

**IMMIGRANTS AND POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION – BACKGROUND,
THEORY, AND EMPIRICAL
SUGGESTIONS**

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2 Introduction

This paper will give a brief presentation of the issue of political participation. In particular, it offers an overview of ‘political participation’ in relation to immigrants.¹

We shall start with some ‘Historic notes’, followed by a ‘Theoretical definition of political participation’. Thereafter we will move to: ‘Why do people vote? General theory of political participation – an overview’. Next, we will move over to issues regarding ‘Why do immigrants vote? Political participation among immigrants – an overview’. This paragraph will furthermore be divided into two parts: ‘Explanations exclusively referring to immigrants’ political participation’, followed by ‘Explanations jointly referring to natives and immigrants’. ‘Apathy, Adaptation, or Ethnic Mobilisation?’ will thereafter raise some issues within the important theme of ‘ethnicity’.

Then, we shall move over to ‘Methodological problems related to political participation among immigrants’ – such as misleading data, statistical gaps and false conclusions. ‘Political participation among immigrants – some empirical observations’ addresses a few examples on a local, practical level that has, arguably, managed to enhance immigrants’ political participation. Subsequently, ‘Common denominator in official statistics in the Member states – two suggestions’ will sum up the above findings. Addressing a small number of WebPages, ‘Recommended sources for data’ will, finally, indicate where to look for reliable information within this most urgent field of policy.

¹ ‘Immigrant’ will here be defined ‘as a person who migrates to a country and then actually resides there longer than a short period of time, i.e. for more than three months.’ Thomas Hammar, (ed.), *European immigration policy – A comparative study*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 11

The theory of ‘political participation’ is the subject of a range of competing interpretations. It is the wish of the author that the following presentation does not appear partial or overly subjectivist. Still, as pointed out by Max Weber, being objective does not necessarily mean being impartial or neutral.

Also, within the area of an often heated debate, it is particularly desirable to steer away from simplifications, and aim at presenting the material in an as balanced fashion as possible.

3 Historic notes

In November 2000 the EU Commission held a meeting, and began a debate on a common European immigration and integration policy. It was needed, one felt, to recognise the importance of the issue, and start discussing measures with which an increased participation among immigrants within their 'host' societies – culturally, socially, and – last but not least – politically, could be hoped for. The reasons for this policy are evident. This foreign-origin population has legitimate needs, demands, rights and duties with respect to (..) 'host societies'. These needs are legitimate because they have contributed much through their labour, taxes, commercial services, participation in schools and neighbourhoods, and by enriching urban cultural landscapes. However, in every country of Europe immigrants and ethnic minorities have suffered disproportionately from a variety of forms of exclusion. As a result, they are often to be found among the worst social-economic circumstances of all of Europe's inhabitants.

The observation that political participation among immigrants within the European Union has declined over the last few decades can hardly, as such, cause attention. Shrinking voting figures is haunting the entire Western Hemisphere. The striking thing is, however, the differences in between the two groups. Without ignoring the problem as whole, the drop in turnout among natives has still been fairly modest. In Sweden, as an example, the decline of the entire population in local elections went down from 90 per cent to 84 percent between 1976 and 1994.² Over the same period of time, political participation (i.e. voting) among immigrants has decreased from 60 per cent to on average 40 per cent. In other words, the alarming decline has been some 33 per cent among immigrants, as opposed to a mere 7 per cent among native Swedes.³

These disquieting figures have moreover been accompanied by a drastic increase in the number of non-EU immigrants within the community. In 2001 estimates of the number of non-EU nationals resident in EU

² The difference in voter turnout decline between 'natives' and 'immigrants' would arguably be slightly larger still, as various immigrant groups in the table is compared to 'the whole population', where immigrants, one should expect, are included.

³ Magnus Dahlstedt, *Politiskt deltagande och icke-deltagande; Om det politiska livets etniska delning i dagens mångkulturella Sverige* (Political participation and non-participation: About the division of political life in current Sweden.), Umeå: PjMI, 1999, p. 15

Figures from 1998 show that the declining trend among Swedish immigrants continues, making the need for political measures more urgent, still. (Magnus Dahlstedt, *Politiskt deltagande och icke-deltagande; Om det politiska livets etniska delning i dagens mångkulturella Sverige*, Umeå PjMI, 1999, p. 57)

countries ranged between 15 and 17.5 million, thus consisting, notably, over 4 per cent of the EU population. The 'foreign' population was thus equivalent to the figures of London and Paris together, outnumbering ten of the fifteen EU member states.⁴ Furthermore, change of figures is, as always, a matter of particular importance. Thus, one should observe that 'in 1996, immigrants accounted for three-quarters of the population growth of the EU, whose countries generally possess low birth rates. By some estimates the EU will need to admit 50 to 70 million newcomers by 2050 to counteract the declining and ageing population.'⁵

What reasons could, then, help to explain the troublesome decline of immigrants' political participation over the last few decades? The brevity of the present paper forces us to limit the description below to some general suggestions.

An important difference in the patterns of immigration over the last few decades is the very cause of the immigration in the first place. Whereas the immigrant in the 1970s in most cases were not only expected but *desired*, the present day immigrant is generally a refugee.⁶ Of course, this very fact suffice in partly explaining a decreasing interest in political participation. Anyone who has a job, a decent income, colleagues at work and a political environment, is no doubt likely to show a greater political interest, than the typical immigrant of the late 1990s; unemployed, financially weak, and socially fragile.

This general change from pull-led 'work-force' immigration, over to that of a 'push'-led refugee nature entails other important aspects. Whereas the immigrant not so long ago instantly achieved an occupation and settled down for good, present day immigrant has less opportunities. Thus, rather than moving *towards*, for instance, the Netherlands, current day *immigrants* would more justifiably be described as *emigrants* from

⁴ Alasdair Rogers et al, 'Introduction: Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities', in Alasdair Rogers, Jean Tillie (eds), *Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities*, Burlington: Ashgate, 2001, p. 1

⁵ Alasdair Rogers, (et al), 'Introduction: Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities', in Alasdair Rogers, Jean Tillie (eds), *Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities*, Burlington: Ashgate, 2001, p. 1

Whatever Jörg Haider might argue, the low birth rate in Austria and elsewhere cannot simply be countered by adapting a policy which would be more 'friendly towards children' ('Kinderfreundlichkeit'). The structural causes run deeper than that. Indeed, in parts of Germany, the current state – or non-state – of reproduction might lead to the closing of entire areas.

⁶ Due to current birth rates within the EU region, a reborn interest in a systematic 'pull-led-immigration might return sooner than expected. In Scandinavia these issues of the early 70s are returning on the political agenda.

their native country. One may argue that the whole notion of *immigration* fundamentally rests upon a view of migration that appropriately reflected realities in the 1960s and the 1970s. At present, however, the whole concept of *immigration* seriously distorts the whole picture. Given the fact that the notion of work-force immigration lately have been forced to leave the centre of the stage for the benefit of the expatriate, it might seem puzzling that the notion of ‘the émigré’, and ‘emigration’ has not gained a wider influence. Consequently, the fundamental status as exiles of those new EU-citizens from the 1980s onwards naturally means that they would be happy to return to their country of origin, if only the situation changes.⁷ Obviously, one easily understands that only the slightest uncertainty about one’s permanent future in the new environment in combination with the scantiest option for positive changes in one’s native country might have a distinctly negative impact upon the likelihood of political participation, as well as other forms of interest in the ‘host’ country, for that matter.⁸

The general recent changing composition of immigration from ‘work-force’ to ‘refugees’ also has a gender aspect. ‘While the number of single, male immigrants has decreased, mainly because of the policy change that occurred at the turning point (around 1974 when the pull-led immigration slowly gave way to one of a push-led nature)⁹, the immigration of refugees and the dependants of resident aliens have increased.’¹⁰ Thus, an increasing amount of female and dependant immigrants might have contributed in a general decrease of immigrant’s turnout.

The case of language is a rather peculiar phenomenon within the history of immigrant’s political participation. Naturally, it cannot be over-looked. Still, lately this matter-of-fact has often been acknowledged with a kind of

⁷ Having taught asylum seekers for a few years, I know that, for instance, a considerable percentage of Iraqi refugees would be happy to return, if only democracy be safely installed.

⁸ According to the sources of this survey, it is unclear whether originating from a dictatorship per se would enhance political awareness, and, consequently, the likelihood for political participation. True, this would indeed be correct with regards to certain activist strata of asylum seekers in the EU. However, these immigrants would arguably constitute an educated minority, predominantly to be found within students in major cities. For the majority of asylum seekers from non-democracies, their origins would, as will be discussed further below, rather hamper than foster political participation.

Therefore, the fact that dictatorships (along with the ‘refugee’) would be a more common native country today as compared to the 70s would contribute to the general decline in voting figures among immigrants within the European Union.

⁹ Turning point: a stage around 1974, when the systematic pull-led immigration was gradually brought to a halt.

¹⁰ Thomas Hammar (ed.), *European immigration policy- A comparative study*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 6

unease. The reason would, one might suspect, be its largely unfair reputation as a means of dominance, exclusion, or even outright racism. On the other hand, as being only one among a great variety of distinct cultural aspects within any community, the urgent case of language *must always* be treated with caution. If not, those above – and, worth reiterating, generally exaggerated allegations – about an implicitly oppressive and imperialist nature of host language, will indeed come true.

Still, language *is* important. A considerable part of immigrants into England were not long ago of Irish origin. Similarly, unlike previous immigration waves, ‘Many immigrants (in Spain) are (no longer) fluent in Spanish or Catalan language.’¹¹ Hence, it would not be far-fetched to assume that this increasing language barrier has had a negative impact on immigrants’ prospect to integrate into the new community, including their likelihood to participate in public elections.

As a final plausible cause for the shrinking political participation among immigrants, the recent dismantling of the trade union – as a mere detail in a wider picture of Neo-liberalism – might, as will be later returned to, add to the picture.

4 Theoretical definition of political participation

Alike any concept within the social sciences, the interpretation of ‘political participation’ is also an undecided matter. There are good reasons for adopting the view upon ‘political participation’ as a joint concept covering ‘voting’, ‘nomination’, ‘representation’ in the public’. Judging from a number of key sources within the field, this also appears to be the most common view. As argued by Sidney Verba in his classic *Participation and political equality – a seven nation comparison* of 1978: ‘By political participation we refer to those legal acts by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions that they take’.¹²

¹¹ Ricard Morén-Alegret, ‘Tuning the Channels: Local Government Policies and Immigrant’s Participation in Barcelona’, in Alasdair Rogers, Jean Tillie (eds), *Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities*, Ashgate, Burlington USA, 2001, p. 82

¹² Sidney Verba, *Participation and Political Equality, a seven nation comparison*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, p. 46

The definition of ‘political participation’ as suggested by Margaret Conway: ‘those activities of citizens that attempt to influence the structure of government,

However, others argue that confining ‘political participation’ within these limits excludes a wide variety of activities that certainly must be seen as political participation. ‘Current research, Daiva K. Stasiulis maintains, has seriously limited the understanding of minority politics by adopting a definition of political participation that is confined to electoral politics and the official politics of the state.’¹³ Some even argue that the participating in political marches, Green Peace activism, hunger strikes, and the printing of ideological journals expresses an incomparably starker ‘political participation’ than ‘the easier act of voting’¹⁴

Still, Stasiulis’ perception of a ‘current research’ that regrettably ignores a wide variety of ‘political participation’ appears overly pessimistic. As a matter of fact, the ‘classic’ definition of ‘political participation’, as laid forward by Sidney Verba and others, is at present the subject of an increasing amount of critique. Among politicians and academics, the concept of ‘ethnicity’ – i.e. mainly focussing the needs of one’s own ethnic group – has meant a serious blow to citizenship, and, consequently, to the idea of ‘political participation’ as defined above. Generally, too, lately the very idea of ‘political participation’ within a parliamentary system has been the subject of growing critique by protagonists of *direct democracy*, stemming, notably, not only from the populist fringes of democracy, but also, worth stressing, from its decent waters.

Thus, the notion of ‘political participation’ seems to have gone through a slight conceptual change; from a rather unequivocal notion focused around the ballot and the act of voting towards a somewhat more complex notion, where the rather ‘exclusive’ definition above omits vital elements of current day political participation.¹⁵

the selection of government authorities, or the policies of government’, is but one of many surprisingly reminiscent of Verba’s definition above, suggesting somewhat of a conceptual consensus. (Margaret M. Conway, *Political participation in the United States*, Washington: CQ Press, 1985, p. 2)

¹³ http://canada.metropolis.net/events/civic/dstasiulis_e.html, Daiva K., Stasiulis, *Participation by Immigrants, Ethnocultural/visible Minorities in the Canadian Political Process*, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Carleton University

¹⁴ Sidney Verba, *Participation and Political Equality, a seven nation comparison*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, p. 256

¹⁵ The undecided connection in between voting figures and political interest offers another problem associated with the traditional notion of ‘political participation’. For decades, Austrian voting figures caused envy among foreign observers. However, the Kafkaesque nature of Austrian politics was revealed by a ‘combination of high voting figures and political apathy.’ Göran Adamson, ‘Austrian Corporatism – an overview’, in *The sudden post-86 rise of the Austrian Freedom Party, the story of a democratic failure*, unpublished manuscript, p. 88

One should mention that any purported definition of ‘political participation’ rests heavily upon one or another ideological foundation. A defence of, for instance, the ‘traditional’ model of political participation is generally being laid forward by parties within the non-social democratic sphere. Citizens should be trusted to vote, and the Parliament should be trusted to function. In contrast, demanding the inclusion within the sphere of ‘political participation’ of non-parliamentary action such as strikes and demonstrations signifies, generally, the opposite, socialist camp, where these actions might seem worthy of pursuing.

Despite these various definitions, ‘political participation’ will, in the following presentation, merely signify the act of voting and parliamentary participation.

5 Why do people vote? General theory of political participation – an overview

Moving away from the abstract debate concerning the inner nature of political participation, we shall now turn over to political practicalities, and ask, Why do people vote? And why don’t they?

Before sketching some factors at present perceived as important, let us first indicate a recent conceptual change. Similarly as above, where the abstract concept of ‘political participation’ over the last decades has broadened somewhat, the general explanation of the act of voting has also been the subject of slightly altered interpretations. One central line of conceptual transformation leads, briefly speaking, from psychology to structure, or, in other words, from the individual to the group.

A few decades back ‘political participation’ was frequently associated with individual convictions and motivations. Sidney Verba stresses the fact that ‘individual motivation’ to political participation does not ‘involve preferences for politics beneficial to some group of which one is a member.’¹⁶ Whereas politics within the EU and the western community at present increasingly is being influenced by pressure groups, lobbies,

Indeed, as pointed out by Sidney Verba, shifting focus from the mere act of voting to contacting a local politician on a personal matter, the Netherlands would be on top. Austria, on the other hand, dropped considerably, positioning itself roughly on par with India.

(Sidney Verba, *Participation and Political Equality, a seven nation comparison*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, p. 61)

¹⁶ Sidney Verba, *Participation and Political Equality, a seven nation comparison*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, p. 11

ethnic minorities, gender and other forms of 'issue politics', political participation were not long ago, according to the author, seen as 'issue-neutral', in other words stemming out of 'civic attitudes',¹⁷ or a 'sense of Civic obligation',¹⁸ including the duty to vote.

Hence, one may address the intricate relation between 'individual motivation,' 'group-based motivation' and 'civic obligation'. Whereas the former and the latter are connected by an individuals 'issue-neutral' sense of duty to vote, group-based motivation allows for an out-spoken issue-politics (such as 'ethnic policy'), questioning the idealistic (and republican) notion of 'civic duties' and, some say, widens the scope for political action. It should also be observed that 'issue-politics' often harbours a certain distrust of what is perceived as 'the elite'; thus explicitly confining – and redefining – a sense of 'communal obligation' to one's own ethnic group.¹⁹

But now we need to take one step back, as Verba's definition fails to explain why an 'individual motivation' for political participation might be at work in the first place. What, then, allows for it? In *Political Participation – How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics?* Lester W. Milbrath suggests four situations, that 'afford considerable 'scope' for personality to affect behaviour:

- Situations where reference groups have politically conflicting points of view.
- Situations at the focus of conflicting propaganda.
- Current situations which for any individual are in conflict with previous experience.
- Situations where social roles are ambiguous, strange and unfamiliar.²⁰

As opposed to analyses a few decades back, current discussions regarding political participation rarely lay particular emphasis on the issue of

¹⁷ Sidney Verba, *Participation and Political Equality, a seven nation comparison*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, p. 11

¹⁸ Lester W. Milbrath and M. L. Goel, *Political participation, How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics?*, New York: University Press of America, 1977, p. 49

¹⁹ As noted by Anne Phillips among others, this argument is not quite convincing. On the idea of a 'slippery slope', whereby any demands of special political recognition of any homogenous, hitherto neglected social group cannot escape the fracturing tendencies from any demands from yet smaller, yet more praiseworthy social groups, see, for instance: Anne Phillips, *The Politics of Presence, The Political Representation of Gender, Ethnicity, and Race*, Oxford: Clarendon, 2003, p. 46

²⁰ Lester W. Milbrath and M. L. Goel, *Political participation, How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics?*, New York: University Press of America, 1977, p. 74

‘individual motivation’. Indeed, if they do, these discussions often describe a persistent focus upon individual causes for political participation as an indication of a fairly unsophisticated and somewhat obsolete methodological perspective. Instead, ‘group based motivation’ – i.e. political participation as a function of one’s adherence to an economic, ethnic, linguistic, religious or other social sphere – has emerged at the forefront.²¹

True, one easily senses a certain antagonism in between these two fundamental approaches upon political participation. However, this need not be. One person trying to quit smoking surely concerns ‘individual motivation’. On the other hand, productive answers to larger issues, such as the positive correlation between working class women and smoking are more likely to be obtained on the level of ‘social groups’.

Now, having suggested a thematic trend over time, we shall briefly describe some present day key explanations to political participation. Within the range of ‘group-based motivation’ above, academic research often refers to the *Theory of socio-economic status*, or short, *SES*. As a general observation, Lester W. Milbrath points out that *SES* ‘is positively related to conventional and unconventional political participation’,²² and William Mishler and Harold Clarke argues that ‘social status’ and socio-economic factors (..) are the principal forces structuring participation’.²³

The theory of *SES* assigns special attention to three different variables: education, income, and occupation.²⁴ Again, the relationship in between each of these and political participation is positive. Therefore, an increase in any of them will statistically increase the likelihood for political participation. More interesting is, however, the fact that the correlation between any single one of these three factors upon the predisposition for political participation varies rather considerably.²⁵

²¹ Sidney Verba, *Participation and Political Equality, a seven nation comparison*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, p. 11

²² Lester W. Milbrath and M. L. Goel, *Political participation, How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics?*, New York: University Press of America, 1977, p. 120

²³ William Mishler and Harold D. Clarke, ‘Political Participation in Canada.’ in Michael S. Whittington and Glen Williams (eds) *Canadian Politics in the 1990s*, Toronto: Nelson, 1995, p. 129

²⁴ The limited amount of pages of this background paper does not allow us to enter into other plausible variables within *SES*, such as ‘Accommodation’.

²⁵ Without going into technicalities, a correlation analysis simply compares data from variable X with data from variable Y. We could, as an example, compare the data from the variable ‘income’, with data from the variable ‘political participation’; ending up with, for instance, an 80% correlation, or co-variation, of the two datasets/graphs. That would mean that 20% of ‘political participation’ has no connection with ‘income’ whatsoever, but stays inside of the unresolved ‘black box’, or *residual*. The remaining 80% do have one or

In order to clarify relations within the social sciences, the German sociologist Max Weber often made quite conscious exaggerations. In his own wording these sociological caricatures were labelled ‘ideal types’. Deploying these ‘ideal types’ upon our *Theory of Socio-Economic Status*, we might perceive of someone who is highly privileged in all of the three categories above. According to the theory of socio-economic status, this person would most certainly vote.

But suppose only one of the envious features above would remain, whereas the other two parameters rather would loom at the other, unfortunate end of the scale. We might, with some effort, imagine a dustbin man with a doctor’s degree, an unemployed billionaire without compulsory school, and a (considerably) underpaid chairman without any education whatsoever.²⁶ Which one(s) of these would still, probably, vote, and which one(s) would, plausibly, not? Indeed, one may pause and ponder about it. Surely income would be on top! If you are poor, you would not care about politics, would you? After all, the theme song in Bertold Brecht’s *Dreigroschenoper* sarcastically declares: ‘Erst das Fressen, dann kommt die Morale’. Or perhaps occupation decided the issue. A well-respected job would certainly call for a greater interest in the polls than someone who, as it were, merely brings in the bacon.

According to academic research within the *SES* framework, however, neither of these two factors is of primary importance. Instead, *level of education* has the greatest impact upon voting figures. ‘Education, in the words of Margaret Conway, is the most important component of socio-economic status in influencing political participation.’²⁷ Thus, whereas the eccentric dustbin man most certainly would vote, the billionaire and chairman above would, possibly, fail to do so. True, ‘within each level of educational attainment, those who have higher incomes tend to participate

another correlation. Precisely *what* kind of correlation this might be, we do not as yet know. True, income might indeed affect political participation. However, the correlation could also be the other way around, or, worse still, of a ‘nonsense character’, i.e. originating from a whole different source altogether.

Then, one can add one further variable on top of the previous ones.

Suppose the addition of ‘education’ on top of the correlation above would sum up to 84%. That would mean that the explanatory strength of ‘education’ would be comparatively weak. The difference between the dataset/graph of ‘income’ and the joint datasets/graphs of ‘income’ *and* ‘education’ in relation to the dataset/graph of political participation would be a mere 4%. Thus, for all practical purposes, one could justifiably say that whereas income strongly affects voting, education does not.

²⁶ To be sure, whereas high level of education easily can be combined with low wages and an unfulfilling occupation, the perceiving of a low paid chairman is hard to imagine outside the scope of this ‘ideal type’ illustration.

²⁷ Margaret M. Conway, *Political participation in the United States*, Washington: CQ Press, 1985, p. 20

more'. Notably, however, 'the differences are small.'²⁸ The same goes for the variable of occupation that fails to add much to the aggregated impact upon political participation by education: 'Once differences in political participation attributable to education have been taken into account, very few effects of occupation remain.'²⁹

Again, leaning towards Weber's methodological simplifications, political participation is, according to the *Theory of Socio-Economic Status*, but on the margin affected by income or occupation. As a matter of fact, the graph of political participation corresponds, it is being argued, rather closely with the graph of education. Hence, a decent estimation of the probability of political participation can be achieved through an exclusive analysis of the length of education.³⁰

Figure 1. Ideal type correlation between education and political participation

²⁸ Margaret M. Conway, *Political participation in the United States*, Washington: CQ Press, 1985, p. 22

The positive correlation between education and income is, simply, no longer what it used to be.

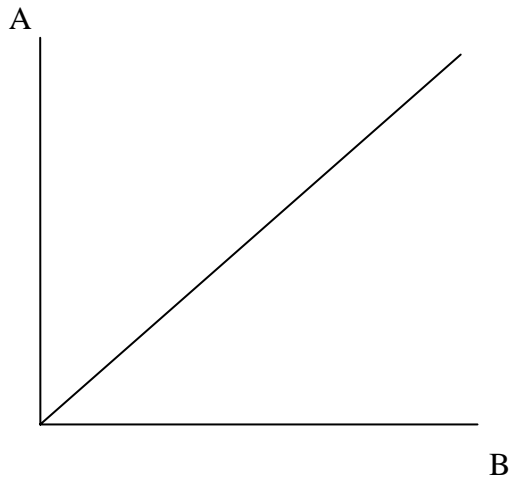
The decrease of this correlation is possibly also stronger still within the EU region than in the US.

By all means, starvation rarely paves the way for ideological reflection. Lester W. Milbrath illustrates the realities on the far end of the economic scale: 'Those at the bottom of the economic ladder are least likely to protest, as most of their time and energy is consumed in eking out a living. In a 'Milwaukee survey the mean income for black protestors was \$6,790 as compared with \$6,300 for non-protestors. (Lester W. Milbrath, M. L. Goel, *Political participation, How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics?*, New York: University Press of America, 1977, p. 96)

On the other hand, precisely low income might justifiably indicate an intellectual choice, where material aspects have been pushed aside for the benefit of 'existential' values, such as the importance of voting and a political awareness in general.

²⁹ Margaret M. Conway, *Political participation in the United States*, Washington: CQ Press, 1985, p. 23

³⁰ There are of course different reasons as to why, as opposed to occupation and income, the level of education has a considerably greater impact on the likelihood of political participation. One reason might be the fact that education as such could be seen as a more 'political decision'. The two other parameters may, in this respect, be regarded as more based upon individual interest. Another plausible reason for the supremacy of education might be due to the fact that sheer lack of education also would entail a lack of knowledge in the existence of politics in the first place. Low income and a low status occupation would not, in contrast, necessarily imply a lack of political awareness. In contrast, with reference to levels of income and occupation, political parties abound. In a sense, low level of income might indeed, if anything, cause for a greater interest in political participation than anyone on the other, fortunate end of the scale, whose privileged whereabouts in contrast may suggest a (neo-liberal) dismantling of the political endeavour altogether.



A: Likelihood for political participation; B: Level of education

Two of the parameters within the theory of *SES*, namely income and occupation, generally require a life within urban surroundings. This leads over to another issue of controversy within the field of political participation. The question is: What kind of social context is most likely to foster political participation? The city, or the smaller community?³¹

The first explanation, generally referred to as ‘The Mobilisation Model’, predicts more political activity in urban than in rural settings. ‘Persons close to the centre occupy an environmental position which naturally links them into the communication network involved in policy decisions for the society.’³² These circumstances are also important among children, who, in an urban milieu, ‘are more likely to develop personalities, beliefs, and attitudes facilitating their entry into politics.’³³

According to the opposing view labelled ‘Decline-of-community model’, the conclusions above express mere wishful thinking. Instead, political participation is rather likely to decline ‘as one move from the smallness and intimacy of town or village to the massive impersonality of the city.

³¹ At heart, this debate presents two opposing perception to the theory of *modernisation* – the pessimistic versus the optimistic.

³² Sidney Verba, *Participation and Political Equality, a seven nation comparison*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, p. 270

³³ Mattei Dogan, ‘Political Ascent in a Class Society: French Deputies 1870-1958’, in Dwaine Marvick (ed.), *Political Decision-Makers*, Glencoe: The Free Press, 1961, p. 57–90, in Lester W. Milbrath, M. L. Goel, *Political participation, How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics?*, New York: University Press of America, 1977, p. 90

In the small town, the community is of a manageable size. Citizens can know the roles of politics, know whom to contact, know each other so that they can form political groups. In the larger units, politics is more complicated, impersonal and distant.³⁴

Moreover, according to the 'Decline-of-community model', this 'modernisation' 'shatters political units'. Once self-sustaining towns and villages, 'relatively independent [and] providing the individual with the social, economic, political and cultural services that he needs'³⁵ are being degraded into 'suburbs' for 'commuters'.³⁶ Thus, the social fabric, the ties and mutual trust that once held political life together are lost, never to return.

Empirically, some evidence would seem to support 'the decline-of-community model'. Urbanisation of recent times, which merely is the decline of community in other terms, has *not* been accompanied with an increase in political participation, but, indeed, with a *decline*.³⁷ Rather than paving the way for political awareness and participation, cities might truly foster a commercial life-style, leading to political passivity and a populist perception, barely hidden behind veil of scepticism. The idea of 'the community' is however, as we all know, not politically innocent. Apart from its inherent vicious seeds of intolerance and outright Fascism, it is far from certain if its tendencies towards – again! – populism and anti-intellectualism allow for free and diverse political participation in the first place.

Summing up, conclusive results seem absent. In one of the most comprehensive analyses of the relationship between size and democracy, adding together the entire literature on community and voting, Robert Dahl and Edward Tufte state: 'Within countries, among local units of the

³⁴ Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, *Participation in America, Social Equality and Political Democracy*, New York: Harper & Roe, 1972, p. 231, in Sidney Verba, *Participation and Political Equality, a seven nation comparison*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, p. 270

³⁵ Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, *Participation in America, Social Equality and Political Democracy*, New York: Harper & Roe, 1972, p. 231, in Sidney Verba, *Participation and Political Equality, a seven nation comparison*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, p. 271

³⁶ Also, the increasing range of complexity widens the gap in between politics and the ordinary citizen.

³⁷ One must of course be cautious with statistics. Urbanisation *might indeed* have contributed to political participation, the benevolent effects of which, however, have been off-set by other unfavourable factors beyond the pale of this brief overview.

same legal type, there is no general relationship between turnout and unit size.³⁸

This lack of conclusive evidence in any direction furthermore supports the weak correspondence between political participation and income within the Theory of *SES* above. If income indeed had been vital for political participation, then, rural areas, often lower on wages, would, one should assume, exhibit meagre figures of political participation, which is apparently not the case.

As was observed, the rural-urban dichotomy failed to suggest any systematic correlation regarding political participation with respect to citizens in general. Nor would it, one would assume, regarding immigrants in particular. Therefore, we shall further down, as we discuss immigrant turnout, notice another geographical dichotomy, namely the distinction between the city and the suburb. Whereas it might not necessarily give evidence in either direction concerning the theme of this paper, it is still of more current interest than the issue of countryside versus city.

It should be observed that 'Flow of propaganda', another suggested factor affecting the level of political participation, easily can be placed within the rural/urban dichotomy. Within the border of a traditional community, political advertising is less important than in the big cities. By all means, some scattered bits of evidence do suggest that the heavier the flow of propaganda, the higher the voting turnout.³⁹ Of course, if one starts from the bottom (no campaign propaganda at all), succeeding increments of propaganda cannot fail to produce some increase in the propensity to vote. But surely, this cannot go on indefinitely. According to the marginal rate of utility sandwich number one has a greater value than sandwich number two. Eventually, at one point the marginal rate of an additional sandwich will be negative. Similarly, there is inevitably a saturation point beyond which additional propaganda no longer has any effect; where, indeed, the mass of propaganda could become so heavy as to offend citizens, thus driving them away from the polls instead of attracting them.⁴⁰

³⁸ Robert Dahl and Edward R. Tufte, *Size and Democracy*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1973, in Sidney Verba, *Participation and Political Equality, a seven nation comparison*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1978, p. 271

³⁹ Pertti Pesonen, 'Citizen Participation in Finnish Politics,' paper prepared for the Fifth World Congress of the International Political Science Association, Paris, September, 1961, in Lester W Milbrath, M. L. Goel, *Political participation, How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics?*, New York: University Press of America, 1977, p. 141

⁴⁰ Worth adding, this discussion fails to address the important distinction between political *propaganda* and political information. Of course, any policy that endeavours to

It should be noticed that none of the suggested causes for political participation above deal with the content of politics. However, attempts have recently been made in order to explain the current gloomy trend within political participation in the EU region as a consequence of present political ideology, more specifically its alleged right-wing shift.⁴¹ Still, a rightist transformation of the political spectrum would not as such suffice to explain a shrinking political participation. Rather, this would arguably be due to certain fundamental underlying ideas within the political philosophy of the right, such as ‘consensus’, ‘co-operation’ – all of which suggests unanimity and mutual understanding.⁴² Surely, vague borders between political alternatives would, on the margin, lower public interest in political participation.⁴³ This observation is supported by Angus Campbell, to whom ‘clear differences between alternatives’ are vital for political participation among the public.’⁴⁴ Narrowing focus, Stein Rokkan and Henry Valen adds that clarity ‘of alternatives seems especially important in mobilising citizens who usually stand on the periphery of politics and do not participate.’⁴⁵

We might conclude this brief overview on the general theory on political participation with the observation that turnout, in addition to a decent *distance* in between political ideologies, further, in contrast, would be

dwell within a community of enlightened and independent citizens must surely consider whether one should allow for political propaganda at all.

⁴¹ Magnus Dahlstedt, *Politiskt deltagande och icke-deltagande; Om det politiska livets etniska delning i dagens mångetniska Sverige*, Umeå: PFMi, 1999, p. 118

⁴² One might argue that present-day persistent focus on ‘co-operation’ as such does not seem utterly different from the abstract dogmatism of ‘conflict’ within yesterday’s Marxism.

⁴³ To be sure, political chasms between left and right would not disappear only because the idea of ‘consensus’ becomes fashionable. Nevertheless, the ‘cost’ of detecting these differences would still increase, which, naturally, again, on the margin would make it a greater effort to vote, consequently reducing voting figures. Donald R. Matthews and James W. Prothro, ‘Southern Racial Attitudes: conflict Awareness, and Political Change’, in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 344: 108–121, in Lester W. Milbrath and M. L. Goel, *Political participation, How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics?*, New York: University Press of America, 1977, p. 140

Thus, the political theory of ‘neo-liberalism’ can be seen as elitist in more than one respect, as it excludes in particular those to whom the political game seem distant in the first place.

⁴⁴ Angus Campbell, ‘Surge and Decline: A Study of Electoral Change’, *Public Opinion Quarterly* 24, p. 394–418, in Lester, W. Milbrath and M. L. Goel, *Political participation, How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics?*, New York: University Press of America, 1977, p. 140

⁴⁵ Stein Rokkan and Henry Valen, ‘Party Membership and Candidate Recruitment in Norway’, *Acta Sociologica* 6 (fasc. 1-2), in Lester, W. Milbrath, M. L. Goel, *Political participation, How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics?*, New York: University Press of America, 1977, p. 140

enhanced by *a proximity* in figures of contesting alternatives.⁴⁶ A vibrant political community would, hence, all other things equal, be expected by a clear difference in political views in combination with a highly unclear difference in voter support.

6 Why do immigrants vote? Political participation among immigrants – an overview

Now, after this brief overview of the general theory of political participation, we shall be somewhat more specific, and address some theories regarding electorate behaviour among immigrants in particular. In doing so, we must of course ask, is there such a thing as a distinct ‘Theory of immigrant political participation’ in the first place? And what, if so, would this imply? According to the findings in this survey, the answer is somewhat mixed. Indeed, there are questions and areas concerning political participation, which apply to immigrants exclusively. On the other hand, many aspects which has an impact upon immigrants’ electorate participation are not distinct, or of some other nature, than those affecting voting among other ethnic groups within society. Certain variables might be different – or hitherto missing, but the general theories of political participation often still seem to apply. Finally, the paper will pay attention to the theory of ethnicity, at present, it is argued, constituting a core area of controversy within the field of immigrants’ political participation.

a) Explanations exclusively referring to immigrants’ political participation

At first glance, the causes for the recent drastic decline in turnout among immigrants might appear obvious. ‘They don’t care!’ is a frequently

⁴⁶ Margaret M. Conway, *Political participation in the United States*, Washington: CQ Press, 1985, p. 68. Theoretical indications often stumble upon realities. The case of Austria, where *Sozialpartnerschaft* (i.e. a rather intimate joint rule between the Social Democrats (SPÖ) and the Conservatives (ÖVP) led the country for many decades, would surely, one might imagine, foster a weak political participation. However, this basic and theoretical suggestion was off-set by a quite unusual high sense of political obligation prevalent in Austria, ‘where the citizens did not even have the strength to refrain from voting.’ (Göran Adamson, ‘Austrian Corporatism – an overview’, in *The sudden post-86 rise of the Austrian Freedom Party, the story of a democratic failure*, unpublished manuscript, p. 88)

uttered comment, not only from the rightist fringes, but from political mainstream, too. ‘They don’t want to participate’⁴⁷ and ‘They turn their backs on power’⁴⁸ were recently headlines on Sweden’s two most respected daily newspapers. Similarly, at a recent ECPR Conference ‘knowledge of German politics, parties, and politicians’ were held forth as vital aspects in ‘Political Preferences and Voting Behaviour of Naturalised Citizens in Germany’⁴⁹

True, one mustn’t be naïve. There are naturally immigrants who simply use the system, who, frankly speaking, are in it for the money. Politics, to them, never enters the picture. In this respect, they are neither worse nor better than the native population. But the vast majority of immigrants do have valid and justifiable reasons for their behaviour. If they vote, they have justifiable reasons for it. If they decide not to, they have understandable reasons for that as well. Hence, what might seem as mere lack of interest would, at a closer look, in effect be an understandable consequence of earlier experiences.

To be sure, the perception regarding immigrant’s political participation of the west, and within the EU is often characterised by an unwarranted optimism.⁵⁰ Shortly after the fall of communism, a democratic official from Moscow assembled all adults in a small Siberian village. Being asked to raise their hands and elect local politicians, they did at first nothing. Once again being informed about the importance of their raising their hands in order to elect, all hands were raised. As a consequence of rather fierce political internalisation, the Austrian citizen often asked himself whether or not a strike was required, and generally replied in the negative. Hence, prolonged mental incapacity as a consequence out of political internalisation would be easier still to understand regarding anyone from less fortunate circumstances. Estimations suggest that, notably, one third of present day asylum seekers within the European Community suffer from PTSS – *Post-traumatic stress syndrome*. The percentage of illiterates among recent asylum seekers in the European Union is far from insignificant. More still, democratic rights (to participate in politics among other things) means nothing to women whose physical whereabouts is decided by men. Dealing with people who have lived all their lives under non-democratic circumstances, it might

⁴⁷ *Dagens Nyheter*, 96-11-09

⁴⁸ *Svenska Dagbladet*, 96-11-10

⁴⁹ ECPR Joint Session, Turin, March, 22–27, 2002, Workshop No. 14: Political Participation of Immigrants and their Descendants in Post-War Western Europe, Andreas M. Wüst, ‘Political Preferences and Voting Behaviour of Naturalized Citizens in Germany’

⁵⁰ Having doubts regarding a sudden shift from communism to capitalism, Vaclav Havel argued that the minds of citizens are slower than signatures on pieces of paper.

simply be rather naïve to expect a swift, merry shift towards political participation. As a matter of fact, according to empirical evidence this seems more likely to be a question of generations than of years of any one single individual.

Of course, anti-democratic structures are only one plausible cause for insufficient political participation of immigrants. These might also, as was previously noted, easily be caused precisely through a *shift from* a patriarchal family structure towards one characterised by a more egalitarian condition in between the sexes. Having lost his natural position within the family, the male immigrant may turn passive, whereas women stay passive.⁵¹

Still, one element is missing. Even without the hurdles above, political participation is impossible with an insufficient knowledge of the native language.⁵² According to the Swedish Social Democrat and MP Nalin Baksi 'political participation is not possible without Swedish language.' For want of it one will inevitably feel 'powerless, exploited, excluded'.⁵³ Indeed, language *is* crucial. Outside the sphere of academia, among politicians and journalists, and on the street, it is also, by far, the most commonly held solution to the 'immigrant issue', including electorate behaviour. However, as always, one mustn't jump to conclusions. Instead of indicating the core of the problem, language may surely be no more than a sign of yet further and more deeply embedded explanations. Mightn't language, instead of constituting the fundamental problem, merely indicate 'an economic, social, and cultural exclusion, impeding an increased understanding of language.'⁵⁴ 'If this is indeed the case, analytic focus should be shifted away from the *language* problem of the single individual over to problems of another and more structural level.'⁵⁵

⁵¹ Sidney Verba, *Participation and Political Equality, a seven nation comparison*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, p. 250

⁵² In Sweden there is at present a rather heated debate whether language fosters occupation, or whether the correlation might be the other way around. The trend is at present towards the latter. Occupation is increasingly regarded as of prime importance regarding integration of immigrants into the Swedish society.

⁵³ Magnus Dahlstedt, *Politiskt deltagande och icke-deltagande; Om det politiska livets etniska delning i dagens mångkulturella Sverige*, Umeå: PFM, 1999, p. 71 (Author's translation)

⁵⁴ Magnus Dahlstedt, *Politiskt deltagande och icke-deltagande; Om det politiska livets etniska delning i dagens mångkulturella Sverige*, Umeå: PFM, 1999, p. 72 (Author's translation)

⁵⁵ Dahlstedt, Magnus, *Politiskt deltagande och icke-deltagande; Om det politiska livets etniska delning i dagens mångkulturella Sverige*, Umeå: PFM, 1999, p. 72 (Author's translation)

b) Explanations jointly referring to natives and immigrants

The importance of analysing and trying to detect causes and variables regarding immigrants' electorate behaviour *exclusively* requires no further justification. Still, assigning 'special' indicators as regards to *immigrants* voting is not in itself of any value.⁵⁶ After all, they do not belong to different species. Empirically, too, apart from the causes indicated above, turnout parameters regarding *immigrants only* are quite uncommon. In fact, 'the analyses of data on naturalised citizens (..) have shown that [their] voting behaviour (..) can well be explained by the traditional models of voting electoral research offers.'⁵⁷ Therefore, we shall briefly return to the general theory of political participation.⁵⁸ In doing so, one might argue that those cleavages that run according to ethnic lines are somewhat marginalised, whereas other borders of demarcation, most prominently class-based distinctions, are pushed to the centre of the stage.

Above, we noted that an easily recognisable borderline between contesting political alternatives is likely to enhance voting figures. Hence, the 'cost' of gaining sufficient information in order to vote will be relatively small. Narrower distinctions on the political arena demands, on the other hand, greater effort by the public, thus deterring turnout *on the margin*. Hence, being situated on this very margin, immigrants are likely to suffer considerably, should we notice a blurring of borders along the scale of politics. As noticed by Stein Rokkan and Henry Valen, 'Clarity of alternatives seems especially important in mobilising citizens who usually stand on the periphery of politics and do not participate.'⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Practically, even though it may seem tolerant, an unavoidable consequence might be an incompatibility with other related data.

⁵⁷ ECPR Joint Session, Turin, March, 22–27, 2002, Workshop No. 14: Political Participation of Immigrants and their Descendants in Post-War Western Europe, Andreas M. Wüst.

The quotation above refers to naturalized citizens in Germany and in the city of Heidelberg. This particular observation is no exception to the rule, but points at important general circumstances.

⁵⁸ At this point, one should touch upon a methodological issue. To anyone involved in statistical investigations within the social sciences, it is well known that empirical findings, be it isolated observations or whole sets of data, at times are fairly easy to sidestep. Through a mere touch of the pen, it can be seen as 'outside the scope of the paper', or simply as 'confusing the picture'. True, no conclusion is aided by a bulk of insignificant information. The question is, however: What picture? What are the premises under which any data might justifiably be ignored?

⁵⁹ Stein Rokkan, Henry Valen, 'Party Membership and Candidate Recruitment in Norway', *Acta Sociologica* 6 (fasc. 1-2), in Lester W Milbrath and M. L. Goel, *Political participation, How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics?*, New York: University Press of America, 1977, p. 140

We discussed above plausible (negative) effects of the recent inroad of neo-liberal tendencies upon political participation. More specifically, the general effect of neo-liberalism upon the ‘immigrant issue’ is an undecided matter. On the one hand, neo-liberalism in the sense of a rightist shift on average easily entails a less tolerant view upon asylum seekers.⁶⁰ On the other hand, die-hard neo-liberal adherents often welcome anyone ‘as long as they can make a living’.⁶¹

The effects of neo-liberalism upon a desired clarity of political alternatives is, however, decidedly negative. As earlier observed, proclamations of ‘consensus’ – to name but one of a great many expressions denying a plurality of demands – hamper any audience’s general understanding of politics. The effects upon immigrants, including their prospects of voting would, arguably, be more discouraging still.

Another aspect where the rise of neo-liberalism would affect political participation among immigrants refers to the fate of its main organised political opponent – the trade union. Naturally, the shrinking importance of the union may indeed have contributed to a decline of voting figures among a population as a whole. Still, as opposed to natives, immigrants have considerably less ‘natural links’ into politics. Thus, current poor immigrant turnout would partly be caused by the neo-liberal onslaught upon the trade union.⁶²

As often is the case, this suggestion relates to other parts of our general theory. As will be remembered, ‘The Decline-of-Community Model’ suggested that the urbanisation of the opposing and more sanguine ‘Mobilisation model’ inevitably, in contrast to its expectations of an increased political participation, easily might lead to atomisation, alienation and, eventually, political apathy. Arguably, the current fate of the trade union – to citizens in general and to immigrants in particular might thus be seen as an empirical observation in favour of the general pessimism within ‘The Decline-of-Community Model’. In contrast to its progressive historic reputation, the trade union appears, in this respect, as a component of a sentimental, conservative political vision.

⁶⁰ The delicacy of the neo-liberal issue might be illustrated by Jörg Haider’s 1997 *Liberated future beyond left and right*, where the unstoppable grey eminence of the (former) Austrian Freedom Party attempts to unite neo-liberalism and right-wing populism, not, one might add, entirely without success.

⁶¹ A qualification that, one would assume, makes all the difference.

⁶² This suggestion would of course, within some regions of Europe, partly be off-set by the fact that a trend from a pull-led immigration – due to a systematic demand of workers, over to a push-led immigration of asylum seekers is linked to a shrinking importance of the trade union.

It has been argued that immigrants are generally ‘on the margin’. Shrinking voting participation due to blurred political borders is likely to hit immigrants in particular. Regarding language their situation is surely on the margin, not to mention regarding income. Investigations also indicate that they are marginalised geographically. Presently, this should not, however, be interpreted sentimentally, as a return to the old rural, intimate village according to the ‘Decline-of-Community Model’. Instead, current day marginalisation, or *periphery* – as it is often labelled – would rather be interpreted as *the suburb*. Actually, ‘the suburb’ constitutes, arguably, the very core of the issue of ‘immigrants’ political participation.’

Finally, we shall observe two additional plausible factors behind immigrants’ turnout; the second being a vital element in the first. Above we argued that anyone who has lived for decades in a dictatorship simply, on the deepest personal level, might lack understanding of the necessity of his or her own vote.⁶³ These unfortunate structures might, in addition, work the other way around. The response to ‘They don’t care about my vote!’ might easily be: ‘I don’t care about their propaganda!’ This leads back to ‘Flow of propaganda’, which is closely linked to politics in any modern society.⁶⁴ Simplifying somewhat, natives and ‘naturalised’ member within the European Community might, again, on a fundamental psychological level, react differently upon information which currently ‘is literally thrust at him’ or her.⁶⁵ Whereas the former manages to separate mere rhetoric from content, the latter might, due to a deeply embedded scepticism towards abstract politics per se as exemplified by the Siberian villagers above, utterly fail to do so.

Thus, as opposed to what seems to be a generally proposed cure against political apathy among immigrants – i.e. doubling the amount of political information, one might instead consider the fact that the ‘saturation point’ where the consequence of an additional piece of electorate information is simply negative, might be considerably lower among immigrants than among natives.

Even though the view of political participation as a ‘civic obligation’ is currently under attack, it is nevertheless still a vital element within the

⁶³ Indeed, among an enlightened minority one would expect high voting figures. Still, this desirable behaviour cannot be expected among a majority of immigrants.

⁶⁴ Neo-liberalism has not only meant the blurring of borders between political alternatives, but also, no less important, contributed to a commercialisation of politics, thus leading to blurring of borders in between politics per se and propaganda.

⁶⁵ Lester W. Milbrath, M. L. Goel, *Political participation, How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics?*, New York: University Press of America, 1977, p. 146

flow of political information or propaganda received by citizens. The 'traditional' perception might be expressed as follows: 'In order to make a balanced political choice, one needs to know about political concepts, and critically be able to analyse the various alternatives',⁶⁶ whereas a rather drastic formulation from the opposing camp would be as follows: It is nothing but a deep rooted prejudice to regard the public participation of citizens as a kind of 'duty'.⁶⁷ On the contrary, it is *a right* to participate in political life, just as it is a right to refrain from doing so.⁶⁸ Further still, David Held argues that 'freedom of abstention from politics counts as one among the most important forms of negative freedom'.⁶⁹ Conclusively (suggesting an influence of the stern power-critic Michel Foucault), should citizens, 'as in a dictatorship',⁷⁰ be forced to participate politically, democracy and the free initiatives of citizens would be replaced by 'paternalism and oppression'.⁷¹

Now, arguing in favour of a 'civic obligation' to vote might, concerning immigrants, be just as problematic as any other flow of information from top to bottom. The optimism (and moralism) behind phrases such as: 'Feel free to vote!', often overlooks a die-hard scepticism towards the 'elite' nourished by decades of abuses. At worst, it may work as a 'push factor', and contribute to a feeling of 'non-citizenship' and 'issue politics' within ethnic groups, the questions of which will be the topic of our remaining overview.

⁶⁶ Magnus Dahlstedt, *Politiskt deltagande och icke-deltagande; Om det politiska livets etniska delning i dagens mångetniska Sverige*, Umeå: PFI, 1999, p. 76, (SSR-tidningen, 1998 [15])

⁶⁷ For a critical stance of the 'civic obligation' theme, see Carole Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation; A Critical Analysis of Liberal Theory*, Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1979

⁶⁸ Margaret M. Conway, *Political participation in the United States*, Washington: CQ Press, 1985, p. 77

⁶⁹ David Held, *Demokratimodeller: Från klassisk demokrati till demokratisk autonomi* (Models of Democracy; from classic democracy to democratic autonomy), Göteborg: Daidalos, , 1997, p. 397

⁷⁰ Magnus Dahlstedt, *Politiskt deltagande och icke-deltagande; Om det politiska livets etniska delning i dagens mångetniska Sverige*, Umeå: PFI, 1999, p. 77 (Author's translation.)

⁷¹ Magnus Dahlstedt, *Politiskt deltagande och icke-deltagande; Om det politiska livets etniska delning i dagens mångetniska Sverige*, Umeå: PFI, 1999, p. 77 (Author's translation.)

7 Apathy, Adaptation, or Ethnic Mobilisation?

Emphasizing the situation of immigrants, we have above briefly touched upon various traditional factors that are seen as important regarding political participation. Indeed, not everything changes. A number of basic principles regarding political participation – among natives and immigrants alike – such as the ‘Theory of Socio-Economic Status’ (*SES*) remain the same. However, a considerable amount of factors relating to immigrants have altered significantly over the last few decades. Issues that, within research on immigrants’ political participation, not long ago were at the forefront are today often considered periphery. Psychological causes of voting cause few headlines, and anyone who today, as Lester W. Milbrath did as late as 1977, would deny that ‘blackness’ might cause low figures in political participation, would at best be seen as spoiling ink.

Instead, ‘ethnicity’ has emerged as possibly the most central concept within the theory of immigrants’ political participation.⁷² However, this does not necessarily mean that other factors have been wiped aside. Instead, at present the role of ethnicity has to a considerable extent gained the position of an overarching framework within the theory of political participation among immigrants. The current disinterestedness in individual or psychological factors regarding turnout would partly be due to the strength of ethnicity, instead highlighting unified groups of ethnic nature. Class-based explanations, which not long ago offered a natural explanation to our issue of controversy, has recently been somewhat pushed aside, the reason being the emphasis upon explanations along ethnic lines. The geographical dichotomy is still on the agenda, even though the previous rural-urban scheme – suggesting a temporal border between the prospects of political action within a conservative community versus that of a city environment – has been replaced by what might be referred to as a dichotomy along an ‘ethnic suburb’ Vs ‘assimilation’ line.⁷³ This latter dichotomy leads, furthermore, on towards the issue of language, which, notably, by the adherents of the ethnicity

⁷² The author confesses that his judgement on these matters partly may be caused by his Swedish origin, where the case of ethnicity arguably has gained a wider influence in academia and within government policy compared to other European countries.

⁷³ Notably, due to its allegedly politically dubious connotations, the concept of ‘assimilation’ has for some time now been replaced by ‘integration’. Even though the meanings of the two concepts are related, by ‘integration’ one generally refers to mutual adaptation or co-existence, which, notably, does not require social homogenisation. In contrast, a homogenous society threatening ‘multiculturalism’ is often associated with ‘assimilation’.

line, is played down as a factor affecting political participation. Within the intricate relation in between 'individual motivation,' 'group-based motivation' and 'civic obligation', ethnicity adheres safely to the second cause, thus questioning an individual's 'issue neutral' sense of duty to vote.

Below we shall ask: Is 'ethnicity' in its various aspects more likely to foster than to hamper political participation among immigrants?⁷⁴ Does it, to quote an illuminating recent article, lead to 'Apathy, Adaptation, or Ethnic Mobilisation?'⁷⁵ We shall initially argue that ethnicity is likely to contribute to immigrants' turnout, and thereafter, in contrast, suggest that its consequences would rather be the reverse.

Alike any other phenomenon within the social sciences, political activities among immigrants cannot be seen in isolation. It is always actions, and reactions, and responses to the surrounding environment, notably government policies. American civil rights movements, and its prominent, democratic leader Martin Luther King, explicitly sought a unity along 'ethnic lines', and did not conform to a mere 'issue neutral' civic obligation to vote. No one would today question their efforts. Similarly, the political endeavour of Nelson Mandela and ANC in South Africa, and Vaclav Havel and Charta 77 in former Czecho-Slovakia was explicitly, and for obvious reasons, directed in opposition to the policies of their respective governments. In brief, the history of ethnicity is generally the history of democracy on the rise. Any conclusion regarding the importance of ethnicity at present must, hence, bear its heritage of enlightenment in mind.⁷⁶

These above observations might suggest that any advocate of the case of ethnicity would be forced to limit her defence by means of historical examples. This is, of course, far from true. Contemporary ethnic organisations, such as those wide-spread Turkish organisations in Berlin, have traditionally sought to unite along ethnic lines. It is a common view that this way of organizing offers a uniting sphere for discussions and

⁷⁴ Naturally, shortage of space makes it impossible to give a complete presentation of the issue, let alone suggest conclusive evidence to the question above. A number of indications must suffice.

⁷⁵ C. Diehl and M. Blohm, 'Apathy, Adaptation, or Ethnic Mobilization? On the Political Attitudes of an Excluded Group', in: *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 27(3), 2001, p. 401–420

⁷⁶ If we move from the past to the present European Community, we find that, in spite of increasingly successful tendencies towards homogenisation regarding asylum issues, immigrant policies within its various member states, as well as the different communities as a whole, still exhibit certain distinctions, which may justifiably affect immigrant political activities along ethnic lines.

common problems that functions as an efficient entry into German society. For the purpose of our paper, evidence show that black organisations – i.e. an ethnic group of considerable size – have had marked success in mobilising politically passive blacks within a lower *SES* environment that normally, as was previously observed, is associated with lower political participation. Importantly, it has also been hypothesised that concentration of an ethnic minority tends to increase its political participation by increasing communication, group consciousness, and feelings of togetherness.⁷⁷

Still, having emphasised the advantageous aspects of ‘ethnic belonging’ in relation to political participation, one should also, for the sake of balance, address some arguments according to which ‘ethnic belonging’ in contrast rather would hamper turnout among immigrants. At first one should make a methodological note that inevitably complicates the notion of ‘ethnicity’. The idea of the nation-state – including its idea of a shared and equal civic obligation to vote, is, according to the political philosophy of ‘ethnicity’, highly suspect, not only due to the inevitably fragmented and conflict-ridden nature of the nation-state, but also, naturally, as a consequence of the extent to which the nation has been used for politically extremist ends. Within its borders stands, however, as homogenous as the nation-state is heterogeneous, ‘the ethnic group’, which, according to its protagonists, speaks on behalf of its unanimous members. The truth is, as a matter of fact, that the above perception of ethnicity is somewhat simplified and idyllic; the reason being the fact that the ethnic community is not entirely different from the notion of ‘the nation’ among right-wing populists. Rather than empirical observations, they are both, albeit on different scales, the products of exaggerated ideological abstractions. Hence, those scattering forces that haunt any rightist idea of a splendid nation one and undivided will inevitably also create havoc to any simplified concept of a unified ethnic group. As Hartmut Esser observes: ‘Especially political participation of immigrants is often characterised by massive internal discrepancies and conflicts of interest, but this is often systematically ignored.’⁷⁸ In other words, the liberal sceptic may ask by what means of logic one may criticise a slightly larger version of a homogeneous entity (the nation), at the same

⁷⁷ Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*, New York: Doubleday, 1960, in Lester, W. Milbrath and M. L. Goel, *Political participation, How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics?*, New York: University Press of America, 1977, p. 121

⁷⁸ http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/res_prog_e_99/fp_9939.htm, Hartmut Esser, (Dir.) Fourth Research Programme., 2.2 Participation of Immigrants, ‘Therefore, neither culture nor institution-based approaches are in a position to provide satisfactory explanations of the participation patterns among immigrants.’

time as one embraces a somewhat smaller, but no less standardized and homogeneous entity (the ethnic group). The question that should haunt any advocate of the ethnic group is: do social groups generally reflect reality, or don't they?

The outcome of this theoretical observation would thus, on the one hand suggest a weakening of the concept of ethnicity, and on the other hand imply a strengthening of the concept of civic obligation (to vote).

As was observed above, blacks' organisations have been highly successful in mobilising politically passive black citizens within a lower *SES* environment. However, and as we shall briefly return to further down, the ethnic community of black people differs from the ethnic community of, for example, the curds, considerably *in size*. In addition, whereas the opponents of black organisations in the U.S. a few decades ago generally was constituted by an oppressive white power, partial interests demanded by ethnic groups at present regularly occur within a more self-conscious and democratic setting. In addition, the demands of contemporary ethnic groups will also, no less importantly, encounter equally justifiable demands of other ethnic groups. Therefore, as we move from abstractions to reality and ethnic groups of less massive proportions, their 'mobilising' impact upon political participation fails, so it seems, to be decisive.

However, the role of the ethnic group with regards to political participation may be criticised along quite different, and arguably more troublesome lines. The question is: Is the idea of ethnicity for our particular purpose benevolent in the first place? Indeed, some scholars argue that strong ethnic ties, if anything, would be more likely to impede on ones propensity to participate in public elections. According to Jeffrey Reitz, 'Political participation was negatively associated with the intensity of ethnic identity'.⁷⁹ Moreover, 'this negative association was to be found particularly among those low in socio-economic status', whereas 'people of higher status have both higher political participation rates and weaker ethnic identities.'⁸⁰ Hence, according to Reitz, the mobilisation of the ethnic 'issue politics' would be a mere chimera, covering a harsh reality

⁷⁹ Jeffrey G. Reitz, *The Survival of Ethnic Groups*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd, 1980, p. 227

Using 1973 data on ethnic groups in five Canadian cities, Reitz measured political participation in terms of an index that combined voting, attendance at political meetings, and familiarity with public affairs.

⁸⁰ Jeffrey G. Reitz, *The Survival of Ethnic Groups*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd, 1980, p. 226

of self-inflicted exclusion, mainly hitting, moreover, the poor and uneducated within minority groups.

For once reaching beyond our ‘classic’, limited definition of political participation – i.e. meaning ‘the act of voting’ and turning to elected Parliamentarians, some commentators, roughly in line with Reitz above, wonder about the practical importance of ethnicity among ‘people of higher status’. As Jerome Black and Aleem Lakhani ironically notes, it is difficult to believe that the ethnic and visible minority MPs in the Reform caucus ‘approach the world of politics based on any promotion of their own ancestral origins.’⁸¹ The new visible minority Reform MPs arrived in Ottawa with strong backgrounds in business. They are more likely to have identified *in class* terms with the neo-liberal economic and financial platforms of the Reform Party and an immigration policy that favours ‘investor immigrants,’ and were thus undeterred by the party’s ‘all-white image’.⁸² (Authors hyphen) Once again turning to plausible consequences of ethnicity for the general public of immigrants, ‘Many ethnic minority Liberal MPs have been outspoken in their opposition to the ghettoising implications of multiculturalism policy’⁸³ Summarizing these various sceptic remarks upon the notion of ethnicity, one might even suggest that political participation would rather be measured by ‘ethnic de-segregation’; i.e. a suggestion diametrically opposed to the one proposed by those in favour of ‘ethnic mobilisation’.⁸⁴

In addition to a certain idealism that one may associate with those unbreakable ties within the ethnic community, one might also add certain

⁸¹ Jerome H. Black and Aleem S. Lakhani, ‘Ethnoracial Diversity in the House of Commons: An Analysis of Numerical Representation in the 35th Parliament’, *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, November, 1997, p. 13–33

⁸² http://canada.metropolis.net/events/civic/dstasiulis_e.html, Simpson, 1977: A22, in Daiva, K. Stasiulis, *Participation by Immigrants, Ethnocultural/visible Minorities in the Canadian Political Process*, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Carleton University

It should be mentioned that the rejection of multiculturalism policy – in Canada and elsewhere – is made both from those who favour stronger anti-racist measures, and those espousing anti-immigrant and racist sentiments.

⁸³ http://canada.metropolis.net/events/civic/dstasiulis_e.html, Daiva K. Stasiulis, and Yasmeen Abu-Laban (1991). ‘The House the Parties Built: (Re)constructing Ethnic Representation in Canadian Politics,’ in Kathy Megyery (ed.), *Ethno-Cultural Groups and Visible Minorities in Canadian Politics: The Question of Access*, Vol.7 of the Research Studies, Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing. Toronto: Dundurn Press p. 3 –99, in Daiva K. Stasiulis, *Participation by Immigrants, Ethnocultural/visible Minorities in the Canadian Political Process*, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Carleton University

⁸⁴ ECPR Joint Session, Turin, March, 22–27, 2002, Workshop No. 14, Andreas M. Wüst, ‘Political Participation of Immigrants and their Descendents in Post-War Western Europe’

romanticism regarding those immigrants who refrain from voting. True, the refraining from voting occasionally reveals a political awareness above average. Still, to argue that ‘a considerably strong political interest’ necessarily would form the basis to anyone who states that the ‘political parties are not particularly distinct’⁸⁵ simply does not hold. Instead, the statement would reveal a mere populist and simplistic perception of politics, and the true origin of non-participation would rather be passivity and lack of political awareness; i.e. social, cultural and political exclusion.

Again, we come across a case where, in the eyes of some scholars, the underlying reasons for political participation among immigrants are seen as distinct from those mechanisms that fundamentally cause political participation among natives. Indeed, *if* one may separate these two groups, then one may actually maintain that the refraining from voting among a majority of immigrants in effect would point towards a ‘sign of strong political interest’ among the very same majority. This result may, for example, be the outcome if a considerable stress is laid on a long-term experience of political manipulation.

If, on the other hand, one would argue that the main thrust that ends in the ballot is essentially of one and the same nature among immigrants and natives alike, then this conclusion would be untenable. Abstention from voting among a majority of immigrants would, under these circumstances, instead, just as among the native population, simply indicate an interest in politics *below average*.

We shall finish this section on political participation among immigrants with another remark on ethnicity. We emphasised above that exposed social groups such as immigrants until recently often were analyzed in a class-based framework, whereas, at present, similar analyses generally run along ethnic lines. Of course, in a sense that one wishes to preserve the cultural heritage and identity of an ethnic group, this is both worthwhile and understandable.⁸⁶ Still, given the focus of our paper, one

⁸⁵ Magnus Dahlstedt, *Politiskt deltagande och icke-deltagande; Om det politiska livets etniska delning i dagens mångkulturella Sverige*, Umeå: PfMI, 1999, p. 107 (Author’s translation)

⁸⁶ Contrasting encouraging voting figures within plain ‘high-status areas’ with disheartening results in ‘multi-ethnic (..) suburbs’ would be an illustrating example of an explicit, ‘anti-Marxist’ desire to steer away from the all-embracing class aspect of ‘low-status’, and instead prevent the sanctity of ‘ethnic groups’. (Magnus Dahlstedt, *Politiskt deltagande och icke-deltagande; Om det politiska livets etniska delning i dagens mångkulturella Sverige*, Umeå: PfMI, 1999, p. 16)

To anyone inclined for conspiracy theories this would easily be a classic example of ‘divide and rule’. By hiding behind a veil of tolerance, the enemy – one and

must ask: Does the current theoretical domination of ethnicity over ‘class’ necessarily promote political participation among immigrants? We might recall the new Canadian reform MPs above, who, although representing a minority ‘were (..) undeterred by the party’s ‘all-white image’,⁸⁷ ‘and [notably] were more likely to have identified *in class* terms with the neo-liberal economic and financial platforms of the Reform Party.’⁸⁸ (Author’s emphasis) Hence, it seems as if these proud bonds of ethnicity would burst in the face of old-fashioned distinctions in terms of class. Again, in contrast to a commonly held view presenting ethnic belonging as a quite vital aspect in the enhancing of political participation, ethnicity might be no more than the privilege of the poor and excluded. Furthermore, as observed by Patrick Ireland, ‘Institutional channelling has on occasion fuelled ethnic identity and conflicts between immigrants and natives and between the immigrant communities themselves’, which ‘has diverted attention from their often common problems as workers and as poor people.’⁸⁹ True, far from all ethnic minority MPs would define themselves according to (a privileged) class, instead of (an underprivileged) ethnic group. Realism is one thing, and blatant cynicism is another. Still, proposing ethnic ties beyond chasms in income and social position might, more often than not, be mere rhetoric.⁹⁰

undivided – would fall apart in ethnic fractions programmatically incapable of vital cooperation.

⁸⁷ http://canada.metropolis.net/events/civic/dstasiulis_e.html, Simpson, 1977:A22, in Daiva, K. Stasiulis, *Participation by Immigrants, Ethnocultural/visible Minorities in the Canadian Political Process*, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Carleton University.

Of course, it should be mentioned that the rejection of multiculturalism policy – in Canada or elsewhere – is made both from those who favour stronger anti-racist measures, and those espousing anti-immigrant and racist sentiments.

⁸⁸ http://canada.metropolis.net/events/civic/dstasiulis_e.html, Daiva K. Stasiulis, ‘Participation by Immigrants, Ethnocultural/visible Minorities in the Canadian Political Process, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Carleton University’.

⁸⁹ Patrick Richard Ireland, *The political participation and impact of immigrants in France and Switzerland*, Ann Arbor: Harvard University Press, 1990, p. 458

⁹⁰ True, surrounded by a fortress of ‘ethnic belonging’ one is not easily accused to deceit ones fellow natives.

8 Methodological problems related to political participation among immigrants

It is now, after this presentation, time to look at some methodological problems which are likely to occur to anyone preoccupied within the field of immigrants' political participation. It needn't be stated that the range of problems is wide indeed. Hence, the issues noted here can, thus, indicate no more than a fraction of possible hurdles.

In the process of collecting and studying data, one must shoot the bull and the bull only. Occasionally, analyses in the field have been proved flawed only because they were unable to separate the focus group (here, 'immigrants') from the reference group (here, 'natives'). Comparing percentage of immigrants with the whole population, i.e. including immigrants is but one example. One must show that any obtained data to a considerable extent affects the core group, whereas the correlation with the reference group is insignificant.⁹¹ If not, values and data from the reference group will inevitably leak into the core material, whereby the results may be questioned.

The problem of language would, arguably, count among rather clear-cut sources of data. Political participation among immigrants partly depends upon knowledge of host language. In contrast, political participation among natives does generally not depend upon various degrees of knowledge in their native tongue. Thus, this separation is fairly clear.

'Suburbs' would belong among less straightforward factors. True, conditions within the suburb – alienation, low *SES* etc, indeed hampers political participation. However, the suburb also harbours natives, a circumstance that significantly would lower the explanatory value of data on immigrants and political participation extracted from 'the suburb' as an unqualified factor. Hence, any investigation regarding 'the suburb' as a plausible factor affecting immigrant's voting must be preceded by measures that 'single out' the core group. Also, the suburb as a factor of explanation is further questioned by the fact that suburbs does not only suggest poor social and economic circumstances, but wealthy ones, too. It all depends on *what* kind of suburb ones refers to. Rosengård and Limhamn are, to name but two examples, both suburbs outside the city of Malmö in Sweden. However, whereas a considerable part of the city's

⁹¹ Any wish for ultimate clarity of results reminiscent of those within the sphere of the natural sciences is, within the murky waters of the social sciences, mere utopianism.

industrial and political elite dwell in the coastal area of Limhamn, the suburb of Rosengård (the garden of Roses) is the home of less fortunate ones; immigrants, Muslims, and working class natives.

As an example further from those unequivocal findings of 'language', commercialism per se has been suggested as an important factor affecting immigrant's turnout. This general idea stumbles, however, on the effects of commercialism upon the native population. If one cannot persuasively argue that immigrants as a group are less tolerant towards 'commercialism', then the idea must be dropped.⁹² Indeed, one may even argue that immigrants, often originating from countries of material scarcity, would be *more rather than less* tolerant towards commercialism than any decadent western native.

However, a clean-cut correlation, such as a distinct positive correspondence in between immigrants' voting and factor 'X', is not the end of the story. Indeed, the findings may, as was exemplified by 'education and voting' be of great significance. On the other hand, it may be a mere 'nonsense-correlation' where both series of data emanate from separate sources. A famous example is the surprising correlation in between sales figures of radios, and reported numbers of mentally ill in the London area in the 1930s. However, after the initial stir one found out that the co-variance was a mere coincidence. Thus, radios *did not* cause mental problems, nor, to be sure, did mental illness boast in interest in airwave equipments.

The 'singling' out of factors, i.e. pushing aside and playing down other variables that 'confuses the picture', is a matter of routine in scientific investigations. It should, however, be observed that any theoretical adjustment of reality has immediate repercussions, not only esoterically or ideologically, but also, and important for our purpose, for practical, political measures as well. We have already touched upon the controversy between 'class' and 'ethnicity'. Whether 'common problems as poor people' would be better suited than 'ethnic mobilisation' in explaining immigrant turnout is, in spite of the somewhat subjective discussion above, fundamentally an undecided matter.

Then again, other causes rest upon empirical evidence. Income, occupation, and education, constituting prominent features within The

⁹² Still, if certain qualifications are made, even commercialism might offer plausible explanations. We argued above that political participation among immigrants, being a social group most likely to be found within lower status occupations, partly was affected by the shrinking importance of the trade union. Thus, if we interpret 'commercialism' as a general neo-liberal right-wards trend, including, notably, the fading power of the union, then we might surely include commercialism among aspects that may impede immigrants' likelihood for political participation.

Theory of Socio-Economic Status are all, as will be recalled, positively correlated with political participation among any social group. However, and as we noticed previously, they are not of equal merit. Whereas education significantly affects political participation among immigrants, the positive statistical correlation with income and occupation is far less pronounced. Thus, government surveys stressing the importance of income, and/or occupation, while overlooking the promoting factor of education will not merely present 'different' suggestions regarding the enhancing of political participation of immigrants to any one national policy, but offer proposals that are incomplete or, at worst, untrue.

Below, in the paragraph on various empirical attempts to enhance political participation among immigrants, we shall shed light on a certain, quite successful policy that aims to integrate immigrants into society. However, given the fact that this particular policy indeed is worthy of serious consideration to any national or international body in search for measures in order to enhance immigrant turnout in public elections, one must still ask: On whose behalf are these efforts being made? Surely, in many cases it is indeed the local government, offering immigrants impartial knowledge within the political arena. However, this needn't be. For financial or other reasons local governments might decide to leave the issue to political interests, which, of course, inevitably raises the issue of impartiality and reliability.

A whole different area of problems refers to the reliability of gathered data material. Even within a single city such as London, investigations have shown remarkable discrepancies in crime statistics being reported from two different, but similar areas. More often than out of purely tactical reasons, these inconsistencies would simply stem from different routines, various definitions etc. Hence, the importance of getting data straight cannot be overestimated. The sheer size of the EU makes this issue more important still, as an insignificant statistical error on a small scale may cause tremendous confusion, if multiplied up to the macro-level of the entire European Community.

9 Political participation among immigrants – some empirical observations

In the following we shall notice a few examples within the borders of the European Union, where local policies in various ways have managed to increase the political participation among immigrants.

Above we noticed the theoretical implication within the controversy of ‘ethnicity’ or ‘multiculturalism’ versus traditional integration into existing structures on an individual level. We observed that multiculturalism and government measured based on the ethnic group had some incontestable advantages; the importance of preserving a cultural heritage and the vital role of the ethnic group for newly arrived immigrants being two of them. On the other hand, the policy of multiculturalism and the benefits of the ethnic group also suffers from numerous set-backs with regards to the purpose of enhancing political participation among immigrants; the anti-individualistic and essentially fictitious perception of the undivided and homogeneous ethnic group possibly being the most problematic among them.

Practically, these central issues of policy might be illustrated by the case of Brussels.⁹³ ‘Within one and the same territory, Flemish and Francophone policy-makers use different frameworks for incorporation of immigrants into the political community. The Flemish mainly adheres to Anglo-Saxon and Dutch ideas of group-based multiculturalism. The Francophones are mainly influenced by the individualist republican

⁹³ As a somewhat less fortunate case study than those below, the policy measures in Athens still give ample illustration of the issue of controversy. ‘As a consequence of the absence of institutionalised channels and central agencies dealing with immigrants, the accomplishments of ethnic associations can only be partial. Meetings with local authorities are described as ‘fruitless discussions, full of un-materialised promises’. They seem more useful in terms of establishing inter-personal links. One is inclined to say that the durability of such links makes the creation of ethnic bodies appear redundant.’ (Marina Petronoti, ‘Ethnic Mobilisation in Athens: Steps and Initiatives towards Integration’, in Rogers, Alasdair, Jean Tillie (eds), *Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities*, Burlington: Ashgate, 2001, p. 49.

And a few pages further on: ‘Hence, ethnic groups remain fragmented, self-referential and temporary, their interest are not directly incorporated in the mainstream political system, and they abstain from formal levels of the civic and social life and take no part in public discourse about political reform.’ (Marina Petronoti, ‘Ethnic Mobilisation in Athens: Steps and Initiatives towards Integration’, in Alasdair Rogers and Jean Tillie (eds), *Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities*, Burlington: Ashgate, 2001, p. 55

model of France.⁹⁴ These equally ambitious, albeit opposing policies naturally also have highly diverging consequences. Whereas the Flemish encourage collective mobilisation and support self-organisation of ethnic minorities, the Francophones ‘opt for an individual assimilationist approach and want to insert immigrants – and their (political) mobilisation – into existing structures, organisations and networks.’⁹⁵ Thus, a considerable number of ‘immigrants active within the structures of existing social organisations (e.g. trade unions) and anti-racist organisations revealed a Francophone influence. Flemish authorities, in contrast, were behind ‘the fact that migrant associations are treated as legitimate partners for discussion’, enhancing ‘the creation of self-organisations and processes of ethnic mobilisation.’⁹⁶

According to our analysis, the Flemish-Francophone power balance in Brussels does not lend itself to decisive conclusions in any direction regarding immigrants’ political participation, but merely points at advantages and problems related to both of these opposing strategies. In contrast, the cases of Barcelona, Amsterdam, and, last but not least, Birmingham, would indeed suggest practical policies that may boost immigrant turnout.

The cases of the following three cities raise some fundamental issues. Do the Anglo-Saxon and Dutch ideas of group-based multiculturalism indeed foster political assimilation and turnout, or is the explicit focus of a homogenous ‘group’ rather unfortunate, preventing native local politicians from discovering the diversity of skilled and useful individuals? What is the current condition of citizenship within successful policies of immigrant political participation in the EU region? Are immigrants more likely to gain real and lasting influence on our social and political environment by means of their distinct collective qualities as an ethnic group, or through their diverse individual capacities as single human beings? Philosophically, what, given the practical ambition of the present paper, would prove more successful: The right to be different, or the right to be equal? Also, once again we are confronted with the fundamental issue of whether the underlying causes behind immigrants’

⁹⁴ Dirk Jacobs, ‘Immigrants in a Multinational Political Sphere: The Case of Brussels’, in Alasdair Rogers and Jean Tillie (eds), *Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities*, Burlington: Ashgate, 2001, p. 107

⁹⁵ Dirk Jacobs, ‘Immigrants in a Multinational Political Sphere: The Case of Brussels’, in Alasdair Rogers and Jean Tillie (eds), *Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities*, Burlington: Ashgate, 2001, p. 119

⁹⁶ Dirk Jacobs, ‘Immigrants in a Multinational Political Sphere: The Case of Brussels’, in Alasdair Rogers and Jean Tillie (eds), *Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities*, Burlington: Ashgate, 2001, p. 119

political participation essentially are different than those behind any native population.

Furthermore, does the dire necessity of raising immigrant political participation render unimportant other issues? What if the governing body has a politically partial interest? This latter observation must not be over-looked, as current tendencies in favour of a neo-liberal ideology, it is often argued, blurs the borders in between citizen and consumer, public and private, and also threatens a shared community of political citizens.

Starting with the case of Amsterdam, one traces a certain change over time. In the eighties the focus was on ethnic and cultural differences and the maintaining of their cultural identity. In the beginning of the 1990s the accent moved towards integration into society. However, recent information indicate that neither path had been overly successful; 'the disadvantaged position of ethnic groups were neither combated by the policy in the 1980s nor by the policies constructed in the beginning of the 1990s.' Seemingly, political participation by individual members of ethnic groups was prevented by the fact that these various individuals still predominantly were regarded as fairly homogenous 'group-members'. Thus, 'individual members of ethnic groups (were) stigmatised and diversity of individuals (..) neglected.'⁹⁷ Then again, as any supporter of a (traditionalist) diversity and plurality of single individuals might argue, this unfortunate outcome was rather the consequence of a systematic *unwillingness* to acknowledge a liberal approach, than a failure due to its factual methodological execution.

Therefore, in order to over-come unfortunate reminiscences from 'ethnic belonging' the Municipality of Amsterdam shifted towards a so-called 'diversity policy' at the beginning of the new millennium. The novelty of this policy consisted in the fact that it no longer focused on groups but on 'problems', hoping to foster 'participation of all individuals in society and politics.' This also means a shift from the 1980s, where migrant organisations merely functioned as intermediaries between newcomers and the governmental institutions, to the present policy, where 'attention and efforts of the City Administration will be more focused on individual immigrants and less on migrant organisations.'⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Karen Kraal, 'Amsterdam: From Group-Specific to Problem-Oriented Policy' , in Alasdair Rogers and Jean Tillie (eds), *Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities*, Burlington: Ashgate, 2001, p. 35

⁹⁸ Karen Kraal, 'Amsterdam: From Group-Specific to Problem-Oriented Policy' , in Alasdair Rogers and Jean Tillie (eds), *Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities*, Burlington: Ashgate, , 2001, p. 36

It is as yet, to be sure, uncertain whether the change of policy in Amsterdam indeed will bear fruit. The reason why these measures still might serve as examples of good practise is, however, its resemblance to successful measures taken in Birmingham, UK. In an article entitled 'Birmingham, Conventional Politics as the Main Channel for Political Incorporation' Romain Garbaye states: 'Interestingly, the other European country that formulated the issue of ethnic minorities at policy level at an early stage, the Netherlands, is now experiencing a similar policy shift, both at national and local level (...). If the example of these two models of relatively early formulation of ad hoc policies is any benchmark to go by, this ebb and flow of institutionalisation of ethnic minority groups, and return to more 'issue-based' policies, may become a recurring pattern in other European cities.'⁹⁹

With the exception of London, the situation of ethnic minorities in Birmingham stands out for two reasons. First, the city's ethnic minority population is among the largest, most diverse, and most well established in Britain. Second, 'Birmingham is arguably one of the cities in Europe where immigrant participation in local debates and local decision-making processes is the most successful, to the extent that one can speak of a real process of empowerment of ethnic minorities in the city.'¹⁰⁰

Why is that? At the local level in Birmingham itself, minorities' incorporation has taken three main forms:

a) Participation in the Labour Party and local electoral politics. In particular, participation in the Labour Party has enabled ethnic minorities to obtain significant representation at the City Council, as the party has dominated the city from the days of the early 1980s. Since then, there has been a dramatic increase in the participation of ethnic minority activists in the local Labour Party. Worth adding, and offering an empirical illustration to the fundamental cleavage between the post-modern, leftist notion of 'difference' (or 'inequality') towards the more, as indicated by the title of Garbaye's article, conventional, leftist idea of 'equality', the City Council's immigrant policy has shifted 'from an approach based on race relations and ethnicity to a one grounded more in terms of equality' (...).

⁹⁹ Romain Garbaye, 'Birmingham, Conventional Politics as the Main Channel for Political Incorporation', in Alasdair Rogers and Jean Tillie (eds), *Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities*, Burlington: Ashgate, 2001, p. 104

¹⁰⁰ Romain Garbaye, 'Birmingham, Conventional Politics as the Main Channel for Political Incorporation', in Alasdair Rogers and Jean Tillie (eds), *Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities*, Burlington: Ashgate, 2001, p. 85

b) A high level of community organisation with around 300 local groups. As opposed to a great many European cities, where the 'ethnic nature' were regarded as sacrosanct, the Birmingham model has meant a kind of 'local republicanism', convincing its inhabitants, and immigrants among them, of the importance of their participation in the running of the city of Birmingham.

c) Institutionalisation of ethnic groups within a consultative structure and through social services run by ethnic minorities.¹⁰¹

Thus, without denying certain benefits within the ethnic agenda, our investigation suggests that successful assimilation of immigrants mainly is achieved by downplaying the exotic implication of group-based difference. A 'traditional' systematic incorporation and institutionalisation of ethnic groups within the city's existing structures has significantly contributed to the objectives – i.e. an increased political participation among immigrants, based, worth underscoring, upon individual, highly diverging qualities, personalities and preferences.

However, as we have already noted in the paragraph on 'Methodological problems related to immigrants political participation', the Birmingham success story of immigrants' political participation is somewhat obscured by two factors, which, incidentally, are regarded as the two main causes for the city's success in the first place. First, there is a large ethnic minority population that has been settled in the city for a long time. Whether the majority of immigrants belong to generation one or 'generation three' would strongly, of course, affect their likelihood to participate politically. One may question whether anyone within the third generation of immigrants should count among immigrants at all. The second cause, the quite decisive role of the Labour Party in incorporating immigrants into political life, has already been mentioned. Naturally, the cynic should be cautious. The Labour Party may indeed objectively be seen as the best bet for a majority of immigrants. Still, the problem must not be underestimated. The proud idea of citizenship, and indeed, the idea of society as such, will find it hard to survive, if any effort above the very minimum in increasing immigrants' political participation is being made by subjective interests – the Labour Party among them – with barely hidden selfish motives.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Romain Garbaye, 'Birmingham, Conventional Politics as the Main Channel for Political Incorporation', in Alasdair Rogers and Jean Tillie (eds), *Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities*, Burlington: Ashgate, , 2001, p. 85

¹⁰² The latest Swedish election in September 2002 introduced so-called 'Democracy Ambassadors' ('Demokratiambassadörer'), which, focussing on immigrant suburbs, tried to raise public understanding in the importance of voting and participating in politics in

As a final example of good practise, we shall notice certain policy changes in Barcelona, which, notably, adheres fairly close to those of Birmingham and Amsterdam above. Notably, the altered policy on immigrations' political participation addresses the importance of indigenous links to immigrants.

In the name of equality of all residents, Barcelona's local government has, ever since the early 1980s, tried to minimise the number and diversity of 'multicultural policies'.¹⁰³ The reason was, similar as above, because immigrant political participation through the policy of ethnic groups had been less successful than what had been hoped for.¹⁰⁴ In the mid-1990s, the weakness of the autonomous immigrants' organisations could no longer be denied. Therefore, a local advisory council on immigration was created, and started to collaborate with a few 'foreign associations' – notably those associations that are more sympathetic with the local government.¹⁰⁵

Given the fact that Birmingham indeed shows the way to a lasting enhancement of immigrant political participation, then one may have valid reasons to regard the altered policies of Barcelona as changes in an appropriate direction. Apart from the trends we have observed above; i.e. a move from the (ethnic) group towards the individual, and, after a few decades of exclusion due to post-modernist influence, the return of the

general. At closer scrutiny, however, they did not work for the government, but for the Social Democratic Party.

Hence, the optimist may celebrate the open battle, while the sceptic would mourn the vanishing public arena.

¹⁰³ An American University paid extensive respect to ethnic groups. Not only should any single ethnic group, regardless of its size, be treated according to its particular characteristics, but any part within these, at times, rather small ethnic groups should also be treated according to its particular features. However, at one stage the number of ethnic groups started multiplying at a worrying pace, comprising, as a consequence, fewer and fewer individuals. Suddenly, one ethnic group comprised one single individual, followed, in short notice, by one after the other. As the University board realised that they were back where they started – in Human Rights and the respect for any single individual – the whole idea of ethnicity was abandoned.

¹⁰⁴ 'So far, the influence of big 'indigenous' NGOs (organisations of solidarity, trade unions, Christian charities, and so on) has been more significant in lobbying public authorities than the influence of foreigners' organisations on their own.' (Ricard Morén-Alegret, 'Tuning the Channels: Local Government Policies and Immigrant's Participation in Barcelona', in Alasdair Rogers and Jean Tillie (eds), *Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities*, Burlington: Ashgate, 2001, p. 82)

¹⁰⁵ Ricard Morén-Alegret, 'Tuning the Channels: Local Government Policies and Immigrant's Participation in Barcelona', in Alasdair Rogers and Jean Tillie (eds), *Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities*, Burlington: Ashgate, 2001, p. 82

classic, leftist idea of ‘equality’ (as opposed to the notion of ‘difference’) as a valid founding principle within theories on immigration, the case of Barcelona also illustrates the need of foreign associations ‘more sympathetic with local governments’ as intermediate links in between on the one hand natives – business people, politicians and so on – and on the other hand immigrants. Conclusively, according to successful present day policy measures for the enhancement of immigrants’ political participation within the region of the European Union, the exoticism of ethnicity seems, for all its reputation of tolerance and pluralist sensitivity, as a somewhat unproductive method.

10 Common denominators in official statistics in the Member states – two suggestions

Now, we shall conclude our presentation by pointing at two common denominators that, according to our empirical findings from various cities in the European Community, appear productive for the present purpose, namely to contribute in enhancing voting figures among immigrants in Europe.

Top-down-approach

Our previous discussion has indicated a dividing line between two different forms or policy, both aimed to improve political participation among immigrants.

Within a ‘top-down-approach’ ‘the institutional framework of the society of settlement is taken as a starting point.’ We ‘ask the question in how far that institutional framework is open for participation by immigrants and ethnic minorities, or is opened and activated in the course of time. In this approach the terms of inclusion/exclusion and ‘opportunity structure’ are key-concepts pertaining to openness of the existing system.’¹⁰⁶

Within a ‘bottom-up-approach’, ‘central focus is on the initiatives taken by immigrants, ethnic minorities and their organisations to stand up for their (political, social and cultural) interests irrespective of institutional

¹⁰⁶ Rinus Penninx, Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies, University of Amsterdam, ‘European cities and their citizens: problem, challenge, opportunity?’, Opening speech at Conference, *Ethnic Minorities and Local Government*, organized by the Bestuurlijk Overleg Stadsdelen of the Municipality of Amsterdam, January 22 and 23, 1998, Amsterdam

structures, alone or in coalition with other actors. The basic concept here is mobilisation.¹⁰⁷

According to the material studied, both empirical results from cities and more theoretical findings, it is here suggested that, despite certain undeniable qualities within the method of ethnicity and collective mobilization, the ‘top-down-approach’ is advantageous in any national policy aimed at the integration of immigrants within the host community. Instead of assigning new structures to new inhabitants, they would benefit more from participating within already existing structures. Fundamentally, it all goes back to a republican idea – namely citizens sharing a common ground.

Education

In seeking to increase immigrants’ voting figures, we have discussed the plausible impact of occupation, income, and education. By all means, all of these three parameters are vital in the enriching of the social situation of immigrants, as, indeed, they are to any citizen. Any one individual would, all other things equal, naturally benefit from an improved position of any single one of these factors. Still, at least with respect to the purpose of the present paper – political participation – two of these factors have but a scant positive impact. As was previously discussed, altering status in occupation and income does not, according to our analysis, exert any significant influence on the likelihood to vote in public elections. Instead, our investigation maintains that education is the most important factor in any policy that seeks to increase political participation among immigrants.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Rinus Penninx, Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies, University of Amsterdam, ‘European cities and their citizens: problem, challenge, opportunity?’, Opening speech at Conference, *Ethnic Minorities and Local Government*, organized by the Bestuurlijk Overleg Stadsdelen of the Municipality of Amsterdam, January 22 and 23, 1998, Amsterdam

¹⁰⁸ Of course, this suggestion is complicated by the fact that a large proportion of immigrants into the EU *do indeed* have a solid education from their native country, which, one would assume, does not have the same effect upon political participation than a similar education achieved within the host country.

11 Recommended sources for data

In the following a number of central sources for data will be addressed. They are all easily accessible over the Internet. The Internet is however, for various reasons, not as trustworthy as written publications. Therefore a certain caution is required. We shall start by focussing a number of databases for general electorate information. Thereafter a small number of databases specially assigned for immigrants' political participation will be commented upon.

It should be stated that given the amount of time and energy devoted to the issue of immigrants' social, cultural and political participation throughout the western community, the amount of easily accessible and useful material is somewhat limited. In particular, we had hoped to trace easy-to-use comparative statistical data sources containing figures on political participation of immigrants within the European Union that went back a few decades, and, importantly, also separated in between various ethnic groups. Regrettably, this material seems non-existent, and would, thus, constitute a plausible future project. Then again, given the general observations in the present paper, it is somewhat uncertain whether or not this path of separation and ethnic distinction truly is worthy of pursuing. Finally we wish to mention that sub sites have been included in our recommendations wherever they have proved informative.

The Social Science Information Gateway (SOSIG)

<http://www.sosig.ac.uk/>

SOSIG provides extensive information about electoral systems and statistical data. It contains a political database stretching back a few decades.

The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)

<http://www.umich.edu/~cses/>

The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) is a collaborative program of cross-national research among election study teams in over fifty states. The analyses of the CSES addresses the effects of electoral institutions on citizens' attitudes and behaviour, and, important for our purpose, the presence and nature of social and political cleavages.

VOTER TURNOUT: A GLOBAL SURVEY

http://www.idea.int/voter_turnout/voter_turnout.html

'Voter turnout: a global survey' harbours voting data from 1945 to 1998. It covers turnout over time and country by country performance. The International IDEA (The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance) database of post-war elections covers 171 independent states,

1129 parliamentary elections and 360 presidential elections. It gives a brief but comprehensive overview of worldwide voter turnout statistics since 1945. Notably, the survey looks at what political, institutional and socio-economic factors may be said to correlate with various voter turnout rates.

International IDEA

Tel: +46 8 698 3700,

Fax: +46 8 20 24 22

E-mail: info@idea.int

International IDEA, Strömsborg, S-103 34 Stockholm, Sweden

More specifically, the sub site on Western Europe, http://www.idea.int/voter_turnout/westeurope/index.html, offers a ‘Ranking of average turnout in Western Europe in the 1990s’, as well as a ‘Ranking of all countries in all elections since 1945’. The last one, in particular, contains valuable electorate information of all EU member states since 1945.

Lijphart Elections Archive

<http://dodgson.ucsd.edu/lij/>

The Lijphart Elections Archive (LEA) is a research collection of district level election results for approximately 350 national legislative elections in 26 countries. The objective of the Archive is to systematically collect election statistics in as much detail as possible, including, as a minimum, the results at the level of the individual election districts. The sub site <http://dodgson.ucsd.edu/lij/westeurope/germany/> contains, as an example, numerous election results.

SUFFRAGE UNIVERSEL

<http://users.skynet.be/suffrage-universel/indexdi.htm>

‘Suffrage Universel’ is a web site specially assigned to emigrants and members of the Diaspora. Thus a double perspective is at times achieved. In ‘*élections et diasporas*’, and ‘*Turcs et Kurdes en Europe: associations, identites, clivages*’ the perspective is that of migrants in the Diaspora in Europe. In ‘*Minorities / Minorités*’ the perspective is, in contrast, that of the European community, raising other issues.

The sub sites harbours rather extensive information about Belgium, Germany, France, Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands. It seems as if these various sites all contain material of great importance to this paper. The sub site on Belgium, for instance:

- <http://users.skynet.be/suffrage-universel/be.htm>, refers to titles such as
- ‘nationalité/naturalisation en Belgique’,

- ‘Ethnicité et élections – La participation politique des allochtones (personnes d'origine étrangère) en Belgique’,
- [‘La participation politique des allochtones en Belgique – Historique et situation bruxelloise’](#),
- and
- [‘Political participation of Belgium’s Muslim populations \(1997\)’](#).

Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities’ (MPMC)

<http://www.unesco.org/most/p97.htm>

We shall end this paragraph on suggested sources for data with ‘Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities’. The Project, which focuses ‘channels of activation and mobilisation’ in European cities, was organised within UNESCO, and touches, so it seems, upon a range of issues of interest for our current purpose. It can also be found under <http://www.unesco.org/most>.

Among ‘2.2 Project Aims and Objectives’, the project, in collaboration with policymakers and members of local organisations, tries to assess the development and interplay of both ‘bottom-up’ (community led) initiatives and ‘top-down’ (municipality-created) policies aimed at better integrating immigrant and ethnic minorities in public decision-making processes. ‘Of central concern to the project are what we shall term ‘channels of activation and mobilisation’ in European cities: that is, organisations, actions or institutions through which immigrant and ethnic minority communities (are supposed to) make their interests and concerns known to municipal decision-makers and other significant actors in the various societal domains.’ Furthermore, ‘the project concerns ways in which immigrant and minority groups have gained access (or been confronted with obstacles) to decision-making processes and other ways of participating in the municipal public sphere.’

The above paragraph refers, however, to the MOST Phase I website (1994-2003). The MOST Phase II website is available at: <http://www.unesco.org/shs/most>

Among working papers written within the MPMC Project, one might mention ‘Immigrants’ Participation in Civil Society in a Suburban Context’, which deals with the situation in a wide range of major European cities, and ‘Ethnic associations, political trust and Political participation’. As a matter of fact, as one among very few databases the MPMC contains information where various ethnic groups are treated separately, such as ‘degree of political distrust’ and ‘Frequency reading ‘ethnic newspapers’’ among Turks, Moroccans etc. As a final recommendation, ‘Political participation

and political trust in Amsterdam: civic Communities and ethnic networks', (M. Fennema and J. Tillie), in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 24, 4, 1999, contains essential material and basic questions of interest for the coming work within the field of immigrant and political participation.

Finally, there are a number of global projects dedicated to the issues of immigrants' social participation. Among them, one might mention *The Metropolis Project*. This project is an international forum for comparative research and public policy development about population migration, cultural diversity and the challenges of immigrant integration in cities in Canada and around the world. http://canada.metropolis.net/index_e.html

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Journals, newspapers

Acta Sociologica, Department of Sociology, University of Copenhagen, Oester Farimagsgade 5, PB 2099, 1014 Copenhagen K, Denmark

Canadian Ethnic Studies,
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Dagens Nyheter, Gjörwellsgatan 30, 105 15 Stockholm, Sweden

Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, <http://www.cemes.org>

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Svenska Dagbladet, SE-105 17 Stockholm, Sweden

Conferences, work shops etc..

ECPR Joint Sessions, Turin, March 22–27, 2002