

Electoral Participation of Immigrants: Why Do Immigrants Not Vote More Often When They Are Given the Opportunity?

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Objective: Examine why immigrants are less likely to vote. **Methods:** A new representative dataset on the political participation of immigrants in the 2015 municipal elections in the Canton of Geneva, Switzerland is presented. It draws on questions from the Swiss Electoral Studies (Selects) and is enriched with questions relevant to immigrant origin. Logistic regression analysis with predicted probabilities is used to predict electoral participation. **Results:** Despite having the right to vote, most immigrant groups are less likely to vote than the majority population. Four explanations are tested for this gap in political participation: differences in social origin, political engagement, civic integration and networks, as well as socialization. Individually, all these explanations are associated with differences in political participation, but when all are tested at once, socialization ceases to be statistically significant. **Conclusion:** While it cannot account for the entirety of differences, social origin accounts for a large part of the different probabilities to vote between nationalities.

Keywords: political participation, immigration, election, turnout, local

Introduction

A principle of modern democracies is that citizens should be able to participate in decision-making through elections. By voting for a particular candidate or party, individuals authorize legislators and governments to take decisions on their behalf. Where substantial parts of the population do not vote, the legitimacy of modern democracies is jeopardized. Broadly speaking, there are three reasons why individuals do not vote: they may not be entitled to vote (franchise), they prefer not to vote (choice), or nobody asked them to vote (mobilization; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Foreign citizens are affected by all three reasons: Often they are not entitled to vote in elections (Earnest 2015), and when they *are* entitled they often do not vote, either because they are not interested or not mobilized (Rooij 2012; Bird, Saalfeld, and Wüst 2010). This reduced electoral turnout of foreign citizens is often referred to as a participation gap or participatory gap (Armingeon and Schädel 2014).

The reasons for this participation gap are not well understood, and different possible explanations have been provided. A common explanation is social origin: In Western countries immigrants are often less educated, younger, and have a lower income than the majority population – all factors commonly associated with lower levels of political participation (Smets and Ham 2013; Cancela and Geys 2016). Other common explanations are social integration and socialization. The intuition is that as immigrants live in the country of destination and become full members of society, they become increasingly interested and involved in political questions and choose to vote. Socialization focuses on the fact that individuals whose parents vote(d) are more likely to vote: they have been habituated into voting (Neundorf, Smets, and García-Albacete 2013; Humphries, Muller, and Schiller 2013). Voicu and Comşa (2014) refer to ‘exposure’ and ‘transferability’ respectively to describe these mechanisms. None of these explanations, however, is able to differentiate between not voting because of a lack of interest and the absence of sufficient mobilization to incite individuals to vote.

This paper uses individual-level data to examine the correlates of participation in a specific local election. With a focus on a single election, institutional and many political variables are controlled for by design. By randomly selecting respondents from the electoral list, it can be ruled out that the respondents did not have the right to vote. At the same time, for the municipal elections in the Canton of Geneva 2015 under study, every foreign citizen entitled to vote received a personalized letter to invite them to participate. Moreover, voter registration is automatic in Switzerland. With this it can be ruled out that the respondents did not vote because they were completely unaware of their right to vote. This leaves us with the *choice* not to vote – as it exists across wide parts of society. I show that electoral participation varies depending on the nationality of foreign citizens. None of the explanations tested is able to account for all the observed differences between nationality groups.

Electoral Participation of Immigrants and Hypotheses

Not all sections of society are equally likely to vote in elections (Deth 2014). In their meta-analysis of individual-level factors associated with an increased likelihood to vote in national elections, Smets and van Ham (2013) identified amongst others education, age, income, mobilization, having voted in the previous election, a sense of civic duty, political interest, or personality (see also Cancela and Geys 2016 for a meta-analysis focusing on the difference between national and sub-national elections). It follows that any section of society scoring lower on these factors is predicted to participate less. The lower levels of participation of immigrants are frequently explained this way (see Ruedin 2010 for a review of the immigrant-specific literature), although in Smets and van Ham's meta-analysis being a foreign citizen is not consistently associated with lower levels of participation.

Recent contributions highlight that the association between these 'classic' predictors and actual voting may be somewhat different for immigrants and foreign citizens than for native citizens (Wass et al. 2015; Spierings 2016). Nationality, however, is not a causal explanation and hides the reason why different passports reflect different electoral behaviour. In this paper, different explanations at the individual level are explored: differences in social origin, political engagement, social networks and civic integration, and socialization. There may be other mechanisms at play that are not relevant for native citizens, and indeed dynamics at local elections may differ from national elections (Cancela and Geys 2016).

Smets and van Ham (2013) highlight that variables of social origin are consistently associated with the likelihood to vote. This is particularly the case of sub-national elections (Cancela and Geys 2016). People with higher levels of education, older age, and higher income are more likely to vote (see also Persson and Solevid 2014). While Wass et al. (2015) report that these associations are somewhat weaker for foreign citizens in Finland than for native citizens, it can be expected – and will be demonstrated – that the associations apply to all nationalities.

Social Origin Hypothesis Younger, less educated, poorer individuals, and those not active in the labour force are less likely to vote.

Gender differences are also considered in this context, although there are no clear expectations that men and women would differ in their likelihood to vote (Smets and Ham 2013).

A different set of explanations revolves around political engagement and political knowledge (Cowley and Stuart 2015). Interest in politics and political knowledge are consistently linked with electoral participation (Smets and Ham 2013). While interest in politics and party identification may be mutually constitutive, both are associated with the likelihood to participate in elections. Particularly relevant for immigrant voters may be the perception of being part of a commu-

nity, having a stake in the political life where they live. This sentiment is likely to be higher for individuals actively participating in associations like human rights associations.

Political Engagement Hypothesis Individuals with greater political knowledge, and those who participate in human rights associations are more likely to vote.

One reason foreign citizens may on average be less interested in politics is the social network they are located in, and civic integration more generally (Klofstad and Bishin 2014; Ruedin 2011). The intuition remains that individuals with a greater stake in the local community are more interested in politics and thus more likely to vote. Wass et al. (2015) suggest that exposure is a key ingredient: the longer individuals have lived in the current place, the more likely they are to vote in national elections (see also Voicu and Comşa 2014 who showed that over time the intention of immigrants to vote approaches what is common in the country of destination; Cancela and Geys 2016 refer to population stability). Using agent-based modelling, Ruedin (2007; 2011) suggests that the relevant variable is not the commonly used time spent in a community, but having personal contacts, interpreted as having ‘roots’. Personality traits seem to interact with the time spent in the community to create relevant personal and emotional ties (compare Foschi and Lauriola 2014; Gerber et al. 2011). Wass et al. (2015) seem to approach this mechanism via identity with the current country (see also Scuzzarello 2015), although in the meta-analysis by Smets and van Ham (2013) identification and trust in (local) institutions are not consistently associated with electoral participation.

Civic Integration and Networks Hypothesis Individuals with no clear return project, a longer residence in the community, and with frequent contact with Swiss individuals are more likely to vote.

Individuals with higher levels of trust in local authorities and those who identify with the municipality are more likely to vote in municipal elections.

A final set of explanations examined is socialization. Children of voters are more likely to vote as adults than children of non-voters (Smets and Ham 2013; Terriquez and Kwon 2015). Spierings (2016) looks at parent-child pairs of migrants and non-migrants and suggests that the association between parents’ participation and electoral participation is stronger among immigrants than non-immigrants. Relevant for foreign citizens is whether they come from a democratic country where political participation carries different meaning than in autocratic states (compare Stockemer 2015). This is a different form of socialization, and more electoral participation can be expected from individuals from democratic countries (Wass et al. 2015).

Socialization Hypothesis Individuals are more likely to vote if their parents voted and if they grew up in a free country.

Data and Methods

New Data on Voting at the Municipal Level

To test these hypotheses, newly collected data on electoral participation in the 2015 municipal elections in the Canton of Geneva, Switzerland are used. The survey refers to the first round of the elections which took place on 19 April. The electoral register was used as a sampling frame, and 832 interviews were completed using CATI in October 2015. The questionnaire drew heavily on that of the 2011 *Swiss Electoral Studies* (Selects 2015) to maximize comparability. A few items were adapted to the context of the municipal election – e.g. the list of parties –, and additional variables were added to capture factors potentially relevant for the electoral participation of foreign citizens.¹

Outcome Variable: Voted in the Municipal Election

The outcome variable in this paper asks whether respondents voted in the municipal election (“In the municipal elections, less than half of voters actually vote. Which of the following statements best describes you?”² – voted, did not vote, wanted to vote but ended up not voting, normally votes but not this time). The different response categories were combined into a binary variable, coded 1 if the respondent states to have voted, and 0 if the respondent did not vote: The three response categories capturing broad reasons for not voting were combined.

Predictor Variables

For the analysis in this paper, the nationality of respondents is grouped into a reduced set of nationalities and groups of nationalities because of sample size.

¹One of the aims of this paper is to introduce this new dataset. The following variables are present in the dataset: nationality, sex, age, length residence in Switzerland, interest in politics, electoral participation in the municipal election, reasons for not participating, party would have voted for, party voted for, reason for voting, feeling close to a party, left-right placement, issue position on 4 domains (economy, EU, immigration, environment), nationality, Swiss national at birth, country of birth, mother’s country of birth, father’s country of birth, party father voted when respondent was 14, party mother voted for when respondent was 14, belongs to discriminated group, residence in canton of Geneva, plans to return to country of origin, highest level of education, employment status, always in education, employee, current occupation, works in public sector, monthly income (group), relative income, sufficient income, attachment with municipality, canton, Switzerland, country of origin, signed petition in last 5 years, trust in institutions (federal council, cantonal authorities, municipal authorities), frequency of contact with Swiss, positive or negative contact, frequency of contact with French, positive or negative contact, frequency of contact with former Yugoslavia or Albania, positive or negative contact, frequency of contact with Portuguese, positive or negative contact, participation in associations (labour union, humanitarian organization, sports club).

²French: “Lors des élections municipales, moins de la moitié des électeurs votent effectivement. En ce qui vous concerne, laquelle des propositions suivantes vous convient le mieux?”

Nationalities were grouped according to the relative size of different nationalities in the general population of the canton of Geneva: Swiss nationals, French, Portuguese, Italian, Spanish, other Western countries (includes Western European countries, the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand), Eastern European countries, and rest of the world. In the multivariate regression analysis, all foreign nationalities are combined.

To capture social origin, the following variables are used in the paper: age, education, income, active in the labour market, and gender. Age is measured in years. Income captures monthly income, and answers were set to the mean of the response category (e.g. a respondent indicating an income of between CHF 4,000 and CHF 5,000 is allocated an income of CHF 4,500). The highest response category (more than CHF 12,000) was set to CHF 18,000, a plausible value given the distribution of incomes.³ The survey asks about the highest level of education completed, which is converted into years of education following typical length of education (Lipps and Kuhn 2009). Being active in the labour market is a binary variable, where all individuals working full time or part time were coded 1, and those disabled, in education, home-makers, retired, or unemployed were coded 0. The gender variable is 1 for women, and 0 for men; as is common in surveys, gender was identified by the interviewer and not asked.

To capture political engagement – whether politics are understood, whether individuals are active in their community –, two variables are used in the paper: objective political knowledge, and participation in human rights associations. Objective political knowledge draws on two questions: knowing the president of the federal government, and knowing the number of EU member countries. The number of correct answers was divided by two, yielding a variable with three categories (0, 0.5, 1), treated as continuous. Although the database also includes variables on participation in labour unions and sports clubs, participation in human rights associations was deemed most appropriate for the analysis at hand as it is less likely to select certain kinds of individuals or occupations. Participation was measured with five response categories. All kinds of involvement (membership, participation, donated money, voluntary work) were coded as 1 (participation, with 0 denoting non-participation). Scale analysis suggests that participation in the three kinds of associations could not be combined in a reliable manner.

To capture civic integration and social networks, the following variables are used in the paper: (lack of) a return project, a longer residence in the community, frequent contact with Swiss individuals (social networks, see also Giugni, Michel, and Gianni 2013). All immigrants were asked how likely they are to eventually return to their country of origin. The four response categories are treated as continuous. Residence captures the number of years the respondent has been resident of the canton of Geneva. It is a continuous variable, ranging from 1 to 87. Frequency of contact with Swiss nationals is measured using five response

³<http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/en/index/themen/03/04/blank/key/lohnstruktur/lohnverteilung.html>

categories and treated as continuous. All respondents were asked about contact with Swiss nationals, irrespective of their own nationality. Scale analysis suggests that the variables measuring contact with different nationalities (France, former Yugoslavia and Albania, Portugal) could not be combined in a reliable manner. Two further variables capture identification and trust: The strength of identification with the municipality is measured using four response categories and treated as continuous. Trust in municipal authorities is measured using 11 response categories and treated as continuous.

To capture socialization, the following variables are used in the paper: father voted when respondent was 14 years old, and whether the respondent was born in a free democracy. In the dataset, there is a question on whether the mother voted, but not all mothers had the right to vote at the time – in Switzerland women’s suffrage was introduced only in 1971, or in Portugal women gained full electoral rights only in 1976. Whether the respondent was born in a free democracy was determined on the basis of country of birth. Data from Freedom House (2006) were used to determine whether the country of birth was free or not. The variable uses the Freedom House ‘Political Rights’ scores of 2005 – a decade ago – to capture likely socialization rather than the current situation. The score for Kosovo was set to that of Serbia (=3). In the analysis, all countries identified as completely free were set to 1 (free), with all other countries set to 0 (not completely free).

Analytical Approach

In this paper, I statistically explain electoral participation in the 2015 municipal elections in the canton of Geneva. The analytical approach is twofold. On the one hand, I show that the variables identified are associated with voting in general – all nationalities pooled. Logistic regression is used and predicted probabilities shown to render the results accessible. Each of these models includes the predictor variables associated with a particular hypothesis. I then show that immigrants tend to differ on these variables. For instance, it will be shown that age is associated with the probability vote, and immigrants are on average younger. On the other hand, I use logistic regression analysis with a binary variable to identify foreign nationals. Although missing values do not appear a major problem, in the multiple regression analysis multiple imputation was used with 30 imputations to maintain the sample size.

Results

The Participation Gap

Overall, 59% of respondents state that they participated in the municipal election, but there are significant differences between nationalities (Table 1). It is apparent that electoral participation is higher for Swiss nationals than for foreign nationals and that participation varies significantly between nationalities. This is clear evidence of a participation gap. The existence of such a participation gap has important repercussions because the political preferences of Swiss nationals and foreign nationals are not necessarily the same (Strijbis 2014, Appendix A1), and because the right to vote potentially affects integration and naturalization (Pedroza 2015).

Table 1: Self-Reported and Measured Electoral Turnout by Nationality

Nationality	OCSTAT (Measured)	Survey (Self-Reported)	Over- Estimation
Switzerland	42%	76%	1.8
Other Western Countries	39%	65%	1.7
France	38%	61%	1.6
Italy	34%	60%	1.7
Rest of World	27%	45%	1.6
Spain	22%	44%	2
Eastern Europe	–	40%	–
Portugal	17%	36%	2.1
Overall	38%	59%	1.6

Notes: Sorted by turnout; source for the measured turnout: OCSTAT (T_17_02_2_09_2015_nationalité.xls); Eastern European countries are not identified by OCSTAT – their category ‘rest of Europe’ has a participation rate of 32%, but includes other Western European countries; ‘rest of world’ refers to ‘other continents’ in OCSTAT.

As is commonly observed, self-reported electoral turnout greatly overestimates actual turnout (Ansolabehere and Hersh 2012; Deufel and Kedar 2010; Hanmer, Banks, and White 2014; Persson and Solevid 2014; Zeglovits and Kritzinger 2013; Sciarini and Goldberg 2016). As is generally the case, over-representation of certain kinds of survey participants may be another reason for differences between stated and observed turnout (Sciarini and Goldberg 2016). Table 1 compares actual turnout according to the statistical office OCSTAT with declared participation according to the survey. The rate of overestimating turnout

is roughly the same for all nationalities (1.6 to 2.1 times), and the paper continues without attempting to correct for the differences between actual and declared electoral participation.

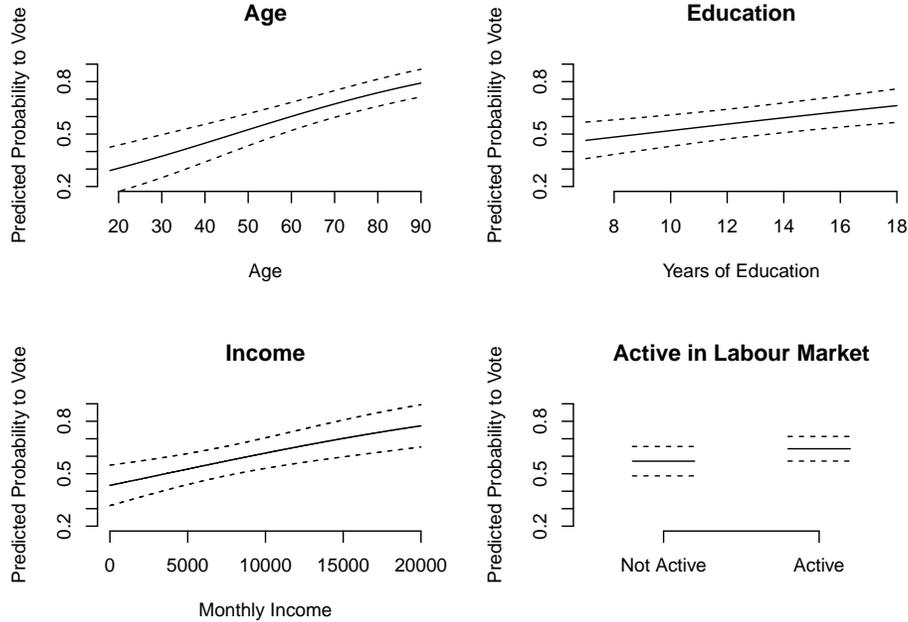
Social Origin

Social origin is associated with electoral participation. Figure 1 shows that the probability to vote in the municipal elections is higher for older individuals (top-left panel), for those with more education (top-right panel), and for those with higher income (bottom-left panel). The predicted probability to vote for a 20-year-old is 30 percent, while the predicted probability for an otherwise equivalent 60-year-old is 60 per cent.⁴ Similarly, a person with basic education completed – 9 years of formal education – is clearly less likely to vote than a university graduate with 18 years of formal education: 50 per cent versus 66 per cent. Or a person with a low monthly income of CHF 2,000 has a 47 per cent probability of voting, compared to someone with a high monthly income of CHF 10,000 who has a 62 per cent probability of voting. Those active in the labour market are more likely to participate (64%) compared to those not active in the labour market (57%). There are no clear gender differences (57% for both, not shown in the figure).

Immigrant groups differ in variables of social origin – and are for that reason less likely to vote. For instance the average Portuguese in the sample is 44 years old, compared to the average Swiss at 59 years. The mean number of education for Italians in the sample is 11 years – 10 years for Portuguese – substantially less than the mean of 14 years for the Swiss population. Median income similarly is substantially lower for traditional immigrant groups. Appendix A2 shows that typical values for these factors vary by nationality group, and thus potentially account for the variance outlined in Table 1. Appendix A3 demonstrates that the sign of the bivariate associations between the predictor variables and voting in municipal elections tends to be the same for all nationality groups; the differences in social origin are therefore likely to translate into differences in turnout.

⁴Here and throughout the paper when predicted probabilities are reported without further qualification, all other variables were set to the mean or 0 in the case of binary variables.

Figure 1: Predicted Probabilities to Vote by Social Origin



Notes: probabilities to votes by age, education, income, and being active in the labour market; the models also include gender; the other variables were set to the mean or 0 (not active in the labour market, male)

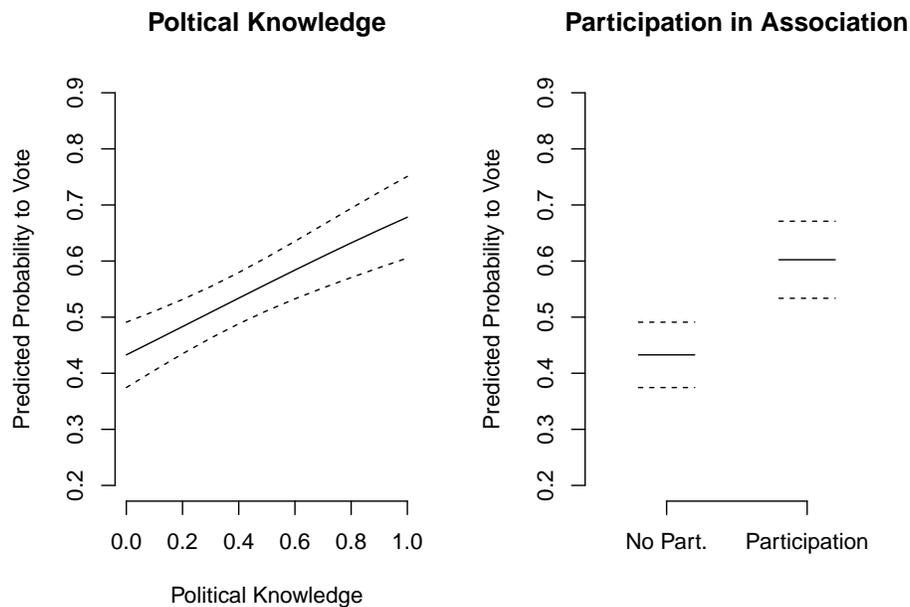
Political Engagement

Political engagement is associated with the probability to vote. Figure 2 gives the predicted probability to vote by political knowledge and participation in human rights associations. Individuals with objectively better political knowledge are more likely to vote. A person who answered both questions incorrectly has a predicted probability to vote of 43 per cent, whereas a person who answered both questions correctly has a predicted probability to vote of 68 per cent. It is plausible, however, that this association is driven by an interest in politics, where interested individuals are both more knowledgeable and more likely to vote. At the same time, political knowledge may influence interest in politics.

Rather than trying to resolve this conundrum, a second variable is considered: participation in human rights associations. Individuals in any way active in this kind of association are more likely to vote (60%) than those not active in human right associations (43%). Individuals more engaged in their community are more likely to vote.

Immigrants tend to be less knowledgeable about politics, and are clearly less likely to participate in human rights associations – and are for these reason less likely to vote. For instance, Spanish immigrants on average scored 0.32 out of 1 on the political knowledge questions, compared to 0.40 out of 1 for Swiss nationals, or 29 per cent of Spanish immigrants participate in human rights associations, compared to 57 per cent of Swiss nationals. Appendix A2 shows that the typical values for these factors vary by nationality group, while Appendix A3 shows that the sign of the associations tends to be the same for all nationality groups.

Figure 2: Predicted Probabilities to Vote by Engagement



Notes: probabilities to vote by political knowledge, and participation in human right associations; the other variable was set to the mean or 0 (no participation)

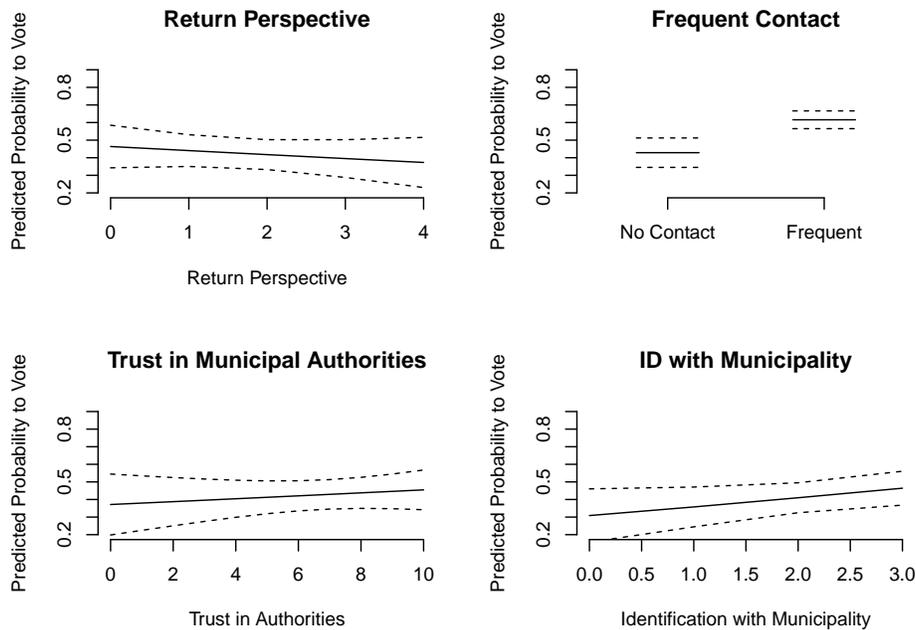
Civic Integration and Networks

Integration and having social networks with the majority population are associated with electoral participation. Individuals with a clear return project are less likely to vote. A person who is not at all considering to return to the country of origin in a permanent manner has a 44 per cent probability to vote, whereas one clearly considering to do so has a 37 per cent probability to vote. Similarly, individuals with frequent contact with Swiss have a 62 per cent probability to vote, whereas individuals without frequent contact with Swiss have a 43 per cent probability to vote.

Higher trust in municipal authorities is associated with a somehow higher probability to vote. Individuals with the least trust have a 37 per cent probability to vote, whereas the most trusting individuals have a 45 per cent probability to vote. Similarly, those who feel most attached to their municipality – having a strong local identity – are more likely to vote (45% predicted probability) than those least attached to their municipality (37% predicted probability).

There are differences between nationality groups in the extent to which they are integrated and have networks involving the majority population. The intention to eventually return to the country of origin is highest for Portuguese and Spanish immigrants. Italians are least likely to report frequent contact with Swiss individuals. 66 per cent of Italians report frequent contact, compared to Swiss individuals with 84 per cent. It is important to note that the base line here is not 100 per cent because not everyone has frequent personal contact with others in society, and because some Swiss nationals have been naturalized but may still prefer contacts in a distinct immigrant community.

Figure 3: Predicted Probabilities to Vote by Civic Integration and Networks



Notes: probabilities to vote by return perspective, frequent contact with Swiss, trust in municipal authorities, and identification with the municipality; the other variables were set to the mean or to 0 (no frequent contact)

Levels of trust in municipal authorities vary between immigrant groups, but interestingly they tend to be somewhat higher for foreign nationals than for Swiss nationals. For instance, on a scale from 0 to 10, the mean response for

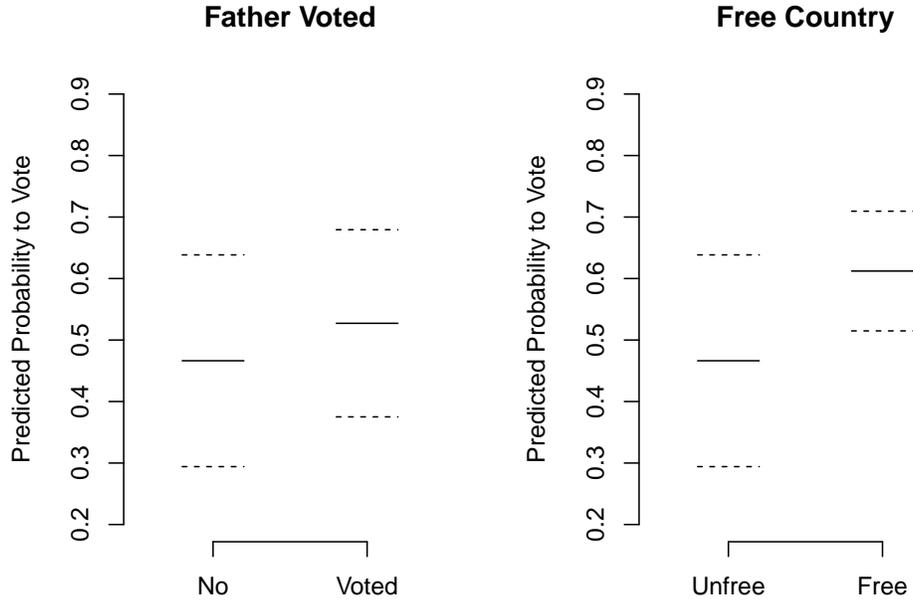
Eastern Europeans is 7.9, or 7.2 for Italians, compared to 6.7 for Swiss nationals. Given the higher levels of trust among immigrants, this variable is not suited to explain why immigrants vote less. Similarly there are no clear differences in identification between Swiss nationals and immigrants, making this variable unsuited for explaining the difference between Swiss and immigrants, and these two variables are not considered in the combined models below. Appendix A2 shows that the typical values for the other factors vary by nationality group, while Appendix A3 shows that the sign of the contact variable is the same for all nationality groups when considered separately.

Socialization

Having been socialized into voting matters for municipal elections. Individuals whose parents voted when the respondent was 14 years old are more likely to vote. This is the case irrespective of the parent. If the father voted, the predicted probability to vote is 53 per cent rather than 47 per cent for respondents with non-voting fathers. The corresponding values are 54 and 46 per cent respectively in the case of mothers. Similarly, coming from a free country increases the likelihood of voting: individuals from countries not classified as completely free a decade ago have a predicted probability to vote of 47 per cent, compared to 61 per cent for individuals from free countries.

There are differences between nationality groups in the extent to which they have been socialized into voting. For instance, 55 per cent of Spanish immigrants report that their father voted, compared to 82 per cent of Swiss respondents. Most immigrants in the canton of Geneva come from countries classified as completely free a decade ago, suggesting that this variable – albeit measuring an important factor – may have little statistical sway. Appendix A2 shows that the typical percentage of fathers' voting varies by nationality group.

Figure 4: Predicted Probabilities to Vote by Socialization



Notes: probabilities to vote by whether the father voted when the respondent was 14, and by origin in a free democracy; the other variable was set to 0 (did not vote, not free)

Combined Models

In a final step, I consider the different covariates jointly in two regression models. The models differ only in the inclusion of a variable that identifies Swiss nationals – and by inference foreign nationals. Figure 5 presents the coefficients of the logistic regression models in graphical form. Given are the estimates as dots along with one and two standard errors as lines of different thickness. Appendix A4 includes these models as conventional tables. We can see that the variables capturing social origin are associated with a higher probability of voting, irrespective of the control of nationality. Contrary to figure 1 above, once all other variables are taken into consideration, the coefficients for education are no longer clearly different from zero.

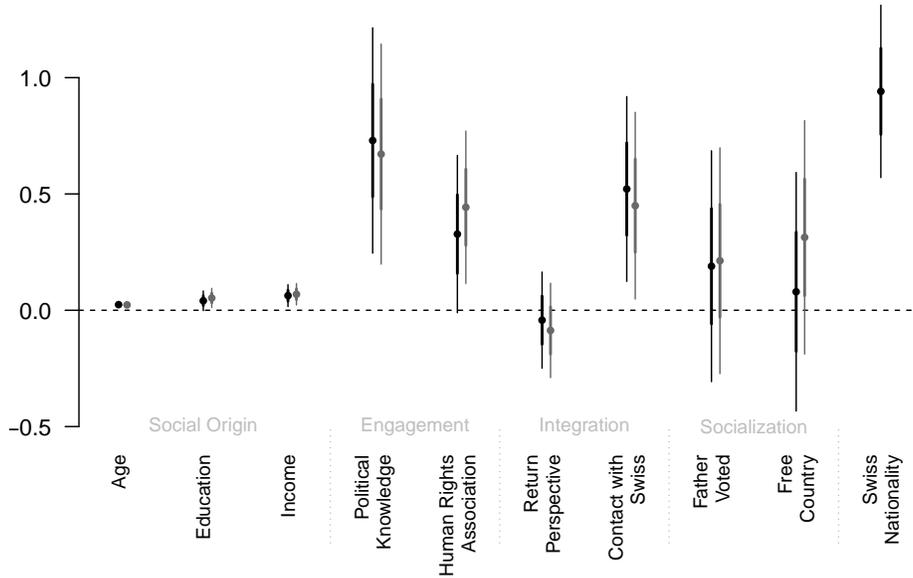
The coefficients for political engagement, civic integration and networks, as well as socialization remain in the same direction as above, irrespective of the inclusion of nationality in the model. The standard errors for these variables are large, and apart from political knowledge and contact with Swiss nationals generally include zero. Notably the variables on socialization are not statistically

significant. Put differently, the combined models presented in Figure 5 support to three of the four explanations. Appendix A5 demonstrates that this does not change when individual nationality (groups) rather than foreign nationality are used in the model.

Appendix A4 includes a series of models to explore the extent to which different explanations help predict electoral participation beyond what can be expected on the basis of social origin alone. To this end, the mean AIC is calculated across all imputations and compared across models. Smaller AIC values stand for a better model fit. Adding variables on socialization does not improve the model fit compared to a model including only social origin. Models including political engagement and civic integration come with better model fits, indicating that these factors likely shape electoral participation beyond differences in social origin.

Even if all four explanations are included, as is the case in Figure 5 and Appendices 4 and 5, variables capturing foreign nationality or specific nationality groups remain statistically significant correlates. This means that the four explanations presented are unable to account for the entirety of the differences between nationality groups, even when considered jointly. Put differently, there are other – unobserved – differences between nationality groups that shape differences in electoral participation. While nationality remains statistically important, in terms of *understanding* differences in electoral participation we do not learn anything on the basis of this variable.

Figure 5: Combined Models of Voting in Municipal Elections



Notes: outcome variable: voted in the municipal elections, predictor variables: age (in years), years of education, monthly income (in 1000 CHF), political knowledge, participation in human rights associations, return perspective, frequent contact with Swiss, father voted when respondent was 14 years old, grew up in a free country, and being a Swiss national; two models are shown, with the variable on being Swiss national only included in the second model (shown in black). The figure gives the log(odds) of voting as dots, along with 1 and 2 standard errors (thick and thin lines).

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has examined the electoral participation of foreign nationals in municipal elections in the Canton of Geneva and compared it with the electoral participation of Swiss nationals. There is clear evidence of a participation gap in that Swiss nationals are more likely to vote than foreign nationals. In search of an explanation for the participation gap, four explanations were examined: social origin, political engagement, civic integration and social networks, and socialization.

The factors that explain electoral participation of foreign nationals reflect those that explain electoral participation of Swiss nationals (compare Ruedin 2010). While all explanations help understand differences in electoral participation, the

two variables capturing socialization ceased to be statistically significant when other explanations were accounted for, notably social origin. None of the explanations on its own, nor the combination of the four explanations, however, was able explain all of the participation gap. For instance, a model accounting for the fact that immigrants from Portugal tend to be younger and less educated than Swiss nationals still leaves us with significant differences between nationalities.

Frequent contact with Swiss nationals is associated with higher turnout (compare Meer 2016; Foschi and Lauriola 2014). These findings are in line with Ruedin’s (2011) argument that ‘roots’ in the society matter for participation – not just time spent in the community –, although a participation gap remains.

Further research is necessary to understand the persistence of the participation gap across models and across time. Statistical interactions may improve the models, such as the interaction reported by Wass et al. (2015) that the age at migration and coming from a democratic country are interacting. On a quite different level, research like that by Sciarini and Goldberg (2016) may be important to understand the participation gap. The difficulties of reaching foreigners from some nationalities in telephone interviews may indicate problematic over-representation of politically interested and educated citizens in some cases. That said, the rate of over-reporting was similar across all nationalities, suggesting that such biases are probably a minor concern.

Further research is also necessary to better understand who has a stake in society, so to speak. In this context, (felt) discrimination may play an important role for some foreign citizen. Because of negative attitudes towards them (Pottie-Sherman and Wilkes 2015; Pecoraro and Ruedin 2015; Berg 2015), immigrants may not feel welcomed and invest less in local affairs. Indeed, in a meta-analysis of field experiments Zschirnt and Ruedin (2016) demonstrate that discrimination remains commonplace, which could lead to political disengagement and withdrawal in a way poorly captured with the social network variables in the current dataset. Important lessons may be learned from a systematic analysis of the stated reasons for non-voting – despite the fact that at first sight there are no substantial differences between Swiss and foreign nationals in the reasons given for non-voting.

In conclusion, the same factors seem to influence electoral participation of Swiss and foreign nationals. Immigrants tend to score lower on variables associated with electoral participation such as age, education, political knowledge, or contact with the majority population. This may translate into immigrants’ perception of having less of a stake in society, although with somewhat different stated political preferences they may have political clout (Strijbis 2014, Appendix A1). If the participation gap is indeed about having a stake in society as is suggested here, we need not merely wait for the gap to disappear, but continue engagement with different immigrant groups.

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Appendix A1: Preferred Party by Nationality

Table 2: Which Party Did You Vote For?

Party	CH	EEur	ES	FR	IT	PT	ROW	West
Left	50%	30%	53%	41%	54%	67%	50%	47%
Right	50%	70%	47%	59%	46%	33%	50%	53%

Notes: percentages of valid answers, only voters included by definition; coded as left = Green Party (PES/GLP), Social Democratic Party (PS/SP), Ensemble à Gauche; right = Green Liberal Party (PVL/GLP), Mouvement Citoyen Genevois (MCG), Christian Democratic People's Party (PDC/CVP), The Liberals (PL, PLR/FDP), Swiss People's Party (UDC/SVP); CH = Switzerland, EEur = Eastern Europe, ES = Spain, FR = France, IT = Italy, PT = Portugal, ROW = rest of world, West = other Western countries

Table 3: Do You Feel Close to a Political Party? Which Party?

Party	CH	EEur	ES	FR	IT	PT	ROW	West
Left	51%	50%	71%	39%	72%	65%	61%	38%
Right	49%	50%	29%	61%	28%	35%	39%	62%

Notes: percentages of valid answers, voters and non-voters included; coded as left = Green Party (PES/GLP), Social Democratic Party (PS/SP), Ensemble à Gauche; right = Green Liberal Party (PVL/GLP), Mouvement Citoyen Genevois (MCG), Christian Democratic People's Party (PDC/CVP), The Liberals (PL, PLR/FDP), Swiss People's Party (UDC/SVP); CH = Switzerland, EEur = Eastern Europe, ES = Spain, FR = France, IT = Italy, PT = Portugal, ROW = rest of world, West = other Western countries

Appendix A2: Differences In Predictor Variables by Nationality (Group)

Table 4: Variables of Social Origin by Nationality (Group)

	Age	Education	Income	Female	Active
Switzerland	59	14	7,500	58%	47%
Eastern Europe	41	12	5,000	44%	64%
Spain	56	10	5,500	53%	67%
France	62	14	6,500	59%	36%
Italy	62	11	4,500	60%	34%
Portugal	44	10	6,500	42%	74%
Rest of World	49	13	4,500	55%	54%
Other Western	59	16	9,500	49%	44%

Notes: given are the mean age, mean years of education, median income, percentage female, and percentage active in the labour market by nationality (group)

Table 5: Variables of Political Engagement by Nationality (Group)

	Political Knowledge	Association
Switzerland	0.40	57%
Eastern Europe	0.31	37%
Spain	0.32	29%
France	0.43	41%
Italy	0.33	31%
Portugal	0.35	19%
Rest of World	0.35	29%
Other Western	0.53	56%

Notes: given are the mean political knowledge, and the percentage active in human rights associations by nationality (group)

Table 6: Variables of Civic Integration and Networks by Nationality (Group)

	Return	Contact	Trust	Attachment
Switzerland	1.4	84%	6.7	2.2
Eastern Europe	1.4	67%	7.9	2.7
Spain	1.8	68%	6.8	2.5
France	1.4	81%	6.9	2.4
Italy	1.4	66%	7.2	2.4
Portugal	1.9	70%	6.9	2.3
Rest of World	1.8	64%	7.3	2.4
Other Western	1.4	72%	6.9	2.3

Notes: given are the mean score on return perspective, the percentage with frequent contact with Swiss nationals, mean trust in municipal authorities, and mean attachment to the municipality (identity)

Table 7: Variables of Socialization by Nationality (Group)

	Father Voted	Free Country
Switzerland	82%	100%
Eastern Europe	85%	2%
Spain	55%	100%
France	86%	100%
Italy	79%	100%
Portugal	72%	100%
Rest of World	67%	13%
Other Western	74%	98%

Notes: given are the percentage whose father voted when the respondent was 14 years old, and the percentage coming from a free country

Appendix A3: Associations by Nationality Group

Table 8: Signs of Regression Coefficients by Nationality

Variable	Combined	CH	EEur	ES	FR	IT	PT	ROW	West
Age	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+
Education	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+
Income	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Political Knowledge	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	+	+
Association	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-
Return Perspective	-	-	+	+	+	-	+	-	-
Contact with Swiss	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Father Voted	+	-	+	+	+	-	+	-	+

Notes: In this table, logistic regressions are run with voting as the outcome variable, and the variable on the left as the sole predictor variable. For instance, the row ‘Age’ refers to models with voting as the outcome variable, and only age as a predictor variable. Given is the sign of the log(odds), once for the model with all nationality (groups) combined, and then for each nationality (group) separately. Abbreviations as in Appendix A1. Because of the small sample size many of these coefficients are not statistically significant at $p < 0.05$.

Appendix A4: Specific and Combined Models

Table 9: Logistic Regression by Hypothesis and Combined

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Social Origin						
Age	0.028 *	0.025 *	0.028 *	0.027 *	0.023 *	0.024 *
	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Education	0.075 *	0.055 *	0.071 *	0.076 *	0.053 *	0.041
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.021)	(0.021)
Income	0.0086 *	0.0079 *	0.0081 *	0.0080 *	0.0069 *	0.0063 *
	(0.0022)	(0.0023)	(0.0022)	(0.0022)	(0.0023)	(0.0023)
Engagement						
Political Knowledge		0.713 *			0.671 *	0.730 *
		(0.232)			(0.237)	(0.242)
No Participation (ref.)		.			.	.
Association Participation		0.425 *			0.443 *	0.327
		(0.162)			(0.164)	(0.169)
Integration						
Return Perspective			-0.104		-0.087	-0.043
			(0.102)		(0.101)	(0.103)
No Contact (ref.)			.		.	.
Contact w/ Swiss			0.451		0.450 *	0.521 *
			(0.202)		(0.201)	(0.199)
Socialization						
Did Not Vote (ref.)				.	.	.
Father Voted				0.149	0.213	0.189
				(0.239)	(0.243)	(0.248)
Non-Free Country (ref.)				.	.	.
Free Country				0.311	0.313	0.079
				(0.246)	(0.251)	(0.256)
Non-Swiss National (ref.)						.
Swiss National						0.941 *
						(0.185)
Mean AIC	1045.4	1032.1	1038.8	1045.9	1026.6	999.6

Notes: * = significant at $p < 0.05$; outcome variable = voted in municipal election; logistic regression model; predictor variables given on the left; shown are the log(odds) with standard errors in brackets, the intercepts are not shown; data were multiply imputed and the combined results are shown. For comparison, mean AIC across imputations for a model with only Swiss nationality as predictor = 1076.2; mean AIC for a model with only nationality (groups) as predictors = 1067.8

Appendix A5: Combined Model with Nationality (Group)

Table 10: Regression Table: Controlling for Nationality (Group)

	log(odds)	SE	p-value	
Socialization				
Age	0.020	0.005	0.0003	*
Education	0.035	0.022	0.113	
Income	0.00067	0.0024	0.005	*
Engagement				
Political Knowledge	0.754	0.244	0.002	*
No Participation (ref.)	.			
Association Partic.	0.363	0.169	0.031	*
Integration				
Return Perspective	-0.040	0.010	0.705	
No Contact (ref.)	.			
Contact w/ Swiss	0.531	0.198	0.007	*
Socialization				
Did Not Vote (ref.)	.			
Father Voted	0.137	0.250	0.583	
Nationality (Group)				
Swiss (reference)	.	.	.	
Eastern Europe	-0.982	0.386	0.011	*
Spain	-0.993	0.305	0.001	*
France	-0.835	0.274	0.002	*
Italy	-0.475	0.265	0.073	
Portugal	-0.117	0.305	0.0001	*
Rest of World	-0.870	0.343	0.011	*
Other Western	-0.848	0.290	0.003	*

Notes: * = significant at $p < 0.05$; outcome variable = voted in municipal election; logistic regression model; predictor variables given on the left; shown are the log(odds), the intercept is not shown; data were multiply imputed and the combined results are shown. Mean AIC across imputations = 999.6

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