Pathways to Power: The Political Representation of Citizens of Immigrant Origin in Eight European Democracies

Report on Preliminary Research Findings

Research consortium

Funders
Introduction and Key Findings

Immigration presents some of the biggest and most intractable policy challenges of our time. These challenges involve several dimensions for countries facing mass emigration as well as for those receiving immigrants, including the problems of managing migration in a world of inequality and conflict, the security dimensions which come with large movements of people and, crucially for our project, the integration of those immigrants and their descendants who remain in the country long term. Integration is a comprehensive task that entails the incorporation of immigrants into their respective countries’ welfare systems, labour markets and societies. In their recent book Strangers No More (2015), the American social scientists Richard Alba and Nancy Foner consider the political integration of immigrants ‘the paramount indicator of their overall inclusion’. The representation of citizens of immigrant origin in elected offices is, according to these authors, ‘the gold standard for political inclusion’.

Comparative studies are crucial to understand the reasons for differences in the extent to which citizens of immigrant origin are represented in national, regional and local legislative assemblies. Yet, to date, academic work on the representation of citizens of immigrant origin (IO) in elected office has been hampered by the lack of comparable high-quality data. Our project – ‘Pathways to Power’ – addresses this gap and provides data on parliamentary representation and its social, political and institutional context for eight European democracies since the 1990s: Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom. The box summarises our key findings.

Key Findings

- The Netherlands and the United Kingdom lead in the presence of citizens of immigrant origin in national parliaments across the eight European countries studied
- South European countries fare worst in the inclusion of citizens of immigrant origin in the national legislature
- There are considerable cross-national variations in the gender, age and educational attainment profiles of IO MPs across Europe. There is no single universal pattern to their socio-demographic profiles
- In the years studied, IO MPs are more likely to be women in Belgium and Spain but the gender pattern is balanced or variable in the other countries
- IO MPs are noticeably younger in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands, but not so in the other countries
- Over 70% of all MPs in all countries have a university degree, and IO MPs are somewhat more likely to have a university degree, except in Belgium and Germany
- IO MPs tend to be elected as candidates of left-wing or centre-left parties more often than of centre-right or right-wing parties, but this is not the case in South European countries
- IO MPs tend to have gained less political experience in their parties’ structure or in subnational elected office before they win their seat in national parliament
- For the years studied so far, IO MPs tend to be underrepresented in key positions of party and committee leadership, although this may be a temporary effect resulting from their generally lower levels of parliamentary experience in some countries

This three-year project has been supported generously by the research funding councils of Britain (ESRC), France (ANR), Germany (DFG) and the Netherlands (NWO) since 2014. The principal investigators are Professors Manlio Cinalli (SciencesPo Paris), Laura Morales (Leicester), Thomas Saalfeld (Bamberg) and Jean Tillie (Amsterdam). The project was joined in 2015 by a Belgian sister project coordinated by Prof. Jean-Benoît Pilet and funded by UC Louvain, ULB, VUB and the Fund of Scientific Research (FNRS). In total, over 20 social scientists are directly involved in collecting the data. The project will cover the period from 1990 to the most recently completed national legislatures in each respective country. It will also include data on the most recent legislative terms of a selection of regional assemblies.
Project Overview

The Pathways project covers both ‘descriptive’ representation – that is, the presence of representatives of immigrant origin (IO) in national and regional parliaments – and ‘substantive’ representation – the activities of MPs on the floor of the respective chambers.

The dynamics of descriptive representation are captured by a large number of indicators that track the personal background and political careers not only of IO MPs but also of a reference group of all MPs in the relevant chambers.

In relation to their activities on the floor, we focus on parliamentary speeches and questions in national parliaments. Differences across countries, regions, parties, individuals and time will be explained through a complex set of contextual variables, especially the socio-demographic composition of electoral districts (including the percentage of IO citizens), the institutional context, public opinion in relation to immigration and extra-parliamentary mobilisation in support of, or in opposition to, immigrants. One particular characteristic of the Pathways project approach is that we seek to capture systematically the crucial mediating role of political parties and the dynamics of party systems (see Figure 1).

Preliminary Findings on Descriptive Representation

The Pathways project is at the mid-point of its three-year duration. At this stage, we are in a position to share some preliminary findings relating to the dimension of descriptive representation: the number of MPs of immigrant origin that are elected to the national parliaments, their socio-demographic profiles, and their political background and experience. We are also able to present a selection of some of the initial data on MPs’ activities in parliament. The next few pages summarise some of the results of our ongoing data collection efforts.
The Pathways project aims to provide detailed empirical information about the total number, the socio-demographic profiles, the political experience and the parliamentary activities of MPs who are of immigrant origin (IO), and how they resemble or differ in these aspects from MPs who are not of immigrant origin. For the purposes of this project, we identify IO MPs as all those elected representatives who were either born abroad as foreign nationals – and have, subsequently, acquired the citizenship of the country in question – or have/had at least one parent who was a foreign national at birth. We are thus interested in studying MPs who either directly experienced migration themselves or whose parent(s) were migrants to the countries that we are studying, and originating from any region of the world.

Identifying IO MPs requires careful gathering of information about the MPs and their parents from publicly available sources – such as biographies, parliamentary websites, Wikipedia entries, the personal websites or blogs of MPs, media reports or interviews, etc. – for all MPs that have taken up a seat in the parliamentary terms and countries studied. While the project will cover the full period since the early 1990s until now, so far we only have preliminary data completed for the last two parliamentary terms in each country. Figure 2 compares the percentage of IO MPs with the share of foreign-national population in the eight European democracies we study for the period covered thus far, from 2002 to 2012.

Our preliminary findings show that there is considerable variation across countries, with the highest percentages of IO MPs in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (at around 11%-12%). The proportion ranges from 3% to 7% in Belgium, Germany and France, with much lower percentages in Greece, Italy and Spain. The proportion of IO MPs in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and France is in line with the percentage of foreign-nationals in their respective populations (as reported by Eurostat). Interestingly, Spain and Greece, despite having one of the highest percentages of foreign-nationals, do not have high numbers of IO MPs. However, it is important to highlight that in Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom using the percentages of foreign-nationals – used here for comparability purposes due to data availability constraints on foreign-born populations – masks a considerable amount of naturalised citizens of immigrant origin, and furthermore masks their immediate descendants who are also part of our subpopulation of interest. Thus, the representation gaps portrayed in Figure 2 are much larger for these countries once this fact is taken into account.
Socio-demographic and partisan profiles of IO MPs: how do they compare with non-IO MPs

How different, if at all, are IO MPs from other MPs? Are they more likely to be women, younger, more highly educated and from left-wing parties, as is often assumed? Figure 3 shows that the gender profile of IO MPs varies considerably across countries. It also shows how this distribution by gender differs from MPs without immigrant background.

For example, whereas in Belgium and Spain IO MPs are more likely to be women, in Greece they are in fact less likely to be women. Equally, while there are no substantial differences in the gender profile of IO and non-IO MPs in Germany and the UK, in France, Italy and the Netherlands we find fluctuating patterns over the two time points for which we can present data thus far. This suggests there are interesting national differences in the gender dimension of political recruitment of citizens of immigrant origin into European parliaments that require further investigation.

Cross-national variation is also evident in the extent to which IO MPs tend to be younger than non-IO MPs (see Table 1). IO MPs are noticeably younger in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands, but not so in Spain, France, Italy and the UK. They are noticeably older in Greece. Again, we do not observe a uniform pattern across all eight countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Term start</th>
<th>Non-IO MPs</th>
<th>IO MPs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BE</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>37.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>42.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>41.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>60.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jun-12</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>63.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FR</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>52.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>54.9</td>
<td>54.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>51.1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>47.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>NL</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>38.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2010</td>
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<td>41.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>49.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>47.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Average age at start of term by IO status
How much do IO MPs differ from other MPs in their educational attainment varies across the countries in our sample. As we can see from Figure 4, in most countries IO MPs are somewhat more likely to have a university degree, except in Belgium and Germany where they are less likely to do so.

Overall however our data suggests that a high level of formal education is a major condition for candidates to reach national elected office in all countries, regardless of migrant background. This may be one of the reasons for lower levels of political recruitment of IO representatives in some of our countries, as recent immigrants to Northern and Western Europe have in general held lower levels of educational attainment than the average in their respective countries of settlement. Variations in the extent to which educational systems have been open for the descendants of immigrants are likely to be one explanatory factor for differences in political recruitment.

To conclude this section on the profile of IO MPs, Figure 5 examines whether the frequently assumed greater permeability of centre-left parties to candidates of IO is supported by our comparative data. Indeed, while in most countries IO MPs are generally more likely to get elected as candidates of a left-wing or centre-left party, this pattern is not universal.

IO MPs are much more likely to gain a seat representing a left-wing or centre-left party in Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Yet, in France, Greece and Italy this pattern is visible only for some parliamentary terms. In Spain, by contrast, IO MPs are more likely to be elected with centre-right parties.

This suggests that party ideology interacts with other features of national party organisations or properties of the national party systems in leading to higher or lower representation of citizens of immigrant origin.
In legislatures, political parties delegate power to individual MPs entrusting them with roles that heighten their importance in the chamber. One instance of this is membership of legislative committees. IO MPs fare slightly worse in gaining access to committee membership. On average, only 82% of IO MPs are members of committees compared with 86% of non-IO MPs. There are important differences across countries in terms of the assignment of IO MPs to committees dealing with migration-relevant policies. In Germany, for example, we find more IO MPs assigned to such committees. By contrast, IO MPs do not play as strong a role in migration-related committees in Spain.

The parliamentary party groups also offer positions of increased parliamentary influence. Such positions include the parliamentary party leadership, the role of party spokespersons in particular policy areas and of party whip. Beyond policy influence, such positions may offer highly symbolic prizes and, in some cases, financial perks. Figure 7 provides some first information on how MPs with an immigrant background fare in comparison with MPs without such

**Political experience of IO MPs**

What type of political experience do IO MPs bring to their respective parliament? Overall, IO MPs are somewhat less likely than the rest of their colleagues to hold a leadership position in their national party organisation — such as membership of the national executive committee or other national party leadership positions — but the difference between the percentages here is relatively small (14% vs. 18%). As with previous aspects analysed, cross-country variations are considerable as we find reverse patterns for some countries and/or years: IO MPs are more likely to hold national party leadership positions in Greece and Spain, and for some years in France, Germany and Italy. This pattern of more reduced political experience of IO MPs prior to their election also extends to having held elected local or regional office. Overall, around 45% of IO MPs have held such office compared to 57% of MPs without immigrant background. Although there are some (few) exceptions for France and Spain in certain parliamentary terms, this seems to be a more general pattern.

Equally, as we might expect from their younger mean age, IO MPs have been sitting in parliament on average for fewer years than non-IO MPs: 7.1 years as opposed to 8.6. Again, however, we find considerable variation across countries in this respect. In fact, in France, Greece, Italy and Spain IO MPs have held their seats in parliament on average for a greater number of years than non-IO MPs (see Figure 6). These results suggest that age and pre-parliamentary political experience need to be analysed separately. For example, in the Spanish parliament elected in 2008, in the French parliament elected in 2007 and in the British parliament elected in 2005, there are hardly any differences between IO and non-IO MPs in terms of their average age but considerable differences in their pre-parliamentary experience.

**IO MPs in committees and leadership bodies**

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background. Overall, IO MPs are less likely to be appointed to parliamentary leadership positions compared with the rest of their colleagues. There are important differences across countries, however. First, in Belgium and in Italy, political parties did not assign leadership positions to IO MPs at all. In Spain, in the 2008 legislature IO MPs had higher assignment rates to leadership positions compared with non-IO MPs. However, the low overall number of IO MPs may explain the high percentages of leadership positions occupied in this case. In Germany, France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, non-IO MPs fare relatively better in accessing leadership positions. In the latter country, on average, 42% of non-IO MPs are selected for leadership positions in contrast to only 36% of IO MPs.

The reduced opportunities for IO MPs to access parliamentary party leadership positions in the parliaments studied thus far has implications for the policy influence of minority MPs, but may be a result of the lower levels of parliamentary experience MPs of immigrant origin have in some countries.

The UK – one of the leaders in parliamentary representation of immigrant-origin communities

Westminster is among the parliaments most representative of the growing immigrant-origin population in our study of eight European parliaments with around 11% of Westminster MPs being of immigrant origin. The other country leading on this dimension of representation is the Netherlands, with around 12% MPs being of immigrant origin. Although the British figures narrowly misses the Census estimates of 13% of population born abroad, these Census figures do not cover the British-born children of immigrants, thus still creating a significant shortfall.

The findings indicate that the direct descendants of immigrants (second generation), born in the UK, are more likely to be represented than first-generation immigrants. Nevertheless, over 3% of British IO MPs in the Parliaments elected in 2005 and 2010 were born abroad. While in the past those visibly from an immigrant background – either due to their appearance or by dint of having a foreign name – were less represented than those who were not visibly of immigrant origin, this gap has all but closed in the 2010 Parliament. Within the category of MPs of visible immigrant origin, ethnic minority MPs are still under-represented.

The Labour Party has had a historical lead on the presence of IO MPs in UK parliaments. This gap however has been closing in recent electoral cycles, with the Conservative Party significantly increasing the number of IO MPs and MPs with ethnic-minority backgrounds on their benches.