

**“I will bear true faith and
allegiance.” –**



WHAT CITIZENSHIP TESTS CAN(NOT) DO

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**Aurelia Schwarzmann
David Hemphill**

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Citizenship test examples



- Q1: What is the supreme law of the land?
- Q2: Are honor killings allowed in this country?
- Q3: What should you do if you spill someone's pint in a pub?
 - A: You would offer to buy the person another pint
 - B: You would offer to dry their wet shirt with your own
 - C: You may need to prepare for a fight in the car park

Construct, procedure and rationale



- **What?**
 - from **factual** (*What is right?*)
 - to **moral/social norms** (*What is good?*)
- **How?**
 - from **oral** interview to **written** tests or no tests at all
- **Why?**
 - To learn about the civic values, democratic principles, to promote civic integration, political allegiance, social cohesion
 - *What about language?*

The US citizenship test



- Eligibility: permanent resident for 5+ years
- 1. Citizenship interview with an immigration officer:
 1. character check (N-400)
 2. civics: 6/10 questions from a list of 100
 3. English: reading and writing one sentence, speaking: questions about application
- 2. Naturalization oath ceremony

English requirements



- English-only mandate in a country that has no official language
- 1952 Act: “demonstrate ability to speak, write and read in English”

A disguised language test

A gate-keeping device?

The US test under review



Test aims

- Policy: unite people around civic ideals, “unifying identity“
- Practice: tests if immigrants respond to questions correctly

Expert voices on the test

- “fair, economical, increasingly irrelevant” (Schneider, 2010)

→ **Policy-practice gap**

Study outline



Justification:

- impact of citizenship classes and tests undocumented
- involve the stakeholder

Research questions:

1. *What are important values that citizens should share?*
2. *What impact does the test have on*
 - a) *values & civic learning?*
 - b) *language learning?*
3. *Is there a mismatch between policy and practice?*

Methodology: Mixed-method: survey & interview

Study's sample I



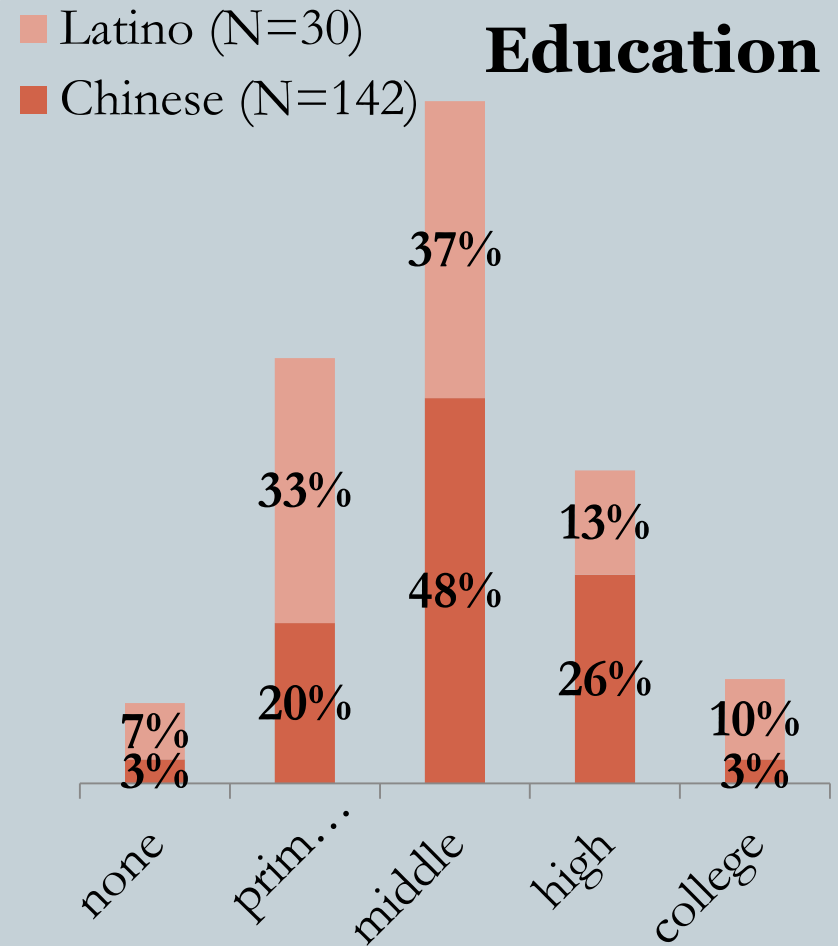
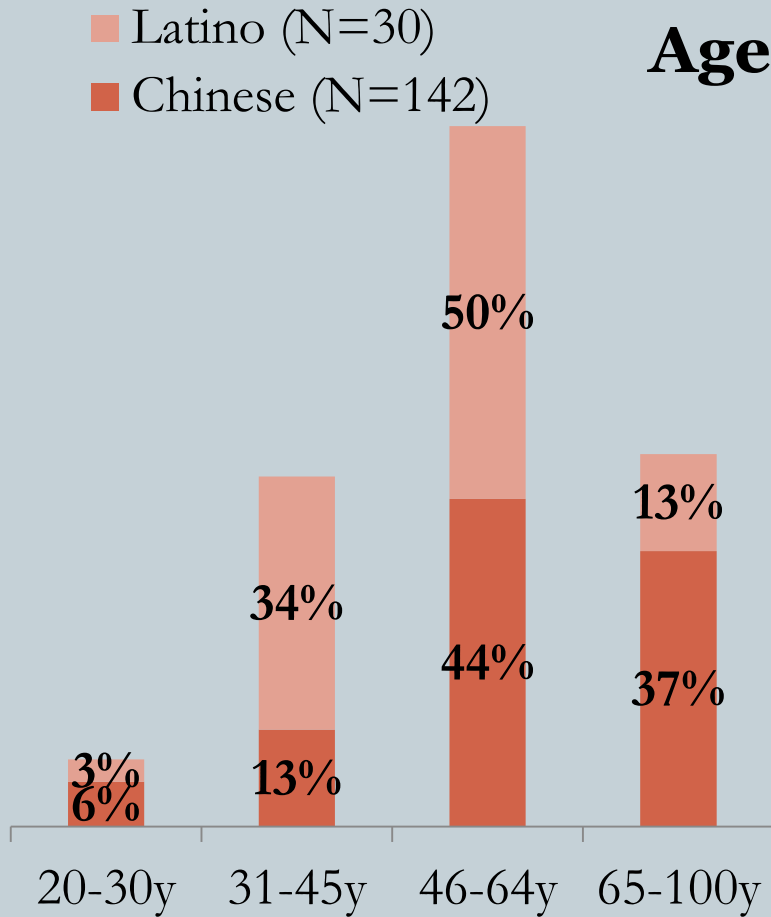
Sample:

- 172 permanent residents in non-credit ESL/citizenship classes (survey)
- test candidates, teachers, administrator

Demographics

- years lived in the US: 5 (Chinese) vs. 20+ (Latino)
- language level: mostly beginners

Study's sample II

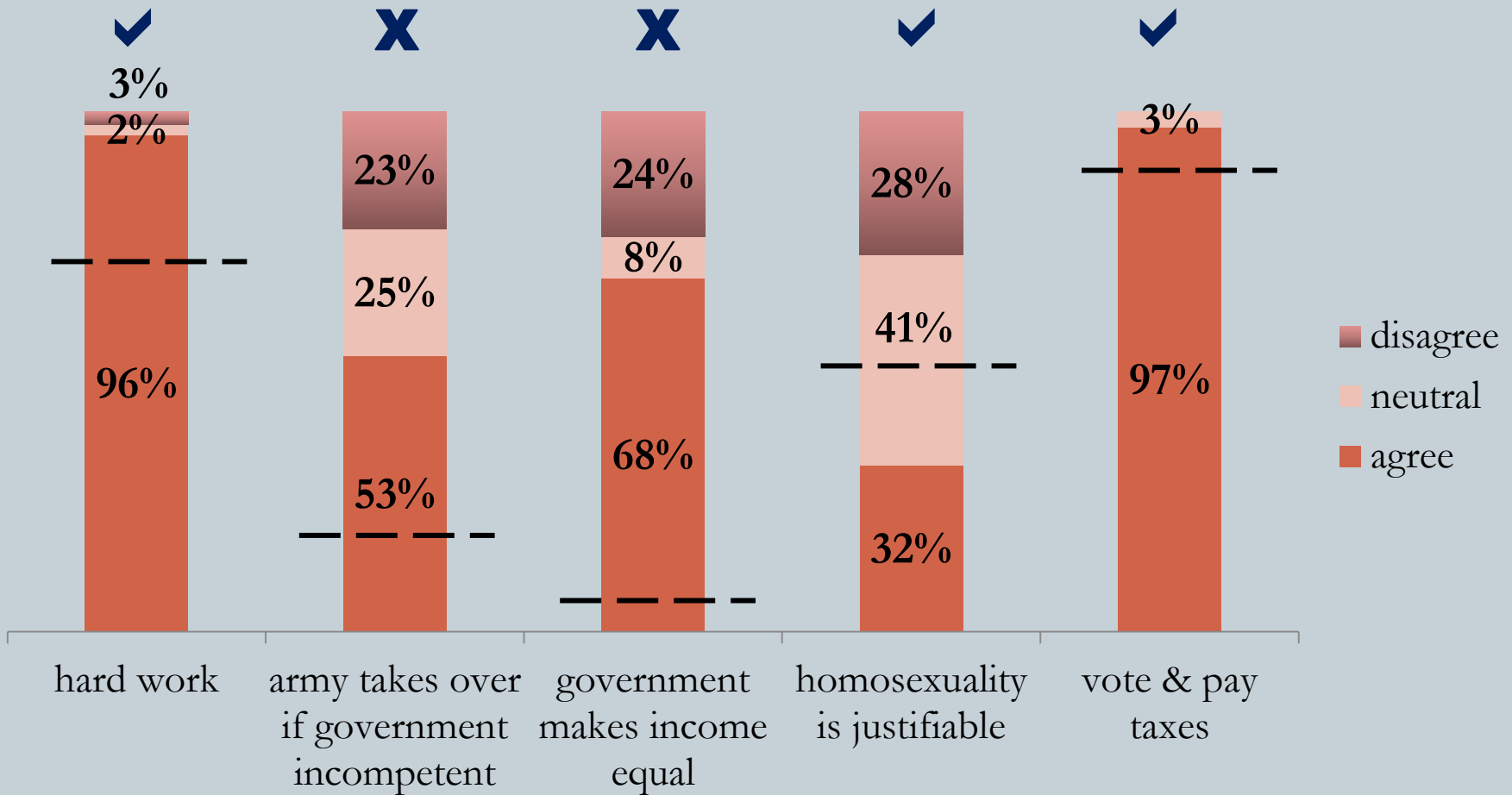


Survey: methodology



- Survey on values
 - inspired by the World Value Survey (<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp>)
 - translated into Mandarin and Spanish
- Sample questions
 - characteristics of a good citizen
 - principles of a democracy
 - controversial topics
- Quantitative survey targets RQ1 & 2

Survey results I: values



Survey results II: determinants of values



- Non-significant determinants of values were:
 1. **amount of instruction**
 2. **gender**
 3. **education**
- Significant **determinants** of values were:
 - a. **age** (*homosexuality = .068)

Interviews: methodology



- individual and semi-structured
- 7 Citizenship students (M=male, F=female)
- 2 Teachers (T)
- 1 Administrator (A)
- in English, partly with the help of translators
- Quantitative survey targets all RQ

Findings I: values



- M: Es portarse bien [=good behavior], trabajar [=work], help other people, and bring the best to the country.
- F: Obey the law, pay taxes, vote. Fourth, maybe, I can help. I usually help many persons.
- A: I think people who want to become citizens must actually feel that it's from the heart. I know that many become citizens because they want to apply for federal jobs, they want the passport, but what I would love people to think "I want to belong."

Findings II: civics



- F: Before I never knew anyone, just know who is Obama, now I know who is the first president. I learnt a lot. So I know something now. This is good.
- T: They say it's to learn about US government and history, but actually not test is instructional. [...] it's always about memorization.

Findings III: language



- F: I learnt many new words. Only for the test, not for job.
- F: I think for the old people the test should not be in English. People are too old should be in Chinese.
- T: An English teacher did not design that test [...] It would try to find a way to make it a bit more conversational.

Findings IV: Test or no test?



- M: I passed the test, I did it myself. It was a good test because it was hard. [...] We need the test. Because it shows you about the country.
- T: [...] to get rudimentary American civic understanding which I think is a good thing. [...] I like the fact that it is achievable.
- F: Maybe if you stay here long time, 10 years, 20 years, after 60 years old, you don't need the interview test.

What can the US citizenship test do?



Category	Can do	Cannot do
ESL	basic words and phrases motivation to continue ESL	ESL class for conversational English
Civics education	basic civic facts	integration & life-skills
Values	inform	affect, change
Global judgment	fair, achievable	just

Conclusion



What does the test actually test?

- tests memorization and sound recognition
- English not appropriately tested to ensure that citizens are really at the level needed to engage in every-day tasks in English
- candidates value the test: signal attachment, shared knowledge

→ there is a policy practice mismatch that seems to be accepted by the stakeholders involved

Should there be a citizenship test at all?



- **YES (?)**
- immigrants value the symbolic meaning
 - signaling attachment, connectedness
 - test shows ability not deficiency
 - their own achievement
- basic education

Should the test be in English?



- **NO (?)**
- English not part of the concept of a good citizen
- English mandate does not turn country into a nation of English speakers
- seldom reach the level of fluency envisioned
- a hurdle for non-English-speaking migrants
- active participation can happen without English

What to do about the policy-practice mismatch?



- probably just accept it content-wise
- achievable tests desirable
- In English?

Future ways to go

- Focus on more impactful steps in integration
- Invest just as much resources and time in more meaningful life-skill (Spruck-Wrigley, 2016)
 - supporting children's schooling
 - participating in neighbourhood groups
 - joining an immigrant support or advocacy group

Thank you!



Aurelia Schwarzmann
San Francisco State University
MA in Education: Equity and Social Justice

Federal Ministry of Education, Austria
aurelia.schwarzmann@gmail.com

Questions?

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