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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Women, Gender Inequality, and Citizenship Among Immigrants in Western Europe

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Abstract

This paper examines the gendered foundations of citizenship status among first-generation immigrants in Western Europe. It posits that foreign-born women are more likely than foreign-born men to become citizens in their new homeland if they originate from countries with greater gender inequality. Moreover, this relationship is amplified among highly educated female immigrants. In contrast, no gender gap in citizenship status exists among newcomers from origin countries with low gender inequality. The empirical analyses based on the individual-level data from the *European Social Survey* (ESS) 2010–22 confirm these expectations. These findings have important implications for our understanding of immigrant political integration in western democracies and the consequences of gender inequality around the world.

Keywords: immigrant integration; citizenship; women; gender equality; education

Although reducing gender inequality has been an important goal for many countries at least since the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, on average women's status remains lower than men's (UNDP 2020). Moreover, progress toward gender parity has stagnated and even reversed in some policy areas since 2000 (Klasen 2020). In the labor market, for example, women continue to be disproportionately responsible for child and elderly care at home (Craig and Mullan 2011; Juhn and McCue 2017; World Bank 2024), and gender segregation across occupations is remarkably resilient (Charles 2011; Cohen 2013). These global trends, however, coexist with large cross-national variability in gender equality. While Western Europe consistently outperforms

the rest of the world according to both objective and subjective indicators (Ruyssen and Salomone 2018, 228), the opposite is true of the developing world (Doepke, Tertilt, and Voena 2012).

High gender equality is not the only distinct feature of Western Europe. In recent decades, the region has become a magnet for international migrants, and many newcomers originate from an increasingly diverse set of non-European countries (Czaika and de Haas 2015). According to *Eurostat*, the official statistical agency of the European Union, 16.8% of the total population in Western Europe in 2024 was born in another country (compared to 12.8% in 2014).[1] Moreover, 70% of these individuals were born outside the European Union, particularly in Morocco, Türkiye, Brazil, China, Colombia, Venezuela, India, Syria, Rusia, and Ukraine.

If migrant origin countries are less fair in their treatment of men and women than immigrant receiving countries, then relocating to Western Europe should result in an improved gender equality for many new arrivals.[2] This improvement may be particularly important to female immigrants, and there is evidence that women are indeed overrepresented among newcomers in this part of the globe. While women comprised 48.1% of the international migrant stock in 2020 worldwide, the pattern was reversed in Western Europe, where 50.7% of immigrants were female (UNDP 2020; see also Bonjour and Cleton 2021). Furthermore, among immigrants naturalized in Western Europe between 2013 and 2022, 52.51% were female.[3]

To understand the underlying reasons for these gender differences, this study examines the role of pre-migration gender inequality in shaping the patterns of citizenship status among foreign-born individuals in Western Europe. Many scholars consider citizenship as the key aspect of immigrant political integration, either because they see it as the crown on the completed integration process or because naturalization catalyzes further immigrant political and socioeconomic incorporation (Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Pietrantuono 2017). Scholars focusing on the downstream effects of citizenship emphasize that because naturalization grants newcomers the right to vote and run for public office, it offers them better opportunities for the expression of political preferences and demands. These opportunities in turn motivate immigrants to become more knowledgeable, efficacious, and active in their host country's politics (Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Pietrantuono 2015; Just and Anderson 2012). In addition, naturalization accelerates newcomers' social integration, particularly among more marginalized immigrants (Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Pietrantuono 2017), as well as enhances their economic well-being by facilitating access to better jobs, higher wages (Fougère and Safi 2009; Steinhardt 2012), and broader social welfare benefits (Nam and Kim 2012; Van Hook, Brown, and Bean 2006). Finally, there is evidence that citizenship also reduces the gap in policy preferences between immigrants and native populations on a variety of issues, including immigration (Just and Anderson 2015), social welfare (Kolbe and Crepaz 2016), and European unification (Roeder 2011).

Given the importance of citizenship, this study examines the role of gender and gender inequality in shaping the patterns of citizenship among first-generation immigrants in Western Europe. I argue that foreign-born women

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are more likely than foreign-born men to become citizens in their new homeland if they originate from countries with greater gender inequality. Moreover, this relationship is particularly pronounced among highly educated female immigrants. In contrast, no gender gap in citizenship status is expected among newcomers from countries that treat men and women equally. The empirical analyses based on the individual-level data from the *European Social Survey* (ESS) 2010–22 confirm these expectations.

The article contributes to existing scholarship in several ways. First, it enhances our knowledge of the gendered foundations of citizenship in contemporary democracies — an issue that remains poorly understood (Donato, Enriquez, and Llewellyn 2017). In doing so, it helps us reconcile some inconsistent findings in previous research. Specifically, while some studies demonstrate that female immigrants are more likely to become citizens in their host country than male immigrants (Corluy, Marx, and Verbist 2011; Fougère and Safi 2009; Pantoja and Gershon 2006; Reichel and Perchinig 2015; Vink, Prokic-Breuer, and Dronkers 2013; Yang 1994; 2002), others detect no statistically significant difference between the two genders (Dronkers and Vink 2012; Jones-Correa 2001b; Peters, Vink, and Schmeets 2016). At the same time, there is some evidence that the gender gap in naturalization varies across immigrant groups from different origin countries (e.g., Bueker 2005; Liang 1994; Yang 2002). By considering the role of pre-migration gender inequality, this study develops a more comprehensive model of citizenship among first-generation immigrants than available to date.

I also add to extant scholarship by systematically testing the effects of gender inequality on a large sample of first-generation immigrants from a diverse set of West European democracies. Several studies have previously suggested that pre-migration gender inequality influences migrants' decisions to naturalize in their new homeland (e.g., Money et al. 2023; see also Alvarez 1987). However, these studies are based on the qualitative analyses of in-depth interviews with a small number of respondents.[4] While these studies offer valuable insights and generate new hypotheses, they are not designed to systematically test the consequences of the macro-level context in migrant sending or receiving countries. Consequently, it remains unclear to what extent pre-migration gender inequality influences newcomers' citizenship status in their host country, and whether this influence, if it indeed exists, varies across immigrants depending on their gender and other characteristics.

In the next section, I develop my argument about how and why gender inequality at the level of countries and gender at the level of individuals shape the patterns of citizenship among first-generation immigrants in Western Europe. I then consider how individual resources in the form of education condition the consequences of being female and gender inequality for citizenship among foreign-born individuals. The subsequent section describes my data, measures, and statistical techniques, and then presents the results of my empirical analyses along with several robustness tests. The final section offers concluding remarks and discusses the implications of my findings for policymaking and future research.

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Women, Gender Inequality, and Immigrant Integration

It has been well established that pre-migration experiences of foreign-born individuals influence their post-migration political attitudes and behavior. Scholars have found that migrants' origin countries matter in explaining their gender attitudes (Röder and Mühlau 2014), political trust (McAllister and Makkai 1992; Voicu and Tufiş 2017; Wals 2011), support for democracy and its alternatives (Bilodeau 2014), party attachments (Black 1987; Finifter and Finifter 1989; Just 2019; Wals 2011), and some forms of political engagement (e.g., Bilodeau 2008; Black 1987). There is also evidence that origin country characteristics influence citizenship acquisition among new arrivals, in part because host countries selectively grant citizenship to immigrants from some origin countries more than others (Hainmueller and Hangartner 2013), but also because newcomers from some origin countries are more likely to apply for citizenship (e.g., Bueker 2005; Dronkers and Vink 2012; Helgertz and Bevelander 2017; Jasso and Rosenzweig 1986; Liang 1994; Logan, Oh, and Darrah 2012; Peters, Vink, and Schmeets 2016; Vink, Prokic-Breuer, and Dronkers 2013; Yang 1994; 2002). Specifically, those who came from states that are highly authoritarian, politically unstable, economically poor, or permit multiple citizenships are more likely to seek citizenship in their host country than immigrants from countries that are democratic, politically stable, economically prosperous, or do not allow dual citizenship.

Given the importance of origin countries for immigrant naturalization, it is surprising that previous research has so far devoted little attention to the role of gender inequality.[5] Part of the reason for this oversight may be that the consequences of gender inequality are unlikely to be the same for male and female immigrants. That women respond to gender equality differently than men is well known in existing research on the behavior and attitudes of ordinary citizens (e.g., Clayton, O'Brien, and Piscopo 2019; Desposato and Norrander 2009; Green and Shorrocks 2023; Newman 2016; Simas and Bumgardner 2017). Studies show that women generally welcome gender parity because it provides them with direct benefits, such as better labor market opportunities along with improved access to education, health care, and political influence, as well as reduced domestic violence and mortality (e.g., Barnes and Burchard 2013; Bock, Byrd-Craven, and Burkley 2017, 191; Davis and Robinson 1991).

In contrast, men tend to perceive women's empowerment as a force that erodes, or threatens to erode, their own social position and its spoils, such as higher prestige, larger wages, and more power in various spheres of society (e.g., Green and Shorrocks 2023; Morgan and Buice 2013; Sanbonmatsu 2008; Simas and Bumgardner 2017). Research in social psychology suggests that because men have traditionally occupied a superior social position, they are more likely to exhibit "social dominance orientations" — that is, believe that status differences are legitimate and support social hierarchy enhancing values and belief systems (Pratto et al. 1994; Sidanius and Pratto 2001).

There are also reasons to suspect that the prospect of gender equality for men implies not only material but also identity costs. Some scholars argue that in many cultures the status of manhood is more precarious than the status of

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womanhood: while manhood must be earned and repeatedly proven through action, womanhood is usually defined in biological rather than social terms (Bosson and Vandello 2011; Vandello et al. 2008). This precariousness leads men to be more sensitive to threats to their identity and react to these treats with more anxiety compared to women (Vandello et al. 2008). Thus, men respond to the rise in gender equality with trepidation. Considering that manhood has always been difficult to earn and easy to lose, men are afraid of losing not only their dominant social status but also their masculine self (Kilmartin 1994).

Not surprisingly, then, men see gender relations as a zero-sum game — that is, interpret women's gains as occurring at the expense of men's losses (Gidron and Hall 2017; Kehn and Ruthig 2013; Ruthig et al. 2017; Sidanius, Pratto, and Bobo 1994; Wilkins et al. 2015; see also Green and Shorrocks 2023).[6] Zero-sum thinking often triggers a defensive response among dominant group members, such as efforts to restore the legitimacy of traditional social hierarchies or sabotage subordinate group members' attempts to improve their status. Consistent with this view, experimental research shows that prompting men with messages about women's advancement heightens men's zero-sum beliefs that in turn undermine their support for workplace gender equity policies (Kuchynka et al. 2018). Cross-national studies confirm that men are less supportive of gender quality in more gender equal countries, presumably because in these countries men are more strongly reminded of women's encroachment on the previously male-dominated areas (Kosakowska-Berezecka et al. 2020, 1286).

In line with these findings, political science research reveals that men respond to the erosion of traditional gender relations either with resentment and backlash (Green and Shorrocks 2023; Morgan and Buice 2013; Sanbonmatsu 2008; Simas and Bumgardner 2017) or indifference (Breyer 2024). Numerous studies point to male backlash against gender equality as a major force in the rise and prevalence of populist or radical-right parties and candidates (Anduiza and Rico 2024; Donovan 2023; Gidron and Hall 2017; Off 2023), voting for Donald Trump in the US 2016 presidential elections (Bock, Byrd-Craven, and Burkley 2017; Schaffner, Macwilliams, and Nteta 2018), and public support for Brexit in the UK referendum to leave the E.U. (Green and Shorrocks 2023). In contrast, women usually react to improving gender equity by becoming more politically engaged (Barnes and Burchard 2013; Desposato and Norrander 2009; but see Karp and Banducci 2008; Lawless 2004).

Taken together, these studies suggest that both men and women respond to gender equality in ways that are designed to protect and enhance their social status. Immigrants should be no exception to this rule. Because of higher appreciation of their host country's gender equality, foreign-born women should be more likely to become citizens in their new homeland than foreign-born men, if they originate from countries with greater gender inequality. Previous research based on ethnographic evidence confirms that male and female immigrants differ in their motivations to naturalize, and that gender inequality plays a role in these motivations (Alvarez 1987; Jones-Correa 1998; Money et al. 2023; Preston, Kobayashi, and Man 2006). However, quantitative studies have so far ignored gender inequality. Evidence of its relevance emerges only indirectly via the mixed findings of different studies with respect to how gender matters for

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immigrant naturalization. In particular, while some studies reveal a positive impact of being female on citizenship among immigrants (Corluy, Marx, and Verbist 2011; Fougère and Safi 2009; Pantoja and Gershon 2006; Reichel and Perchinig 2015; Vink, Prokic-Breuer, and Dronkers 2013; Yang 1994), others fail to find a statistically significant effect (Dronkers and Vink 2012; Jones-Correa 2001b; Peters, Vink, and Schmeets 2016).

Yet, several studies report that the extent to which gender influences citizenship acquisition varies across immigrant groups from different origin countries (e.g., Bueker 2005; Liang 1994; Yang 2002). Although these studies offer little explanation for this variation, looking closer at their findings reveals interesting patterns that are consistent with my expectations. For example, Bueker's (2005, 129) study of 10 immigrant groups in the US finds that women are more likely than men to naturalize in the host country if they originate from Mexico and India — countries with traditional gender relations — but not if they come from western democracies, such as Canada, Britain, or Italy, or socialist regimes, such as the Soviet Union, China, or Cuba — all of which are known to be relatively egalitarian in their treatment of men and women.

Furthermore, several studies find that among immigrants from Latin America — another region where gender relations remain traditional — women are more likely than men to naturalize and integrate politically in the US (Jones-Correa 1998, 340-1; Pantoja and Gershon 2006, 1180). In addition, analyzing foreign-born Asian immigrants in the US, Yang (2002, 398) reports that women are more likely than men to become citizens if they came from Japan, China, Korea, and Vietnam, while no such gender difference emerges among arrivals from Philippines or India.[7] Because the former countries are more strongly shaped by Confucianism associated with a patriarchal structure of society (Yang 2002, 398), these findings are in line with my theoretical expectations that gender inequality in the country of origin motivates female immigrants more strongly than male immigrants to settle in the new homeland by adopting its citizenship.

In short, because gender equality is generally welcomed and embraced by women, particularly if they experienced considerable gender discrimination in the past (Morgan and Buice 2013, 658; see also Newman 2016), pre-migration exposure to greater gender inequality should motivate female immigrants more than male immigrants to become citizens of their host country. I therefore hypothesize that, among foreign-born individuals who have migrated to Western Europe from countries with more severe gender inequality, women should be more likely to report having their host country's citizenship than men (*Hypothesis 1*). In contrast, among arrivals from countries with equal treatment of men and women, the gender gap in citizenship status should be considerably reduced or nonexistent.

Contingent Effects of Gender Inequality: The Role of Education

Beside the role of pre-migration gender inequality in shaping citizenship acquisition among first-generation immigrants, I am also interested in whether the effect of gender inequality among female immigrants is magnified by education.

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To be sure, women of all education levels are likely to benefit from a broader range of employment opportunities and higher wages in their host country if they originate from countries with greater gender inequality. In highly patriarchal societies, gender discrimination in the labor market is widespread (Money et al. 2023, 1501), and women either face resistance to being employed outside their home or are confined to socially isolated occupations (Pedraza 1991). Better labor market opportunities in the destination country not only improve the economic well-being for many women but also bolster their influence within families and offer more autonomy from oppressive family relations (Alvarez 1987, 341–3; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Guendelman and Perez-Itriago 1987; İnce Beqo 2019; Pedraza 1991). Moreover, countries with higher gender equality provide women with better legal protection against gender-based violence (Money et al. 2023). Since physical and emotional abuse is more widespread in households with low levels of education (Abramsky et al. 2011; Kaukinen 2004), reducing exposure to domestic violence may be an especially important consideration to less-educated female migrants.

While pre-migration gender inequality can be expected to contribute positively to post-migration citizenship acquisition among all women, I expect this relationship to be particularly pronounced among better educated female migrants. Previous studies show that women's individual resources interact with macro-level gender inequality in shaping their position within the family and society. For example, Fuwa (2004) finds that women with more substantial individual assets are more successful in negotiating their workload at home, but only if gender inequality in their country is low. Where gender inequality is high, women's resources do not translate into more favorable outcomes for women.

Building on these insights, I expect that individual resources in the form of education amplify the positive relationship between pre-migration gender inequality and post-migration citizenship acquisition among foreign-born women. While originating from a country where women lack equal treatment should provide stronger incentives for them to naturalize in highly egalitarian Western Europe, it is education that enables individuals to overcome the information costs related to this process. In addition, education permits women to better discern how gender norms and practices differ between their origin and destination countries and figure out how to use these newly available labor market opportunities to their own advantage.

Furthermore, because schooling is generally linked with higher aspirations in the labor market, better educated women are not only more capable but also more motivated to benefit from improved gender equality following migration. Previous research suggests that women who have acquired more education desire careers more and, thus, have more to gain from gender equality than less educated women (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004, 766). Moreover, an increase in female education in some developing countries in recent decades has outpaced the availability of jobs in which educated women could work, leaving many of them unemployed and willing to consider job opportunities abroad (Klasen 2020, 6). And because citizenship enhances newcomers' access to better jobs and higher wages (Fougère

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and Safi 2009; Steinhardt 2012), education should amplify women's interest in acquiring their host country's citizenship. Hence, I hypothesize that the effect of pre-migration gender inequality on post-migration citizenship should be particularly pronounced among foreign-born women who are better educated than women who are less educated (*Hypothesis 2*).

Data and Measures

My empirical analyses rely on the individual-level data collected as part of the *European Social Survey* (ESS) project 5–10 rounds (2010–22).[8] The earlier rounds of the ESS data were excluded because they did not ask foreign-born respondents for the exact year of arrival to the host country. This information is crucial for the purpose of my study because it enables me to augment the ESS data with the origin country characteristics of foreign-born respondents, such as gender inequality, prior to migration. The relevant variables were available for 18 western democracies with considerable immigrant populations: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

Foreign-born individuals in my data were identified using the survey question: "Were you born in this country?" Only respondents who said "no" in response to this question were kept in the sample, while those who said "yes" or did not answer the question were excluded. In addition, survey questions: "Was your father born in this country?" and "Was your mother born in this country?" were utilized to eliminate foreign-born respondents whose both parents are native-born. Finally, I dropped foreign-born individuals who had not resided in their host country long enough to qualify for its citizenship at the time of the survey.[9] The resulting sample of foreign-born respondents in 18 Western democracies and six survey rounds contains 13,977 observations (7.82% of the overall ESS 5–10 sample).

Dependent Variable

My dependent variable is derived from the survey question: "Are you a citizen of this country?" Foreign-born respondents who responded positively to this question are coded as citizens, while those who gave a negative answer — as non-citizens.[10] I find that, on average, 47.2% of foreign-born respondents were citizens in the host country at the time of the survey, whereas 52.8% were non-citizens. However, there is also considerable variation across the host countries: only 25.5% and 28.6% of the first-generation immigrants reported being citizens in Cyprus and Greece; in contrast, 73.9% and 69.8% did so in Sweden and the Netherlands.

Key Independent Variables

I model my dependent variable — citizenship — as a function of individual traits and country-level characteristics. At the macro-level, my key independent

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variable is gender inequality in the country of origin at the time of arrival to the host country. I use the Gender Inequality Index (GII) — provided by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) — that reflects the extent to which women are disadvantaged in accessing reproductive health, labor market, and political influence in their country. This measure (recorded annually since 1990 for 166 countries) ranges from zero — a value that denotes complete equality between men and women — to one — the maximum level of gender inequality.[11] At the micro-level, my key independent variable is gender — a measure available in the ESS data that distinguishes between male and female respondents. Finally, to capture education — the variable expected to amplify the consequences of pre-migration gender inequality for citizenship among foreign-born women — I rely on the survey item capturing the number of years of completed full-time education.

Control Variables

My empirical analyses include several additional variables found to be important determinants of immigrant naturalization in previous research. First, I control for respondent's income and manual (vs. professional) skills, as individual resources facilitate and motivate newcomer adaptation to the host society (e.g., Alvarez 1987; Bloemraad 2002; Bueker 2005; Jones-Correa 2001b; Liang 1994; Portes and Curtis 1987; Vink, Prokic-Breuer, and Dronkers 2013; Yang 1994; 2002). Including these variables is important also because some host countries are more likely to grant citizenship to foreigners with better education and professional qualifications than newcomers without them (Hainmueller and Hangartner 2013, 161). In addition, because social connectedness increases the odds of naturalization, I use respondent's marital status, employment, and union membership (Bueker 2005).

Among immigrant-specific characteristics, one relevant control is linguistic skills. Immigrants who can speak their host country's official language or report using this language at home are more likely to naturalize (e.g., Bloemraad 2002; Dronkers and Vink 2012; Liang 1994; Yang 2002). Respondent's age at the time of arrival to the host country also matters because the benefits of citizenship are smaller for those who immigrated at a later age (e.g., Liang 1994; Peters, Vink, and Schmeets 2016; Yang 2002). In addition, I include duration of stay because longer residence in the host country provides more time to apply for citizenship and receive it (e.g., Bloemraad 2002; Dronkers and Vink 2012; Jones-Correa 2001b; Liang 1994; Yang 2002).[12] Another potentially relevant control is whether a foreign-born respondent originates from an EU member state or not. Since EU nationals enjoy many rights and freedoms in other EU states, they have fewer incentives to naturalize in their host country than arrivals from non-EU countries (Dronkers and Vink 2012; Peters, Vink, and Schmeets 2016).

To ensure that gender equality is not merely a proxy for higher levels of democracy and economic development, and also because these phenomena are related to naturalization, as shown in previous research (Dronkers and Vink 2012; Helgertz and Bevelander 2017; Jasso and Rosenzweig 1986; Logan, Oh, and

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Darrah 2012; Vink, Prokic-Breuer, and Dronkers 2013; Yang 1994; 2002), I include the liberal democracy index from the *Varieties of Democracy* (V-Dem) project (Coppedge et al. 2023) and the human development index (HDI), provided by the UNDP. Moreover, some studies suggest that immigrants from origin countries that do not permit dual citizenship are less likely to naturalize in their new homeland (e.g., Bloemraad 2002; Jones-Correa 2001a; 2001b; Vink, Prokic-Breuer, and Dronkers 2013; but see Helgertz and Bevelander 2017). I therefore also control for whether the country of origin allows its nationals to hold multiple citizenships using information from the *MACIMIDE Global Expatriate Dual Citizenship Dataset* (Version 5.00) (Vink, de Groot, and Luk 2020).

Among the macro-level characteristics of destination countries, my models include liberal citizenship policies from the *Migrant Integration Policy Index* (MIPEX) project (Solano and Huddleston 2020), as easier access to nationality facilitates citizenship acquisition among immigrants in Western Europe (Dronkers and Vink 2012). Furthermore, I control for anti-immigrant opinion climates because less hospitable social environments not only discourage newcomers from naturalizing (Van Hook, Brown, and Bean 2006) but also reduce the probability that citizenship would be granted to them by the host country (Hainmueller and Hangartner 2013; 2019). Finally, to account for the cumulative nature of the ESS data, all models contain ESS round fixed effects (For further details on all variables, see the Appendix).

Analysis and Results

To test my theoretical propositions, I use data with a multilevel structure where one unit of analysis (the individual) is nested within another unit of analysis (country). Such data structure may lead to statistical problems, such as clustering, non-constant variance, and incorrect standard errors (Steenbergen and Jones 2002). Given the dichotomous nature of my dependent variable, the results reported below are therefore multilevel (random intercept) logistic regression estimates, listed as log odds with their standard errors in parentheses and odds ratios in italics.

The results of my base-line model (Model I, Table 1) reveal that foreign-born women are more likely than foreign-born men to be citizens in their host country. The coefficient of gender inequality in the country of origin is also positive and statistically significant, suggesting that arrivals from nations with higher gender inequality are more likely to naturalize in the new homeland than newcomers from more equal countries. To ensure that gender inequality is not merely a proxy for political and economic conditions, Model II additionally controls for the level of liberal democracy and human development in the country of origin. The results of this more fully specified model indicate that while the substantive magnitude of the gender inequality coefficient is considerably reduced, it remains positive and highly statistically significant. Furthermore, to assess whether the consequences of pre-migration gender inequality differ for male and female immigrants, Model III includes an interaction term between gender and gender inequality in the country of origin. I find that while

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Table 1. Gender, pre-migration gender inequality, and citizenship among foreign-born individuals in 18 western democracies, 2010–22

Variables	Model I		Model II		Model III	
Female	.140(.060)*	*1.151*	.135(.060)*	*1.145*	−.130(.133)	*.878*
Gender inequality (origin)	2.178(.232)***	*8.826*	1.480(.299)***	*4.392*	1.130(.337)***	*3.095*
Female*Gender inequality (origin)	-		-		.722(.322)*	*2.059*
Liberal democracy (origin)	-		−.459(.198)*	*.632*	−.467(.198)*	*.627*
Human development (origin)	-		−.743(.368)*	*.476*	−.747(.368)*	*.474*
Education	.028(.007)***	*1.028*	.028(.008)***	*1.028*	.028(.008)***	*1.029*
Age at migration	−.022(.003)***	*.978*	−.022(.003)***	*.978*	−.022(.003)***	*.978*
Income	.100(.038)**	*1.105*	.110(.038)**	*1.116*	.111(.038)**	*1.117*
Manual skills	−.014(.065)	*.987*	−.021(.065)	*.979*	−.017(.066)	*.983*
Unemployed	−.072(.097)	*.930*	−.069(.097)	*.933*	−.071(.098)	*.931*
Union member	.108(.076)	*1.114*	.115(.076)	*1.122*	.116(.076)	*1.122*
Married	−.087(.065)	*.917*	−.095(.065)	*.909*	−.090(.065)	*.914*
Duration of stay	.102(.006)***	*1.108*	.104(.006)***	*1.109*	.104(.006)***	*1.110*
Speaks the host country's language at home	.487(.085)***	*1.627*	.500(.085)***	*1.648*	.498(.085)***	*1.646*
Anti-immigrant opinion climate (host)	−.823(.287)**	*.439*	−.840(.289)**	*.432*	−.837(.289)**	*.433*
Liberal citizenship policies (host)	.017(.005)***	*1.017*	.017(.005)***	*1.017*	.017(.005)***	*1.017*

(*Continued*)

Table 1. *Continued*

Variables	Model I		Model II		Model III	
Dual citizenship (origin)	.316(.074)***	*1.372*	.315(.074)***	*1.370*	.304(.074)***	*1.355*
EU foreign-born	−.803(.087)***	*.448*	−.683(.093)***	*.505*	−.677(.093)***	*.508*
ESS round fixed effects	Yes		Yes		Yes	
Constant	−2.642(.602)***	*.071*	−1.671(.681)*	*.188*	−1.541(.685)*	*.214*
SD of random intercept	.438(.096)		.439(.097)		.441(.097)	
Intra-class correlation (rho)	.055(.023)		.055(.023)		.056(.023)	
Number of observations	5,877		5,877		5,877	
Wald X^2(df)	871.62(20)***		878.39(22)***		880.77(23)***	

Note: Multilevel (random-intercept) logistic regression estimates obtained using the Stata's xtlogit command; odd ratios are in italics and standard errors in parentheses.
*p ≤ .05; ** p ≤ .01; *** p ≤ .001 (two-tailed).

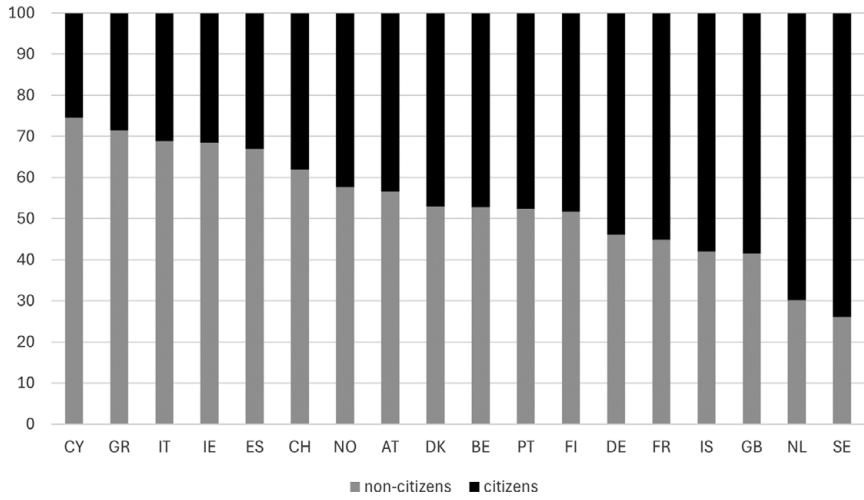

Figure 1. Percent citizens among foreign-born individuals in 18 West European democracies ESS 2010–2022.

he additive term of pre-migration gender inequality remains positive and statistically significant, the interaction coefficient is also positive and statistically significant. Thus, in line with my expectations, the positive relationship between pre-migration gender inequality and post-migration citizenship among foreign-born individuals is more pronounced among foreign-born women than foreign-born men.

To gauge the substantive effects of my key variables in greater detail, Figures 2a and 2b plot the *marginal effects* of my main independent variables (with 95% confidence intervals), using the results presented in Model III, Table 1.[13] Specifically, Figure 2a reports the marginal effect of pre-migration gender inequality on citizenship in the host country separately for males and females among foreign-born individuals. This figure shows that the marginal effect of pre-migration gender inequality is positive and statistically distinguishable from zero for both genders, but as expected, it is considerably larger for females than males (.372 vs. .229). Further evidence of the interaction effect is evident in Figure 2b. I find that, at the low levels of pre-migration gender inequality, there is no gender difference in citizenship status among foreign-born individuals. However, once gender inequality reaches a score of .4 (on a 0–1 scale), the marginal effect of being female becomes positive and statistically significant, and its substantive impact is particularly pronounced (with a score of .12) at the maximum level of gender inequality.

Taken together, the results so far show that gender inequality in the country of origin contributes positively to citizenship acquisition among foreign-born individuals in their host country of Western Europe, and that this effect is more powerful among female than male immigrants. But are all female immigrants equally responsive to gender inequality when they consider becoming their host country's citizens? Table 2 examines this possibility by interacting my key

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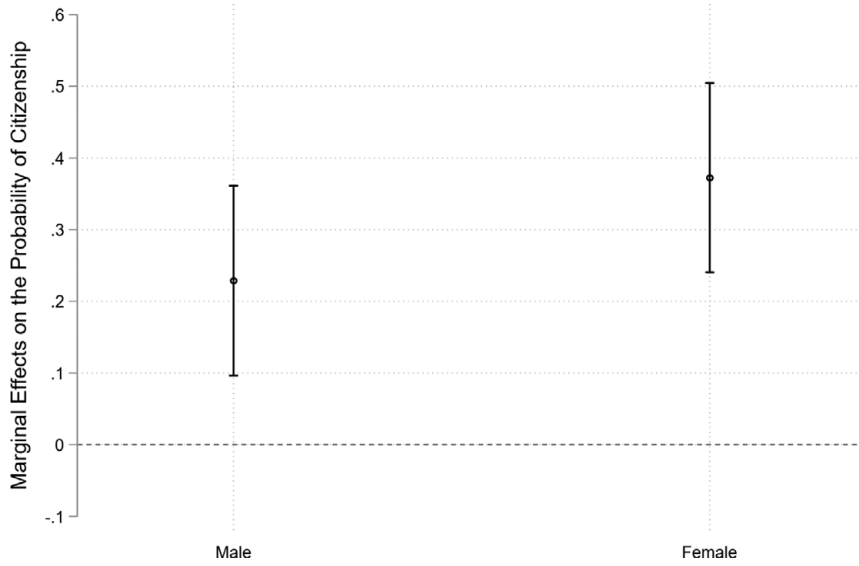

Figure 2a. Marginal effects of gender inequality in the country of origin on the probability of citizenship among foreign-born males and females in 18 West European democracies, 2010–22.

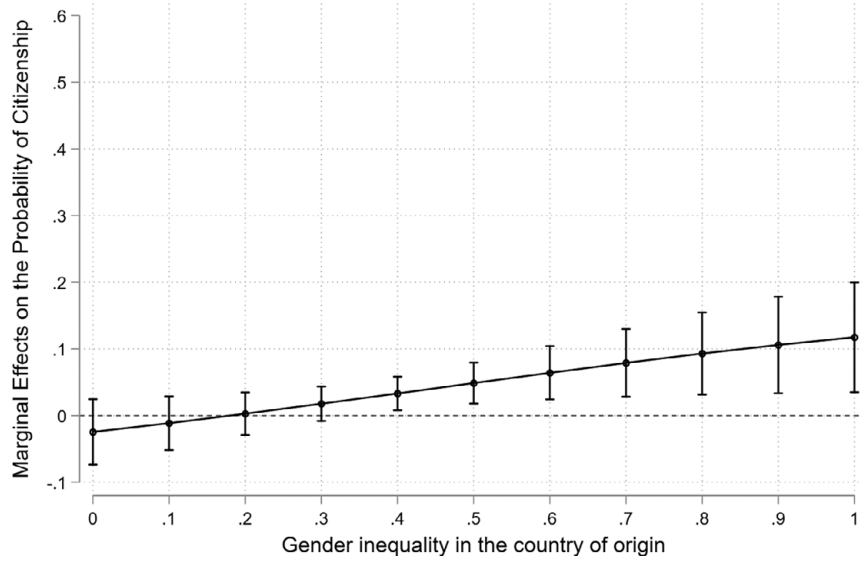

Figure 2b. Marginal effects of female by gender inequality in the country of origin on the probability of citizenship among foreign-born individuals in 18 West European democracies, 2010–22.

variables of interest with education. To this end, I classify foreign-born individuals into four categories: low-education males, high-education males, low-education females, and high-education females.[14]

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Table 2. Interaction effects of gender, education, and pre-migration gender inequality on citizenship among foreign-born individuals in 18 West European democracies, 2010–22

Variables	Additive model		Interaction model	
High-education male	.187(.094)*	*1.205*	−.020(.204)	*.980*
Low-education female	.066(.097)	*1.069*	.085(.229)	*1.089*
High-education female	.360(.090)***	*1.433*	−.282(.202)	*.754*
Gender inequality (origin)	1.501(.300)***	*4.488*	.892(.437)*	*2.440*
High-education male*Gender inequality (origin)	-		.463(.462)	*1.589*
Low-education female*Gender inequality (origin)	-		−.079(.519)	*.924*
High-education female*Gender inequality (origin)	-		1.771(.476)***	*5.874*
Liberal democracy (origin)	−.452(.198)*	*.636*	−.454(.199)*	*.635*
Human development (origin)	−.711(.369)	*.491*	−.653(.370)	*.521*
Age at migration	−.022(.003)***	*.979*	−.022(.003)***	*.979*
Income	.113(.038)**	*1.119*	.114(.038)**	*1.121*
Manual skills	−.037(.065)	*.964*	−.047(.065)	*.955*
Unemployed	−.069(.098)	*.933*	−.076(.098)	*.927*
Union member	.113(.076)	*1.120*	.114(.076)	*1.121*
Married	−.093(.065)	*.911*	−.081(.065)	*.922*
Duration of stay	.103(.006)***	*1.109*	.104(.006)***	*1.110*
Speaks the host country's language at home	.506(.085)***	*1.658*	.500(.085)***	*1.649*
Anti-immigrant opinion climate (host)	−.829(.289)**	*.436*	−.807(.292)**	*.446*
Liberal citizenship policies (host)	.017(.005)***	*1.017*	.017(.005)***	*1.017*
Dual citizenship (origin)	.307(.074)***	*1.359*	.307(.075)***	*1.360*
EU foreign-born	−.684(.093)***	*.505*	−.675(.093)***	*.509*
ESS round fixed effects	Yes		Yes	
Constant	−1.448(.677)*	*.235*	−1.282(.692)	*.277*
SD of random intercept	.441(.097)		.446(.098)	
Rho (intra-class correlation)	.056(.023)		.057(.024)	
Number of observations	5,877		5,877	
Wald X^2(df)	878.22(23)***		887.97(26)***	

Notes: Multilevel (random-intercept) logistic regression estimates obtained using the Stata's xtlogit command; odd ratios are in italics and standard errors in parentheses. The reference category for gender-education variables is low-education male. * p ≤ .05; ** p ≤ .01; *** p ≤ .001(two-tailed).

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Employing low-education males as the reference category for the other three groups, the results in Model I reveal that low-education females are not statistically distinguishable from low-education males. However, the coefficient for high-education females — and to a lesser extent for high-education males — is positive and statistically significant, suggesting that both groups are more likely to acquire citizenship in the host country than low-education males.[15] Model II subsequently interacts the gender-education variables with gender inequality in the country of origin. As expected, the interaction term between high-education female and pre-migration gender inequality is positive and highly statistically significant. In contrast, there is no evidence that gender inequality conditions the relationships between low-education female or high-education male and citizenship.[16]

To provide more insight into the substantive impact of these variables, Figure 3 plots the *predicted probabilities* of having the host country's citizenship for high-education females and low-education females among foreign-born individuals (with 95% confidence intervals) at different values of gender inequality in the country of origin (using the results from Model II, Table 2).[17] The results reveal that, as we move from the minimum to the maximum value of pre-migration gender inequality, the probability of citizenship increases from .358 to .526 (a difference of .168) points for low-education females, and from .289 to .803 (a change of .514) points for high-education females. Thus, foreign-born women of all education levels are more likely to become citizens in their host country if they originate from a country with more severe gender inequality.

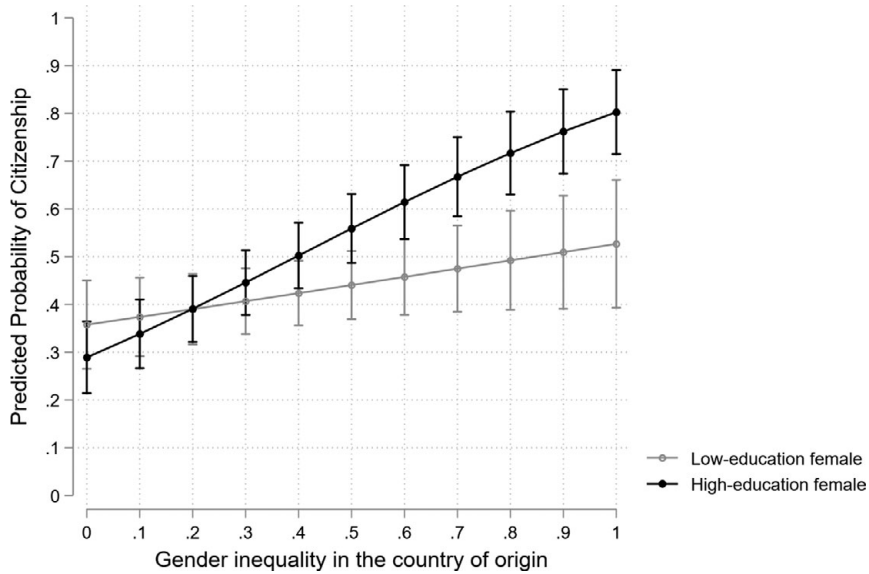

Figure 3. Predicted probabilities of the host country's citizenship by respondent's education and gender inequality in the country of origin among foreign-born women in 18 West European democracies, 2010–22.

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However, as expected, the probability of having the host country's citizenship is higher for better educated women than for women with less education.

With respect to my control variables, there are some interesting patterns as well. While income is positively related to citizenship, I find no statistically significant effects of being unemployed, having manual skills, or being a member of a union. Moreover, married individuals are neither more nor less likely to be citizens in their host country than unmarried ones. In addition, immigrants who arrived in their host country at an earlier age, whose duration of stay is longer, and who speak their host country's language at home are more likely to be citizens in their new homeland. At the same time, non-EU immigrants are more likely to naturalize in their host country of Western Europe than EU immigrants, and so are newcomers from less democratic or economically less developed countries. Moreover, while liberal citizenship policies in the host country contribute positively citizenship acquisition, anti-immigrant opinion climates have the opposite effect.

In short, the results confirm that gender at the level of individuals and gender inequality at the level of countries powerfully shape the patterns of citizenship among first-generation immigrants in Western Europe. Specifically, foreign-born women, particularly if they are highly educated, are more likely to become citizens in their host country than foreign-born men, but only if they were exposed to greater gender inequality prior to migration. In comparison, arrivals from countries where men and women are treated equally exhibit no gender difference in their citizenship status in the new homeland.

Robustness Tests

To test whether my results are sensitive to different variable measurements or model specifications, I performed several additional analyses. First, I reestimated my models with an alternative measure of gender inequality. Instead of using the *level* of gender inequality in the country of origin utilized in my main analyses, I employed the *difference* in the levels of gender inequality between the country of origin and the host country (both captured in the year of arrival).[18] The results, reported in figure B1a–b in the Appendix, indicate that my main findings remain essentially the same.

Moreover, I reestimated my models while additionally controlling for the levels of gender inequality in the *host* country (Tables B2a–b). This variable turns out to be statistically insignificant in all my models (both alone and in interaction with my key individual-level variables), while my main findings do not change. Furthermore, I reran my models separately for males and females among foreign-born respondents (Tables B3a–b). The results reveal that pre-migration gender inequality is no longer statistically significant for male immigrants but remains positive and highly statistically significant for female immigrants, alone and in interaction with education.

I have also examined whether my findings are sensitive to the alternative measures of some of my control variables. Specifically, to capture democracy level in origin countries, I replaced the liberal democratic index from the

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Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) data with the polity scores from the *Polity V* project (Jaggers and Gurr 1995; Marshall and Gurr 2020). The results (shown in Tables B4a–b) indicate no difference in my main results. Moreover, using the overall migrant integration policy index (MIPEX) (Tables B5a–b) or its more specific measure of anti-discrimination policies (Tables B6a–b) instead of liberal citizenship policies reveals that while these various aspects of immigrant integration policies are positively related to citizenship, my core findings remain the same.

Furthermore, I have reestimated my models while additionally controlling for the share of foreign-born individuals in the host country because larger immigrant communities may provide better resources for immigrant naturalization (e.g., Yang 1994; 2002). I found no evidence that the size of foreign-born population matters for citizenship among first-generation immigrants in Western Europe, while my key variables remained highly statistically significant and in the same expected direction (Tables B7a–b). In addition, some scholars suggest that geographic distance between the origin and destination country increases the probability of naturalization because it magnifies the costs of return migration (Jasso and Rosenzweig 1986; Portes and Mozo 1985). I found that foreign-born individuals from more distant nations are indeed more likely to become citizens in their host country compared to those from more proximate locations (Tables B8a–b). However, even when controlling for this variable, the effects of pre-migration gender inequality remains substantively and statistically significant, alone and in interaction with gender and education.

Finally, I have reanalyzed my models with an additional control for the origin country's passport ranking. Previous research suggests that arrivals from countries with lower ranking passports are more motivated to naturalize in western democracies because having a higher-ranking passport reduces barriers to international travel, enhances opportunities in the global economy, and serves as a status symbol for immigrants in their origin country (Money et al. 2023, 1487). My results reveal, however, that passport ranking falls short of the conventional levels of statistical significance (Tables B9a–b), while my key findings remain unchanged.[19] Taken together, the results confirm that the main relationships hypothesized in this study are indeed robust.

Conclusions

Citizenship is a central aspect of immigrant political integration in contemporary democracies. Becoming a full member of the host society not only transforms the lives of newcomers but also has important consequences for migrant sending and receiving countries. For migrant sending countries, the formal inclusion of their nationals in western democracies often has positive consequences in the form of larger financial remittances, diffusion of socioeconomic ideas, and stronger public support for democratic values. For migrant receiving countries, successful newcomer incorporation can boost the quality and stability of democratic governance, as citizenship enables and motivates new arrivals to voice their demands through legitimate rather than violent means.

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Given the importance of citizenship, this study examines its gendered foundations among first-generation immigrants in Western Europe. The article develops a model of citizenship that points to the effects of individual gender contingent on immigrant exposure to gender inequality in the country of origin. I argue that female immigrants are more likely to become citizens in their host country than male immigrants if they originate from countries with greater gender inequality. Moreover, the consequences of pre-migration gender inequality on post-migration citizenship are particularly pronounced among better educated women.

Empirical evidence using the individual-level data from the ESS project collected 2010–22 in 18 Western democracies with diverse immigrant populations support these expectations. Moreover, the results reveal that, among foreign-born individuals from countries with greater gender inequality, not only women but also (to a lesser extent) men respond to improved gender equality by naturalizing at higher rates. One possible explanation for this surprising finding is that male immigrants interpret gender equality as an expression of their host country's openness, inclusion, and commitment to fundamental justice.[20] Social psychology research suggests that individuals who belong to subordinate or less powerful groups are highly attuned to their environment and pay attention to even the nonverbal and affective tone of the dominant group members (e.g., Frable 1997; Oyserman and Swim 2001). Since immigrants often perceive themselves to be in an inferior and stigmatized social position due to their outsider status, they are likely to be sensitive to any signs of their host country's willingness to accept them. Thus, they may believe that if their host country treats men and women equally, it may extend this approach to foreigners as well. Future studies using data and measures designed to directly test this and other possible mechanisms would refine our understanding how immigrants — both male and female — interpret and respond to improved gender equality following their migration.

These findings have important implications for future research and policy-making. The results challenge the common view of international migrants as a bastion of traditional gender values that could derail efforts to promote and maintain gender equality in western democracies. The study shows that foreign-born women are more likely to become citizens in Western Europe than foreign-born men, but only if they originate from countries with severe gender inequality. This relationship is highly statistically and substantively significant even when controlling for the levels of democracy and human development in the country of origin and is particularly pronounced among better educated women. The evidence suggests that first-generation immigrants appreciate, rather than reject, gender equality in their new homeland, and express this appreciation by being more likely to adopt their host country's citizenship.

The study also highlights international migration as a way for women to escape gender inequality in the origin country. Given that cultural values are slow to change, women may be reluctant to wait for an improvement in their rights and freedoms back at home and instead choose to settle elsewhere where they can enjoy a wider range of opportunities in the public sphere of society. Interestingly, putting roots in another country helps women not only to escape gender-based discrimination but also diffuse the norms of equal treatment to

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other countries. Existing research shows that because many migrants move to states with more gender equality and adapt to their host country's gender values (Breidahl and Larsen 2016; OECD 2020), migrants facilitate the transmission of these values back to their origin countries, particularly where migrant flows are large (Ferrant and Tuccio 2015, 247).

While the effects of pre-migration gender inequality on post-migration citizenship are well supported by the empirical evidence in this study, these effects may not extend to other types of immigrant political engagement. One previous study finds, for example, that female immigrants from the source countries with more gender inequality are less likely to engage in some forms of political participation, such as answering survey questions related to the host country's politics, compared to their counterparts from the origin countries with less gender inequality (Bilodeau 2016). More research is needed to understand how pre-migration gender inequality influences different forms of political engagement among newcomers in western democracies, and how the obstacles for political integration facing female immigrants could be overcome.

Supplementary material. The supplementary material for this article can be found at http://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X25100160.

Competing interest. The author declares none.

Notes

1. These estimates are based on the Eurostat data from 19 Western Democracies: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. Data are not available for the United Kingdom.
2. According to the UNDP ranking of 166 countries by the gender inequality index (GII) in 2022, most West European democracies are at the top of the distribution: Denmark (1), Norway (2), Switzerland (3), Sweden (4), the Netherlands (5), Finland (6), Iceland (9), Belgium (11), Austria (12), Italy (14), Spain (15), Germany (19), Ireland (20), Portugal (21), France (24), United Kingdom (28), Greece (37), and Cyprus (62).
3. This estimate is based on the Eurostat data from 18 West European countries covered in this study. For detailed information by country, see Table A2 in the Appendix.
4. For example, Money et al. (2023) relies on interviews with 16 immigrants in metropolitan California who came from four countries — Iran, Mexico, the Philippines, and Ukraine (1488). Similarly, Alvarez (1987) uses interviews with 38 Hispanic immigrants residing in four US cities — Los Angeles, Houston, Chicago, and New York.
5. For the origins of gender inequality, see Alesina, Giuliano, and Nunn (2013) and Iversen and Rosenbluth (2010).
6. The negative male perspective on gender equality is most likely reinforced by the fact that, in both developed and developing countries, the (modest) gains women have made in paid employment in recent decades have coincided with labor market losses for men due to globalization, shrinking of manufacturing, and technological development (Klasen 2020). In contrast, women perceive gains in gender parity as unconnected to changes in men's social position. At the same time, there is evidence that gender equality has created a "win-win" situation for both men and women by enhancing economic performance and prosperity (e.g., Doepke, Tertilt, and Voena 2012; Klasen 2018; World Bank 2024).

7. There may be many reasons why Bueker (2005) finds a statistically significant relationship between being female and naturalization among Indian immigrants while Yang (2002) does not. Although both studies analyze foreign-born individuals in the US, they utilize different data, measures, and model specification. For example, to identify immigrant groups, Bueker (2005) relies on the country of origin, while Yang (2002) employs ethnicity, noting that foreign-born Indians in his sample originate from 99 different countries. At the same time, both studies find that, using the *same* data, measures, and empirical model for different immigrant groups, the relationship between gender and citizenship acquisition is more pronounced among newcomers originating from places with less egalitarian gender relations.
8. Other studies that previously relied on the ESS data to study citizenship among immigrants in Western Europe include Dronkers and Vink (2012) and Vink, Prokic-Breuer, and Dronkers (2013).
9. The residency requirement for naturalization is five years in Belgium, Germany, France, Great Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Sweden; six years in Finland; seven in Iceland and Greece; eight years in Norway; nine years in Denmark; and 10 years in Austria, Cyprus, Italy, Spain, and Switzerland.
10. Respondents who did not answer the question were excluded from the sample. However, the nonresponse rate is extremely low — 0.24% (only 33 out of 13,977 respondents in my sample did not answer the question). Although female immigrants were slightly less likely to answer the citizenship question than male immigrants (their nonresponse rates are 0.26% and 0.20%, respectively), this gender difference is statistically insignificant. Moreover, there is no statistically significant correlation between failing to respond to the citizenship question and pre-migration gender inequality among female immigrants.
11. Because the measure is available only since 1990, foreign-born respondents who came to their host country prior to 1990 were excluded from the analyses. I did not use the 1990 gender inequality values for earlier arrivals because existing research reveals major changes in the levels of gender inequality from 1960 to 2000 in both developed and developing countries (Hallward-Driemer, Hasan, and Rusu 2013; Juhn and McCue 2017; Klasen 2020).
12. Controlling for age at migration and duration of stay in one's host country necessitates dropping respondent's age due to collinearity. Replacing age at migration with age and reestimating my models produces identical results.
13. I hold other variables at their means and dichotomous variables at their medians.
14. I use the median value of education among foreign-born respondents to distinguish between low- and high-education respondents. High-education refers to having completed 13 or more years of full-time education, whereas low-education — 12 or fewer years of full-time education.
15. The coefficient for high-education females is also positive and statistically significant relative to low-education females and high-education males.
16. Using low-education females or high-education males as the alternative reference categories produces identical results.
17. As before, other variables are held at their means and dichotomous variables at their medians.
18. Further details on the measurement and descriptive statistics for all variables are available in the Appendix.
19. Moreover, I find no evidence that passport ranking matters more for male than female immigrants, as suggested in previous research (Money at al. 2023).
20. A similar argument has been made in previous research on the legitimacy beliefs of ordinary citizens; this research shows that women's presence in politics enhances legitimacy beliefs not only among women but also among men (Clayton, O'Brien, and Piscopo 2019; Karp and Banducci 2008; Lawless 2004; Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005).

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