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Extending urban democracy? The immigrant presence in European electoral politics

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Symposium 2- Immigrant incorporation in urban politics

Extending urban democracy? The immigrant presence in European electoral politics

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Abstract: Many European cities have significant shares of immigrants among their inhabitants. Their unequal access to the political life of the cities, and the country overall, is a major democratic deficit. This introduction to the symposium emphasises the need to consider immigrants as actors in politics and explains the specific relevance of the local level. While the focus of the symposium is on European countries with a longer history of immigration, the introduction also outlines key features of immigrants' political rights and participation in other parts of Europe.

Europe', as embodied by the European Union, is frequently criticised for having a democratic deficit; policymaking takes place at a European level, but ordinary citizens have limited voice on decisions. Yet as Bauböck (2010) highlights, an equally important challenge for European states, whether or not in the EU, is the democratic deficit produced by

large and growing populations of immigrants and their descendants. These residents are often excluded from political deliberation, either because of formal rules around membership and participation, or due to exclusionary practices on the ground. As Joppke (2010: 146) contends, while European states have extended civic, social and economic rights to many residents regardless of membership status, political rights remain most tightly tied to citizen- ship. Held up to republican ideals of self-governing political communities, wide- spread non-participation challenges the very notion of democracy.

And yet, slowly but surely, individuals of immigrant background are becoming more visible in the political lives of many European countries. The contributions to this symposium address the difficult progress of immigrant political incorporation, that is, the extent to which residents of immigrant backgrounds have voted and gained access to the elected legislative bodies of cities across major countries of immigration in Europe. They thus provide empirical assessments of the democratic deficit and insight into the responsiveness of democratic institutions to a changing population. The contributions evaluate the extent to which voting rights for foreigners contribute to electoral participation and the characteristics and resources that help those of immigrant background gain access to elected bodies.

While it is generally acknowledged that immigration has wrought significant transformations in European politics, research in this area remains sparse. Most attention has been paid to new cleavages that have arisen around immigration and immigrant policy1, citizenship law, and the rights given to different members of society, as well as the ways in which these changes have been exploited by extreme- right formations for electoral gain (see, e.g., Koopmans et al, 2005; Joppke, 2010 and Messina, 2007 for overviews). Thus, research often considers immigrants and their children as the object of politics: the focus of attacks, the subject of concern, the issue around which politicians and decision makers make a case for a particular policy or platform.

We know much less about immigrants' own participation in mainstream politics, beyond involvement in immigrant organisations, such as their influence on the election of political decision makers or their ability to become those decision makers.

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es and power in a society'.

This symposium addresses the political inclusion of immigrants and their descendants, with a targeted focus on the immigrants themselves and on urban politics. This is important because participation and access to political positions are indicators of equal or unequal chances and power in a society. The focus on the local level allows a careful investigation into the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion since it is arguably the arena in which those of immigrant origin face the smallest hurdles to participation and easier pathways to office holding. In various European cities, residents' ability to participate in conventional politics is not de- pendent on holding national citizenship. Thus, the immigrant electorate is much larger in local than in national elections. Laura Morales and Amparo González- Ferrer (2013) investigate to what extent local voting rights for foreigners indeed ensure broader participation.

The political inclusion of immigrants is also important since the legitimacy of democratic institutions, as well as their ability to take into account the demands and interests of a diverse population, depends in part on adequate representation of this diversity (see, e.g., Philipps, 1995; Pantoja and Segura, 2003). In this context, access to local office might be easier because local representative bodies may be less exclusive in their social composition than regional or federal ones, and competition for seats may be less intense. More broadly, cities are assumed to have a more liberal political culture than more rural regions, and the residential concentration of immigrants in urban centres, along with the existence of stronger community structures, may provide a more favourable context for political mobilisation and electoral representation. Nevertheless, across cities and countries, political parties and local councils vary in the degree to which they incorporate residents of immigrant origins and these residents' interests. All of the contributions to the symposium investigate such inter-city variation.

Various contributions also examine change over time. Since the 1980s, politicians with a migration history have emerged and increasingly have been elected to city councils in Germany (Schönwälder, Sinanoglu and Volkert, 2013), and in France and the Netherlands (Michon, 2013). The data show that although immigrant representation tends to increase it rarely equals immigrants' share of the population. A critical question for academics and political observers is why we see such dramatic underrepresentation in so

many cities that house and employ significant numbers of immigrant-origin residents.

Apart from the well-known influence of socio-economic status, particular immigrant or minority-specific factors influence political presence. Maxwell explains variation in the presence of national-origin groups in elected office by pointing at a 'trade-off' between social assimilation and group-based mobilisation capacity, a resource that furthers the political presence of groups suffering discrimination. A 'better integrated' minority, as measured by social relations and socio-economic status, may be less well represented in elected bodies. National immigration and citizenship laws can also structure political participation and representation, even when the local level has rules in place to facilitate political participation by all city residents, regardless of legal status. Thus, Morales and Gonzáles- Ferrer argue that those of immigrant origin participate more like their native-born counterparts in local elections when national citizenship laws are relatively liberal, even if non-citizens have local voting rights.

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Contributions by Michon and Schönwälder, Sinanoglu and Volkert focus instead on the backgrounds and migration experiences of elected representatives, and both articles underscore the (perhaps surprising) relative success of women among immigrant councillors.

Across the contributions to this symposium, we see how examining immigrant political integration opens up new questions and underlines the need for revised. models of participation and representation that take these specificities into account.

Beyond western Europe

The focus of this symposium is on countries with longstanding immigrant populations and significant numbers of European-born generations, countries that tend to be located in the West and North of Europe. Of course, these countries do not represent Europe as a whole. In Eastern Europe, immigration has, so far, been limited and is too recent to have produced large settled minorities with full political rights.

In the early twenty-first century, foreign-born individuals made up less than 1.5 per cent of the population in countries such as Hungary, Poland and the Slovak Republic (OECD, 2007: 343). In this region, political debates – and academic attention – have focused on the status of national minorities or groups who migrated within the Soviet Union and became minorities through the formation of new states. For example, discussion of dual citizenship – which in Western and Northern Europe often centres on multiple citizenship for immigrants and their children – revolves in Europe's east largely around the rights of former members of the ethnic or national community who now live in foreign countries given the rapid increase in migration across the continent, states in Eastern Europe will, in all likelihood, soon face some of the same challenges as their Western neighbours.

Indeed, these challenges are already appearing in Southern Europe, where the transformation in countries of immigration began in the 1980s. Today, Italy and Spain, as well as increasingly Portugal and Greece, have significant immigrant populations. The dissolution of socialist East Europe, European Union enlargement, refugee flows and colonial or ethnic links have been major factors driving immigration to Southern European countries. Spain, in particular, has become a major immigration country, with about 5.25 million foreign-born individuals. Romanians are the most numerous nationality, while Latin America and Northern Africa are two other major sources of immigration (Kreienbrink, 2008). Italy now has a foreign population numbering 4.2 million or 7 per cent of the population (data for 2009, Collicelli and Giannone, 2010: 1). Here as well, Romanians are the largest foreign nationality, followed by Albanians and Moroccans.

In Portugal, registered foreigners in 2007 accounted for a more modest 4 per cent of the population, but this figure obscures the rapid and dramatic increase in immigration: since the 1990s, the foreign population in Portugal multiplied by four (Peixoto and Sabino, 2009). In Greece, the OECD (2007: 343) reports that 5 per cent of the population was foreign-born in 2005, a steady increase from the estimated 2.8 per cent of migrants in 1998. Thus, throughout Southern Europe, immigration is becoming a major issue.

Because migration is relatively new in these regions, especially as compared with West and Northern Europe, and in some cases because citizenship laws are restrictive, the numbers of naturalised immigrants, and the size of a second generation with host country citizenship, remain limited.

It would be difficult to expect significant electoral participation and election to office among immigrants in East and Southern Europe.[2] Politically, the immigrant populations in Southern Europe are mostly present through migrant associations and through consultative bodies. However, for Italy, for example, Caponi (2005: 947) asserts that immigrant associations 'have always played a marginal role in national policy-making. This situation does not differ much on the local level'. In response, the associations had, since the late 1990s, withdrawn into 'the community sphere'. In Greece, immigrant participation in public life is also rather limited, perhaps even more than in Italy. As Gropas and Triandafyllidou (2005: 4) point out, even immigrant associations are rare, and '[i]mmigrant activism in mainstream associations like trade unions or political parties is barely existent'.

In contrast, we see somewhat more inclusion in Portugal, where a growing number of immigrant associations emerged in the 1990s. These associations increasingly acquired a political presence (Fonseca *et al*, 2002: 140). After the 1995 victory of the Socialist Party in the national elections, a new official body was set up (ACIME, High Commissioner for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities), and immigrant associations acquired a status as official partners of the state and members of advisory bodies. Participation in an advisory capacity currently seems to be the major form of participation.

However, in Portugal, political rights of foreigners are relatively wide-ranging; the country grants voting rights to foreign citizens of a number of EU and non-EU countries. Portugal conferred such rights, including the vote in national elections, to Brazilians in the 1970s, while a 1996 law ensured that, in addition to EU citizens, foreigners from Portuguese-speaking countries and other foreigners who meet a residence requirement can vote and, in some cases (based on reciprocity), also be elected (Fonseca *et al*, 2002: 141; Lu´ıs, 2000).[3] Pires (2010: 23) points out that after the 1996 reform, all major parties put up foreign candidates, but more detailed research on the impact of local voting rights seems unavailable. Apparently, few foreigners have been registered as voters (Teixeira and Albuquerque, 2007: 283–284).

In Spain, a multiplicity of immigrant associations exist but the 'explicit conceptualization of the immigrant as *homo economicus*' (Zapata-Barrero and Zaragoza, 2009: 3) has shaped the public debate and long prevented a stronger focus on immigrants as citizens.

More recently, however, voting rights for immigrants were debated, and agreements with a number of Latin American countries now provide immigrants with voting rights based on reciprocity. These countries include Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela and Colombia (Zapata- Barrero and Zaragoza, 2009; Méndez Lago and Pérez-Nievas, 2011: 54). Given EU citizenship and accompanying voting rights, the impact of European immigrants in local elections is an un-der-studied topic.4 Some hints of their possible effect exist for Spain, where Méndez Lago suggests that EU citizens are quantitatively far more relevant in the local electorate than naturalised immigrants. Around 25 per cent register to vote, but probably not all of them actually take part in the elections (Méndez Lago and Pérez-Nievas, 2011: 56; Méndez Lago, 2003: 13; see González-Ferrer, 2011, on natural-ised immigrants). The role of EU citizens in local elections and the impact of the extensions of voting rights across Europe – to EU citizens and third-country nationals – require greater scholarly attention.

Overall, the research reported here suggests that more inclusive national citizenship regimes, the presence of a strong group consciousness and infrastructure,
and the degree to which parties reach out to immigrants, or particular immigrant groups, affect the electoral participation of immigrants and their descendants, as well as their success in winning office. Future research will need to assess whether such dynamics apply beyond the older countries of immigration, or whether particularities within some European regions – such as the relevance of national minorities in some East European countries or relatively generous voting rights for foreigners in some South European countries – produce outcomes unique to the more recent immigration countries of Europe.

Notes

1. This terminological distinction was introduced by Hammar (1985) in order to keep the regulation of immigration apart from policies directed at immigrants within a country.
2. Spain, however, may have a sizeable group of naturalised Latin Americans (Méndez Lago and Pérez-Nievas, 2011: 53) since they can apply for naturalisation after only 2 years of legal residence. This, combined with Spanish fluency by many, might pro-

duce more rapid electoral engagement among this group. Morales (2011: 36–37) presents data on participation in national and local elections.

3. In 2002, the latter applied to Brazil, Cape Verde, Peru and Uruguay (Fonseca *et al*, 2002: 141).

4. There are some publications on this topic in Spanish but these are often little noticed by scholars in other countries (see, e.g., Méndez, 2010; Morales and San Martín, 2011).

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