

# Migration and Citizenship

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## Studying Minority Politics with Survey Experiments and Election Data

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Among the big questions raised by migration are whether, and how, immigrants can become full participants in the politics of their new country. When the new homeland is a democracy this should, in principle, be possible. But immigrants, especially those from non-democratic regimes, may need extra opportunities to learn democratic habits and to acquire the resources that facilitate participation. For their part, native residents may resent and resist immigrant political power, due to prejudice or competition over resources. Studying these processes of learning, mobilization and counter-mobilization can provide insights not only into the effects of immigration, but also into the workings of democracy more broadly. Are to-



day's democracies open to new democrats, with distinctive backgrounds and some fresh demands? Of course, there are many ways to tackle these questions. In this paper I shall argue

that combining survey experiments with parallel observational data on elections is a particularly promising approach.

Survey experiments make use of random assignment to treatment conditions, within a survey. For example, scholars may randomly split survey respondents into two groups, to test the effects of different question wording. Or the manipulation may be more complicated, with sub-sets of survey participants receiving different kinds of information, or having the chance to make a series of choices in different scenarios. In general the research subjects do not know that they are being sent down a certain track, nor that their responses will be compared with those of subjects on other tracks. Random assignment ensures that the effects of the manipulation are not confounded by other differences between research subjects. In addition, using data from a broad sample of the population, rather than a convenience sample (e.g. undergraduates), may increase our confidence that the results from the experiment will also apply in the real world. In short, survey experiments aim for both internal and external validity.

The first survey experiments in political science required innovative computer programming to ensure that telephone interviewers shifted quietly from one experimental condition to another, without alerting the respondents (Sniderman 2011). Now, many surveys are conducted with computers, whether via computer-guided scripts on the phone, or, increasingly, via online surveys that can include not only variation in question wording but also other kinds of treatment such as images or videos. It is easier than ever to embed experiments in surveys. There is also a literature with advice on how to design such studies (Mutz 2011).

And yet, despite the advantages of survey experiments, and their growing popularity, there are limits to what this tool can do. Many of the theories that we wish to test cannot plausibly be studied by randomly varying the design of a survey. A survey cannot move you to a new country, or give you a different neighbor. In addition, the effects of the experiment are usually measured later in the same survey, raising the suspicion that any effects may be fleeting rather than durable (Gaines, Kuklinski and Quirk 2007). Finally, while the sample of people in the survey may be representative of the wider population, the context in which the experiment is conducted is not naturalistic—the research subjects are taking a survey, not engaging in real political debates or casting actual votes. This raises doubts about external validity (Barabas and Jerit 2010).

I propose that one way to mitigate concerns about external validity with survey experiments is to match the experimental data with parallel observational data. There are many opportunities for this approach when studying elections, since official election returns are readily available. Scholars can easily gather data on races that involve different sets of candidates, running for offices in different branches and at different levels of government, and seeking the support of varied electorates. As a result, there are opportunities to match experimental treatments with real-world variation in a similar set of causal factors. In the rest of this paper I describe one such study that I conducted (Street 2014).

### **The survey data: hypothetical candidates in German elections**

Germany is home to a growing immigrant population. Although citizenship laws have long been restrictive, the immigrant-origin share of the electorate is rising, to around 10 percent of

the state and federal electorate.<sup>3</sup> Belatedly, German political parties are courting migrants as voters. Growing numbers of immigrants and their offspring are also running for office, especially for parties on the left, although migrants remain under-represented compared to their share of the population (Schönwälder, Sinanoglu and Volkert 2011).

Despite these changes, there are reasons to expect that immigrant-origin political candidates face barriers. Considerable numbers of German voters express negative attitudes toward immigrants, especially stigmatized groups such as Muslims (Heitmeyer 2012). One might expect voters with prejudice against immigrant minorities, or those who feel threatened by minorities, to vote against political candidates with names suggesting an immigrant background. Such group-level attitudes could translate into a penalty for particular candidates.

Besides the attitudinal mechanism, it is also possible that German voters stereotype immigrant candidates, by assuming they belong on the political left. There is some evidence that migrant voters in Germany lean left (Wüst 2011b), and the great majority of immigrant-origin political candidates run for the Greens, the Social Democrats or the Left Party (Wüst 2011a; Schönwälder, Sinanoglu and Volkert 2013). Thus the inference that immigrant-origin candidates lean left may be accurate on average, but it is still an act of stereotyping to assume that it applies in any single case. This kind of stereotyping has been shown to affect support for women in US politics, who are assumed to be liberal, even compared to other candidates from the same party (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; McDermott 1997). In the case of immigrant-origin candidates in Germany,

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<sup>3</sup> The share is higher in cities such as Berlin, Hamburg or Bremen. The number eligible to participate in local elections is also higher, since EU citizens can vote.

such stereotyping is likely to bring benefits from voters on the left, but a penalty from those on the right.

A survey experiment provides opportunities to test for evidence of such mechanisms at work. Since surveys gather many pieces of information on each respondent, it is possible to compare experimental effects among sub-sets of survey participants. In this case, people surveyed shortly after the 2009 German federal elections were randomly assigned to be given information on hypothetical candidates for the federal parliament (*Bundestag*) with either typically German or typically Turkish names, and were then asked whether they could imagine voting for them, and which political party they thought would propose such candidates.<sup>4</sup> Native Germans were eight percentage points less likely to say that they would vote for otherwise identical Turkish-named candidates (significant at  $p=0.02$ ).

In an earlier round of the survey, the same respondents were asked about their social and political attitudes, including questions that measure feeling threatened by immigrants.<sup>5</sup> This allowed me to compare responses to the experimental treatment among people who were and weren't threatened by immigrants, to test the attitudinal mechanism. I was also able to test whether German voters stereotype candidates with immigrant names as belonging on the left. These comparisons suggest that both of

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<sup>4</sup> Both candidate name and gender were randomized, yielding four candidates: Anna Kramer, Andreas Kramer, Ayla Celik, and Ali Celik (the latter two are the typically Turkish names). This experiment was designed by Dr. Ina Bieber and Prof. Dr. Sigrid Roßteutscher, as part of the 2009 German Longitudinal Election Study.

<sup>5</sup> I used a measure of agreeing or disagreeing with the statement, "The many Muslims here sometimes make me feel like a stranger in my own country," and obtained similar results with the statements "There are too many immigrants in Germany" and "Muslims should be banned from migrating to Germany."

the mechanisms were at work.<sup>6</sup> Support for the Turkish-named candidates was 20 percent lower among those threatened by migrants. German voters were also more likely to guess that the Turkish-named candidates would run for parties on the left, and right-leaning voters were about 20 percent less likely to support such candidates. The results also suggest overlapping effects, since most of the people who expressed resentment or negative attitudes toward minority groups identified with parties on the right.

While these findings on the mechanisms of discrimination were in line with theoretical predictions, they had somewhat surprising implications for actual elections. Since immigrant-origin candidates run mainly on the left, and the people inclined to penalize such voters are mainly to be found on the right, the direct effects of electoral discrimination should be limited.

### **The observational data: election returns and candidate names**

In order to test this prediction of “representation despite discrimination,” I turned to election data. Specifically, I merged district results for the federal elections of 2005 and 2009 with data on candidate names. The lists of candidate names were coded to identify people with names that indicated membership of stigmatized groups in Germany: those from predominantly Muslim parts of the world, as well as the former Yugoslavia and Africa (in line with the groups identified in Alba, Schmidt and Wasmer

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<sup>6</sup> One should be careful when interpreting experimental effects among sub-sets of the survey population. There may also be other factors at work that distinguish the people in each group. Since group membership (e.g. feeling threatened by immigrants) was not experimentally manipulated, the experimental design does not guarantee a causal interpretation of variation across groups of survey respondents.

2003).<sup>7</sup> The electoral data matched the survey data, since in each case the key cue to the voter was the candidate’s name. Other observational data also suggests that candidate names are relevant. For example, the Turkish-origin politician Ekin Deligöz reports that other Green party members initially had reservations. “There were people who said: not with a migrant name” (quoted in Jenkner 2007).

For the analysis of the electoral data, I took further steps to avoid confounding. The districts where candidates with non-German names were nominated differed from those where this did not happen; for instance the share of foreign residents in the local population was 50 percent higher on average. Rather than simply comparing across districts, I therefore studied over-time variation in the support for candidates from a given party, within each district. I estimated the effect of changing from a German-named candidate in one election to a candidate with a name suggesting an immigrant background in the subsequent election, while also including controls to account for overall swings in support for the main political parties across the two elections. The results were consistent with the predictions based on the experiment: migrant candidates ran exclusively on the left, and there was no evidence that they received a lower vote share than German-named candidates for the same party, in the same district, and in the previous election.

Returning to the question of whether the rapidly diversifying democracies of Western Europe and North America are open to new democrats, these findings suggest that the prospects are mixed. Immigrant-origin candidates may be able to avoid some of the direct effects of voter discrimination, but only as long as their ambi-

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<sup>7</sup> To ensure reliability, I confirmed that my coding was similar to that of two other scholars of German politics.

tions are limited. At the highest level, such candidates must appeal to a broad electorate, and this will be difficult even if voter discrimination is concentrated in certain sectors of the electorate.

### Conclusion

Political scientists studying migration and citizenship commonly turn to survey experiments to test competing theories (e.g. Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010; Pérez 2015). It is now easy to embed experiments within surveys, and scholars should continue to do so. But survey experiments have limitations, especially with regard to external validity. We may be able to make faster progress by deliberately matching survey experiments with parallel observational data. This strategy is especially promising in research on voters and candidates, since election results are readily available for a wide range of contests. Broadly, scholars can gather election data, design surveys with outcome measures that parallel the choices that voters face when completing the ballot, and use randomization within the survey to test their theories.

I have described research on the effects of voter discrimination. Another option, especially relevant in countries with high levels of residential segregation, would be to use a similar approach to study positive preferences for (co-ethnic) minority candidates. In addition to measuring aggregate electoral effects, survey experiments could test potential mechanisms, such as a preference for descriptive representation, or a belief that one's substantive interests are better represented by a co-ethnic. Alternatively, scholars who suspect that mixed aggregate outcomes are due to offsetting effects in different sub-sets of the electorate could use survey experiments to test this idea, to see whether the experimental effects are consistent with the observed election results. Yet another strategy would be to pair natural experiments with sur-

vey experiments. For example, Abrajano, Nagler and Alvarez (2005) focus on actual races in which candidate ethnicity and ideology were crossed. The authors might have learned even more by using a survey experiment to study the kind of people whose support was swayed by these factors. In short, the survey experiment is a valuable tool, but those of us studying migration and citizenship should also keep the tools of observational research at hand.

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## Going against the Tide: Experimental Survey Design for Measuring Prejudice in France

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Social desirability bias is one of the most-documented biases in attitude surveys. Pollsters and academics know quite well that respondents are reluctant to declare certain opinions or behaviors, such as abstention from voting or votes for extreme right parties. This is even more salient when prejudice is concerned and particularly in recent years. As general levels of education increase, so does the capacity of respondents to decode what political scientists are looking for when they administer traditional survey questions. Some critics of mass surveys in France, following the path opened by Bourdieu, argue that if college-educated respondents appear to be more tolerant, it is only because they are better able to provide the acceptable answer (Lehingue 2011).

These concerns are particularly salient in the study of race relations. James Kuklinski and his colleagues (1997), for example, have demonstrated how answers about racial equality in the US cannot be taken at face value. Affirma-



tive action creates much more animosity among the general public than what the traditional Q and A design can capture. To prove it, their experimental design is simple and smart: respondents are provided with two identical lists of issues, but one version of this list includes an "affirmative action" item. Respondents are randomly assigned to one or the other version of the list. They are then asked to count the number of issues that anger them. Evaluating the real level of anger produced by affirmative action is only a matter of subtraction.