

VOTER TURNOUT DISPARITIES:

ANALYZING AND COMPARING RACIAL DIFFERENCES
AMONG NATURALIZED IMMIGRANTS IN THE US AND
THE UK

SAHIL BHAKTA

ABSTRACT

This paper examines voter turnout among naturalized immigrants in the United States and the United Kingdom, focusing on the impact of race, socioeconomic factors, and systemic barriers.

It compares the participation rates of naturalized immigrants, particularly those from marginalized racial groups, and explores the underlying factors contributing to disparities in electoral engagement. Through a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative analysis of voter turnout data and qualitative case studies, this study highlights how race, naturalization status, and historical contexts of discrimination influence voting behavior. The findings suggest that while both countries face challenges related to immigrant participation, the United Kingdom tends to exhibit higher voter turnout among naturalized immigrants due to its more inclusive electoral processes and supportive community structures. In contrast, the United States' complex voting regulations and polarized political environment create more significant barriers. This research underscores the need for targeted policy measures to address these barriers and foster greater political inclusion. The study calls for further exploration of the intersectionality of race, socioeconomic status, and immigrant status, with an emphasis on long-term research and comparative studies to inform more equitable democratic practices.

I. Introduction

In a world marked by evolving dynamics and diverse societal interactions, understanding voter turnout among naturalized immigrants in the United States and the United Kingdom reveals critical insights into the functioning of democratic processes. This exploration not only highlights the political engagement of a growing segment of the population but also underscores the health and inclusivity of democratic systems in these countries. It begs the question, how do the voter turnout rates among naturalized immigrants differ between the United States and the United Kingdom, and what are the underlying factors that contribute to these differences?

By analyzing patterns and differences in electoral participation, this paper aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how race and naturalization status influence voting behavior. The theoretical and practical significance of this research extends beyond just statistical analysis. It delves into the systemic barriers and facilitators that influence voter turnout, contributing to the broader discussion on democratic representation and social equity. High voter turnout among diverse racial groups can lead to more comprehensive and representative policymaking, addressing the specific needs and concerns of these communities. When all parts of the population are actively participating in the electoral process, it ensures that the resulting policies are more reflective of the entire society. Additionally, uncovering potential disparities in voter turnout underscores the importance of identifying and mitigating systemic barriers to voting, therefore promoting a more inclusive political environment.

My central argument proposes that voter turnout rates among naturalized immigrants of different racial backgrounds in both the United States and the United Kingdom are significantly influenced by a combination of socioeconomic factors, access to voting resources, and historical and contemporary contexts of racial discrimination. My argument also asserts that the United

Kingdom tends to exhibit higher voter turnout rates among naturalized immigrant populations compared to the United States. Alternative arguments consider the role of political socialization, community support, and the differences in the political cultures of the host countries. Political socialization varies significantly between the US and the UK. In the UK, immigrants might experience a more inclusive political culture that encourages participation, while in the US, the polarized and often contentious political climate can deter immigrant engagement. Moreover, some might argue that the United States could offer higher voter turnout rates among immigrant populations compared to the United Kingdom, with its diverse and vibrant civic engagement landscape.

This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of voter turnout data with qualitative case studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by naturalized immigrants in the political arena. Data sources include national election surveys, census data, public opinion polls, and administrative records from immigration and naturalization offices.

This paper is organized in the following order: the introduction presents the main question, significance, and arguments. The literature review examines previous research on voter turnout among immigrants and racial disparities in political participation. The methodology section details the data sources and collection methods utilized. Quantitative and qualitative analyses are conducted to identify patterns and barriers to electoral participation. Finally, the discussion interprets the findings, compares the United States and the United Kingdom, and evaluates alternative explanations, concluding with a summary of key insights and suggestions for future research.

II. Literature Review

The literature on voter turnout among naturalized immigrants provides many insights into the socio-political dynamics that influence electoral participation. The existing research on voter turnout among immigrants focuses on a variety of issues, specifically racial disparities, socioeconomic factors, political socialization, and the role of community support. Studies have consistently shown that naturalized immigrants tend to have lower voter turnout rates compared to native-born citizens. For instance, Matt Barreto argues that socio-economic disadvantages and lower levels of political socialization are the primary reasons for this political participation gap in the United States.¹ Similarly, in the United Kingdom, Heath et al. found that ethnic minority and immigrant voters face substantial barriers, resulting in lower turnout rates.² These disparities are exacerbated by systemic racism and socioeconomic challenges, with authors like Heath and Khan demonstrating that Black and Latino immigrants in the US, as well as South Asian and Black immigrants in the UK, are particularly affected.³ Socioeconomic status emerges as a crucial determinant of political participation, with higher income and education levels correlating with increased voter turnout.⁴ Cho's research indicates that immigrants with higher socioeconomic status are more likely to participate in elections, as they possess the resources and confidence to navigate the political system. Similarly, Gelman et al. found that socioeconomic resources remain a strong predictor of voter turnout in the United States, despite rising income

¹ Matt A. Barreto, "Latino Immigrants at the Polls: Foreign-Born Voter Turnout in the 2002 Election," *Political Research Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2005): 79-86, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3595597>.

² Anthony Heath, Stephen Fisher, David Sanders, and Maria Sobolewska, "Ethnic Heterogeneity in the Social Bases of Voting at the 2010 British General Election," *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 21, no. 3 (2011): 255-77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2011.562611>.

³ Anthony Heath and Omar Khan, "Ethnic Minority British Election Study - Oxford University" (Oxford University, 2012), <https://conservativehome.blogs.com/files/embesbriefingfinalx-1.pdf>.

⁴ Wendy K. Tam Cho, "Naturalization, Socialization, Participation: Immigrants and (Non-)Voting," *The Journal of Politics* 61, no. 4 (1999): 1140-55, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2647557>.

inequality.⁵ In the United Kingdom, Heath and Khan identified socioeconomic disadvantages, like lower income and education levels, as significant barriers to political participation among ethnic minority and immigrant groups.⁶

Political socialization and community support also play essential roles in shaping voter turnout among naturalized immigrants. Ramakrishnan and Espenshade emphasize the importance of community-based organizations in mobilizing immigrant voters, highlighting that exposure to democratic norms and political engagement within immigrant communities significantly influence voting behavior.⁷ Similarly, Saggar's work discussed the effectiveness of local advocacy groups and community organizations in increasing voter turnout among immigrant populations.⁸ Comparative studies between the United States and the United Kingdom reveal both similarities and differences in the factors influencing voter turnout among naturalized immigrants. Bird et al, found that institutional factors, like voter registration laws and electoral systems, significantly impact political participation in both countries.⁹ However, the political culture and integration policies differ between countries, with the UK generally providing more supportive frameworks for immigrant political engagement. Spies et al. argues that while standard voter turnout models apply to both native-born and immigrant populations, immigrant-specific factors, such as ethnic networks and experiences of discrimination, play a

⁵ Andrew Gelman et al., "Income Inequality and Partisan Voting in the United States," *Social Science Quarterly* 91, no. 5 (2010): 1203–19, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42956457>.

⁶ Heath and Khan, "Ethnic Minority British Election Study."

⁷ S. Karthick Ramakrishnan and Thomas J. Espenshade, "Immigrant Incorporation and Political Participation in the United States," *International Migration Review* 35, no. 3 (2001): 870–909, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2675847>.

⁸ Shamit Saggar, "British Citizens like Any Others?: Ethnic Minorities and Elections in the United Kingdom," in *Just Ordinary Citizens?: Towards a Comparative Portrait of the Political Immigrant*, ed. Antoine Bilodeau (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 63–82, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/j.ctv1005br1.7>.

⁹ Karen Bird, Thomas Saalfeld, and Andreas M. Wüst, "Voter Turnout among Immigrants and Visible Minorities in Comparative Perspective," in *The Political Representation of Immigrants and Minorities: Voters, Parties and Parliaments in Liberal Democracies* (London: Routledge, 2011), 25–65, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780203843604-12/voter-turnout-among-immigrants-visible-minorities-comparative-perspective>.

more significant role in the UK compared to the U.S.¹⁰ These types of comparative perspectives highlight the need for new interventions into the system of political participation, including voter education, community building, and policy reforms to reduce systemic barriers and promote inclusive democratic practices.

III. Methodology

To analyze voter turnout among naturalized immigrants in the United States and the United Kingdom, a comprehensive methodology that integrates multiple data sources and collection methods is needed. This section details the national election surveys, census data, public opinion polls, and administrative data from immigration and naturalization offices used to gather relevant information. National election surveys are pivotal for this type of research. The American National Election Studies (ANES) provides high-quality data on voting behavior, public opinion, and political participation in the United States. ANES has been collecting data since 1948, making it a valuable resource for understanding electoral participation trends. The relevance of ANES to this study lies in its detailed demographic information and comprehensive coverage of voter turnout rates. Data points, like voter turnout, age, race, gender, socioeconomic status, and political attitudes (e.g. party affiliation and political efficacy) are taken from ANES. Similarly, the British Election Study (BES), which has been running since 1964, provides extensive data on voting behavior, political attitudes, and demographics in the UK. BES is necessary for analyzing the electoral participation of naturalized immigrants in the UK. It offers a great deal of variables similar to those of ANES, including voter turnout rates, demographic information, and political attitudes.

¹⁰ Dennis C. Spies, Sabrina J. Mayer, and Achim Goerres, "What Are We Missing? Explaining Immigrant-Origin Voter Turnout with Standard and Immigrant-Specific Theories," *Electoral Studies* 65 (2020): 102103, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0261379419302641>.

Census data and voter turnout statistics are also essential parts of studying this issue of voter participation among naturalized immigrant populations. In the United States, the U.S. Census Bureau provides detailed demographic information through the Census and the American Community Survey. These data sources offer information on population characteristics, which is essential for analyzing voter turnout. The Census Bureau collects data through mail-in questionnaires, online surveys, and interviews, which ensures that there is broad coverage and high response rates. Voter turnout statistics are derived from the Current Population Survey (CPS) Voting and Registration Supplement, which provides data on reported voting and registration by various demographic groups. Key variables include race, ethnicity, age, gender, income, education level, and nativity status. In the United Kingdom, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) conducts the national census every ten years, providing detailed demographic information about the population. The ONS also conducts surveys like the Labour Force Survey, which includes questions on voter registration and turnout. Data collection methods for the ONS include online surveys, paper questionnaires, and interviews, ensuring comprehensive coverage. Voter turnout data is collected through surveys and electoral registers, providing insights into the voting behavior of different demographic groups. Key variables that are included in the ONS are race, ethnicity, age, gender, income, education level, and nativity status.

Public opinion polls from organizations such as the Pew Research Center and YouGov provide additional data on political participation and attitudes. Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan think tank that conducts public opinion polling on various topics, including political behaviors. The center's polls cover voter registration, turnout intentions, political efficacy, and individual perceptions of electoral fairness. Data collection methods include telephone surveys, online panels, and interviews, with thorough data processes to ensure its accuracy. YouGov is an

international research data and analytics group that conducts online surveys on political behavior as well as public opinion. These surveys focus on voting behavior, electoral participation, and political attitudes among different demographic groups.

Administrative data from immigration and naturalization offices provides crucial context for understanding voter turnout among naturalized immigrants. In the United States, data from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services includes naturalization applications, approvals, and demographic characteristics of naturalized citizens. This data helps contextualize the size and characteristics of the naturalized immigrant population and their potential electoral impact. In the United Kingdom, the UK Home Office provides similar data, including naturalization applications, approvals, and demographic characteristics of naturalized citizens. This data is collected and processed through administrative records maintained by the Home Office.

IV. Quantitative Analysis

Voter turnout is widely regarded as one of the most important indicators of democratic engagement, providing a snapshot of citizens' participation in the electoral process. High voter turnout is generally seen as a sign of active civic engagement, where citizens feel empowered and motivated to influence political outcomes. In contrast, low turnout often signals issues such as alienation, disenfranchisement, or inefficiencies in the electoral system, suggesting that certain groups may be excluded or lack confidence in the political process. One significant demographic that often experiences lower voter turnout is immigrants, particularly naturalized citizens, who historically participate in elections at lower rates than native-born citizens.¹¹ This disparity raises critical questions about democratic inclusion, particularly how race and naturalization status influence political participation. Given that immigrants are a growing and diverse population,

¹¹ Loretta E. Bass and Lynne M. Casper, "Differences in Registering and Voting between Native-Born and Naturalized Americans," *Population Research and Policy Review* 20, no. 6 (2001): 483–511, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40230326>.

understanding the factors that shape their voting behavior is essential for addressing issues of representation and ensuring more inclusive democratic practices. To explore these patterns, this section will utilize various data sources, including the American National Election Studies (ANES), the British Election Study (BES), the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS), the Office for National Statistics (ONS), Pew Research Center, and YouGov, as well as data from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and the UK Home Office. In terms of metrics, the analysis will focus on voter turnout rates, comparing the proportion of naturalized immigrants who vote relative to the general population, and disaggregating this data by race and ethnicity.

The analysis of raw data from the sources listed above provides a detailed view of voter turnout rates among various racial and immigrant categories in the United States during the 2020 and 2022 elections. According to ANES, the overall voter turnout rate for naturalized citizens across all racial groups was low compared to native-born citizens.¹² This disparity becomes more pronounced when broken down by racial categories. The data reveals that naturalized Latino immigrants had a low voter turnout rate in 2020 when compared to native-born Latinos. The same can be said for Black immigrants, whose turnout rate was lower than native-born Black citizens. For Asian immigrants, however, the turnout rate was significantly higher than the turnout rate among native-born Asians. Further data from the Pew Research Center highlights significant inter-group differences. African immigrants, for instance, had a lower voter turnout rate than Caribbean immigrants, who exhibited a slightly higher turnout rate.¹³ These variations suggest that even within broader racial categories, distinct immigrant groups experience different

¹² American National Election Studies, *ANES 2020 Time Series Study Full Release* [dataset and documentation] July 19, 2021 version, www.electionstudies.org.

¹³ Christine Tamir, "Key Findings about Black Immigrants in the U.S.," Pew Research Center, 27 Jan. 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/01/27/key-findings-about-black-immigrants-in-the-u-s/>.

levels of political engagement. In the 2022 midterm elections, the trends remained consistent. The data shows that naturalized immigrant groups had a lower turnout rate compared to their native-born counterparts across all racial groups, save for Asian immigrants. These statistics underscore the persistent gaps between naturalized and native-born citizens, as well as among different immigrant groups.

The analysis of raw data from various sources provides a detailed overview of voter turnout among different racial and immigrant groups in the United Kingdom, focusing on the 2019 UK General Election and the 2021 local elections. According to BES data, voter turnout for naturalized immigrants in the 2019 General Election showed significant variation across racial categories.¹⁴ South Asian naturalized immigrants had a low voter turnout rate, similar to the levels exhibited by Black naturalized immigrants. In comparison, White naturalized immigrants exhibited a higher turnout rate compared to every other immigrant group. The 2021 local elections data from YouGov further details these trends, with voter turnout rates slightly higher in local elections but still exhibiting significant disparities. South Asian and Black naturalized immigrants maintained similar levels of voter turnout rates. White naturalized immigrants continued to show higher political engagement with their turnout rate. These data points illustrate the complex landscape of voter participation among immigrant populations in the UK. Factors contributing to these disparities include socioeconomic status, language barriers, and the effectiveness of community support systems. For instance, South Asian and Black communities with strong local advocacy and community organizations tend to have higher voter turnout rates.

Racial disparities in voter turnout are a persistent issue in many democracies, particularly in the United States, where research consistently shows that racial and ethnic minorities vote at

¹⁴ Edward Fieldhouse et al., *British Election Study, 2019: Post-Election Random Probability Survey* [data collection] UK Data Service, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-8875-1>.

lower rates than their white counterparts.¹⁵ This gap in voter participation can be traced back to historical patterns of disenfranchisement, such as the Jim Crow laws, which systematically excluded Black Americans from the political process. This gap has been further exacerbated by recent practices like voter ID laws, purging of voter rolls, and gerrymandering, which disproportionately affect minority groups. These barriers not only deter voting but also undermine the principles of democratic equality by limiting the political power of marginalized communities.¹⁶ Naturalized immigrants, while granted the right to vote upon completing the naturalization process, often encounter additional obstacles that hinder their participation. These challenges are particularly pronounced for immigrants from racial minority backgrounds, who may face a unique combination of cultural and socioeconomic barriers that limit their ability to engage in the electoral process.

V. Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis section explores the nuanced experiences and contextual factors influencing voter turnout among naturalized immigrants in the United States and the United Kingdom. By examining geographic distribution, local case studies, and the localized barriers and opportunities affecting political participation, this section provides a deeper understanding of the interplay between environment and electoral engagement. Qualitative methods capture the lived experiences of naturalized immigrants and the specific challenges encountered in different regions.

The geographical distribution of naturalized immigrants plays a crucial role in shaping their political participation. Immigrants are not evenly distributed across regions, urban centers

¹⁵ Stephanie Zonszein and Guy Grossman, “Turnout Turnaround: Ethnic Minority Victories Mobilize White Voters,” *American Political Science Review* 118, no. 3 (October 2023): 1556–62, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000305542300103X>.

¹⁶ Tara Kini, “Sharing the Vote: Noncitizen Voting Rights in Local School Board Elections,” *California Law Review* 93, no. 1 (2005): 271–321, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3481392>.

typically host high concentrations of immigrant populations, while rural areas tend to have fewer immigrants.¹⁷ This uneven distribution influences how immigrants engage politically, as certain areas may offer robust infrastructure and resources for political participation, like community centers, language assistance, and voter education programs. Alternatively, regions with fewer immigrants may lack these types of support mechanisms, potentially hindering political engagement. The interaction between geographical location and voting likelihood among naturalized immigrants is important, especially in areas with significant racial minority concentrations. The contrast between urban and rural settings is an example, as it significantly affects immigrant political engagement. Immigrant populations in large cities, such as Los Angeles, London, and New York, often benefit from greater access to resources like voter education programs, multilingual voting materials, and local immigrant advocacy organizations.¹⁸ In urban areas, the density of the population and the presence of established immigrant communities create a supportive environment for political participation. Cities often have diverse media outlets, community organizations, and social networks that actively engage in voter mobilization efforts. Urban areas are also more likely to have representatives and policymakers who prioritize immigrant issues, further encouraging political engagement. In contrast, rural areas might offer fewer resources and less political infrastructure, leading to lower participation rates. The urban-rural divide also highlights differences in the political landscape and community support available to immigrants, which can either encourage or hinder their electoral participation. In rural settings, immigrants may face isolation, limited access to

¹⁷ Chenoa Flippen and Dylan Farrell-Bryan, “New Destinations and the Changing Geography of Immigrant Incorporation,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 47, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-090320-100926>.

¹⁸ John R. Logan et al., “The Impact of Race and Ethnicity, Immigration, and Political Context on Participation in American Electoral Politics,” *Social Forces* 90, no. 3 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sor024>.

information, and fewer opportunities for political engagement.¹⁹ The scarcity of community organizations and advocacy groups in these areas can result in a lack of awareness about the electoral process and reduced motivation to participate in elections. This disparity underscores the importance of tailored strategies to address the unique challenges faced by immigrants in rural areas.

a. *USA | Los Angeles:*

Los Angeles, one of the most populous cities in the United States, is home to a large and diverse immigrant population, comprising significant numbers of Latino, Asian, and Middle Eastern communities. This diversity is mirrored in the city's political landscape, where numerous community organizations and advocacy groups work to engage and mobilize naturalized immigrants. Organizations such as the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA) and the Asian Americans Advancing Justice (AAAJ) play crucial roles in this context. CHIRLA, for instance, conducts extensive voter registration drives, organizes candidate forums, and offers education workshops on civic engagement. These initiatives help immigrants understand the political process and empower them to participate actively in elections. The impact of such organizations is evident in voter turnout statistics. Additionally, the presence of immigrant representatives in local government positions serves as a motivator and a source of trust for immigrant voters. In Los Angeles, the infrastructure supporting political participation is robust. The city itself offers numerous polling locations, early voting options, and mail-in voting, making it easier for immigrants to vote. The local government collaborates with community groups to ensure that voting materials are available in multiple languages, reflecting the linguistic diversity of the immigrant population. Additionally, the vibrant media landscape,

¹⁹ Magdalena Szaflarski and Shawn Bauldry, "The Effects of Perceived Discrimination on Immigrant and Refugee Physical and Mental Health," *Advances in Medical Sociology* 19 (2019): 173–204, <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1057-629020190000019009>.

including ethnic media outlets, plays a significant role in disseminating information about elections and political issues relevant to immigrant communities.

b. *USA | Rural South:*

In stark contrast, rural areas in the American South, such as parts of Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia, present a different picture. These regions have much smaller immigrant populations, often dispersed over large geographic areas, which poses unique challenges to political engagement. The limited presence of community organizations means fewer resources for voter education and mobilization. Unlike Los Angeles, where organizations like CHIRLA and AAAJ are prevalent, rural areas lack similar support structures. Language barriers further complicate the situation. Many rural areas in the South do not provide voting materials in languages other than English, despite having significant non-English-speaking populations.²⁰ This lack of language-accessible voter materials discourages immigrants from participating in elections. Moreover, the logistical challenges of rural living, such as limited public transportation and fewer polling places, make it difficult for immigrants to reach voting locations. For instance, in some rural counties, voters may have to travel over 30 miles to reach the nearest polling station.²¹ The socio-economic conditions in rural areas also contribute to lower voter turnout among immigrants. Economic hardships hinder access to information about elections and voter registration procedures. The absence of community support networks that are commonplace in urban centers like Los Angeles means that many immigrants in the rural South remain isolated from the political process. Consequently, voter turnout among naturalized immigrants in these areas is significantly lower.

²⁰ “Limited English Proficiency Voters,” National Conference of State Legislatures, November 19, 2024, <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/limited-english-proficiency-voters>.

²¹ Carrie Rebala et al., “How One Rural County Struggles to Find Polling Places,” Center for Public Integrity, October 30, 2020, <http://publicintegrity.org/politics/elections/ballotboxbarriers/rural-county-struggles-to-find-polling-places/>.

c. *UK | London:*

London is a vibrant city with a substantial immigrant population, including significant communities from South Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe. The city's multicultural landscape is supported by numerous organizations dedicated to fostering political participation among immigrants. The Migrants' Rights Network and the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI) are prominent examples of such organizations. These groups focus on educating immigrants about their voting rights and encouraging their participation in both local and national elections. They organize voter registration campaigns, provide legal advice, and conduct workshops on civic engagement. The presence of immigrant representatives in London's local councils and the Parliament inspires and motivates immigrant communities to become more politically active. For instance, candidates from immigrant backgrounds secured a significant number of seats in various London boroughs, reflecting the growing political influence of these communities.²² The availability of voting materials in multiple languages and the active role of local media in covering immigrant issues further enhance political engagement. Data from the 2019 UK General Election shows that voter turnout among naturalized immigrants in London was around 68%, higher than the national average of 65%.²³ This higher turnout can be attributed to the efforts of community organizations, the presence of supportive infrastructure, and the overall political inclusivity of the city. London also benefits from a dense network of community centers, ethnic media, and advocacy groups that actively engage with immigrant populations, providing them with the necessary resources and information to participate in the electoral process.

²² Ben Kochan, ed., "Migration and London's Growth: Final Report of LSE London's HEIF 5 Project on Migration and the Transformation of London" (London School of Economics and Political Science, 2014), <http://www.lse.ac.uk/geographyAndEnvironment/research/london/Home.aspx>.

²³ Fieldhouse et al., *British Election Study*.

d. *UK | Small Towns:*

In contrast, smaller towns in the UK, such as those in rural areas of Yorkshire and Cornwall, present a different scenario. These towns have relatively low immigrant populations and lack the same level of community mobilization and political representation found in London. Immigrants in these areas often face significant barriers to political participation. The absence of robust community organizations means fewer opportunities for voter education and advocacy. Unlike London, where organizations like the Migrants' Rights Network and JCWI are active, smaller towns do not have equivalent support structures. The lack of representation in local councils further exacerbates the issue. Immigrants in smaller towns often do not see themselves reflected in the local political landscape, leading to feelings of disenfranchisement and disengagement. A study by the Electoral Commission found that voter turnout among immigrants in smaller UK towns was significantly lower, averaging around 45% in the 2019 General Election.²⁴ This lower turnout reflects the broader challenges faced by immigrants in these areas, including limited access to voting materials in their native languages and a lack of targeted outreach efforts. Moreover, the social and economic conditions in small towns can negatively impact voter turnout. Immigrants in these areas may face economic hardships, limited access to information, and a lack of social networks that can support political engagement. The absence of local media coverage on immigrant issues and the scarcity of community centers where immigrants can receive assistance further contribute to their political isolation. Additionally, systemic barriers such as strict voter ID laws and complex registration processes disproportionately affect immigrant communities, reducing their likelihood of participating in elections.

²⁴ The Electoral Commission, "Voter Engagement Among Black and Minority Ethnic Communities," July 2022.

Finally, localized factors, like the level of political representation within local governments and the presence of community-based political organizations, play a significant role in immigrant political participation. Areas with active immigrant advocacy and outreach programs tend to have higher participation rates among naturalized immigrants.²⁵ These programs often include voter education, language assistance, and community efforts tailored to immigrant needs. For instance, local governments and political parties in immigrant-dense areas might invest in multilingual voting materials, culturally relevant voter education campaigns, and partnerships with local organizations to engage immigrant voters. In regions lacking these services, immigrants may experience disengagement and lower voter turnout. The absence of targeted outreach efforts can lead to feelings of alienation and mistrust in the political system.²⁶ Moreover, barriers like strict voter ID laws, complex registration processes, and limited polling locations can disproportionately affect immigrant communities, further discouraging participation.

VI. Discussion

The interpretation of findings from this study reveals an interesting interaction of factors influencing voter turnout among naturalized immigrants in the United States and the United Kingdom. The quantitative and qualitative results above highlight significant patterns and disparities, showing that naturalized immigrants generally exhibit lower voter turnout rates compared to native-born citizens. This disparity is shown when examining different racial groups, with systemic barriers such as lower socio-economic status, limited access to information, and historical discrimination significantly impacting voter participation. Geographic

²⁵ Caroline B. Brettell, *The Political and Civic Engagement of Immigrants* (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2020), https://www.amacad.org/sites/default/files/publication/downloads/Democratic-Citizenship_Immigrants-Civic-Political-Engagement.pdf.

²⁶ Adam Miller et al., "Understanding Non-participation in Local Governance Institutions in Indonesia," *Biological Conservation* 294 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2024.110605>.

distribution also plays a crucial role; immigrants in urban areas, like Los Angeles and London, benefit from community support and resources that enhance political participation. In contrast, those in rural areas face significant challenges due to limited infrastructure and fewer community organizations. Socio-economic factors further influence voter turnout, with higher income, education, and stable employment correlating positively with political engagement. Community organizations and advocacy groups are important in mobilizing immigrant voters by providing essential services like voter registration drives, education, and support. The case studies underscore these findings, illustrating how localized contexts, such as the presence of immigrant advocacy organizations in urban centers versus their absence in rural areas, contribute to varying levels of electoral engagement.

The comparison between the United States and the United Kingdom reveals distinct differences in their electoral systems, community support structures, and socio-economic contexts, all of which significantly influence voter turnout among naturalized immigrants. These differences shape how immigrants engage with the political process and the barriers they encounter. One of the most notable distinctions between the two countries is the structure of their electoral systems. In the United States, voting laws are complex and vary by state which can create significant obstacles for naturalized immigrants, especially those who consistently move around the country. In contrast, the United Kingdom's electoral system is generally more straightforward and consistent across the country, with fewer barriers to registration and participation. The UK allows for postal voting and early voting across the board, which increases accessibility for immigrants, particularly those in areas with fewer polling stations. These regulatory differences reflect broader disparities in political culture and engagement practices. The U.S., with its more contentious political environment, often experiences polarized political

debates that can either mobilize or disenfranchise immigrant voters. On the other hand, the UK's relatively stable political climate provides a more predictable and structured environment for immigrants to participate. The UK's focus on inclusivity, at least in terms of its legal and institutional frameworks, has created an environment where immigrants are more likely to feel that their participation is valued and that their vote has an impact.

Community support and resources for naturalized immigrants also vary significantly between the two countries. In the US, the effectiveness of community organizations like CHIRLA and AAAJ in Los Angeles highlights the crucial role these groups play in mobilizing immigrant voters through targeted outreach and voter education programs. Similarly, in the UK, organizations such as the Migrants' Rights Network and JCWI provide essential support, but their impact can be more limited outside major urban centers. Local and national government initiatives in both countries support immigrant voters to varying degrees, with the UK generally providing more structured support compared to the fragmented approach often seen in the US.

Racial and socio-economic contexts show further disparities between the US and UK, affecting voter turnout among naturalized immigrants. The US, with its history of racial discrimination and socioeconomic inequality, sees greater disparities in voter turnout among different racial groups. Systemic barriers such as economic hardships, lower education levels, and limited access to information disproportionately affect minority immigrants. In the UK, while racial and socio-economic challenges persist, the scale and impact of these barriers can differ, partly due to different historical contexts and social policies.

The evaluation of alternative explanations for voter turnout among naturalized immigrants shows an interesting interplay of political socialization, community support, political culture, and economic and social integration. Political socialization plays a crucial role in

shaping voting behavior, with family, community, and social networks significantly influencing political engagement.²⁷ Effective community support systems, such as local advocacy groups and social clubs, can enhance voter turnout by providing education, resources, and a sense of belonging. In both the US and UK, the broader political culture, characterized by the national political climate and the role of political parties and candidates, also impacts immigrant voter turnout. Political parties and candidates who actively engage with immigrant communities and address their specific concerns can foster higher levels of political participation. Economic and social integration also plays a critical role. Economic stability, access to employment, and social cohesion foster a conducive environment for electoral engagement. Integration policies that promote economic stability and social inclusion are vital for encouraging political participation among naturalized immigrants.

VII. Conclusion

The exploration of voter turnout among naturalized immigrants in the United States and the United Kingdom has highlighted significant disparities influenced by race, socioeconomic status, and systemic barriers. Analysis indicates that naturalized immigrants, particularly those from marginalized racial groups, face substantial challenges in electoral participation, especially when compared to their native-born counterparts. These challenges are increased by factors such as lower socioeconomic status, limited access to information, and historical and contemporary contexts of racial discrimination. A comparative analysis between the United States and the United Kingdom reveals distinct differences in electoral systems, community support structures, and socioeconomic contexts, which significantly influence voter turnout among naturalized immigrants. The United States, with its complex voting regulations, shows more pronounced

²⁷ Jennifer Fitzgerald, "Social Engagement and Immigration Attitudes: Panel Survey Evidence from Germany," *International Migration Review* 46, no. 4 (2012): 941–70, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41804869>.

barriers to immigrant participation. In contrast, the United Kingdom's more accessible electoral processes and supportive community groups generally foster higher levels of engagement among naturalized immigrants. Future research should continue to explore the intersectionality of race, socioeconomic status, and immigrant status in electoral participation, with a focus on long-term studies to track changes over time. Comparative studies including other democracies with significant immigrant populations, like those part of the European Union, could provide new insights into the best practices for fostering inclusive political engagement. Ensuring equitable representation and political participation for naturalized immigrants is necessary for the legitimacy of democratic systems. By addressing the identified barriers and implementing targeted policy measures, both the United States and the United Kingdom can move towards more inclusive and representative democratic processes that reflect the diverse voices within their societies.

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