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Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity

Max-Planck-Institut zur Erforschung multireligiöser und multiethnischer Gesellschaften

MMG Working Paper 09-03 • ISSN 2192-2357

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Trendsetter Obama? The ascent of immigrant voters and politicians in European states

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MMG Working Paper 09-03

Max-Planck-Institut zur Erforschung multireligiöser und multiethnischer Gesellschaften,
Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity
Göttingen

ISSN 2192-2357 (MMG Working Papers Print)

Download: www.mmg.mpg.de/workingpapers

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Abstract

This paper discusses key features of the political incorporation of immigrants into host society structures and institutions. It begins with theoretical considerations of the specifics of political, as distinct from e.g. economic or social, integration. A further section outlines trends in political participation arguing that a participation gap is likely to persist in the coming decades. Nevertheless, an increasing number of individuals with a migration background are appearing on the parliamentary stages of major European immigration countries. The paper identifies nationally specific constellations that enabled such careers and that shape the development of immigrant political elites in Britain, France, the Netherlands and Germany. Although we can record slow progress, equal representation is unlikely to be achieved without determined intervention.

Der Text diskutiert Kernmerkmale der politischen Inkorporation von Einwanderern in die Strukturen und Institutionen der Einwanderungsgesellschaften. Eingangs werden theoretische Überlegungen zu den Spezifika der politischen, im Unterschied etwa zu ökonomischen oder sozialen Integration vorgestellt. Ein anschließender Abschnitt skizziert Trends der politischen Partizipation, wobei argumentiert wird, dass eine ‚Beteiligungslücke' vermutlich noch längerfristig existieren wird. Dennoch erreicht eine wachsende Zahl von Persönlichkeiten mit Migrationshintergrund die parlamentarischen Bühnen wichtiger europäischer Einwanderungsländer. Das Paper beschreibt länderspezifische Konstellationen, die solche Karrieren ermöglichten und auf die Entwicklung einer politischen Elite der Einwanderer in Großbritannien, Frankreich, den Niederlanden und Deutschland Einfluss nehmen. Insgesamt können wir zwar langsame Fortschritte feststellen, um eine proportionale Vertretung zu erreichen, würde es aber vermutlich gezielter Interventionen bedürfen.

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Contents

1. Introduction

Obama is everywhere – currently, in early 2009, he is omnipresent as the leader of the world's most powerful nation and as a star of the world's media. For the future, the search for a 'European Obama' has begun. In Germany, the former Chancellor Schröder – having missed the opportunity to promote ethnic minority politicians during his seven years in office – has predicted that the country would soon have a minister of migrant origin (FAZ 29 Jan. 2009). Regional minister Laschet, a member of the Christian conservative party, announced that it would take Germany less time than the US before a dark-skinned president would be elected (he did not set very high stakes given that he took 1776 as the United States' starting point) (MGFFI 2009). And Lale Akgün, a member of Germany's federal parliament with Turkish roots, was already presented as a potential future federal president (FAZ 24 Jan. 2009).

Will the election of Barack Hussein Obama as President of the United States with hindsight be seen as a political breakthrough towards the acceptance of the descendants of former slaves, colonial subjects or foreign workers into the ranks of the political elites? Indeed, there are indications that very slowly but surely the immigrants of the post-war decades – or their children – are rising into political positions and that political institutions in Europe are becoming more representative of the diversity of their societies: In Germany, the regional parliament of Hessen on the day of the American presidential election – almost – elected a new Minister President whose government would have included the son of a Yemenite father. Although that did not happen, Germany now has a party leader of immigrant descent: Cem Özdemir of the Green Party. Further, almost unnoticed by the general public, a son of Vietnamese parents has become minister in the regional government of Niedersachsen.[1] If we extend the perspective to European neighbour states, we can see that even Austria, a country not renown for its inclusiveness, now has its first Turkish-origin MP. In the Netherlands, the city of Rotterdam is represented by a mayor of Moroccan origin, while the French government formed in 2007 included a Minister

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* An earlier version of this text was delivered as a lecture at the GIF migration conference in Jerusalem in November 2008. Thanks for helpful comments and suggestions to my colleagues at the Max-Planck-Institute, to Laure Michon and Christine Weinbach.

1 Philip Rösler became finance minister in February 2009. He was adopted by a German couple as a baby. In spite of his visible Asian roots, he is rarely portrayed as someone belonging to an ethnic minority.

of Justice with family origins in the Maghreb and a deputy minister born in Senegal.[2]

And yet, the impression of a breakthrough may be misleading. The political integration[3] of immigrants does not proceed along a straight path. Arguably it is an even slower process than their economic or social integration, in particular, if we think not only of voting but of immigrants' representation in the political elites. Across Europe, immigrants and their descendents, like members of ethnic minorities, still rarely hold positions of political power. Ensuring equal political participation and representation may at the same time be a particularly important dimension of integration if we assume that the integration of a heterogeneous society mainly occurs at the level of political communication and negotiations. If ethnic loyalties, networks and ethnically defined differences do not become irrelevant in the medium term, participation in the sphere of political decision making could be a key sphere of interaction. Jürgen Habermas, for instance, assumes that an 'inclusive citizens-society' (*inklusive Bürgergesellschaft*) will be marked by a "new relationship between democratic state, civil society and subcultural independence", and he emphasizes the key role of the inclusion of minorities in civil society (2008: 40).

This paper offers both a theoretical and empirical approach to the issue of political incorporation of immigrants in the structures of host societies. In the section following this introduction, I shall discuss what may be distinctive about the political dimension of immigrant integration. Next I shall turn to some empirical trends of immigrant political participation. A fourth part will focus on immigrant political elites in Europe and offer an interpretation of nationally specific constellations determining their emergence and development. Throughout, my empirical focus will be on Germany, but within a wider framework. As will become clear, we can rely only on a limited body of previous research in this field, and comparative debates are at a beginning (see Schönwälder 2009).[4] The thoughts presented here are intended

2 However, when President Sarkozy urged both women to stand as candidates in the European parliament election in June 2009, this was generally interpreted as an attempt to get rid of them. Rachida Dati, Minister of Justice from 2007 to 2009, has parents born in Algeria and Morocco. Rama YADE, who was born in Senegal, is Minister for Human Rights.

3 In this paper, I use the terms "integration" and "incorporation" interchangeably. The latter term has been criticized as suggesting a one-sided inclusion into existing structures, which, however, for the political field may just be appropriate. Both terms are used not in a normative, but an analytical sense.

4 Important work has been done on some issues, including local studies and theoretical considerations of, e.g., links between social capital and participation, and migrant organizing. Still, the overall picture for Europe remains extremely patchy.

as a contribution to a rethinking of the process of incorporation of immigrants into the political institutions and processes of immigration countries. They are part of ongoing research projects at the Max-Planck-Institute in Göttingen that, over the coming years, aim to produce insights into the development of the process, its driving forces and barriers, and the specifics of the political field. This paper will, to a considerable extent, offer hypotheses and questions that arise from the current state of research.

2. Political incorporation: theoretical considerations

What considerations would lead us to assume that the political incorporation of immigrants may be a particularly complicated process? I want to suggest that, apart from general mechanisms that determine integration processes as well as degrees and forms of political participation in the population overall, it could be helpful to consider possibly specific characteristics of political incorporation.[5] This refers to general forms and levels of participation as well as access to positions of political leadership.[6] Obviously, we should consider conditions related to both the characteristics and behaviour of individuals as well as of institutions into which immigrants may or may not be incorporated. As suggested by Pippa Norris (2007: 642-3) for the analysis of the political participation of individual citizens more generally, it may be useful to distinguish structural resources of the individuals (like education, occupational status), their cultural attitudes (confidence, knowledge etc.) and the broader social context in which individuals become active (incl. institutional structures and mobilizing agencies). In the case of immigrant incorporation, specific conditions arise from the adjustment of immigrants as newcomers to an unfamiliar context and the negotiation of legal and ethnic borderlines that may be erected, overcome or re-defined in the process (see Wimmer 2008; Alba/Nee 2003). So, what may be specific to political, as opposed to, say, economic, integration?

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5 The general literature on immigrant integration altogether pays little attention to the political dimension, see also Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad (2009: 3, 6-7) for comments on such gaps.

6 At this stage I accept a certain degree of generalization although it would be desirable to further specify the conditions of different forms and levels of participation.

- Political participation is to a greater extent than e.g. participation in the labour market or the educational system linked to the legal status of citizen. Although there are of course many forms of political participation that are open to foreigners, elections as the still most widely practiced form of participation in society overall usually require citizenship of the respective country. Political leadership positions will rarely be held by non-citizens of the respective state. There thus exists a specific, often high, barrier regulating full access to a country's political life.
- Political participation, and specifically political careers, even in positions that are not dependent on citizenship, require a certain degree of cultural and social integration. Language competence, knowledge of the system and access to specific networks or milieus are necessary in order to express views effectively, to form coalitions and to exert pressure. To some extent this can be overcome when incorporation occurs collectively, via ethnic organizations. Still, at least their leaders would have to possess the above-mentioned competences.
- Political participation requires a specific motivation – it is not necessary in order to make a decent living and usually not obligatory (although, in so far as voting is concerned, participation may be a strong social norm). As emphasized by Bourdieu (1987: 639-40), political participation – like political interest and knowledge – is dependent on the belief to be legitimized to exercise the "right to politics". Thus rights, societal acceptance and individual activism should be seen as interlinked.
- Institutionalized mechanisms of political socialisation exist, but they are less general or encompassing than educational institutions as mechanisms promoting cultural and social integration. In the more recent literature, doubts have been expressed as to whether mass organisations like trade unions or political parties will lose influence as agents of political socialization as membership figures decline and mobilisation often relies on media and publicity campaigns rather than direct involvement. The role of migrant organizations may also be changing. In some parts of the literature, they are ascribed the key role in the political socialization of immigrants (Portes/Rumbaut 2006: 166-7). New forms of activism have arisen that could provide an avenue for mobilization. But if civil society mobilization increasingly occurs in the form of campaigns organized by professional elites, and the development of a broad membership basis loses importance, migrant organizations and other NGOs may not, or no longer, fill the role of mass socialization agents (DeSipio 2001, referring to Skerry; Waldrauch/Sohler 2004: 281).

- Political participation involves procedures, and takes place in institutional structures, that have evolved historically and are bound up with cultural traditions and definitions. This is to some extent also true for the educational system and partly the welfare state, but in political life – as distinct from other spheres –, participation necessarily involves taking sides. Immigrants who participate politically, at least if they do so beyond ethnic or immigrant politics, have to position themselves in a field of actors that is often marked by historically grown loyalties specific to the long-term population of the country of immigration, such as the support of Catholics for a Christian party, and by longer-term divisions, such as between language groups. The institutions and the institutional system may have to adjust to cater to the needs and demands of a new clientele. Immigrants themselves may bring with them certain attitudes or experiences that might shape their participatory behaviour over a longer period of time – or even be passed on to their children.[7]
- Politics is altogether still a more national affair, i.e. more strongly linked with a national cultural tradition, than e.g. the increasingly internationalized economy. The core issues institutions deal with are still mostly national or take a nationally specific form, and their operating codes may be more nationally specific than those of economic institutions.
- Political – as distinct from e.g. business – careers not only require that gatekeepers are passed but they are additionally dependent on popular consent.

Last but not least

- Politics is about power, and power may be less accessible than money. Political careers thus require overcoming more obstacles and higher hurdles than business careers; institutions may be less inclined to share power and to allow the ascent of newcomers into positions of leadership.

And yet, it would be wrong to conclude that necessarily, for all groups and in all situations, the process of incorporation will be slow and only follow integration in other fields. We should not think of political incorporation in terms of a particular stage or step in an assimilation trajectory. Sometimes, as the example of the Irish in the

7 This may be the case for attitudes to the state, trust in institutions etc. See Bilodeau (2008) for comments on the unsatisfactory state of research and for some evidence on participation in protest activities and pre-migration experiences.

United States suggests[8], political mobilization can offer a route to economic opportunities and would thus be a prior step to economic integration. Specific preconditions, like a colonial context, can mean that immigrants are already familiar and, in a way, identify with the political structures and culture of the immigration country.[9] It is also conceivable that a major conflict or political mobilization around a particular issue (like protest against a restrictive law) accelerate the acquisition of familiarity and identification with a political system.[10]

Further, the institutional field need not be static. It is conceivable that immigrant incorporation occurs by way of an establishment of migrant or ethnic organizations as powerful actors or that new, inclusive institutions emerge. Ethnic mobilisation and organisation – which does not require some of the acculturation steps listed above – can offer an easier way of incorporation into the political structures and processes of the country of immigration if it is, or becomes, a recognized part of mainstream politics.

As always, at least if you are an historical institutionalist, we should investigate the complex, institutional and historical, configurations in which the political incorporation of a particular immigrant cohort takes place. On an extended empirical basis and, urgently needed, a broader basis of comparative studies, it will become possible to judge whether the considerations outlined above make sense. What follows is a brief sketch of some key insights already available in the literature and very hypothetical suggestions for a European typology of immigrant incorporation into parliamentary positions.

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8 Alba and Nee, for instance, emphasize that, in this case, political incorporation was achieved early and served to ease access to economic positions: The "Irish came to dominate the politics of many cities and took advantage of opportunities in government employment to move up" (2003: 82).

9 See below my argument on the British case. It is also argued that Philippino immigrants to the US show higher rates of participation because of the history of US domination of the Philippines (Ramakrishnan 2005: 97).

10 In a way, the Rushdie affair in Britain serves as an example. Muslim leaders have argued that it played a key role in their active engagement with Britain's political structures, see Schönwälder 2007: 246. For the US, several authors emphasize that migrants are often mobilized in response to restrictive policy proposals specifically affecting them (see Portes/Rumbaut 2006: 148ff.).

3. Trends in political participation

Obviously, there are many forms of political participation that are open to immigrants, even if they do not possess the citizenship of the country they reside in. They can usually, at least in democratic states, take part in the activities of trade unions and social movements, possibly also join political parties, attend demonstrations, sign petitions and form their own associations.[11] And yet, the acquisition of citizenship is the key route to equal participation chances. To the individuals, it provides access to the mainly practiced form of participation: voting.[12] Political institutions often only open up their gates to newcomers when faced with a significant pressure group of potential voters. Elected bodies and the state administration will, in all likelihood, be more responsive to group demands if they are backed by the threat, or promise, of electoral consequences. It is highly probable – as often argued – that the liberal or, respectively, restrictive character of naturalization laws has a strong influence on the extent and speed of immigrants' identification with a host country and its polity.

And yet, in spite of the undeniable superior role of citizenship, researchers may have focused too narrowly on generous naturalization laws as the key to political participation. This is the case for two reasons:

First, many immigrants do not naturalize. This is true for several countries, including the US. For the year 2000, a figure of 12.5 million naturalized US-citizens among the 31.1 million foreign-born residents is quoted (DeSipio 2006).

In Germany, naturalization rates have never been high. In the decade following the recruitment stop, i.e. from 1974 to 1983, about 135.000 foreigners were naturalized. Figures rose in the following decade, in spite of a political context marked by campaigns for a revitalization of German 'national identity', but at about 220,000 they remained low. Things changed in the 1990s, when naturalization was eased in the 1990, 1993, and, in particular, the 1999 reforms.[13] But while figures are now much higher than in the 1980s, they have again declined after 2000.

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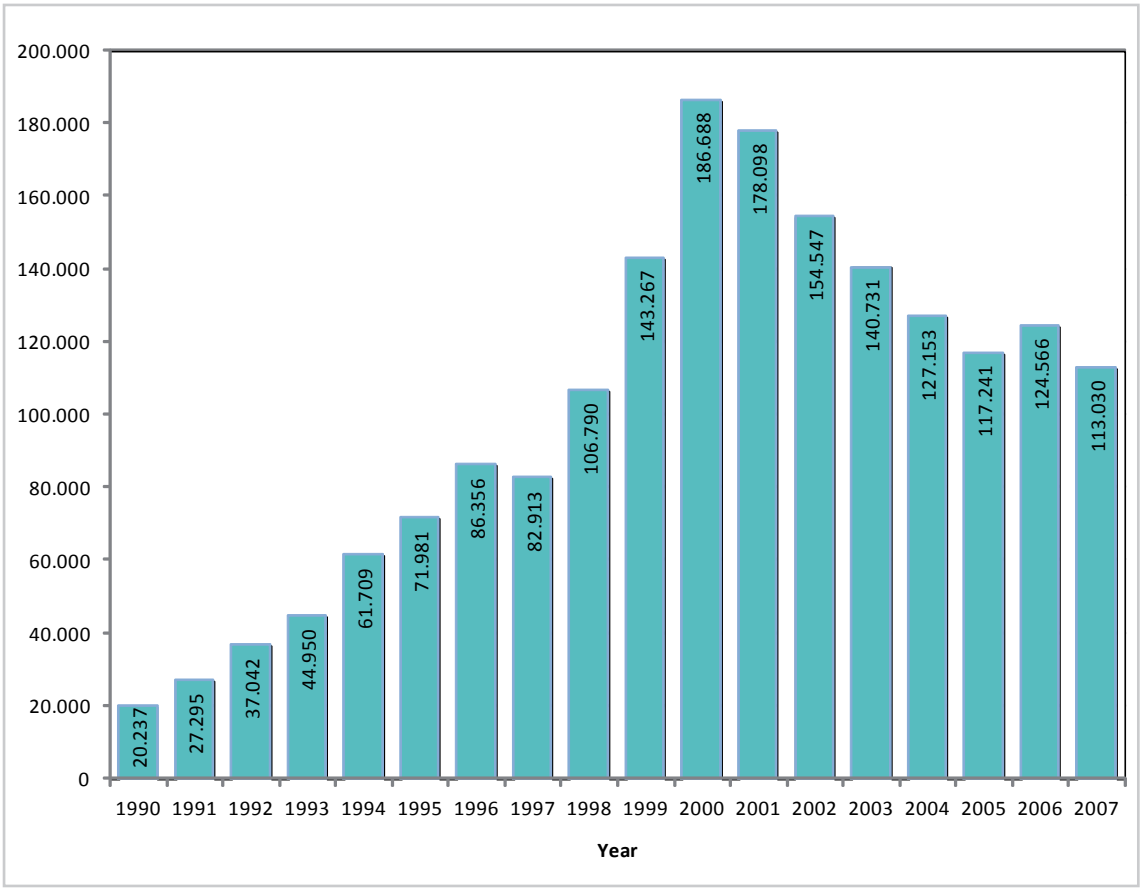
11 Some of these activities are restricted by national law, thus France as late as 1981 allowed foreigners to form associations; Germany has specific legal provisions regulating the political rights of (non-EU) foreigners.

12 For other forms of participation the maximum score was 33 per cent, see Neller/van Deth 2006 with data from the European Social Survey. In Germany, participation in unconventional forms of political behaviour has recently been higher with more than 50% saying they had signed a petition and more than 20% saying they had taken part in a demonstration (Datenhandbuch 2008: 392).

13 In 1990, for the first time more than 20,000 foreigners were naturalized. Reforms in 1990 and in 1993 simplified naturalization for young immigrants aged 16 to 23 and for those

Naturalizations of Foreigners in Germany (absolute numbers)



Source: Statistisches Bundesamt; Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration, Flüchtlinge und Integration (2004).

According to the 2006 micro census, there are now 3.559 million naturalized German citizens of all age groups among Germany's inhabitants. About half a million of them are of Turkish descent (Worbs 2008: 22-3)[14] and another large group 'ethnic Germans' from Eastern Europe. Altogether 7.9 million German citizens have a migration background (Statistisches Bundesamt 2006).[15] Of the latter, roughly

who had spent 15 years or more in Germany. In 1999 a new citizenship law was passed that makes children German citizens who are born in Germany to foreign parents with a secure status. Further, the law gave foreigners the right to naturalization after eight years of residence in Germany. However, extended German language requirements and a restrictive approach to dual citizenship contradict trends towards liberalization.

14 This figure is lower than some estimates that are based on an addition of annual naturalizations. The difference is probably due to deaths and return migration.

15 Based on the definition used by the federal statistical office, this includes ethnic Germans and their children, the naturalized and their children as well as German children of for-

5 million are of voting age, i.e. about 8 per cent of the 62-million electorate.[16] If naturalization trends continue, the immigrant electorate will grow only slowly, and a major part of the immigrant population will – for a longer period of time – remain excluded from key dimensions of political participation. While, in the US, the foreign born and their children will in 2020 account for about one quarter of the electorate, in Germany the respective figure will remain much lower. By 2020, those of migrant background may reach a share of around 12 % of the electorate.[17]

Immigrants from longer-term EU member states, in particular, are largely unwilling to become German citizens. Thus among Italians (the third largest foreign group[18]) around 70% are determined not to become Germans. Less than 10% say they will (Worbs 2008: 28-34). While restrictive provisions (in particular the non-toleration of dual citizenship for Turks, but also income requirements) play an important part in keeping naturalization figures down, they are not the only reason for low naturalization rates. Apparently, more or less equal residence and social rights, as enjoyed by EU citizens, lead to a dramatically decreased motivation for naturalization, which means that we could face a persistent participation gap – in so far as participation remains dependent on citizenship – and that closing or reducing it will require active mobilizing strategies.

Second, as the US example indicates, naturalization does not directly lead to equal participation. Researchers in the field emphasize that differences in participation between the naturalized and the non-naturalized are smaller than might be expected (Barreto/Munoz 2003 for Mexicans). For Europe we do not know much about differences between the two groups. As a recent research review concludes, it is 'difficult to answer' 'to what extent citizenship impacts on political views, migrants' interest in politics and political participation' (Bauböck 2006: 64).

US-American research, which is the most advanced, suggests that, overall, the political incorporation of immigrants proceeds slowly: "in contemporary elections, most empirical studies indicate that naturalized citizens register and vote at rates

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eigners. Ethnic Germans are, however, only partly identifiable in official statistics, i.e. only partly included in this figure.

16 Wüst (2006: 228) gives a lower figure because he does not include those born as Germans.

17 This is a very rough estimate based on the figures of the 2005 Mikrozensus and current naturalization trends. It is unlikely that new ethnic German immigration will add significantly to the figure as numbers have declined steeply.

18 In 2007, 528.000 Italian citizens lived in Germany; 86 per cent of them had lived there for at least ten years. Taken together, the (former) Yugoslavs are the second-largest group of foreigners in Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt 2008: 24, 54-5).

lower than comparably situated U.S.-born citizens" (DeSipio 2001: 81; similar de la Garza 2004).

Participation does increase with length of stay (Ramakrishnan 2005: 81-83). But there are differences between immigrant groups, and participation does not, for all groups, increase steadily over immigrant generations. Among Latinos, participation does not increase in the second and third generations and remains on a relatively low level.[19] Asian Americans "are considerably less likely to vote than their black and white counterparts" (Ramakrishnan 2005: 83). For them, in particular, socio-demographic factors do not offer a full explanation for such differences: "Even controlling for this relatively comprehensive set of socio-demographic variables, Asian-Americans remain less likely to be registered and to turn out to vote." (Jackson 2003: 364) As it seems, apart from age, income and education, further factors contribute to the less active electoral participation among key immigrant groups. Such factors may include the long-term impact of traditional attitudes to the state and differences in political socialization[20], but as empirical investigations remain wanting, these are just speculations.

For Germany, the data situation on the political interests and activities of migrants is dire. Although, numbering 5 million or about 8 per cent of the electorate, the Germans with a migration background are not a negligible group, there are no regular, systematic polls to assess their voting participation and preferences. Astonishingly enough, existing – scarce – data suggest that, at least with regard to voting intentions, differences between migrants and non-migrants are minor. Based on data for 2000/01, Wüst came to the conclusion that the naturalized did not differ significantly from other Germans with regard to their voting intentions in federal elections (2006: 230). However, his figures for those of Turkish and Soviet origin showed a 9% difference with born Germans.[21]

A more recent survey among Turkish immigrants in the regional state of Northrhine Westfalia similarly concluded that proportions declaring the intention to vote

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19 Jackson (2003: 359) argues that "Latino citizens' lower levels of socioeconomic status and social-connectedness largely account for their lower levels of electoral participation".

20 De la Garza (2004: 101) suggests that perhaps 'Latinos are simply less and differently socialized regarding the electoral process. Even when they are native born, psychologically integrated, and patriotic Americans, most have less contact with major electoral institutions and government per se.'

21 82% among the naturalized expressed the intention to vote, and 87% among other Germans. The range was between 78% among those from Turkey and the Soviet Union and 88% among those from Romania (Wüst 2006: 230).

in the next regional election were similar among Turks and other inhabitants of the state (ZfT 2007: 160-68). It remains to be seen whether these data would be confirmed in a broader, representative study of immigrant voters and actual voting behaviour.

In the Netherlands and in Britain turnout of immigrant or ethnic minority voters has traditionally been shown to be lower than for the overall population. In the Netherlands, one study of the 2006 parliamentary elections showed a turnout for those of foreign origin that was about 10% below the average turnout. Differences between national origin groups were significant with a range of 62% turnout for Antilleans and 74% for those from Surinam (quoted in Michon et al. 2007: 10). In Britain, according to survey data from the British Election Study (Sanders et al. 2005: 14), 56% of ethnic minority respondents, but 68 per cent of white respondents voted in the 2005 general election. Again, there are differences between groups (Electoral Commission 2002). A recent study by Fieldhouse and Cutts suggests that South Asians are more likely to vote than other voters – if they are registered. However, "South Asians adults are less likely to be registered to vote than the rest of the population" (2007: 52).

Turning to interest in politics, data for Germany confirm a lower level among immigrants. They show that among Turkish migrants only 13% declare a "strong" interest in German politics. It is higher among those born in Germany (20.5%) and among the German citizens of Turkish origin (21.6%), but even they are more interested in Turkish than in German politics (ZfT 2007: 148-52). For the German population as a whole the share of those who express a strong interest in politics ranges between 30 and almost 50% according to different surveys (Niedermayer 2005: 21-4; Datenreport 2008: 391).

Similarly, a large German survey on voluntary activity, conducted in 2004, shows lower participation rates for migrants with regard to political activities. Asked generally whether they actively participated ["*mitmachen*"] in politics and political representation (parties, local parliament, political group), 4% among those with a migration background versus 7% among non-migrants said they did. 4.5% among migrants (and 7% among non-migrants) said they participated in civic activities in their place of residence (Gensicke/Picot/Geiss 2005: 366, 440).[22]

Among immigrants – like the rest of the population – political participation is strongly related to education, socio-economic status and age. Further factors, partly

22 The survey was conducted in 2004 and had a migrant sample with 1529 participants. The sample was probably selective as it was only conducted in German. This is underlined by the fact that no migrants born in Turkey were among the respondents.

as yet unexplained, play a part, such as those related to migration itself (i.e. entry into an unfamiliar system and culture) and maybe culturally and historically determined attitudes to political life (degrees of trust in political institutions, experience with democratic processes). As social and educational disadvantages and immigrant background overlap, political participation will probably remain unequal even when barriers immediately related to immigration, like language competences, are overcome – unless mobilizing events occur, or interventions are found and applied, that can overcome the participation gap.

4. Parliamentary careers

The representation of immigrants and their descendants among those in political leadership roles is related to the broader levels of activity and incorporation of immigrants in society, but it need not be a direct reflection of that. Political elites may emerge early, because a highly educated and/or highly politicized sub-group exists in the population. Or, on the reverse, a 'glass ceiling' may hold back a largely naturalized and politically participating group from achieving higher office. So, what experiences can be observed with regard to the incorporation of immigrants or ethnic minorities into leadership positions within the established political system? Are we indeed, as suggested in the introduction, witnessing the steady rise of the post-war immigrants into positions of power? How do key European immigrant states compare, and how can we explain possible differences?

In part two above, general features and conditions of immigrant political incorporation were considered. As one aspect I argued that political life and political institutions are still strongly shaped by national cultures and traditional cleavages. If that is true, we should expect immigrant political incorporation to take nationally specific shapes. Further, I assume that nationally specific combinations of factors situated in the electoral and more general political system, the political culture and immigration history, the interests and mobilizing capacities of key actors as well as the history of conflicts, and of course the characteristics of the immigrant population shape the specific forms, the timing and extent of the political incorporation and representation of immigrant groups (see e.g. Bird 2004; Alba/Foner 2009).

Due to the unsatisfactory research situation, the following discussion will be restricted to parliamentary representation. This is of course a very incomplete reflection of today's realities of political activism. A fuller picture should include lead-

ership positions in civil society in a broader sense, i.e. in trade unions and NGOs. The focus will be on conditions that enabled immigrant representation to emerge, rather than on the barriers. Even for the traditional, formal forms of participation and representation, the state of research allows only a very hypothetical sketch of characteristic features in a number of European countries and possible determining influences. Comprehensive data sets for the national, regional and local levels do not exist, and as usual in this area, we are confronted with different conceptualisations of immigrant background that are not directly comparable. The following sketch of the situation in four European countries is intended as a hypothesis that will, hopefully, be able to speak to ongoing and future research.

Britain: confident minorities plus responsive elites

In Britain, of European states, minority careers and representation developed particularly early and are more advanced than in several other European states. In 1974, London already had 12 ethnic minority councillors; in 1979 the first Black councillor was elected in Birmingham (Back/Solomos 1995; Anwar 1994). The first ethnic minority MPs entered the House of Commons in 1987; by 2005 there were 15 Black and Ethnic Minority MPs and 7 "white immigrant" MPs (Saalfeld/Kyriakopoulou 2007). This still falls way short of a direct reflection of the size of the minority population which would be achieved if about 50 parliamentarians were of ethnic minority affiliation. The 12 non-white MPs elected in 2001 represented 1.8% of the 659 MPs while the census for the same year estimated the ethnic minority population as 7.9 per cent of the population. In a survey among local councillors in England, 3.3% described themselves as other than White, in London the respective share was 16% (Local Government Association 2008). The non-White population accounts for 9% of the population in England, and for 29% of London's inhabitants.[23] The limited progress towards ethnic equality is also reflected by the facts that elected representatives still overwhelmingly represent the Labour Party (13 of 15 members of the House of Commons) and that, at least on the national level, ethnic minority members are mostly elected in constituencies with large ethnic minority populations (Electoral Reform Society 2005). Karen Bird (2004: 15) has – rather harshly – described this as "representative ghettoization".

23 Note that figures do not exclusively refer to the electorate but to all inhabitants.

Four factors can be identified that explain the relatively early entry of immigrant representatives into local and national elected bodies and their in European comparison fairly high representation: Among the ethnic minority population a high level of mobilization existed, directed at equality and access to British political bodies. This in turn reflected the (past) colonial context which ensured voting rights in Britain, a belief in the legitimacy of claims directed at the former colonizing power, and familiarity with its political structures. As early as the 1970s, and in particular the mid-1980s, the issue of under-representation was placed on the political agenda. As even today voting is open to non-citizens, if they belong to the Commonwealth, the barriers were and are very low. Second, in the British political culture antidiscrimination stances were well-established and, as early as 1965, enshrined in a law. Thus, among the elites and the general population, calls for equal representation and symbolic gestures of non-discrimination found a receptive audience. Third, an electoral system with single member constituencies and a first-past-the-post principle allows minorities, if they live spatially concentrated, to make an impact. Additionally, contingency, i.e. a situational context of the late 1970s and 1980s in which the Labour Party moved to the left and sought to strengthen its antiracist profile against Thatcher's Conservatives favoured the inclusion of ethnic minority members.

It remains open to debate whether these, or other, factors provide enough impetus to further increase the parliamentary representation of ethnic minority and immigrant populations. Norris and Wlezien (2005: 23-4) recently judged "any advancement" in the parliamentary representation of the ethnic minority population to be "very limited and slow". They expressed doubts that the parties "are genuinely committed to bringing more minority representatives into parliament". Indeed, representation would have to expand beyond (mainly) the Labour Party and concentrations of the minority population.

France: co-optation from above

France seems to represent a model in which the incorporation of immigrants typically occurs in cooperation with, or even engineered by, established elites. Thus, early electoral successes (on the local level) of candidates from the Maghreb region in the late 1980s were largely owed to efforts of the Parti Socialiste and a "France Plus"

campaign invented and backed by the Socialist Party.[24] The Beurs marches in 1983-4 probably played a role in that they underlined the discontent among immigrants and motivated attempts to integrate them politically.

A (later) broader inclusion of immigrants on the candidate lists in local elections[25], according to Romain Garbaye (2005), occurred as a top-down move. Centralized political structures in which mayors have a strong and independent position were in this case helpful to immigrant incorporation – but only after the assimilationist paradigm had lost much of its force and it had become acceptable to acknowledge the existence of ethnic minorities and address their representation. According to Geisser (1997) and Garbaye (2005), candidates are typically co-opted, i.e. selected by the non-immigrant political leadership. Often they did not have relevant political backing in migrant organisations and little experience: their political careers began with the election into a local parliament. In contrast to Britain, where minority mobilisation plays a greater role and, due to the electoral system, can have a more direct impact in areas of concentrated immigrant settlement, in France integrationist intentions on the part of the established political leadership seem to be crucial. As in Britain, the Left has led the way, looking for an extended voter basis, although it was Conservative President Sarkozy who included individuals of a minority background in his government. Today, minority representation on the national level is still very limited, but, according to a recent study, at least on the local level the political parties now in general include "visible minority"-candidates on their lists (Keslassy 2009).

The Netherlands: structural intervention from above

In the Netherlands, political intervention from above, in this case parliament, i.e. the very top, seems to have successfully created the conditions for an incorporation of immigrants into, initially, the local political elites. As part of the multicultural minorities policy of the 1980s, voting rights on the local level were granted to foreigners (in 1985). Following that, the number of councillors of minority background ("of foreign origin") increased from 74 in 1994 to 150 in 1998 and to 302 in 2006 (Michon et al 2007: 11). Although this is not representative of the share of immigrants in the

24 Thanks to Laure Michon for comments on this issue. Note that before the immigrants from the Maghreb, Portuguese immigrants were the major political force among the immigrant population. It would be desirable to develop a perspective that encompasses the longer-term developments and all immigrant groups.

25 According to a study by Geisser/Oriol in 2001, 3.5% of the newly elected councillors in cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants had Maghreb origins (Garbaye 2005: 8).

population[26], the increase of the number of local parliamentarians is impressive. In Amsterdam the migrant population was, in 1998, nearly proportionally represented, and it was over-represented in Den Haag and Utrecht (van Helsum 2001: 5).[27] Today, more than 20% of the seats in the Amsterdam parliament are held by individuals of foreign origin (Michon et al 2007: 12).

Local enfranchisement may have provided a push for participation on the national level. In 1994, 7 MPs of minority origin were elected. In 2006, 17 of 150 seats were held by politicians of "non-western" origin. It is remarkable that this is not only a relatively high proportion of seats but that MPs represented several political parties (Michon et al 2007: 15).[28]

When, in 1985, local voting rights for resident foreigners were introduced, this came as part of an all-party agreement on the new multicultural integration policy. According to Dirk Jacobs, enfranchisement became "totally entangled" with integration policy more generally and was "carried along with the flow" (1998: 364). The policy change was a response to violent protests by members of one immigrant group (Moluccans) but not a reaction to a more general demand for political rights. At the same time, differences in the representation of different national origin groups suggest that an interaction occurred between an institutional framework that offered new opportunities and the collective mobilization of some minority groups which seems to influence the extent to which the new opportunities are taken up (Tillie/ Slijper 2007). The densely organized Turks hold more than half of the seats on local councils (Michon et al 2007). The political parties in the Netherlands were apparently more willing than in other countries to put minority candidates on their lists, i.e. less afraid of a backlash or more willing to face that. Possibly, the tolerance of the Dutch is not altogether a myth. It should also be explored whether the multicultural framework contributed to the development of a pool of immigrant candidates, as

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26 In 2006, about 3% of the councillors were of foreign origin, while the statistical office estimates that 18% of those entitled to vote in the local elections of 2006 had a foreign background (2.2 of ca 12 million).

27 Van Helsum refers to the so-called non-western minorities and to first and second generation immigrants. With respect to the Netherlands, differing conceptions of the minority population are used. Non-western immigrants are defined as immigrants from Africa, Asia (excl. Japan, the former Dutch East Indies and Indonesia), South America and Turkey.

28 In 2008, the Netherlands had a population of 16.4 million of which 3.22 million, or almost 20%, were described as "persons with a foreign background", a conception that refers to first- and second-generation immigrants. 1.8 million were described as of non-western background.

individuals involved in the multicultural institutions became familiar with political structures and gained access to important networks (as argued by Bloemraad, 2006, for Canada).

Germany: incremental change without public mobilisation

In Germany, ethnic minority politicians are only slowly appearing on the political scenery. The first Turkish-origin parliamentarians entered the federal parliament in 1994, and today 11 out of 612 members have a migration background. On the regional level, it is overwhelmingly the three small city states where individuals of immigrant origin have found a way into the state parliaments.[29] But here as well, these are recent developments. For the local level, no systematic evaluation exists.

Obviously, the low levels of naturalization, largely owed to a restrictive citizenship policy, have retarded the development of a large immigrant electorate and of a group of political activists with career ambitions in the German political system. The political parties have only recently begun to acknowledge the emergence of an immigrant electorate. Even today, no major political initiative aimed at improving participation and representation of the immigrant population can be found. Although "integration" is now high on the political agenda, this rarely includes issues of political incorporation, a theme that is not even mentioned in the context of major policies like the current national integration initiative.

Nevertheless, we can record progress, and this is largely due to three factors: On the side of the immigrants themselves, the individual aspirations of a second generation but also a collective shift of political ambitions towards Germany among Turkish immigrants have created a pool of aspiring politicians.[30] Of the political parties, Green Party and The Left, in particular, offer opportunities for activists with a migrant background. And, third, Social Democrats and Conservatives as the two

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29 I have so far identified 37 members of state parliaments with a migration background. 29 of them are members of the parliaments of Berlin, Hamburg and Bremen. The 16 state parliaments together in 2009 had 1825 members. Wüst and Heinz (2009) count 65 MPs with a minority background in the federal, the regional and the European parliaments, their definition includes third generation immigrants. Sara Claro de Fonseca at the Social Science Research Centre Berlin has compiled a data set that aims to identify all candidates in recent federal elections with a migration background. The analysis is ongoing.

30 For my analysis of the German situation I use evidence from interviews with parliamentarians and individuals holding offices in political parties. This is part of ongoing research.

largest parties are now acknowledging that some immigrant representation within their ranks is desirable.

This does not necessarily translate into political interventions. The Social Democrats – who as the likely beneficiaries of a growing immigrant vote might be expected to be more active – have so far not made a determined move towards immigrant representation. Although already around 1980 they began to accept the permanence of guestworker immigration, the SPD has made little attempt to promote minority careers. Not even in centres of immigrant settlement, like Berlin-Kreuzberg or the Ruhr region, does the party leadership push for representation by politicians with immigrant background. Clearly, the immigrant vote is not yet seen as a factor that should systematically influence candidate selection processes. Factors such as established power structures and fears of a voter backlash may also play a part. Nevertheless, a group of individuals with a migration history is emerging who worked their way up the ranks to leadership positions. Trade union involvement and/or a social democratic background, for instance in Turkish organisations, seem to be typical features of such careers.

The Conservatives have only very recently given up their hostile attitude to immigration and largely lack an immigrant membership.[31] Some members of the party leadership now welcome a certain degree of immigrant representation and are prepared to support the careers of individuals with a migration background. Germany's Liberals (the *Freie Demokratische Partei*) equally lack a noticeable immigrant membership, but may be prepared to open their lists to immigrant candidates.

Green Party and the socialist party of the Left present the most favourable contexts for an immigrants' career. Seven of the currently eleven MPs with a migration background belong to those two factions that hold 104 of the 612 seats. Barriers are lower both because in these relatively new parties power structures are more flexible and because equality and a positive attitude to diversity are constitutive for their identities. For the Green Party, the power of a minority vote did not play a great part; migrant candidates were generally not selected because they were expected to attract a significant immigrant vote. In the Green Party, in particular, typically individuals who come from a migrant family (not ethnic group leaders) move up on a career ladder within the party. The Left, on the other hand, may, to an extent, see immigrant candidates as a way to win over voters from the Social Democrats, and

31 Detailed figures are not available as the political parties in Germany do not have statistics on the ethnic or immigrant background of their members.

for a small party the growing immigrant vote could make a difference. Structurally, the emergence and entry into parliaments of new parties on the left of the political spectrum, and thus a party system that allows such new developments, has created opportunities for outsiders. Beyond that, the advantages usually ascribed to proportional representation, which is thought to facilitate the entry of women (Bird 2004: 9-10), do not seem to work in favour of immigrant representation – at least not yet.[32] The German electoral system with its dominance of proportional representation and regional candidate lists, combined with the relatively low residential concentration of immigrants (Schönwälder/Söhn 2009), does not favour concentrated local mobilizations for minority representation.

No major publicly visible and organized push towards parliamentary representation has emerged from within the immigrant population itself, or as a broader civil society initiative.[33] Activists seem to fear that any such move would lead to a backlash.

Altogether, we are witnessing the slow emergence of a political elite of immigrant background. The key mechanism appears to be the reluctant adjustment of German society to its reality as an immigration country.

5. Conclusions

Seen in an optimistic light, we can state that in the major postwar immigration countries of Western Europe, individuals of immigrant descent are now generally represented in parliaments and other mainstream political positions. Immigrant political incorporation does take place, immigrant representation has, since the 1980s, in Germany the 1990s, increased. Across Europe, majorities of the population state that they would feel 'comfortable' or at least 'fairly comfortable' about having someone 'from a different ethnic origin than the majority of the population' in the 'highest

32 The idea is that PR systems provide more incentives for the creation of balanced lists of candidates. However, if the candidates are seen as representing local party organisations, and they put up most of the candidates, this may not be the case.

33 However, the *Netzwerk türkeistämmiger Mandatsträger* has published a political statement on political participation (*Positionspapier zur politischen Partizipation,* April 2008, www.mitarbeit.de/sm_projekt_netzwerk.html). This has not yet been linked with any broader publicity and mobilization.

elected political position' (European Commission 2008).[34] The aspirations of the immigrants themselves, the power of their vote and the now widespread acceptance of a norm of non-discrimination have ensured that the existing barriers were not insurmountable.

However, there are still very few leading politicians of immigrant descent in major European immigration countries. Developments are uneven and slow, and some push factors of the past – like Dutch multiculturalism – may no longer be as forceful as they once were. Further, the example of women's representation suggests that the power of the vote and general declarations of good intentions alone do not ensure equal representation in leadership positions. It remains to be seen whether the immigrant population (and others) will find powerful forms of collective mobilisation pushing for equality and whether political organisations are willing to take organised steps to grant individuals of a migrant or ethnic minority background equal access to their leading positions. Without such determined intervention, an individual of migrant background may still achieve a leading government position in one of the European states, but a broader breakthrough towards equal representation is unlikely to occur in the near future.

34 The survey was conducted in February and March 2008. In the EU 27, 41% said they felt comfortable and 32% said they felt 'fairly comfortable' about this.

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