

Beyond Symbolism: The Determinants, Processes and Outcomes of Descriptive  
Immigrant Representation in Twenty European States

This research project will analyse immigrants as political office-holders in European host countries. It will be a comparative study that will seek to uncover the determinants, processes and outcomes of immigrant office-holder's behaviour. This can be restated in question form as "how do immigrant politicians behave once elected to political office in European countries"? The aim here is to discover the nature of the representation provided by immigrant political actors. While descriptive representation may not be sufficient for the achievement of political equality and policy responsiveness for marginalized groups, scholars point to its symbolic or material importance as a necessary condition or positive factor towards group empowerment. Moreover, an increasing research focus on gender in the political system has generated scholarship that places questions of inter-sectionality into the framework of descriptive representation. That is, how do race and gender intersect in the representational roles and policy priorities of women (and men) of minority ethnic groups (Hardy Fanta et al, 2005: 2)? Although descriptive representation may boost the subjective efficacy immigrants derive from participation activities such as voting, unless certain behaviours and strategies outlined in this research design are evident, the significance of immigrant politicians will fail to cross the threshold from symbolism to substance.

*The dependent variable*

The dependent variable of this project is the immigrant political actor. More specifically, immigrants as elected representatives at all levels of government in European countries. The term immigrant refers to the immigrant themselves and their and their children. The term also applies where only one parent is an immigrant. This definition is used as we would expect to find that with each subsequent generation succeeding the migrant, there would be a greater potential for participation in the host country's political system but a corresponding decrease in that generation's self identity as an immigrant. Few scholars think that trans-national ties and identity persist past the first generation. They cite both declining language fluency and survey findings indicating that the children of immigrants have no intention of returning to

live in their ancestral homes (Alba & Nee 2003, Kasinitz et al. 2002, Portes & Rumbaut 2001). For this reason the grandchildren of immigrants are excluded from the analysis. This operationalization of the term immigrant has been identified as the most encompassing in Back & Soininen's (1998: 32) study of immigrants in the political process in Sweden. This definition puts 1.6 million Swedish residents into the immigrant category out of a population of 8.8 million.

The variation to be explained is the nature of the representation exhibited by the immigrant office holder. Does the immigrant representative see herself as solely representing her particular ethnic group, the immigrant community of her electoral constituency as a whole, or the general electorate of the constituency which may include immigrants and natives alike? The emphasis here is on the degree to which descriptive representation of immigrants benefits their integration into the host society in terms of status and redistribution of resources. The opportunity for immigrants to exercise political rights has not been sufficiently examined, which has been a point of criticism against research (Bäck and Soininen: 1998: 30). From here on any references to the political behaviour of immigrants will refer to elected office-holders rather than voters unless otherwise stated.

Several questions then arise in relation to this research. Do immigrant representatives make policy decisions in an independent manner or do they exert influence only after consultation with, and clear guidance from, the constituency they claim to represent? Moreover, is the immigrant representative more concerned with the politics of the host or source country? Do they get involved in politics in order to ensure that the immigrant population receives proportionate consideration in the formulation of public policy or do they try to influence the host state's relations and policy with their country of origin? More broadly does the nature of immigrant representation qualitatively differ from their host country counterparts? Finally, does the migration experience provide opportunities for immigrant women to seek political office relative to native women as some studies have suggested (Jones-Correa, 1998)?

The initial point of departure for such a study is to illustrate the potential cases and the numbers involved. The European context as defined here includes all twenty-seven member states of the European Union with Norway and Switzerland. In order to identify cases where immigrant political participation and representation would be of significant saliency, I compiled a dataset of immigrant populations across these cases from the UN Migration database. The dataset includes the total population, the foreign

born population, and the foreign born citizenry of each case. Additionally the number of the female foreign born residents/citizens population and the country's MIPEX score of political rights (Niessen et al: 2007) are included. I then excluded Luxembourg and any country with less than five percent foreign-born residents (FBR). This leaves a dataset of twenty countries. In the table below, the first and second columns respectively indicate the percentage of foreign-born citizens (FBC) to the total population of the country. The third column shows the MIPEX political participation score for that country. The number of foreign citizens is relevant because the potential for political representation is expected, but not guaranteed, to increase when citizenship is conferred. With citizenship comes the right to run for political office, in particular, at the national and supranational level.

**Table 1. Immigrant Populations and MIPEX Political Rights**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Foreign Born (%)</b>	<b>Foreign Citizen (%)</b>	<b>Political Rights</b>
Sweden	14.27	5.41	93
Norway	9.51	5.07	86
Netherlands	10.67	3.61	80
Portugal	6.29	2.69	79
Germany	12.81	8.11	66
Ireland	14.68	10.06	59
Belgium	7.92	9.22	57
Switzerland	18.78	20.79	55
Denmark	8.45	2.81	55
France	10.99	6.18	52
Spain	13.10	6.57	50
Britain	10.75	-	46
Austria	14.90	9.85	34
Estonia	18.41	20.05	30
Malta	6.07	2.94	19
Cyprus	12.74	9.39	18
Slovenia	8.64	2.25	15
Greece	9.89	6.76	14
Lithuania	5.86	0.98	12
Latvia	19.05	1.78	11

However, there are several caveats to bear in mind when interpreting this data. The population figures are compiled by the UN Migration Division from census data that is somewhat inconsistent. By this I mean the population numbers relating to the FBRs may be sourced from different years than those of the FBCs. For instance, the numbers for Switzerland's FBRs are sourced from the 1990 census while the numbers for FBCs date to 2005. This is the most extreme case although the numbers of Belgian FBRs are sourced from 1981 while there is no reference year supplied for the Belgian FBCs. More directly, taking the definition of immigrant and the corresponding numbers supplied by Back and Sojininen (1998) for Sweden (1.6m of 8.8m) would suggest that the UN figures understate the immigrant population. A drawback of the MIPLEX score is that it considers political participation rights only as they relate to third country nationals. EU residents exercising their free movement rights are not considered 'immigrants' in the MIPLEX dataset, who are given the right to vote in local elections of the member state in which they are resident regardless (Garbaye: 2005), nor are refugees, asylum seekers and irregular migrants. Nevertheless, this table provides a general overview of potential cases for the study of immigrant political behaviour.

The next issue is to outline variation in the representation of immigrants across the cases. Given that immigrant politicians in Europe are a relatively under-studied topic in political science, a comprehensive dataset of immigrant elected representatives is difficult to present at this point. However, the available data will be indicative of the trends across Europe. On the national level, Messina (2007: 215) displays a table outlining the number of minority deputies in five European parliaments in 2002. The figures are complemented by a "representation index" which subtracts the immigrant share of the population from their share of political representatives and divides by the share of the population. I have recreated the table here with updated figures.

**Table 2. Ethnic Minority Deputies in National Parliaments** (Most recent available data)

<b>Country</b>	<b>Minority Deputies</b>	<b>Minority Deputies as % of Total Deputies</b>	<b>Representation Index</b>
Netherlands	15	10	-0.06
Germany	15	2.41	-0.81
Ireland	1	0.6	-0.96
Belgium	9	6	-0.24
France	21	3.64	-0.7
United Kingdom	15	2.32	-0.78
-	-	-	-

Messina also outlines some figures for immigrant representatives at the local and European parliament level. These figures are as they were originally presented by Messina and have not been updated.

**Table 3. Ethnic Minority Councillors and MEPs**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Councillors</b>	<b>MEPs</b>
England & Wales	674	4
Copenhagen & Arhaus	8	
France	11,524	
Belgium	92	
Netherlands	35	
Ireland	3	
Germany		3

(Messina:2007)

Messina concludes that identifying the ultimate significance of the under-representation of ethnic minority politicians is difficult because there is little evidence of the impact that minorities actually have whenever they have attained elective office. Messina (2007: 218) identifies three benchmarks for measuring the significance of elected immigrants which up until now have been un-measurable using traditional analytical techniques. The first is that immigrants or ethnic minorities would have to behave as a cohesive bloc within the institution they operate as agents or delegates of the larger ethnic minority constituency, and they would have to cooperate to promote the shared interests of this constituency. Second, immigrant politicians would require numerous allies among their native counterparts. Even in considerable numbers immigrant representatives and their collective political agenda would be dependent

upon the goodwill and political support of their host counterparts. Third, and most importantly, immigrant politicians would need an effective means by which to achieve their collective political goals. In particular, they would require an institutionalised political vehicle to articulate, aggregate, represent and implement their shared policy priorities. Indeed it seems reasonable to conclude that, in the absence of these three conditions, the election of a representative number of immigrant politicians would probably have more symbolic value than practical effect.

There are two themes to consider when studying the immigrant politician. The first is that of the trans-national experience and how it affects immigrant incorporation into the political system (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). The second is gender and the implications for immigrant and native women arising from the potential for immigrant women's incorporation into the political system (Jones –Correa: 1998). These themes will be discussed in detail in the sections on existing and alternative explanations.

#### *Data and Methodology*

This research will be explored using textual data analysis, an inexpensive method that returns highly valuable results. This involves the collection of material consisting of written, printed, or electronically published words, typically either purposefully written or transcribed from speech to make inferences about individuals' true preference (see Laver, Benoit & Garry: 2003). The process involves several steps. The first is to identify the relevant text that informs the research question. This research will use formal sources such as legislative speeches and minutes of local council meeting as the primary source of data, with other public statements such as newspaper interviews being employed as secondary sources. After discovering the appropriate methods of storing and editing text I will use a language-blind computerised tool called *Wordscores* to count the frequencies of pre-identified words and phrases and identify patterns among them. The patterns relate to the immigrant representative's policy goals as indicators of broader political strategies.

To illustrate the efficacy of this technique as a data rich and unexplored territory, Laver and Benoit (2002) used the speeches of 51 Irish legislators in one confidence motion to make policy preference inferences about each individual legislator. This article used one issue in one legislature at one point in time and successfully estimated the positions of each legislator i.e. all the government ministers and most of the backbenchers supported the government and vice versa for the

opposition. The implications for cross national research over time, and across a variety of issues, on this basis, are immense. Scarce as immigrant representatives are, they leave a considerable amount of textual data in the form of parliamentary records, local council minutes and media interviews most of which is freely available online. This data can then be analysed in terms of content and volume, relative to native politicians, and to politicians in their country of origin on similar issues.

#### *Existing explanations of immigrant political representative's behaviour*

Research to date has focused on explanations for the absence of immigrant from electoral politics to the neglect of their substantive electoral representation. This section will outline the existing explanations from the literature for immigrant participation in host country politics in terms of processes and outcomes.

The key explanatory variables forwarded by researchers as being the most significant in relation to immigrant political behaviour are socio-economic status, associational membership, and region of origin (Latin America, Asia, Europe etc.). From the gender perspective, male emphasis on the politics of the source country only serves to reinforce the social hierarchy of the source country and limiting their opportunities for political mobilisation. This approach is based on the observable disproportionate emphasis on the politics of the country of origin by male immigrant political leaders. These issues will be discussed below. I will then outline the alternative explanatory variables which this research will employ.

Early models of political participation found a significant relationship between socioeconomic variables and the propensity to vote (Campbell et al 1960; Verba and Nie 1972; Wolfinger and Rosenstone: 1980). Among immigrants there is an over-representation of people with characteristics that usually entail low electoral participation. For example, they are single, young, have short educations, are seldom members of associations, and most importantly, they have recently moved to a new environment. But there are other factors that are more specific for immigrants: lack of information, language problems, difficulties with the technicalities of voting, lack of knowledge about political parties and politics, and a feeling of not belonging in the host society (Back and Soininen: 1998: 36). In contrast to this approach, social learning theory predicts that variations in political participation will result from the values and beliefs about politics gained from childhood and adolescent socialization (McAllister & Makkai: 1992: 270).

In the context of European and Asian immigration to Australia, McAllister & Makkai (1992) found that social learning is an explanation for different levels of political participation which stands in its own right. However, they concluded that social learning presents an additional explanation for political behaviour, rather than a substitute for established socio-economic resource theories. Future research into aspects of group political behaviour, they add, should treat the two theories as complementary, rather than as competing explanations. For Europeans, resources and social learning are of roughly equal importance in determining their participation. For Asians, however, social learning is by far the more important. In the case of campaign activity, for example, social learning is more than seven times as important as the socio-economic resources that they possess. The important aspect to note here is McAllister and Makai's treatment of immigrants to Australia as generally homogenous groups with only region of origin differentiating between them.

The treatment of immigrants as a homogeneous bloc is promoted further by Wong et al (2005). Although these authors acknowledge that Asian-Americans are a heterogeneous group they argue that a group consciousness can form from common experiences they may face as a group such as discrimination. The outcome of this process, they argue, is a meaningful political community. This is particularly a function of the fact that Asian people in the United States face common stereotypes (i.e. model minority or yellowperil) that may stimulate the construction of politically relevant pan-ethnic organisations (Espiritu: 1992). Therefore despite their heterogeneity Wong et al (2005: 549) argue that Asian-Americans represent a meaningful political category in the same way as Blacks, Whites (Anglos) and Latinos. They find that being a member of an Asian American organization and having feelings of linked fate with others of the same ethnic background are positive and statistically significant predictors of political participation beyond voting. In contrast, group-based resources do not appear to manifest themselves through formal channels, such as voting, which requires citizenship and registration.

Wiegl and Reyes (2001) presented a comparative "portrait" of Anglos and Latinos to illustrate the cultural differences between them and their subsequent divergence in patterns of political behaviour. The article was a report on the Hispanic Leadership Project which aimed to prepare newly arrived El Salvadoran immigrant leaders for integration into local politics. This research found powerful ethnocentric dynamics which led Latino and Anglos to reciprocally differentiate and enact core

features of their social selves. The differences they find can be aggregated into the terms “individualist” for Anglos and “collectivist” for Latinos. Anglos tend to take a more proactive approach to politics where Latinos are reactive. The implication is that personal Latino power is exercised from a location in a hierarchy with influence extending over those below and beholding to a range of powers above (Wiegl & Reyes: 2001: 253).

Scholars have also emphasised associational life (or social capital) as being more important to immigrants in their host country than integration via electoral politics. Existing research has focused heavily on the associational life of Latinos in North America. The establishment of Hometown Associations by Latin American immigrants has been the key dependent variable of these studies. For example, Landholt (2008) presented a comparative study of Salvadoran migrants in Los Angeles, Washinton D.C. and Toronto. The point of departure for the rise of Washington HTAs is similar to the pattern found in Los Angeles. In the post-war era, small cliques of co-villagers organized collective remittance projects geared toward improvements in their places of origin. She found that in Washington and Los Angeles, chain migration networks push migrants toward village-level loyalties, identities, and political priorities. In Toronto, by contrast a state-mediated refugee flow, the tendency toward residential dispersal of recent immigrants, and the local politics of multiculturalism lead to the formation of a Salvadoran migrant community that is organized around loosely networked post- migration friendship clusters (Landholt: 2008: 69).

Despite the significance of socio-economic variables and hometown associations in immigrant politics, some scholars argue that church attendance is the most relevant factor. Martinez (2005) found that the church going variable was the most significant predictor *inter alia* of immigrant involvement in protest politics. However, Latinos were less likely overall to become involved in protest politics than non-Latinos, implying that Black and Anglos were more likely to do so. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) posit that variation in ethnic group political participation, while related to socioeconomic differences among them, is derived from the acquisition of civic skills through their associational memberships and, in particular, from their experiences in church. Jones- Correa and Leal (2001: 752) argue that while the SES model highlights some variables highly correlated with political participatory behaviour, it does not provide a causal explanation for this behaviour.

By far the more important contribution to an explanation of political participation is made by churches' central civic associational role. Church associational life offers skill endowing opportunities that compensate for a lack of political resources among church activists whose educational and occupational levels might hinder their participation in politics.

A study of immigrants from India to the United States demonstrates how religion and the migration experience frame the political agendas of trans-national migrant groups. Kurien (2001) departs from much of the existing explanations by identifying two separate groups, Hindus and Muslims, within the Indian immigrant community. The consistency with existing explanations is the focus of these groups on Indian politics. The struggle between them relates to the definition of "Indianess", where Hindus view India as a Hindu society and are strong supporters of the Hindu nationalist movement in India. Muslim-Indian organizations, on the other hand, view India as a multi-religious and multicultural society. They are striving to safeguard India's secularism and towards this end, have entered into coalitional relationships with lower caste groups. Both types of organizations are working to influence American and Indian politics in line with their respective interests, leading to an exacerbation of the conflict between the two immigrant groups. The leaderships seem to be involved largely because of the resources (for example, political power, status and recognition) that they hope to obtain from ethno-politics. Many of the supporters of such groups, however, participate in the activities of the religious organizations because they experience marginality and intensified religious and nationalistic commitment as a consequence of immigration (Kurien: 2001: 238). Therefore, by analysing the leaderships of immigrant communities, a move away from sociological theories towards a rational-choice model is appropriate. This will be further discussed in the alternative explanations section.

From the perspective of gender, the emphasis of source country politics and relations between the host and source countries is an environment that reinforces the male dominance of public life and immigrant representation. The experience of migration costs a male a great degree of social status. Some find themselves doing manual labour for the first time post-migration where they may have been business or other leaders in the source country. They minimise the psychological impact of this transition by establishing hometown associations that deal with issues such as remittances to the source country (Weigl and Reyes: 2001). In this process gender

distinctions are sometimes reinforced and reinvented to create hierarchies that are more rigid and traditional than in the homeland. Such strategies are pursued under the guise of protecting women from what is perceived as hostile and immoral host country culture (Levitt & Jaworsky: 2007: 138).

In terms of party support within the host country, parties of the left have traditionally absorbed immigrants and their concerns. During the 1970s, for example, social democratic parties across Scandinavia strongly advocated for the right of long-term residents to vote as part of a larger strategy of and commitment to immigrant incorporation (Layton-Henry: 1991: 129). Similarly, since the 1960s, the British Labour party has adopted numerous policy commitments that openly favoured ethnic minorities. These commitments included the enactment of several race relations acts, the creation and empowerment of a national race relations regulatory watchdog, and the adoption of proactive procedures for selecting ethnic minority candidates (Messina: 2007: 109).

In sum, existing explanations of immigrant political participation have focused primarily on their political engagement outside of the electoral arena and disproportionately in the U.S. context. The former is an understandable approach as associational life is not constrained by the requirement of citizenship. Moreover, research has focused on the immigrant experience in North America. Furthermore, immigrant women suffer what can be characterised as a double disadvantage in the trans-national process by belonging to two traditionally underrepresented descriptive groups. In relation to immigrants in electoral politics, immigrant issues and candidates are typically absorbed by parties of the left.

### *Alternative Explanations*

This section will outline the alternative explanations for immigrant participation in host country politics and how they will be applied to this research. First, I will move the emphasis away from group behavioural analysis to focus on the behaviour of individual elected representatives. This allows the research design to make a theoretical departure from existing explanations to one that employs a rational choice model. This is justified on the grounds that rational-choice (Downs: 1957, Riker 1982, Hall & Taylor: 1996) is founded on assumptions about individuals. The model assumes that individuals will pursue goals that maximise their personal utility.

Individuals pursue these goals when the benefits of doing so can reasonably be estimated to outweigh the costs.

Rational choice behaviour is evident in some of the literature discussed above, although none of this literature was explicitly discussed within the framework of rational choice. In Kurien's (2001) study of Indian immigrants, leaders pursued goals that maximised their influence within the host society in terms of relations with decision makers and the accumulation of popular support. It can reasonably be assumed that had the leaders been concerned with the politics of Indian integration they may have faced institutional barriers such as domestic political opposition to the expansion of political rights or more favourable redistributive policies to Indian immigrants. Moreover, male Latinos established hometown associations in order to minimise the psychological shock that a loss in socio-economic status entails. Pursuing political office in the host country would have only aggravated this shock. They also attempted to ensure that the rising economic power of women would not challenge their authority. This rational interpretation better explains their lack of ambition for political office in the host country. Therefore, this research will assume that the issues pursued by European immigrant representatives are those that ensure that they remain in office after the subsequent election. If the politics of the source country and relations between the host and source country are the issues that get them re-elected then that is the behaviour we should observe. Similarly, if an immigrant representative's constituents are more concerned with the politics of, and their integration into, the host, we should observe policy goals oriented around issues like welfare, free movement between host and source, expansion of political rights etc.

The heterogeneity of migrant groups will not be under-estimated in this project. Research has shown that different cultural practices, such as the ability to invent kinship ties or membership in a clan or caste group, produced different patterns of trans-national involvement. Therefore, a major research task is to specify the types and dimensions of different kinds of social fields and their effects on migrant trajectories. A second and related task is to delineate how various kinds of social fields intersect with class, race, nationality, and gender. Migrants vary considerably, and broad, taken-for-granted categories such as ethnicity, nationality, or religion mask the diversity within what can be extremely heterogeneous groups (Levitt & Jaworsky: 2007: 144). This can be accounted for in the research design by noting the country of origin of the immigrant representative, and then when variance between the

representative and her host-country counterparts is observed, relating the representative's policy position back to that of representatives in the source country on that issue. This will illustrate the degree an immigrant's policy preference is a product of his migration experience or his ethnic background. This method also ensures that there is sufficient attention paid to both ends of trans-national spectrum, as scholars have advised.

Contrary to the view that women suffer a double disadvantage through the migration experience, some evidence has shown that migration provides opportunities for women that may not otherwise have had in the source country. Jones-Correa (1998) found that Latin American women are much more likely to participate in the labour force upon migrating to Queens in New York City than they are in the home country. As this factor is usually correlated with political participation, we should observe an increase in women's participation in politics. Moreover, Jones-Correa (1998) found that because women are still expected to be the primary care-givers to children, this necessitates a significant level of contact with the institutions and programs of the federal and local government and women's political priorities are then expected to be oriented around host country issues.

Despite the affiliation and interaction of immigrant with parties of the left, some research has shown that, ideologically speaking, immigrants in Britain and France are not entirely compatible with left-wing policies. However this could be a function of strategic compromise on the part of the immigrants as domestic right-wing parties engage and encourage immigrant political participation to a lesser degree than left-wing parties. Dancey and Saunders (2006: 977) found that while factors related to the immigrant experience exert some influence on political behaviour, they do not operate as those who fear that immigrants are "benefit tourists" might predict. With regard to political preferences, they found that immigrants in both Germany and Britain are no more likely than their comparably situated native counterparts to favour social spending or redistribution. Moreover, in contrast to the human capital frame, immigrants in Britain have more conservative welfare and redistribution preferences than natives, even controlling for socioeconomic variables. The political integration of immigrants can also be inferred from the positions they hold within the institutions they are elected to. British councillors of Black and Asian descent have frequently become well-established in the councils where they sit and in urban, low income communities that they have represented. Despite frequent accusations of tokenism

and patronage, they have managed to participate actively in the decision-making process of the councils in which they sat, regularly rising to positions of prominence, for instance, as chairs of council committees. (Garbaye: 2005: 8)

To avoid endogeneity problems, it will be necessary to analyse the behaviour of host representatives in relation to immigrants before and after the election of the latter. It is assumed that the presence of immigrant representatives alters the behaviour of the native representative as he now is in competition for re-election with the immigrant. Policy outcomes that favour immigrants being initiated by host representatives would potentially be indicators of this type of behaviour, particularly when the representative's party is generally less encouraging of immigrant political participation.

### *Summary*

This paper outlines a research design for the study of elected immigrant representatives in twenty European countries. The research will use textual data analysis to make inferences about immigrant representative policy priorities to determine whether the descriptive representation of immigrants in Europe has any substantive value in terms of advancing salient immigrant issues. The research design assumes that representatives are rational agents who faithfully represent the views of their constituents in order to be re-elected. It would also be expected that host country representatives adapt their policy priorities in response to the arrival of elected immigrants onto the political scene. The objectives described have previously been unfeasible in terms of time and financial resources. The use of computerised textual data analysis allows this research to overcome these restraints and analyse immigrant political representatives across numerous dimensions and themes.

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