per Frankfort-Nachmias et al., the “population” is the set of all units involved about which conclusions will be drawn (p. 145). Frankfort-Nachmias et al. identified that the “sampling unit” is a single member (person, structure, perspective, activity, or time) of the population (p. 145). As per Ravitch and Carl (2016), determining the unit-of-analysis will guide the selection of your participants or sample (p. 138). A total of 16 participants were recruited to partake in semi-structured interviews based on the following criteria:

- Legal Mexican immigrants;
- At least 18 years of age;
- Have been Legal Permanent Residents for at least 5 years;
- Currently live in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas; and
- Are currently participating in U.S. citizenship classes.

All 16 interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis. The research participants selected to conduct their interviews in person at two of the ARISE locations. The interview questions were conducted over a 2-week period. The interview questions were open-ended, and each interview lasted between 12-40 minutes. The participants were

identified by utilizing pseudonyms to protect their identity and confidentiality. Table 1 includes the demographics of the participants in more detail.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Age	City	Household Income in 2022	Year Immigrated to US	Year Became LPR	Year Eligible for Citizenship
01A	66	Pharr	Unknown	2002	2008	2013
01B	58	Pharr	Unknown	1987	1996	2001
02A	65	Pharr	\$16,000	1970	1970	1974
02B	67	Elsa	Unknown	1993	1993	1996
03A	66	Mission	\$3,000	2006	2006	2011
03B	65	Edinburg	\$35,000	1985	1990	1995
04A	55	Edinburg	\$12,000	1998	1998	1999
04B	83	Edinburg	Does not file	1976	1987	1992
05A	51	Pharr	\$30,000	1991	2003	2006
05B	68	Edinburg	\$13,000	1985	1989	1994
06A	71	San Juan	Unknown	2006	2007	2012
06B	68	Edinburg	Does not file	1988	1995	2000
07A	58	Pharr	Does not file	1995	2006	2011
07B	57	Alamo	Does not file	1984	1990	1995
08A	50	Pharr	Does not file	1989	1990	1995
09A	46	Alamo	\$3,000	2000	2005	2010

I interviewed 16 participants whose ages ranged from 50 to 83. The household income for those who reported one ranged from \$3000 to \$35,000 a year. The participants identified living in various cities within the RGV, Texas – Alamo, Edinburg, Elsa, Mission, Pharr, and San Juan. The interview participants immigrated to the United States from Mexico between 1970 and 2006. The 16 participants received their Legal Resident status between 1970 and 2008 and were eligible for United States citizenship between 1974 and 2013.

Data Collection

The data collection process for this study took several steps. The sample collected was “conveniently” and “purposefully” obtained from members of ARISE. I introduced my research plan to the Executive Director and staff leading the citizenship classes early on during my research process and they immediately agreed to allow me to collect my sample at their sites.

Once the IRB granted me approval (02-16-23-0607391) to begin collecting my data, I reached out to the Executive Director of ARISE and she instructed her team to assist me in the research process. I reiterated that participation in my study was completely voluntary. To recruit participants, I worked with the coordinator and the teachers at each of the four ARISE centers where English Civics and Spanish Civics classes are offered. I dropped off study flyers (Appendix B) for the ARISE staff to distribute in their classes to invite students to participate in my study. The flyer included a brief description of my study, my contact number and email, and the timeline for

conducting the interviews. Potential participants were encouraged to contact me directly to express their interest in participating in my study.

All potential participants were invited to an information session where I addressed questions regarding the purpose and importance of my study as well as the interview process. I also went over the consent form and explained that participation in my study was completely voluntary, and that each participant could end their participation at any step of the process of the study. In addition to the consent form, I also described how I would safeguard the participants' identity and ensure their anonymity. I explained that I would assign a number to each participant and store the data on my personal password protected computer, which only I would have access to. I also explained that the interview consisted of 7 open-ended questions and the duration would be between 15-30 minutes. I further explained that recording the interview was preferred for accuracy in reporting. Of the 30 potential participants that attended the information session, 25 signed and returned a consent form, and 16 completed the interview process.

I then began reaching out to the potential study participants to schedule their interviews. For safety concerns of the research participants, the non-profit employees, and myself during the pandemic facing our nation, I provided the research participants with the options to conduct our interviews in person or via Zoom, Hangouts, or WhatsApp video conferencing, phone call, or in person. All the potential research participants expressed preferring to meet in person. I also provided each participant with the option to conduct the interview in either English or Spanish. All potential research participants selected to conduct the interview in Spanish.

I scheduled 16 participant interviews in a period of two weeks. The remaining 9 potential participants were not able to participate due to health issues or conflicting personal commitments. I had a short debriefing session with each research participant at the end of their interview. I asked if they had any additional information to add to our interview, and we discussed the key points for accuracy. The debrief session took the place of the proposed follow up interview. I also informed each participant that I would provide them with a summary of the results in Spanish upon completion of the study during the debriefing. Every interview was audio recorded on my personal laptop and lasted between 12-40 minutes. I thanked each participant for their time at the end of their interview and provided them with a \$10 gift card from HEB or Walmart. None of the 16 participants opted to withdraw from my study and completed the entire interview.

As I engaged in the participant interviews, I began to realize that no new information was being obtained. Hence, I did not pursue to schedule the pending participant interviews because saturation had been reached.

Data Analysis

Miles et al. (2014) identified several tools qualitative researchers can use to keep from getting overwhelmed by the accumulation of data (p. 122). Frankfort-Nachmias et al. (2015) identified that technology is needed for content analysis and coding (p. 278). Creswell (2009) further identified that the researcher can retrieve large passages, can determine the use of codes, and compare different codes (p. 188). However, Creswell pointed out that most software programs are only available on the PC platform: MAXqda; Atlas.ti; QRS NVivo; and HyperRESEARCH (p. 188). After looking into

several of these software programs, I decided to rely on Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, Google Docs, YouTube, and NVivo. I relied on these software programs to transcribe, categorize, and synthesize and subsequently analyze the obtained information from the interviews for recurring themes and perspectives.

Once I completed the participant interviews, I used both Google Docs and YouTube to transcribe the video audio recording. I reviewed and compared both transcripts thoroughly. Because the interviews were collected in Spanish, the transcriptions were not quite accurate. I carefully listened to each audio recording and manually corrected each of the 16 transcripts. Reviewing the information with the participants after the interview helped ensure I captured everything accurately. Once I cleaned up all the transcriptions, I downloaded a free trial of NVivo 14 and explored tutorials available on their website where I learned how to organize and analyze the data. I soon learned that NVivo does not automatically identify codes and themes. Instead, there is a multi-step process for the researcher to manually identify codes and themes, a process which proved more time consuming than I had initially anticipated.

I first developed a participant demographic table, which can be found in Table 1 *Participant Demographics* within the “Demographics” section in Chapter 4 of this text. I then uploaded a clean transcript for each of the 16 interviews I conducted. I then linked the demographics to each participant interview. The NVivo software significantly simplified the coding process by helping me develop codes and themes that helped me make sense of my data and draw conclusions. I first created a code for each of the 4 research questions. I assigned the “(RQ1) Decision to Seek or Not Seek,” code to

research question 1: What are the lived experiences of Legal Permanent Residents of Mexican origin that influenced their decision to seek, or not seek, United States citizenship? I assigned the “(RQ2) Perceptions of Barriers” code to research questions 2: What are the lived experiences of Legal Permanent Residents of Mexican origin that influenced their perceptions of barriers that lead them to not seek United States citizenship? I assigned the “(RQ3) Perceptions of Facilitators” code to research question 3: What are the lived experiences of Legal Permanent Residents of Mexican origin that influenced their perceptions of facilitators that lead them to seek United States citizenship? I assigned the “(RQ4) Perceptions of Barriers to Facilitators” code to research question 4: What are the perceptions of Legal Permanent Residents of Mexican origin on the role of non-profits in turning barriers into facilitators to seeking United States citizenship?

Once I had identified the guiding codes, I then read through each participant interview and began identifying additional codes to support each of the 4 research questions. Tables 2 – 5 within the “Results” section in Chapter 4 include the codes that emerged from the first round of coding.

To complete the second round of coding, I exported the coding data into an Excel Document for easier viewing. I then used a Word Document to synthesize information, rename, recode, merge codes, and identify common clusters and themes. This second round of coding allowed for a closer, more comprehensive look at emergent patterns and human experiences. Creating clusters helped develop themes and allowed me to better

understand the data results. Tables 6 – 9 within the “Results” section within Chapter 4 include the themes from which I was able to draw interpretations of this study’s findings.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Shenton (2004) identified that qualitative researchers need to employ frameworks to ensure the rigor of their methodologies to satisfy the criteria of dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability (p. 63). This section will detail the measures I took to ensure the trustworthiness of my study.

Dependability

According to Shenton (2004), meeting the “dependability” criteria in qualitative research is like meeting the reliability criteria in quantitative research (p.71). However, Shenton pointed out that meeting the dependability criteria may be more difficult for qualitative researchers because it relies on observations in the present time (p.71).

According to Shenton, qualitative researchers should strive to provide the tools to repeat the study in the future (p. 71). To ensure dependability in my study, I described the process for collecting my data, storing, analyzing, and reporting my findings in detail so a future researcher could replicate the process. In addition, I had a short debriefing session with each research participant at the end of their interview and asked if they had any additional information to add to our discussion. This served as an opportunity to discuss the key points for accuracy.

Credibility

Shenton (2004) argued that “credibility” in qualitative research is the equivalent of internal validity in quantitative research (p. 64). Shenton further identified that to

address “credibility,” qualitative researchers must demonstrate they accurately recorded the phenomenon under investigation (p. 64). To ensure credibility in my study, I engaged in prolonged, open-ended interviews with the research participants to ensure I accurately and thoroughly captured their experiences. Additionally, I provided the research participants the opportunity to confirm and verify key points of the interview through a debrief session. Participants were able to notify me if any information was incorrect. I also completed a thorough data analysis process with the intent to capture the true lived or perceived experiences of the research participants.

Confirmability

Shenton (2004) defined “confirmability,” of a qualitative study as the use of objective instruments versus human perception and skill (p. 72). As per Shenton, to achieve “confirmability,” qualitative researchers must demonstrate that results are based on the data and not their own perceptions (p. 63). To ensure objectivity in my findings, I addressed any risk of potential personal bias by letting my research participants know I am also an immigrant from Mexico who had to learn English and waited years for the opportunity to obtain my citizenship. I maintained a professional relationship with the research participants and avoided fraternizing with them. I also ensured to use the interview guide that was approved by the IRB. I used the same questions with each research participant and ensured the use unobtrusive methods in conducting the interviews. I also engaged in a detailed coding process during the data analysis process.

Transferability

According to Shenton (2004), “transferability” in qualitative research is like external validity in quantitative research (p. 69). Shenton further identified that to allow for “transferability,” qualitative researchers are tasked with providing enough details of the context and the environment in which the research was conducted and finding can be applied (p. 69). Shenton further identified that it is difficult for a qualitative researcher to demonstrate his/her research can be applied to the larger population because qualitative research studies a small sample of a specific population (p. 69). To ensure transferability of my study, I ensured to provide enough contextual information surrounding the population, methods, and findings to allow future researchers to “transfer” my findings to other situations. I intentionally attempted to identify the unique codes and themes within the research phenomenon and not engage in generalizations based on the literature.

Results

This section presents findings based on the lived experiences of legal Mexican immigrants residing in the RGV, Texas, as they contemplated naturalized citizenship of the United States. The following research question guided the study:

- What are the lived experiences of LPRs of Mexican origin that influenced their decision to seek, or not seek, U.S. citizenship?

The following sub-questions were also explored:

- What are the lived experiences of LPRs of Mexican origin that influenced their perceptions of barriers that led them to not seek U.S. citizenship?

- What are the lived experiences of LPRs of Mexican origin that influenced their perceptions of facilitators that led them to seek U.S. citizenship?
- What are the perceptions of LPRs of Mexican origin on the role of non-profits in turning barriers into facilitators to seeking U.S. citizenship?

Emerging Codes

Several themes of the participants' lived experiences emerged from the interviews and data analysis process. Each theme helped me better understand the perceptions and the experiences of each participant in their decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. Below, Tables 2 – 5 include the codes that emerged from the first round of coding:

Table 2
Emerging Codes: Research Question 1 - “Decision to Seek or Not Seek”

Code and Subcode	Occurrences (Interview Count)	Occurrences (Code Count)
Beneficios (Benefits)	13	24
Cambio de leyes (Change in Immigration Laws)	5	6
La vida en MX es difícil (Life in Mexico is Hard)	6	11
Llevo años viviendo aquí (I've Lived Here for Several Years)	2	2
Mi familia es ciudadana (My Family Members are Citizens)	10	12
Ya era tiempo (It was about Time)	8	11
Proteccion de deportación (Protection against Deportation)	8	19
Sentimientos Anti-inmigrante (Anti-immigrant Sentiments)	8	17
Servir de jurado (Serve on a Jury)	2	2
Violencia en MX (Violence in MX)	2	6
Votar (Voting)	13	25
Ya no tener que renovar la residencia (Not having to Renew the Residency)	3	3
Total	16	138

Table 2 *Emerging Codes: Research Question 1 - "Decision to Seek or Not Seek"*

shows codes and subcodes that emerged for Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of Legal Permanent Residents of Mexican origin that influenced their decision to seek, or not seek, United States citizenship? I assigned the code "Decision to Seek or Not Seek." Both "Benefits" and "Voting" were identified in 13 out of the 16 interviews as factors that affected their decision to seek or not seek U.S. Citizenship. "My Family Members are Citizens," was identified in 10 of the 16 interviews, while "It was About Time," "Protection Against Deportation," and "Anti-Immigrant Sentiments," were identified in 8 of the interviews.

Table 3*Emerging Codes: Research Question 2 - "Perceptions of Barriers"*

Code and Subcode	Occurrences (Interview Count)	Occurrences (Code Count)
Descapacidad <i>(Disability)</i>	5	9
Desconfianza <i>(Mistrust)</i>	4	6
Dinero <i>(Money)</i>	11	31
Divorcio <i>(Divorce)</i>	1	2
Edad <i>(Age)</i>	3	3
El tiempo <i>(Time)</i>	3	8
El Trabajo <i>(Work)</i>	7	9
Falta de información <i>(Lack of Information)</i>	8	14
Falta de transporte <i>(Lack of Transportation)</i>	3	6
Ingles <i>(English)</i>	15	33
Jurar alianza / Ir a guerra <i>(Swear Allegiance / Go to War)</i>	4	9
Las Preguntas <i>(The Questionnaire)</i>	6	13
Miedo y desidia <i>(Fear and Apathy)</i>	11	32
Muchos requisitos <i>(A Lot of Requirements)</i>	2	3
Niños pequeños <i>(Small Children)</i>	5	5
Pandemia <i>(Pandemic)</i>	3	4
Viajes seguidos a México <i>(Often Trips to Mexico)</i>	4	11
Total	16	198

Table 3 *Emerging Codes: Research Question 2 - "Perceptions of Barriers"*

shows codes and subcodes that emerged for Research Question 2: What are the lived experiences of Legal Permanent Residents of Mexican origin that influenced their perceptions of barriers that led them to not seek United States citizenship? I assigned the code "Perceptions of Barriers." "English" was identified in 15 out of the 16 interviews as perceived barriers affecting their decision to seek or not seek U.S. Citizenship. "Money" and "Fear and Apathy" were identified in 11 of the 16 interviews, while "lack of information," was identified in 8 of the interviews.

Table 4*Emerging Codes: Research Question 3 - "Perceptions of Facilitators"*

Code and Subcode	Occurrences (Interview Count)	Occurrences (Code Count)
Ayuda de la familia (<i>Help from Family Members</i>)	3	5
Clases de ciudadanía (<i>Citizenship Classes</i>)	13	22
Confianza en el gobierno (<i>Trust in the Government</i>)	2	3
Hablar ingles (<i>Speak English</i>)	2	3
La edad para hacerlo en español (<i>The Required Age to do it in Spanish</i>)	9	14
Motivación (<i>Motivation</i>)	5	7
Saberse las preguntas (<i>Knowing the Questionnaire</i>)	12	16
Servicios Gratuitos (<i>Free Services</i>)	3	5
Transporte (<i>Transportation</i>)	3	4
Total	16	79

Table 4 *Emerging Codes: Research Question 3 - "Perceptions of Facilitators"*

shows codes and subcodes that emerged for Research Question 3: What are the lived experiences of Legal Permanent Residents of Mexican origin that influenced their perceptions of facilitators that led them to seek United States citizenship? I assigned the code "Perceptions of Facilitators." "Citizenship Classes" was identified in 13 out of the 16 interviews as perceived facilitators affecting their decision to seek or not seek U.S. Citizenship. "Knowing the Questionnaire" was identified in 12 of the interviews, while meeting "The Required Age to do it in Spanish" was identified in 9 of the interviews.

Table 5*Emerging Codes: Research Question 4 - "Perceptions of Barriers into Facilitators"*

Code and Subcode	Occurrences (Interview Count)	Occurrences (Code Count)
Asesoramiento (Advice)	15	48
Ayudas económicas del gobierno (Government Financial Assistance)	10	13
Buenos modos (Good methods)	9	15
Confianza (Trust)	15	36
Las Iglesias (Churches)	1	1
Mas lugares que ayuden (More Places Providing Aid)	8	10
Menos requisitos (Less Requirements)	4	5
Ofrescan transporte (Offer Transportation)	1	1
Te animan (Encouragement)	11	22
Total	16	151

Table 5 *Emerging Codes: Research Question 3 - “Perceptions of Barriers into Facilitators”* shows codes and subcodes that emerged for Research Question 4: What are the perceptions of Legal Permanent Residents of Mexican origin on the role of non-profits in turning barriers into facilitators to seeking United States citizenship? I assigned the code “Perceptions of Barriers into Facilitators.” “Advice” and “Trust” were identified in 15 out of the 16 interviews as perceived barriers turning into facilitators, by non-profits, affecting their decision to seek or not seek U.S. Citizenship. “Encouragement” was identified in 11 of the interviews, while needing additional “Government Assistance” was identified in 10 of the interviews.

Themes and Supporting Codes

A second round of coding allowed me to rename, recode, merge codes, and identify common clusters and themes. This second round of coding allowed for a closer, more comprehensive look at emergent patterns and human experiences. Creating clusters helped develop themes to better understand the data results. Tables 6 – 9 include the themes from which I was able to draw interpretations of this study’s findings.

Research Question 1 – Decision to Seek or Not Seek

Table 6 *Themes and Supporting Codes: Research Question 1 - “Decision to Seek or Not Seek”* includes themes and supporting codes that emerged for Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of Legal Permanent Residents of Mexican origin that influenced their decision to seek, or not seek, United States citizenship? Four themes emerged from the data: “Benefits of Being a Citizen,” “Discrimination for Not Being a

Citizen,” “I Would Not be Able to Live in Mexico,” and “My Life is in the United States.”

Table 6

Themes and Supporting Codes: Research Question 1 - “Decision to Seek or Not Seek”

Themes	Supporting Codes
Beneficios de ser ciudadano (<i>Benefits of Being a Citizen</i>)	Votar (<i>Voting</i>) Beneficios (<i>Benefits</i>) Servir de Jurado (<i>Serve on a Jury</i>) Yo no tener que renovar la residencia (<i>Not Having to Renew the Residency</i>) Protección de deportación (<i>Protection Against Deportation</i>)
Discriminación por no ser ciudadano (<i>Discrimination for Not Being a Citizen</i>)	Cambio de leyes (<i>Change in Immigration Laws</i>) Sentimientos antinmigrantes (<i>Anti-Immigrant Sentiments</i>)
No podría vivir en México (<i>I Would Not be Able to Live in Mexico</i>)	La vida en México es difícil (<i>Life in Mexico is Hard</i>) Violencia en México (<i>Violence in Mexico</i>)
Mi vida está en Estados Unidos (<i>My Life is in the United States</i>)	Llevo años viviendo aquí (<i>I’ve Lived Here for Many Years</i>) Mi familia es ciudadana (<i>My Family Members are Citizens</i>) Ya era tiempo (<i>It was About Time</i>)

“Benefits of Being a Citizen,” was identified as a factor that influenced research participants’ decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. Supporting codes for “Benefits of Being a Citizen” include “Voting,” “Benefits,” “Serve on a Jury,” “Not Having to Renew the Residency,” and “Protection Against Deportation.” As indicated in Table 2, both “Benefits” and “Voting” were identified in 13 out of the 16 interviews (81.25%) as

factors that affected their decision to seek or not seek U.S. Citizenship. “Protection Against Deportation,” was identified in 8 of the interviews (50%), while “Not Having to Renew the Residency” was identified in 3 of the interviews (18.75%), and “Serve on a Jury” was identified in 2 of the interviews (12.5%).

“Discrimination for Not Being a Citizen” was also identified a factor that influenced participants’ decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. Supporting codes for “Discrimination for Not Being a Citizen” include “Change in Immigration Laws” and “Anti-Immigrant Sentiments.” As indicated in Table 2, “Anti-Immigrant Sentiments” was identified in 8 of the 16 participant interviews (50%), and “Change in Immigration Laws” was identified in 5 of the interviews (31.25%).

“I Would Not be Able to Live in Mexico,” was also identified a factor that influenced participants’ decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. “Life in Mexico is Hard” and “Violence in Mexico” are supporting codes for “I Would Not be Able to Live in Mexico.” As indicated in Table 2, “Life in Mexico is Hard” was identified as a factor affecting their decision to seek or not seek citizenship by 6 of the participants (37.5%) while “Violence in Mexico” was identified by 2 participants (12.5%).

Lastly, “My Life is in the United States” was also identified a factor that influenced participants’ decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. Supporting codes for “My Life is in the United States” include “I’ve Lived Here for Many Years,” “My Family Members are Citizens,” and “It was About Time.” As indicated in Table 2, “My Family Members are Citizens,” was identified by 10 of the 16 research participants

(62%). “It was About Time” was identified by 8 of the research participants (50%), while “I’ve Lived Here for Many Years” was identified by 2 participants (12.5%).

Research Question 2 – Perceptions of Barriers

Table 7 *Themes and Supporting Codes: Research Question 2 - “Perceptions of Barriers”* includes themes and supporting codes that emerged for Research Question 2: What are the lived experiences of Legal Permanent Residents of Mexican origin that influenced their perceptions of barriers that led them to not seek United States citizenship? Six themes emerged from the data: “Life Circumstances,” “Fear of the Unknown,” “Economic Status,” “Personal Responsibilities,” “Not Wanting to Swear Loyalty,” and “Difficulty with the Requirements.”

Table 7*Themes and Supporting Codes – Research Question 2 - “Perceptions of Barriers”*

Themes	Supporting Codes
Circunstancias de la vida (<i>Life Circumstances</i>)	Discapacidad (<i>Disability</i>) Pandemia (<i>Pandemic</i>) Divorcio (<i>Divorce</i>)
Miedo a lo desconocido (<i>Fear of the Unknown</i>)	Desconfianza (<i>Mistrust</i>) Falta de información (<i>Lack of information</i>) Miedo y desidia (<i>Fear and Apathy</i>)
Estatus económico (<i>Economic Status</i>)	Dinero (<i>Money</i>) Falta de transporte (<i>Lack of Transportation</i>)
Responsabilidades personales (<i>Personal Responsibilities</i>)	El tiempo (<i>Time</i>) El trabajo (<i>Work</i>) Niños pequeños (<i>Small Children</i>)
No querer jurar lealtad (<i>Not Wanting to Swear Loyalty</i>)	Jurar alianza / Ir a guerra (<i>Swear Allegiance / Go to War</i>) Viajes seguidos a Mexico (<i>Often Trips to Mexico</i>)
Dificultad con los requisitos (<i>Difficulty with the Requirements</i>)	Muchos requisitos (<i>A Lot of Requirements</i>) Las preguntas (<i>The Questionnaire</i>) Edad (<i>Age</i>) Ingles (<i>English</i>)

“Life Circumstances,” was identified as a perceived barrier that influenced research participants’ decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. Supporting codes for “Life Circumstances” include “Disability,” “Pandemic,” and “Divorce.” As indicated in Table 3, “Divorce” was identified by 5 of the research participants (31.25%). “Pandemic” was identified by 2 of the research participants (12.5%), while “Divorce” was identified by 1 participant (6.25%).

“Fear of the Unknown” was also identified as a perceived barrier that influenced research participants’ decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. Supporting codes for “Fear of the Unknown” include “Mistrust,” “Lack of Information,” and “Fear and Apathy.” As indicated in Table 3, “Fear and Apathy” was identified as a barrier for seeking citizenship by 11 of the 16 research participants (68.75%). “Lack of information” was identified as a barrier for seeking citizenship by 8 of the participants (50%) while “Mistrust” was identified by 4 participants (25%).

“Economic Status” was also identified as a perceived barrier that influenced research participants’ decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. Supporting codes for “Economic Status” include “Money” and “Lack of Transportation.” As indicated in Table 3, “Money” was identified by 11 of the research participants (68.75%), while “Lack of Transportation” was identified by 3 participants (18.75%).

“Personal Responsibilities” was also identified as a perceived barrier that influenced research participants’ decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. Supporting codes for “Personal Responsibilities” include “Time,” “Work,” and “Small Children.” As indicated in Table 3, “Work” was identified as a barrier to seeking citizenship by 7 of the

research participants (43.75%). “Small Children” was identified by 5 of the participants (31.25%), while “Time” was identified by 3 of the participants (18.75%).

“Not Wanting to Swear Loyalty” was identified as a perceived barrier that influenced research participants’ decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. Supporting codes for “Not Wanting to Swear Loyalty” include “Swear Allegiance / Go to War” and “Often Trips to Mexico.” As indicated in Table 3, 4 participants (50%) identified “Often Trips to Mexico” as a barrier to seek U.S. citizenship. Four participants (50%) also identified “Swear Allegiance / Go to War” as a barrier.

Lastly, “Difficulty with the Requirements” was identified as a perceived barrier that influenced research participants’ decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. Supporting codes for “Difficulty with the Requirements” include “A Lot of Requirements,” “The Questionnaire,” “Age,” and “English.” As indicated in Table 3, “English” was identified by 15 of the 16 research participants (93.75%) as a perceived barrier to seeking citizenship. “The Questionnaire” was identified by 6 of the research participants (37.5%) while “Age” was identified by 3 participants (18.75%) and “A Lot of Requirements” was identified by 2 participants (12.5%).

Research Question 3 – Perceptions of Facilitators

Table 8 *Themes and Supporting Codes: – Research Question 3 - “Perceptions of Facilitators”* includes themes and supporting codes that emerged for Research Question 3: What are the lived experiences of Legal Permanent Residents of Mexican origin that influenced their perceptions of facilitators that led them to seek United States citizenship?

Three themes emerged from the data: “Resources for Citizenship,” “Advantages,” and “Support.”

Table 8

Themes and Supporting Codes: Research Question 3 - “Perceptions of Facilitators”

Themes	Supporting Codes
Recursos para la ciudadanía (<i>Resources for Citizenship</i>)	Clases de ciudadanía (<i>Citizenship Classes</i>) Servicios Gratuitos (<i>Free Services</i>) Transporte (<i>Transportation</i>)
Ventajas (<i>Advantages</i>)	Saberse las preguntas (<i>Knowing the Questionnaire</i>) Hablar ingles (<i>Speak English</i>) La edad para hacerlo en español (<i>The Required Age to do it in Spanish</i>)
Apoyo (<i>Support</i>)	Motivación (<i>Motivation</i>) Ayuda de la familia (<i>Help from the Family</i>) Confianza en el gobierno (<i>Trust in the Government</i>)

“Resources for Citizenship,” was identified as a perceived facilitator that influenced research participants’ decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. Supporting codes for “Resources for Citizenship” include “Citizenship Classes,” “Free Services,” and “Transportation.” As indicated in Table 4, “Citizenship Classes” was identified as a facilitator for seeking citizenship by 13 of the 16 research participants (81.25%). “Free Services” and “Transportation” were both identified by 3 of the research participants (18.75%) as facilitators for seeking citizenship.

“Advantages” was also identified as a perceived facilitator that influenced research participants’ decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. Supporting codes for “Advantages” include “Knowing the Questionnaire,” “Speak English,” and “The Required Age to do it in Spanish.” As indicated in Table 4, “Knowing the Questionnaire” was identified as a perceived facilitator for seeking U.S. citizenship by 12 of the research participants (75%). “The Required Age to do it in Spanish” was identified by 9 of the research participants (56.25%), whereas “Speak English” was identified by 2 participants (12.5%).

Lastly, “Support” was also identified as a perceived facilitator that influenced research participants’ decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. Supporting codes for “Support” include “Motivation,” “Help from the Family,” and “Trust in the Government.” As Table 4 indicates, “Motivation” was identified as a facilitator of seeking citizenship by 5 of the research participants (31.25%). “Help from the Family” was identified by 3 of the research participants (18.75%), whereas “Trust in the Government” was identified by 2 participants (12.5%).

Research Question 4 – Perceptions of Barriers to Facilitators

Table 9 *Themes and Supporting Codes: Research Question 4 - “Perceptions of Barriers to Facilitators”* includes themes and supporting codes that emerged for Research Question 4: What are the perceptions of Legal Permanent Residents of Mexican origin on the role of non-profits in turning barriers into facilitators to seeking United States citizenship? Four themes emerged from the data: “Non-Profit Organizations,”

“Need for More Resources,” “Other Places Providing Aid,” and “Need for Changes in Citizenship Requirements.”

Table 9

Themes and Supporting Codes: Research Question 4 - “Perceptions of Barriers to Facilitators”

Themes	Supporting Codes
Organizaciones sin fines de lucro (<i>Non-Profit Organizations</i>)	Asesoramiento (<i>Advice</i>) Confianza (<i>Trust</i>) Te animan (<i>Encouragement</i>) Buenos modos (<i>Good Methods</i>)
Necesidad de más recursos (<i>Need for More Resources</i>)	Ayudas económicas del gobierno (<i>Government Financial Assistance</i>) Mas lugares que ayuden (<i>More Places Providing Aid</i>) Ofrescan transporte (<i>Offer Transportation</i>)
<i>Centros de apoyo adicionales</i> (<i>Other Places Providing Aid</i>)	Las iglesias (<i>Churches</i>)
Necesidad de cambios en los requisitos para la ciudadanía (<i>Need for Changes in Citizenship Requirements</i>)	Menos requisitos (<i>Less Requirements</i>)

“Non-Profit Organizations” was identified as a resource for turning perceived barriers into facilitators that influenced research participants’ decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. Supporting codes for “Non-Profit Organizations” include “Advice,” “Trust,” “Encouragement,” and “Good Methods.” As Table 5 indicates, “Advice” and “Trust” were both identified by 15 of the 16 research participants (93.75%) as resources

for turning barriers into facilitators in seeking citizenship. “Encouragement” was identified by 11 of the participants (68.75%), while “Good Methods” was identified by 9 of the participants (56.25%).

“Need for More Resources” was identified as a need for turning perceived barriers into facilitators that influenced research participants’ decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. Supporting codes for “Need for More Resources” include “Government Financial Assistance,” “More Places Providing Aid,” and “Offer Transportation.” As Table 5 indicates, “Government Financial Assistance,” was identified by 10 out of the 16 research participants (62.5%) as a need for turning perceived barriers into facilitators for seeking citizenship. In addition, “More places Providing Aid” was identified by 8 of the 16 participants (50%), while “Offer Transportation” was identified by 1 participant (6.25%).

“Other Places Providing Aid” was identified as a resource for turning perceived barriers into facilitators that influenced research participants’ decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. The supporting code identified is “Churches.” As Table 5 indicates, 1 participant (6.25%) identified “Churches” as resources for turning barriers into facilitators for seeking U.S. citizenship.

Lastly, “Need for Changes in Citizenship Requirements” was identified as a need for turning perceived barriers into facilitators that influenced research participants’ decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. The supporting code identified is “Less Requirements.” As indicated in Table 5, “Less Requirements” was identified by 4 of the

16 research participants (50%) as a need for turning perceived barriers into facilitators in seeking U.S. citizenship.

Summary

Chapter 4 provided a thorough analysis of the participant interviews and discussed common codes and patterns as well as findings of the study based on the lived experiences of legal Mexican immigrants residing in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, as they contemplated naturalized citizenship of the United States. Chapter 4 also addressed the research setting; participant demographics; the data collection process; the data analysis process; the evidence of trustworthiness; and the study results. Several themes of the participants' lived experiences emerged from the interviews and data analysis process. Each theme helped me better understand the perceptions and the experiences of each participant in their decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship.

Chapter 5 will provide an interpretation of the research findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research and implications of the study for policy and social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Chapter 5 will provide an interpretation of the research findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research and implications of the study for policy and social change.

A phenomenological qualitative approach sought to answer the following research question:

- What are the lived experiences of LPRs of Mexican origin that influenced their decision to seek, or not seek, U.S. citizenship?

The following sub questions were also explored:

- What are the lived experiences of LPRs of Mexican origin that influenced their perceptions of barriers that led them to not seek U.S. citizenship?
- What are the lived experiences of LPRs of Mexican origin that influenced their perceptions of facilitators that led them to seek U.S. citizenship?
- What are the perceptions of LPRs of Mexican origin on the role of non-profits in turning barriers into facilitators to seeking U.S. citizenship?

This study relied on purposeful and convenient participant interviews of legal Mexican immigrants who sought citizenship services at a local non-profit to shed light on the barriers and facilitators that led them to seek, or not seek, U.S. citizenship. The data was analyzed using NVivo where themes and trends emerged to better understand experiences of legal Mexican immigrants and to identify actionable insights, recommendations, and tools to use at each step in the naturalization journey. Supporting

the U.S citizenship journey has several implications for positive social change including a sense of security against deportation and discrimination, increased civil rights and benefits, the right to vote in a representative government, eligibility to serve in the military, and an increased labor force.

Interpretation of the Findings

This study sought to identify actionable insights, recommendations, and tools to use at each step in the naturalization journey of Mexican immigrants. The study focused on interpreting the lived experiences of 16 interview participants. Participants targeted for this study were those who are legal immigrants from Mexico, at least 18 of age, who currently live in the RGV, Texas, and are seeking assistance with the U.S. citizenship process from ARISE, a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization that provides immigration services to residents.

The results of this study confirmed the findings of other studies and filled a gap in the literature. The existing literature about naturalization rates was predominantly quantitative, lumping Latin Americans into a single demographic category. The existing literature also failed to study areas where there is predominantly Mexican population or areas with proximity to the home country - Mexico. This study used a phenomenological qualitative approach to better capture the lived experiences of Legal Permanent Residents of Mexican origin living in the RGV, Texas that influenced their decision to pursue United States citizenship. The RGV, Texas is located along the border between the United States and Mexico, and the population is over 90% of Mexican origin.

Research Question 1: Seek or Not Seek

Passel (2007) identified that naturalization comes with many civic, social, economic, and political rights, including voting, running for public office, eligibility for all state and federal employment, and accessing public benefits (p. 1). Yep et al. (2014) further identified that naturalization secures an individual's right to live in the United States, travel freely to other countries, and sponsor family members to live in the United States (p. 272). This study identified "Benefits of Being a Citizen," as a factor that influenced research participants' decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. This study identified "Voting," "Benefits," "Serve on a Jury," "Not Having to Renew the Residency," and "Protection Against Deportation" as sub-codes for "Benefits of Being a Citizen." As indicated in Table 2 of Chapter 4 of this study, both "Benefits" and "Voting" were identified in 13 out of the 16 interviews (81.25%) as factors that affected their decision to seek or not seek U.S. Citizenship. "Protection Against Deportation," was identified in 8 of the interviews (50%), while "Not Having to Renew the Residency" was identified in 3 of the interviews (18.75%), and "Serve on a Jury" was identified in 2 of the interviews (12.5%).

Majma et al. (2019) identified the increased fear of anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric produced by the Trump administration was a new barrier (p. 10). Velazquez (2013) argued that the immigration debate was "often fueled by distorted public perception about crime, terrorism, drug trafficking, and other offenses allegedly committed by [Mexican] immigrants" (p. 67). Velazquez also identified that Mexican immigrants were often conveyed in the media as "illegal aliens who sneak into the United

States to commit crime, steal jobs, and create havoc” (p. 67). The participants of this study also identified “Discrimination for Not Being a Citizen” as a factor that influenced participants’ decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. Supporting codes for “Discrimination for Not Being a Citizen” identified by this study include “Change in Immigration Laws” and “Anti-Immigrant Sentiments.” As indicated in Table 2 in Chapter 4 of this study, “Anti-Immigrant Sentiments” was identified in 8 of the 16 participant interviews (50%), and “Change in Immigration Laws” was identified in 5 of the interviews (31.25%).

According to DeSipio (2011), legal immigrants from countries closer to the United States were slower to naturalize than legal immigrants from countries that are more distant (p. 1197). In fact, Gonzalez-Barrera et al. (2013), identified that the geographic proximity of Mexico to the United States contributed to Mexican legal immigrants’ maintenance of close ties to their home country than legal immigrants from other countries and thus creating a reluctance to naturalize (p. 12). Woroby and Osborn (2015) further argued that clusters of Mexican-born immigrants negatively affected the rate of legal immigrants seeking citizenship (p. 17). Inconsistent with the literature, research participants for this study identified that “My Life is in the United States,” and “I Would Not be Able to Live in Mexico” as factors influencing their decision to seek citizenship.

This study identified “I’ve Lived Here for Many Years,” “My Family Members are Citizens,” and “It was About Time” as sub-codes for “My Life is in the United States.” As indicated in Table 2 in this study, “My Family Members are Citizens,” was

identified by 10 of the 16 research participants (62%). “It was About Time” was identified by 8 of the research participants (50%), while “I’ve Lived Here for Many Years” was identified by 2 participants (12.5%). The participants of this study identified “Life in Mexico is Hard” and “Violence in Mexico” as sub-codes of “I Would Not be Able to Live in Mexico.” As indicated in Table 3 in Chapter 4 of this study, “Life in Mexico is Hard” was identified as a factor affecting their decision to seek or not seek citizenship by 6 of the participants (37.5%) while “Violence in Mexico” was identified by 2 participants (12.5%).

Research Question 2: Perceived Barriers

Most of the literature identified limited English proficiency and low economic status as the most significant barriers to naturalization. A survey of LPRs in Texas conducted by Freeman et al.(2002, as cited in Pastor, et. al, 2013, p. 2) found that 20% of LPRs who had not yet sought naturalization identified cost as a prohibitive factor. This study identified “Economic Status” as a perceived barrier that influenced research participants’ decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. “Money,” as a subcode of “Economic Status,” was identified as a barrier to seeking citizenship by 11 of the research participants (68.75%).

Gonzalez-Barrera et al. (2013) found that 26% of those who have not sought naturalization identified lack of English proficiency, and other personal barriers, as contributing factors; and an additional 18% identified the financial cost of naturalization and other administrative barriers as factors (p. 6). This study identified “Difficulty with the Requirements” as an additional perceived barrier that influenced research

participants' decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. As indicated in Table 3 in Chapter 4 of this study, "English," as a sub-code of "Difficulty with the Requirements," was identified by 15 of the 16 research participants (93.75%) as a perceived barrier to seeking citizenship.

Yep et al. (2014) identified that the USCIS last altered the naturalization exam in 2008 (p. 272). As per Yep et al., the assessment goals of the naturalization exam shifted from memorization of facts to acculturation and assimilation including increased mastery of the English language (p. 272). Pickus (2014) identified the exam requires 6 out of 10 questions answered orally from a list of 100 questions, and 4 out of 10 answered in written form (p. 160). Woroby (2015) however, argued that proving language proficiency through the written exam had a high failure rate (p. 443). "The Questionnaire," as a sub-code of "Difficulty with the Requirements," was identified by 6 of the research participants (37.5%), while "A Lot of Requirements" was identified by 2 participants (12.5%).

Majma, et al. (2019) argued that in addition to the recurring barriers to naturalization included of cost and difficulty in mastering the English language, "the information gap between the complex requirements and legal immigrants' understanding of them" was also identified (pp. 9-10). This study supports the findings of Majma et al., identifying "Fear of the Unknown" as a perceived barrier that influenced research participants' decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. Supporting codes identified by this study for "Fear of the Unknown" include "Mistrust," "Lack of Information," and "Fear and Apathy." As indicated in Table 3 in Chapter 4 of this study, "Fear and Apathy"

was identified as a barrier for seeking citizenship by 11 of the 16 research participants (68.75%). “Lack of information” was identified as a barrier for seeking citizenship by 8 of the participants (50%) while “Mistrust” was identified by 4 participants (25%).

According to Gonzalez-Barrera et al. (2013), the geographic proximity of Mexico to the United States contributed to legal Mexican immigrants’ maintenance of close ties to their home country than legal immigrants from other countries and thus, their reluctance to naturalize (p. 12). Additionally, Gonzalez-Barrera et al. identified that not all legal Mexican immigrants were aware that dual citizenship was allowed since 1998 (p. 12). Woroby and Groves (2015) suggested that a significant network, or clustering, of immigrants in an area affects naturalization rates (p. 17). “Not Wanting to Swear Loyalty” was also identified as a perceived barrier that influenced research participants’ decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship by this study. Supporting codes for “Not Wanting to Swear Loyalty” identified by this study include “Swear Allegiance / Go to War” and “Often Trips to Mexico.” As indicated in Table 3 in Chapter 4 of this study, 4 participants (50%) identified “Often Trips to Mexico” as a barrier to seek U.S. citizenship. Four participants (50%) also identified “Swear Allegiance / Go to War” as a barrier.

Gonzalez-Barrera (2017) further identified that about a 31% of Mexican LPRs and 16% of non-Mexican Latino LPRs identified not having the time or initiative to naturalize (p. 9). This study also identified “Personal Responsibilities” as a perceived barrier that influenced research participants’ decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. Supporting codes for “Personal Responsibilities,” as identified by this study, include

“Time,” “Work,” and “Small Children.” As indicated in Table 3 in Chapter 4, “Work” was identified as a barrier to seeking citizenship by 7 of the research participants (43.75%). “Small Children” was identified by 5 of the participants (31.25%), while “Time” was identified by 3 of the participants (18.75%).

Research Question 3: Perceived Facilitators

Majma et al. (2019) identified that advocacy groups and state and municipal governments invested in increasing naturalization rates (p. 10). Majma et al. further identified that this was achieved through outreach to legal immigrant communities, running low-cost nonprofit-led citizenship workshops; offering free ESL classes; and working to dispel anti-immigration misinformation and fear (p. 10). This study also identified “Resources for Citizenship,” was as a perceived facilitator that influenced research participants’ decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. Supporting codes for “Resources for Citizenship” identified by this study include “Citizenship Classes,” “Free Services,” and “Transportation” provided by local non-profits. As indicated in Table 4 in Chapter 4 of this study, “Citizenship Classes” was identified as a facilitator for seeking citizenship by 13 of the 16 research participants (81.25%). “Free Services” and “Transportation” were both identified by 3 of the research participants (18.75%) as facilitators for seeking citizenship.

According to DeSipio (2011), those who naturalized tended to be older, have higher levels of education, higher levels of income, and could speak, read, and write English (p. 1197). Passel (2007) further identified that legal immigrants’ who spoke English “well” were more likely to naturalize (pp. 10-11). Taylor et al. (2012) also

argued that foreign-born Latinos who identified as speaking English “very well” or “pretty well” were more likely be motivated to naturalize in comparison to those who spoke English “just a little” or “not at all” (p. 18). This study identified “Advantages” as a perceived facilitator that influenced research participants’ decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. Supporting codes for “Advantages,” as identified by this study, include “Knowing the Questionnaire,” “Speak English,” and “The Required Age to do it in Spanish.” As indicated in Table 4 in Chapter 4 of this study, “Knowing the Questionnaire” was identified as a perceived facilitator for seeking U.S. citizenship by 12 of the research participants (75%). “The Required Age to do it in Spanish” was identified by 9 of the research participants (56.25%), whereas “Speak English” was identified by 2 participants (12.5%).

Lastly, this study identified “Support” as a perceived facilitator that influenced research participants’ decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. Supporting codes for “Support” identified by this study include “Motivation,” “Help from the Family,” and “Trust in the Government.” As Table 4 in Chapter 4 indicated, “Motivation” was identified as a facilitator of seeking citizenship by 5 of the research participants (31.25%). “Help from the Family” was identified by 3 of the research participants (18.75%), whereas “Trust in the Government” was identified by 2 participants (12.5%).

Research Question 4: Perceived Barriers to Facilitators

As Pickus (2014) pointed out, the U.S. does not require, nor provide, civic courses for naturalization preparation (p. 160). As per DeSipio (2011), the United States does very little to promote naturalization and leaves the decision to naturalize to individuals (p.

1195). Pickus identified that any broader strategy for assisting those seeking to naturalize was largely dependent on the work of local governments and non-profit agencies (p. 160). In fact, this study identified the important work of “Non-Profit Organizations” in turning barriers to facilitators for seeking U.S. citizenship. Supporting codes for “Non-Profit Organizations” include “Advice,” “Trust,” “Encouragement,” and “Good Methods.” As Table 5 in Chapter 4 of this study indicated, “Advice” and “Trust” were both identified by 15 of the 16 research participants (93.75%) as resources for turning barriers into facilitators in seeking citizenship. “Encouragement” by non-profits was identified by 11 of the participants (68.75%). “Good Methods” used by non-profits was identified by 9 of the participants (56.25%).

As per Yep et al. (2014), the 2008 version of the citizenship exam implemented by the USCIS increased comprehension of standardized English and “American” culture in which legal immigrants must read, write, speak, and understand basic standardized English (p. 274). This study identified the “Need for Changes in Citizenship Requirements” for turning perceived barriers into facilitators that influence the decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. The supporting code identified by this study is “Less Requirements.” As indicated in Table 5 withing Chapter 4 of this study, “Less Requirements” was identified by 4 of the 16 research participants (50%) as a need for turning perceived barriers into facilitators in seeking U.S. citizenship.

Pastor et al. (2013), argued that the large increase in fees for immigration services in 2007 had a negative impact on the rate of naturalization, especially among low-income Legal Permanent Residents (p. 1). Although Pastor et al. identified that new programs

promptly emerged to address this barrier, including innovative micro-loans programs to help low-income legal immigrants, the ultimate way to encourage increased naturalization rates was through absolute fee reductions, or changes in the immigration service fees structure (p. 1). The participants of this study also identified the “Need for More Resources” as a need for turning perceived barriers into facilitators that influenced their decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. Supporting codes for “Need for More Resources” include “Government Financial Assistance,” “More Places Providing Aid,” and “Offer Transportation.” As Table 5 in Chapter 4 indicated, “Government Financial Assistance,” was identified by 10 out of the 16 research participants (62.5%) as a need for turning perceived barriers into facilitators for seeking citizenship. In addition, “More places Providing Aid” was identified by 8 of the 16 participants (50%), while “Offer Transportation” was identified by 1 participant (6.25%).

Social Exclusion Theory

Behrman et al. (2003, as cited in Velazquez, 2013, p. 67) argued that the economic instability faced by immigrants from Latin American countries, including Mexico, creates “social exclusion” in their home country. Velazquez (2013) further identified that the United States is often the destination for immigrants in search for better living conditions even if that involves risking their lives (p. 68). Queen and Gruener (2001, as cited in Velazquez, 2013, p. 69) further argued that social conditions do not change for many Latin American and Mexican immigrants when they immigrate to the United States. In fact, Queen & Gruener identified that Latin American and Mexican

immigrants encounter conditions that prevent them from effectively participating in society within the United States.

As per Gonzalez-Barrera et al. (2013), in 2012, 36% of legal immigrants from Mexico who were eligible for naturalization, did seek naturalization, compared to 61% of legal immigrants from other Latin American and Caribbean countries, and 68% for all non-Mexican legal immigrants (p. 7). Although most legal immigrants in the United States are from Mexico, Mexicans naturalize at slower rates than legal immigrants from other countries around the world. Legal Mexican immigrants residing in the RGV, Texas, face various facets of social exclusion contingent to country of origin, socioeconomic status, and geographic location. This study sought to increase the understanding of the lived experiences of Mexican immigrants, specifically legal Mexican immigrants, as they contemplated and sought U.S. citizenship. This study also sought to identify actionable insights, recommendations, and tools to use at each step in the naturalization journey. Supporting the U.S citizenship journey has several positive implications including a sense of security against deportation and discrimination, increased civil rights and benefits, and the right to vote in a representative government. Velazquez (2013) urged policymakers to develop inclusive initiatives which promote legal immigrants' integration to life in the United States (p. 84)

Modern Democracy Theory of Equal Rights

Barber (2004) identified that there are many implicit and explicit values embedded in the beliefs of modern democracy, such as “equal rights,” “liberty” (freedom), and “majority rule” (pp. 3-5). According to Post (2006), the people of a

democracy are entitled to “equal” protection of their persons, possessions, and rights; have “equal” opportunity to pursue their lives and careers; and have “equal” rights of participation (pp. 27-28).

As per Yep et al. (2014), the 2008 version of the citizenship exam implemented by the USCIS increased comprehension of standardized English and “American” culture in which legal immigrants must read, write, speak, and understand basic standardized English (p. 274). The 2008 version of the citizenship exam directly infringes on the safeguards established by the EO 13166 and Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*.

The modern democracy theory of equal rights applies to the research problem here presented, by identifying modern-day lived experiences of legal Mexican immigrants residing in the RGV, Texas. The study sought to shed light on the barriers and facilitators that led legal Mexican immigrants to seek, or not seek U.S. citizenship to better understand experiences of legal Mexican immigrants and to identify actionable insights, recommendations, and tools to use at each step in the naturalization journey. Supporting the U.S citizenship journey has several positive implications including a sense of security against deportation and discrimination, increased civil rights and benefits, and the right to vote in a representative government.

Limitations of the Study

Rudestam and Newton (2015) defined limitations as restrictions within a research study in which the researcher has no control (p. 122). These restrictions can be attributed to access to a narrow segment of the population I sought to study, or the selected method of study. This study had several limitations.

One of the limitations of this study was that the existing literature about naturalization rates was predominantly quantitative, lumping Latin Americans into a single demographic category. The existing literature also failed to study areas where there is predominantly Mexican population or areas with proximity to the home country - Mexico. This study relied on a phenomenological qualitative approach. Despite the difference in research approach from the literature, the results of this study did confirm the findings of other studies in the literature. This study also filled a gap in the literature.

However, another limitation to this study was that due to the limited qualitative studies addressing my research question and sub questions, I developed my own research instrument. I used Moreno Saldivar's (2015, p. 67) survey questions and some demographic questions from the Pew Hispanic Center's 2012 National Survey of Latinos (2012) as a guide to develop my interview guide.

Another limitation of this research inquiry is that data collection and interpretation are human constructs. The researcher served as a research instrument in this qualitative study. By revealing personal experiences and biases, the researcher had to consider how such experiences influenced his/her positionality and interpretation of the data for the research. This required a researcher's focused attention on remaining objective and impartial in data interpretation, collection, and utilization.

Recommendations

As per Gonzalez-Barrera et al. (2013), in 2012, 36% of legal immigrants from Mexico who were eligible for naturalization, did seek naturalization, compared to 61% of legal immigrants from other Latin American and Caribbean countries, and 68% for all

non-Mexican legal immigrants (p. 7). Although most legal immigrants in the United States are from Mexico, Mexicans naturalize at slower rates than legal immigrants from other countries around the world. Most of the literature identified limited English proficiency and low economic status as the most significant barriers to naturalization.

Yep et al. (2014) identified that the USCIS last altered the naturalization exam in 2008 (p. 272). As per Yep et al., the assessment goals of the naturalization exam shifted from memorization of facts to acculturation and assimilation including increased mastery of the English language (p. 272). Pickus (2014) identified the exam requires 6 out of 10 questions answered orally from a list of 100 questions, and 4 out of 10 answered in written form (p. 160). Woroby (2015) however, argued that proving language proficiency through the written exam has a high failure rate (p. 443). As a result, DeSipio (2011) identified that immigrants of Mexican origin that did naturalize tended to be older, have higher levels of education, higher levels of income, and could speak, read, and write English (p. 1197).

DeSipio (2011) pointed out that the United States does very little to promote naturalization and leaves the decision to naturalize to individuals (p. 1195). Pickus (2014) identified that any broader strategy for assisting those seeking to naturalize was largely dependent on the work of local governments and non-profit agencies (p. 160). Although Pastor (2013) identified that new programs promptly emerged to address this barrier, including innovative micro-loans programs to help low-income legal immigrants, the ultimate way to encourage increased naturalization rates was through absolute fee reductions, or changes in the immigration service fees structure (p. 1). Velazquez (2013)

also urged policymakers to develop inclusive initiatives which promote legal immigrants' integration to life in the U.S. (p. 84). The 2008 version of the citizenship exam directly infringes on the safeguards established by the EO 13166 and Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*.

The participants of this study identified several recommendations for turning perceived barriers into facilitators that influenced their decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. One of the recommendations identified by the research participants is the "Need for More Resources." An alarming 62.5% of research participants identified such needs to be met through "Government Financial Assistance." An additional 50% of research participants identified "More Places Providing Aid" and an urgent means for facilitating U.S citizenship for Mexican immigrants. Lastly, 50% of the research participants identified having "Less Requirements" for the citizenship process, including updating the citizenship exam. The research participants identified that the ultimate way to increase naturalization rates is through fee reductions and policy change inclusive initiatives which promote legal immigrants' integration to life in the United States.

Future research is needed to explore what other non-profits and government entities are currently doing to facilitate the naturalization process. This study only focuses on one non-profit in the RGV. At least 2 other non-profits and a religious institution were identified by the research participants. Future research is also needed to understand the experiences of legal permanent residents before obtaining their legal status. This would provide a better understanding of their entire immigrant experience and further identify their motivation for seeking or not seeking citizenship. Some of the participants identified

coming to the United States to work as farmworkers on a work visa, while others identified gaining legal status through marrying a United States citizen. Lastly, future research is needed to explore systemic policy changes that are inclusive and accessible to every immigrant that chooses the United States as their homeland.

Implications

Creswell (2009) stressed the importance of conveying to the reader a clear rationale for the importance of the study (p. 107). For example, a research study may contribute to scholarly research, may help improve practice, may help improve policy, or may also lead to positive social change. Walden University's (2014b) mission is to develop "a diverse community" of "scholar-practitioners" to "affect positive social change" (para. 3). Walden University (2015) focuses on inspiring and celebrating students to continue to address challenges to make a difference within the community they live in (para. 1). Walden University's (2014a) vision includes committing to "working toward positive social change" through servant-leadership in preserving human rights, addressing "societal and global challenges," and trusting in "government and nonprofit institutions" (para. 3).

This study had several implications for positive social change and contribution to the field of Public Policy and Administration. Understanding the lived experiences of LPRs of Mexican origin residing in the RGV, Texas, and helping them naturalize has several implications for positive social change. Implications for social change for the naturalized citizens include obtaining protections from deportation and discrimination and the right to vote. Increasing naturalization rates also contribute to the creation of jobs

and a more diverse workforce, as well as an increased tax revenue and eligible members to join the military.

Velazquez (2013) identified that immigration from Mexico and Latin America is a topic of current political and social debate (p. 67). As per Velazquez, Mexican immigrants were often conveyed in the media as “illegal aliens who sneak into the United States to commit crime, steal jobs, and create havoc” (p. 67). Alternately, but not as commonly, Mexican immigrants were “portrayed as hard working, earnest providers for their families who are pursuing the American Dream” (p. 67). In fact, Velazquez argued that Americans were rarely exposed to images or information portraying the risks and vulnerabilities experienced by Mexicans, including Mexican Americans, legal Mexican immigrants, and undocumented immigrants living in the United States (p. 67). This study sought to increase the understanding of the experiences of Mexican immigrants and inform the border narrative at a national scale.

Similarly, Cort (2012) studied naturalization rates in California following the passage of State Proposition 187, anti-immigrant legislation that would prohibit undocumented immigrants from having access to state social services like health care and public education (pp. 483-484). While Cort pointed out that there is no research to support this legislation, it sparked naturalization rates of Latinos, especially those of Mexican origin (p. 483). As per Cort, naturalization rates in the State of California dramatically increased after the passage of the State Proposition 187 (p. 483). Cort further identified immigrant political groups mobilized to fight a growing discriminatory trend in the state and country during the passage of State Proposition 187 (p. 486). Cort

further pointed out that a federal district judge filed a temporary injunction against the State of California three days after the passage of State Proposition 187, and a second federal district judge followed with a permanent injunction (p. 486). As per Cort, the upheaval motivated legal immigrants to naturalize and protect their resources (p. 486). The upheaval also increased their ability to hold public officials accountable through their voting power (p. 486).

Understanding of the experiences of Mexican immigrants residing in the RGV and supporting their U.S citizenship journey can lead to an increased “minority voter pulls” in the State of Texas, like what Cort (2012) identified in California. The RGV historically has a low-voter turnout and is one of the most impoverished regions in the United States. Increasing the voter turnout increases the minority voice nationally and a more representative government. Increasing minority voter turnout also has the potential to create systemic policy changes to address minority disparities, and the better allocation public resources of public resources. Hence this study has the potential for social change and to contribute to the field of Public Policy and Public Administration.

Conclusion

Chapter 5 provided an interpretation of the research findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research and implications of the study for policy and social change. This study sought to identify actionable insights, recommendations, and tools to use at each step in the naturalization journey of Mexican immigrants.

Passel (2007) identified that naturalization comes with many civic, social, economic, and political rights, including voting, running for public office, eligibility for

all state and federal employment, and accessing public benefits (p. 1). However, Pickus (2014) pointed out, the U.S. does not require, nor provide, civic courses for naturalization preparation (p. 160). As per DeSipio (2011), the United States does very little to promote naturalization and leaves the decision to naturalize to individuals (p. 1195). Pickus identified that any broader strategy for assisting those seeking to naturalize is largely dependent on the work of local governments and non-profit agencies (p. 160). In fact, this study identified the important work of “Non-Profit Organizations” in turning barriers to facilitators for seeking U.S. citizenship. The study focused on interpreting the lived experiences of 16 participant interviews. Participants targeted for this study were those who are legal immigrants from Mexico, at least 18 of age, who currently live in the RGV, Texas, and were seeking assistance with the U.S. citizenship process from ARISE, a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization that provides immigration services.

The results of this study confirmed the findings of other studies and filled a gap in the literature. Most of the literature identified limited English proficiency and low economic status as the most significant barriers to naturalization. Yep et al. (2014) identified that the USCIS last altered the naturalization exam in 2008 (p. 272). As per Yep et al., the assessment goals of the naturalization exam shifted from memorization of facts to acculturation and assimilation including increased mastery of the English language (p. 272). As a result, DeSipio (2011), argued that those who naturalized tended to be older, have higher levels of education, higher levels of income, and can speak, read, and write English (p. 1197). Hence, the 2008 version of the citizenship exam directly

infringes on the safeguards established by the EO 13166 and Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*.

The participants of this study identified the “Need for More Resources” as a vital need for turning perceived barriers into facilitators that influenced their decision to seek or not seek U.S. citizenship. Over 50% of research participants identified such needs to be met through “Government Financial Assistance,” “More Places Providing Aid,” having “Less Requirements” for the citizenship process, including updating the citizenship exam. The research participants identified that the ultimate way to increase naturalization rates is through fee reductions and policy change inclusive initiatives which promote legal immigrants’ integration to life in the United States.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Guía de la Entrevista / Interview Guide

Nombre/Name: _____ Género/Gender: _____ Fecha/Date: _____

Secciones de la entrevista / Sections of the Interview	Preguntas de la entrevista / Interview Questions
<p><i>Introducción</i> /Introduction</p>	<p><i>Hola. Mi nombre es _____ y soy estudiante de doctorado en el programa de Administración Pública en Walden University. Necesito de su ayuda participando en una entrevista de 15-30 minutos para la investigación de mi tesis.</i> Hello. My name is _____ and I am a student in the doctoral program in Public Policy & Administration at Walden University. I need your help in participating in a 15-30-minute interview for my dissertation project.</p> <p><i>Este estudio busca aumentar la comprensión sobre las experiencias de inmigrantes legales de origen mexicano en su proceso hacia la ciudadanía estadounidense.</i> This study seeks to increase the understanding of the experiences of legal Mexican immigrants, as they become naturalized citizens of the United States.</p> <p><i>Esta investigación es importante para mí porque también soy inmigrante de México y quiero entender como mis experiencias se comparan con las de otros inmigrantes.</i> This research is important to me because I am also an immigrant from Mexico, and I want to understand how my experiences compare to other immigrants.</p> <p><i>Mi objetivo es identificar ideas, recomendaciones y herramientas que se pueden utilizar en cada paso hacia la ciudadanía para otros inmigrantes mexicanos en el Valle del Río Grande. Su identidad será anónima en mi reporte. Usted puede terminar la entrevista en cualquier momento.</i> My goal is to identify actionable insights, recommendations, and tools to use at each step in the citizenship journey for other Mexican immigrants in the Rio Grande Valley. Your identity will be anonymous in my reporting. Please note that you can choose to end the interview at any time.</p> <p><i>Agradezco mucho su ayuda. En caso de que guste comunicarse conmigo después de su participación, puede llamarme a XXX- XXX-XXXX o enviarme un correo electrónico a student@waldenu.edu</i> I greatly appreciate your help. In the case you wish to contact me after your participation, you may call me at XXX-XXX-XXXX or email me at student@waldenu.edu</p>
<p><i>Preguntas demográficas /</i> Demographic Questions</p>	<p>1) <i>¿Es usted de origen o descendencia mexicana?</i> Are you of Mexican origin or descent? _____ Sí /Yes _____ No/No _____ No sé/Don't know</p>
	<p>2) <i>¿En qué año inmigro (llego) a los Estados Unidos?</i> In what year did you immigrate (arrive) to the United States? _____</p>

	<p>3) <i>¿Cuántos años tiene?</i> How old are you?</p> <p>_____ 18 – 29 _____ 30 – 49 _____ 50 - 65 _____ 65+</p>
	<p>4) <i>¿En qué ciudad dentro del Valle del Rio Grande vive?</i> In what city within the Rio Grande Valley do you live in?</p> <p>_____</p>
	<p>5) <i>El año pasado, 2022, ¿cuál fue el ingreso total de su familia antes de los impuestos?</i> Last year, 2022, what was your total family income from all sources, before taxes?</p> <p>_____ < \$10,000 _____ \$10,000 - \$20,000 _____ \$20,000 - \$30,000 _____ \$30,000 - \$40,000 _____ \$40,000 - \$50,000 _____ \$50,000 - \$75,000 _____ \$75,000 - \$100,000 _____ \$100,000 - \$150,000 _____ >\$150,000 _____ No sé / Don't know</p>
	<p>6) <i>¿En qué año obtuvo su estatus de Residencia Legal Permanente?</i> In what year did you obtain your Legal Permanent Resident status?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>a. <i>¿En qué año fue elegible para hacerse ciudadano estadounidense?</i> What year were you eligible to become a U.S. citizen?</p> <p>_____</p>
	<p>7) <i>¿A cuál organización acudió para ayudarle con su proceso de ciudadanía?</i> What organization did you go to for help with your citizenship process?</p> <p>_____ ARISE Adelante, ARISE</p>
<p><i>Preguntas abiertas /</i> Open-ended Questions</p> <p><i>Pregunta 1 / Question 1</i></p>	<p>1) <i>Basado en sus experiencias, ¿porque es o no es importante hacerse ciudadano estadounidense?</i> Based on your experiences, why is it important or not important to become a U.S. citizen?</p> <p>a. <i>¿Cuáles cree que son algunos beneficios de hacerse ciudadano estadounidense?</i> What do you think are some of the benefits to becoming a U.S. citizen?</p> <p>b. <i>¿Cuáles cree que son algunas de las desventajas de hacerse ciudadano estadounidense?</i></p>

	<p>What do you think are some of the disadvantages to becoming a U.S. citizen?</p>
Pregunta 2 / Question 2	<p>2) <i>Basado en sus experiencias, ¿cuáles son algunos impedimentos por los cuales no ha podido hacerse ciudadano estadounidense?</i> Based on your experiences, what are some impediments for which you have not been able to become a U.S. citizen?</p> <p><i>a. ¿Cuáles son los impedimentos que más han afectado su decisión de hacerse ciudadano?</i> What are the impediments that have most affected your decision to become a citizen?</p>
Pregunta 3 / Question 3	<p>3) <i>¿Qué paso en el proceso de hacerse ciudadano estadounidense considera el más difícil?</i> What step in the process of becoming a U.S. citizen do you consider the most difficult?</p> <p><i>a. ¿Por qué cree que este paso es el más difícil?</i> Why do you think said step is most difficult?</p>
Pregunta 4 / Question 4	<p>4) <i>¿Qué factores han influido su decisión de querer hacerse ciudadano estadounidense en este momento?</i> What factors have influenced your decision to become a U.S. citizen now?</p> <p><i>a. ¿Cómo ha influido el clima político actual su decisión de hacerse ciudadano estadounidense?</i> How has the current political climate influenced your decision to become a U.S. citizen?</p>

<p>Pregunta 5 / Question 5</p>	<p>5) <i>¿Por qué acudió a ARISE para ayudarle con su proceso de ciudadanía?</i> Why did you go to ARISE to help you with your citizenship process?</p> <p><i>a. ¿Porque cree que otras personas que conoce no acuden a ARISE para ayuda con su proceso de ciudadanía?</i> Why do you think other people you know do not come to ARISE for help with their citizenship process?</p>
<p>Pregunta 6 / Question 6</p>	<p>6) <i>¿Por qué cree o no cree que tendrá éxito en hacerse ciudadano estadounidense?</i> Why do you believe or do not believe you will be successful in becoming a U.S. citizen?</p> <p><i>a. ¿De qué maneras (si existen algunas) ARISE le está educando sobre el proceso para hacerse ciudadano estadounidense?</i> In what ways (if any) is ARISE is educating you about the process for becoming a U.S. citizen?</p> <p><i>b. ¿De qué maneras (si existen algunas) ARISE sirve como facilitador del proceso para hacerse ciudadano estadounidense?</i> In what ways (if any) is ARISE serving as a facilitator of the process for becoming a U.S. citizen?</p>
<p>Pregunta 7 / Question 7</p>	<p>7) <i>¿Qué servicios/recursos adicionales cree podrían apoyarle en su proceso para hacerse ciudadano estadounidense?</i> What additional services and/or resources do you think would help you in the process for becoming a U.S. citizen?</p>



Buscando el Sueño Americano

“¿Es usted un residente permanente de origen mexicano participando en clases de ciudadanía?”

El camino del inmigrante mexicano hacia la ciudadanía estadounidense.

Este estudio busca aumentar la comprensión sobre las experiencias de inmigrantes legales de origen mexicano en su proceso hacia la ciudadanía estadounidense. Al entender esas experiencias, el estudio busca identificar perspectivas, recomendaciones y herramientas que se pueden utilizar en cada paso del camino a la naturalización.

Los Participantes Recibirán:

- Una tarjeta de regalo de \$10 por su participación.

Ubicación

- Una entrevista de 15-30 minutos por Zoom, Hangouts o WhatsApp.
- Una entrevista de seguimiento de 15 minutos por Zoom, Hangouts o WhatsApp para asegurar exactitud.

¿Es elegible?

- Origen Mexicano
- Por lo menos 18 años de edad
- Ser Residente Permanente por lo menos 5 años
- Actualmente vive en el Valle del Rio Grande, Texas
- Actualmente participa en una clase de ciudadanía

Si le interesa participar, llámé o envíe mensaje a la investigadora:

- estudiante de doctorado
- estudiante@waldenu.edu
- XXX-XXX-XXXX



Buscando el Sueño Americano

“Are you a Mexican Legal Permanent Resident participating in citizenship classes?”

A Mexican Immigrants' Path to U. S. Citizenship.

This study seeks to increase the understanding of the experiences of legal Mexican immigrants, as they become naturalized citizens of the United States. In doing so, the study seeks to identify actionable insights, recommendations, and tools to use at each step in the naturalization journey.

Participants will receive:

- \$10 gift card for their participation.

Location

- 15-30-minute interview via Zoom, Hangouts, or WhatsApp
- 15 minute follow up interview via Zoom, Hangouts or WhatsApp to ensure accuracy in reporting.

Are you eligible?

- Mexican origin
- At least 18 years of age
- Have been Legal Permanent Residents for at least 5 years
- Currently live in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas
- Are currently enrolled in U.S. citizenship classes

If interested in participating, call or email the researcher:

- PhD student
- student@waldenu.edu
- XXX-XXX-XXXX