Culture, Context, and the Political Incorporation of Immigrant-Origin Groups in Europe

RAFAELA M. DANCYGIER

Do the social and cultural resources characteristic of immigrant groups guide their integration, or do host country receiving contexts have a greater impact on this process? A large body of research has addressed this question, aiming in particular to isolate these dueling effects on immigrants’ economic fortunes. Studies have documented substantial variation in the occupational and educational attainment across immigrant groups, and some have found that these differences remain when structural characteristics are accounted for. While such findings support the view that cultural and behavioral repertoires intrinsic to immigrant groups are ultimately responsible for socio-economic mobility, other scholars point to such structural factors as labor market conditions, economic restructuring, or welfare policy as essential in holding back or promoting these groups’ economic advancement.¹ Many occupy the middle ground between these two poles: group-level attributes and host society structures interact to shape immigrants’ economic pathways and destinations in a nonlinear pattern (Marrow 2005; Zhou 2005; Portes and Rumbaut 2006).

Turning to immigrants’ political incorporation, this chapter makes the case that analysts benefit from considering both group traits and institutional settings, and it demonstrates how these two sets of variables shape immigrants’ political incorporation across contexts. A host of behavioral and structural features help set in motion immigrants’ path toward political

¹ For reviews, see Rajman and Tienda (1999), Zhou (2005), and Portes and Rumbaut (2006).
incorporation. The importance of these features comes into sharp relief when studying immigrant electoral participation across groups and across institutional contexts. Immigrant groups who face the same electoral institutions may vary in their ability or willingness to rally the co-ethnic vote, resulting in divergent incorporation outcomes and supporting the notion that group-level characteristics are key variables in shaping political incorporation. In this way, immigrants emerge as distinctive political actors. Variables that usually go a long way in accounting for patterns of political participation such as income, education, or age do not provide the same kind of explanatory leverage when it comes to immigrant groups’ electoral behavior.

Notwithstanding this distinctiveness, immigrant voters and candidates confront the same electoral institutions as do natives or other nonimmigrant minorities. As has been shown with respect to other groups—for example, women, national minorities, the working class—electoral institutions matter in translating political mobilization into electoral inclusion. Comparing across institutional settings, we thus observe that some electoral rules reward immigrant groups for getting out the ethnic vote, while others do not turn immigrants who may have what it takes to organize collectively into influential political actors.

In this chapter I illustrate how both culture and context matter in shaping immigrants’ political incorporation. Figure 7.1 summarizes these dynamics.\(^2\) Within the same institutional contexts, differences in groups’ mobilizational capacity lead to differences in immigrant political incorporation (arrow A). Some groups may draw on social networks to raise turnout and to turn group members into pivotal constituencies. Such networks can predate arrival in the new country and shape the immigration and settlement processes themselves. In the destination country, they may be utilized for electoral purposes. This chapter will illustrate the electoral significance of these organizational resources by comparing political behaviors of immigrant groups who vary in such capacities within one institutional context—local elections in the United Kingdom. To highlight the significance of institutions, I make reference to immigrant political incorporation in a set of additional European countries. When we hold constant group-level characteristics advantageous for mobilization, electoral institutions will, on their own, exert influences on immigrants’ political incorporation (arrow B). Some electoral rules are more conducive to the election of immigrants and minority groups more generally than others. In this chapter, I focus on the size of the electoral arena and on rules that

---

\(^2\) For a comprehensive framework of immigrant political incorporation that also examines group characteristics as well as macro- and meso-level institutions, see Bird, Saalfeld, and Wüst (2011).
determine the importance of party elites in candidate nomination procedures, institutions that vary across European countries.

In addition, electoral rules interact with groups’ ability to mobilize to produce distinct incorporation outcomes: the effect of groups’ mobilizational capacity can be amplified—or blunted—by electoral institutions (arrow C). Groups that have the capacity to mobilize collectively may confront institutions that make such mobilization more or less effective at the polls. Similarly, institutions that may encourage immigrant participation and representation are more likely to have such effects when groups have the social resources to take advantage of the institutional setting.

The chapter is organized as follows. I first illustrate the significance of group-level social organization by investigating differences in turnout and representation across groups in one country and in one electoral context: local elections in the United Kingdom. The second part of the chapter then goes on to show how cross-national differences in electoral rules have significant implications for immigrant voting and representation and is followed by a discussion of the interactive effects of culture and context on immigrant political incorporation. The last section concludes.

Before proceeding it is important to point out that in this chapter immigrant political incorporation refers specifically to electoral participation and descriptive representation, mainly at the local level. These are only two dimensions of the broader concept of political inclusion of newcomers, but they are worthy of study. Research has shown that group-level turnout is usually related to the election of group members and, moreover, that the election of group members tends to be associated with substantive representation of group interests.  

---

3 On such linkages, see, for example, Kasinitz et al. (2008), Dancygier (2010a, 2010b), and Tatari (2010). Note that some have called into question that descriptive representation leads to policy gains (e.g., Cameron, Epstein, and O’Halloran 1996). For a discussion of the importance of descriptive representation, even in the absence of substantive representation, see Mansbridge (1999).
Though this chapter does not intend to argue that mobilization at the group level is the only or the best way to achieve political incorporation and representation, empirically such collective organization has been linked to these outcomes. Furthermore, to keep this chapter manageable I restrict my discussion to contexts where large shares of immigrants are eligible to vote. Though many immigrant-receiving countries allow noncitizens to cast ballots in local elections (Bauer 2007), this is not the case when it comes to national polls. Here, cross-national differences in citizenship rules still prove to be decisive, and previous research has highlighted the significance of citizenship regimes in molding various dimensions of immigrant political behavior (Koopmans et al. 2005). The present analysis follows this research in considering the important impact of institutions on immigrant political incorporation, but it focuses on contexts where immigrants are allowed to participate in elections.  

### Group Differences in Immigrant Political Incorporation

When attempting to explain differences in voter turnout, political scientists often begin by analyzing differences in the attributes of individual voters, such as age, socioeconomic status, or gender (e.g., Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Empirical studies of immigrant turnout have likewise focused on individual characteristics (see Ramakrishnan 2005 and sources cited therein), though prominent accounts also view electoral participation and immigrant political incorporation more generally as a collective, group-level process (e.g., Wolfinger 1965; Uhlaner 1989).

The remarkable differences in turnout rates across immigrant groups cannot be easily accounted for by such variables as immigrants’ gender or their socioeconomic achievement. Figure 7.2 depicts self-reported turnout rates of several immigrant groups in the United Kingdom, broken down by the share of co-ethnics who live in a respondent’s neighborhood (data are derived from survey responses of foreign-born UK citizens, contained in the 2003 Citizenship Survey; see Office for National Statistics and Home Office 2005). Several

---

4 Though I limit my discussion to this group for reasons of space, it should be borne in mind that countries vary in the extent to which they confer such eligibility (via citizenship or local voting rights). Eligibility in itself may thus denote varying degrees of political engagement across contexts.

5 Specifically, respondents were asked: “What proportion of people in your neighborhood is from the same ethnic group as you?” Respondents answered “less than half,” “about half,” or “more than half.” According to cognitive tests conducted at the pilot stage of the survey, respondents tended to associate the neighborhood with their street or their block (Green and Farmer 2004, 63).
patterns stand out. First, turnout varies considerably across groups. Migrants from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh register the highest turnout rates, with averages of 68, 67, and 63 percent, respectively. These impressive turnout rates easily surpass those of the white British native-born population, 54 percent of whom reported to have voted in local elections. By contrast, only 47 percent of those born in the Caribbean isles and 38 percent of migrants hailing from Africa cast ballots in the previous local elections. Among Chinese migrants, turnout is as low as 21 percent.

Studies about the voting behavior of immigrants in the United States have found that turnout tends to rise with the time migrants have spent in the destination country (e.g., Gordon 1964; Ramakrishnan 2005), a finding in line with assimilation theory. Yet, the aforementioned differences do not map onto groups’ immigration histories. Among the groups shown here, Caribbeans started arriving in England in great numbers in the late 1950s, a few years before large-scale immigration from the Indian subcontinent began. Similarly, the majority of Chinese immigrants—the group with the lowest turnout rates—trace their origins to postwar migration that began in the mid-1950s. Most of the United Kingdom’s African immigrants have more recent origins (Hiro 1991; Wei 1994; the survey does not ask respondents when they arrived in the United Kingdom).

Moreover, research on nonimmigrant and immigrant voting behavior has found that electoral participation increases with age (e.g., Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba et al. 1995; Ramakrishnan 2005). In the present sample, immigrants from the Caribbean isles are, on average, the oldest group, followed by Indians and Pakistanis. Nonetheless, turnout among Caribbeans is at the low end of the scale and indeed much below the participation exhibited by South Asian migrants. Immigrant voting patterns at the group level are also not easily reconciled with the long-established finding that turnout rises with
socioeconomic status. Sixty percent of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis (compared to 27 and 26 percent of black Caribbeans and Indians, respectively) find themselves in the bottom fifth of the income distribution, but these groups are near the top when it comes to electoral participation.\(^6\)

Another interesting pattern to emerge from Figure 7.2 relates to neighborhood effects. Though turnout increases among all groups as the concentration of co-ethnics in the neighborhood rises, this effect appears to be more substantive and significant among South Asian migrants than it does among those originating from the Caribbean and Africa (Chinese turnout in ethnic neighborhoods is not shown because too few Chinese respondents live in such areas).\(^7\) The data in Figure 7.2 cannot tell us whether immigrants that live in areas with high ethnic concentrations have different preferences for electoral participation—irrespective of the makeup of the neighborhood—than do immigrants who live in low-concentration areas, whether mobilization is more effective in areas with a high share of co-ethnics, or both. Either way, ethnic neighborhoods, rather than signaling a retreat from mainstream political culture or a withdrawal from political information, may be associated with electoral participation, though turnout rates still vary considerably by group.\(^8\)

To gain a better understanding of the ways in which group features matter in patterning immigrant political incorporation as outlined in the model in Figure 7.1 (arrow A), scholars can draw on qualitative and ethnographic accounts of voter behavior across groups and over time. With respect to immigrant political behavior in the United Kingdom, previous research has shown that nonimmigrant candidates have relied on ethnic intermediaries to turn out the community vote while immigrant candidates have engaged co-ethnic electorates directly, with the incidence of these strategies depending on the mobilizational capacity at the group level (e.g., Solomos and Back 1995; Dancygier 2010a). Indeed, accounts of immigrant political mobilization in England going back to the postwar years already hint at such dynamics. Settlers from the Caribbean were more loosely connected with one another than migrants from the subcontinent, who displayed tight social networks buttressed by links of kin, clan, and caste. Political entrepreneurs have made use of these networks

\(^6\) These statistics refer to disposable incomes net of housing costs; see Saggar (2009). For a similar finding with respect to the second generation in New York City, see Kasinitz et al. (2008).

\(^7\) When regressing local turnout on the three-point ethnic concentration variable, ethnic concentration is statistically significant (at \(p = 0.1\) or less) among Indians and Bangladeshis and insignificant among Pakistanis, Caribbeans, and Africans.

\(^8\) In the United States, residential ethnic concentration has likewise been shown to promote turnout in some settings, but it is also believed to depress electoral participation in others (Ramakrishnan 2005; Tam Cho, Gimpel, and Dyck 2006).
but have found it more challenging to approach and mobilize the Caribbean electorate. As early as the 1960s, South Asian immigrants regularly fielded their own candidates and relied on strong social networks to get out the vote. Numerous studies of voter mobilization illustrate how so-called ethnic leaders within South Asian communities were able to rally their compatriots to the polls.

Such dynamics appear to have persisted over the decades: on the basis of research conducted in Birmingham, Solomos and Back (1995, 79) find that “the whole process of vote brokering also often involved the mobilization of kin and clan relations.” Among Birmingham’s Pakistani-origin migrants in particular, “Caste plays a significant role in defining lines of support and recruitment…. This was the mechanism by which supporters could not only be recruited but also [be] persuaded to support particular candidates.” In brief, South Asian local electoral participation in the United Kingdom has been high, and it has been reinforced by mobilization at the group level.

By contrast, local electoral participation among migrants from the West Indies has been much more subdued. Students of Caribbean immigration noted early on that West Indians were “on the whole not yet used to being ‘organization men’” (Glass 1961, 200–201). The apparent absence of ethnic leaders, an election researcher in Birmingham concluded, made it “very difficult for anyone, whether West Indian or English, to try to speak to or influence the West Indian community as a whole,” contributing to low turnout rates (Shuttleworth 1965, 73). Even where Caribbean-origin migrants had settled in large numbers, such as in Brixton (south London), their “settlement… lack[ed] a potential elite or internal leadership” (Patterson 1963, 59), which in turn made it more demanding for party elites to mobilize this electorate. More recently, scholars have asserted that West Indians are “ill-equipped by tradition and disposition to provide an exclusively ‘ethnic’ leadership…. West Indians are disinclined to base social and political action on ethnicity” (Goulbourne 1990, 297).

This dislike for communal political organization is hardly a problem from the perspective of assimilation theory. But it has also been associated with lower levels of electoral participation and descriptive representation. The rejection of ethnically based electioneering among Britain’s Caribbean-origin migrants has contributed to the group’s relative underrepresentation in local politics. By the early 1990s, when South Asians constituted about half of the ethnic minority population, they fielded the majority (70 percent) of ethnic

---

9 The discussion about electoral mobilization among South Asians and West Indians in the United Kingdom draws on findings from Dancygier (2010a).

10 See, for example, Bentley (1972/1973), Scott (1972/1973), Le Lohé (1979), and Eade (1989).
minority councilors. Moreover, in a number of cities, South Asians had almost reached representational parity: the share of elected councilors who were South Asian mirrored this group’s share in the cities’ population. By contrast, descriptive representation of Caribbean immigrants has been found to be lagging (Le Lohé 1998; Maxwell 2008). The pronounced differences in mobilizational capacities across groups have thus had lasting impacts.

The comparison of South Asians and Caribbeans in the United Kingdom illustrates the importance of the effect of group mobilizational capacity on immigrant political incorporation within one institutional setting (arrow A). The substantial and persistent group differences in turnout rates support the view that characteristics of ethnic groups explain differences in immigrant political behavior. Similar to studies that have attributed differentials in immigrant groups’ economic advancement to an intangible and unobservable “ethnic-group effect” (Chiswick 1978, 914), the group-level variation in turnout rates in the face of similar immigration histories, societal contexts, and economic conditions in the receiving country (see Dancygier 2010a) suggests that the cultures and behavioral patterns that immigrants carry over from their homelands crucially influence their political incorporation in the destination country. Yet, as the model of immigrant political incorporation presented earlier implies, an account that focuses on such group-level traits alone is incomplete when analysts want to understand differences in political inclusion of newcomers across contexts.

Differences in Electoral Institutions and Immigrant Political Incorporation

The differences in turnout and representation across groups within one institutional context reveal the importance of group characteristics. Once we vary the institutional setting, however, we begin to appreciate the power of electoral rules in shaping immigrant electoral participation and descriptive representation (this section refers to arrow B in Figure 7.1). For reasons of space, I will only focus on two types of institutions here: the size of the electoral arena and the role of party elites in the nomination process (keeping in mind that macro-variables, such as citizenship regimes, can have additional influence).

The expanse of electoral boundaries can dilute or expand the potential immigrant electoral clout and thereby influence both immigrants’ turnout rates and the likelihood of electing a co-ethnic. At-large elections, where the entire city forms one electoral district, have thus been shown to be less favorable to the election of minorities than have elections that divide the city into districts. This logic holds when groups are not evenly distributed across the
city (as is often the case with immigrant populations), and it has been used to explain the election of African Americans in US cities.\textsuperscript{11} In district-based elections, groups may constitute a large enough share of the electorate to motivate participation and to facilitate the election of a group member. When the entire city forms one district, relative group size declines and groups will be less likely to elect a fellow immigrant, holding constant a group’s capacity to mobilize.

Differences in the size of the electoral arena can help explain part of the variation in immigrant political incorporation across Britain and France.\textsuperscript{12} British cities are divided into wards, which, on average, contain about 6,000 residents.\textsuperscript{13} Given this size, a small number of immigrant voters can in fact swing election outcomes. Moreover, immigrant newcomers themselves may be more comfortable and successful accessing local ward party organizations in their neighborhoods compared to party organizations at the city level.

In France, by contrast, the entire city forms one electoral district, considerably enlarging the electoral arena. This arrangement makes it easier for political candidates to ignore immigrant electorates without incurring high costs at the polls. Indeed, party leaderships in French cities have been found to pay less attention to immigrant voters than have their counterparts in Britain. Attempts to incorporate immigrant voters in France have often failed to move beyond symbolic tokenism (Geisser 1997; Bird 2005; Maxwell 2012).

To be sure, a host of additional contextual features contribute to differential incorporation outcomes in Britain and France, including, on one hand, French-style republican assimilationism, which shuns the recognition of communal bonds, and British-style multiculturalism on the other, which, at least in the past, has not only recognized but also reinforced such ties (Koopmans et al. 2005). Yet, that even within one country, the United States, at-large elections have been systematically linked to the underrepresentation of

\textsuperscript{11} See, for instance, Trounstine and Valdini (2008) for such a finding and for a concise review of the literature relating these institutions to the election of minorities in American municipalities. See also Davidson and Grofman (1994) and Cameron et al. (1996) on how redistricting influences descriptive and substantive representation of African Americans in Congress. See also Posner (2004) on how political boundaries can change the relative sizes of ethnic groups, thereby affecting incentives for interethnic coalition building and, subsequently, influencing the political salience of ethnic cleavages across contexts.

\textsuperscript{12} See Garbaye (2005) and Maxwell (2012) on this topic. Note that British local elections operate according to plurality rule and wards typically elect between one and three candidates. French local elections follow semiproportional rules that heavily favor winning parties by allotting disproportionate seat shares to them. For instance, a party that wins 60 percent of the vote receives half of all council seats in addition to another 60 percent of the remaining seats, for a total of 80 percent of all seats (see Bird 2005).

\textsuperscript{13} This figure is based on 2001 census data (author’s calculation, available at http:///) and will be somewhat higher in urban areas where immigrants tend to settle.
minorities at the local level when compared to district-level elections speaks to the importance of this institutional difference in shaping political incorporation of immigrants.\footnote{For a review of the US literature, as well as further evidence of this pattern, see Trounstine and Valdini (2008).}

Another set of institutional variables that can have significant effects on immigrant electoral participation and representation pertains to the role of party elites in the nomination and election process. In some countries, incumbent party elites exercise considerable control over nomination procedures, while in others, this process is more open to outsiders, including to immigrant newcomers. Moreover, in systems that use party lists, once candidates are selected to run for office, elites may influence their shot at getting elected by determining their placement on the list. When examining how nomination procedures affect immigrant political incorporation, analysts should investigate at what stage immigrants can be involved in the nomination process and, where applicable, if they can influence the placement of candidates.

Continuing with the juxtaposition of Britain and France, we once again observe that British elections are more open to immigrants than are French elections. Though rules vary somewhat by party (Ali and O’Cinneide 2002), local parties in Britain tend to play a large role in the selection of candidates. Here, ward party members are involved in the selection process by voting for their preferred candidate at ward party meetings. Ward party membership is, in turn, open to local residents, including to immigrants. In wards that are home to sizable immigrant-origin electorates, immigrants have joined ward parties in great numbers and have thereby been able to select co-ethnics to run in local elections. There is, of course, no guarantee that these comparatively open rules are indeed followed in practice, and researchers have to check to what extent formal rules are followed in practice. In the United Kingdom, for instance, party elites at higher levels have at times stepped in on behalf of nonimmigrant candidates who lost nomination to immigrant-origin candidates, and established members have accused immigrants of bending the rules when undertaking membership drives (Solomos and Beck 1995; Geddes 1998; Purdam 2001). Furthermore, party elites do play an important role in approving candidates’ eligibility for selection, and it is also at this stage that immigrant-origin office seekers have encountered discrimination, especially when they wish to represent safe seats in mostly white, nonimmigrant areas (Ali and O’Cinneide 2002; Dancygier 2010b). Nevertheless, immigrants have been shown to enter local ward parties with great success and to elect fellow co-ethnics to run in their ward party (Dancygier 2010a).
Party elites are more influential in selecting candidates in French elections. As Bird (2005, 438) explains, the “selection of candidates is controlled by the mayor and his local power barons. While visible minorities might be included on the list, they are rarely given key positions.” Elites thus not only determine who may run, but also what position a candidate receives on the list. Once immigrant-origin politicians succeed in securing a spot on the party list, the party leadership may still place them on the bottom of this list, ultimately thwarting these candidates’ chances of being elected (Garbaye 2005).

Note that voters can also influence the placement of candidates on party lists, and this ability may be conducive to political inclusion of migrants. Though elites are generally crucial in determining candidates’ entry and position on party lists, electoral rules that allow voters to register preference votes for specific candidates can diminish the importance of elites. Such a system characterizes local elections in several European countries, including Belgium, the Netherlands, and Denmark. Here, voters can choose to cast votes for the party as a whole, or they can elect to allocate personal votes for preferred candidates. Candidates who obtain sufficient personal votes can improve on their list position and thus enhance their chances of getting elected. This system thus places more power in the hands of voters compared to elites, and it allows immigrant voters to express a preference for co-ethnics, if they choose to do so. Studies have indeed documented that immigrants are more likely than native voters to make use of personal votes to boost the descriptive representation of the immigrant electorate (Togeby 1999, 2008; Bird 2005; Teney et al. 2010).

Interactive Effects

This chapter has traced how group traits and electoral institutions shape patterns of immigrant electoral incorporation. In addition to their independent effects, group features and institutions interact to enhance or dampen the impact of each on immigrant political incorporation (arrow C in Figure 7.1).

As we have seen, for example, district-level elections have contributed to political inclusion of newcomers when compared to at-large contests, but it is especially in the presence of groups that organize collectively that small electoral wards can promote turnout and the election of immigrant candidates. The contrast between Caribbeans and South Asians in the United Kingdom makes this point. Similarly, though candidate nomination procedures are comparatively open in the United Kingdom, it is groups who have the capacity

---

15 All three countries permit noncitizens to vote in local elections, which operate according to proportional representation rules.
to recruit co-ethnics to become party members and to thereby increase their chances of nomination that have been particularly effective in using this system to advance group-level turnout and representation (Dancygier 2010b).

Similarly, systems that allow voters to cast personal votes have raised immigrant turnout and representation of groups that show a penchant for ethnically based campaigning and voting. In Belgium, the Netherlands, and Denmark, preferential voting has thus been used to great effect by immigrants of Turkish origin, many of which appear to view local elections through the prism of community interest and organization and who can parlay the strength of their social networks into political capital. As suggested by the model presented earlier, in these countries, strong mobilizational capacity converges with electoral institutions to provide incentives for electoral participation among voters and elites alike. Nonimmigrant party elites have not shied away from relying on this system to “conquer local ethnic electoral niches,” hoping to appeal to immigrant communities that can rally their members on election day (Teney et al. 2010, 293). 16

Note also that one implication of the model proposed here is that incentives produced by specific electoral rules and groups’ mobilizational capacity can be at least as significant in molding immigrant political incorporation as are national citizenship regimes (though, importantly, the latter help determine eligibility for participation in the first place). As Teney et al. (2010, 279) point out with reference to the effects of preferential voting and ethnic mobilization among immigrant-origin minorities in Belgium, given these institutions’ and groups’ mobilizational capacity, party elites are not reluctant to mobilize voters on the basis of their ethnicity even though elections in Belgium and immigrant incorporation more generally take “place in a discursive context in which political mobilization on an ethnic ticket was—fairly hypocritically—being presented by all political parties as something undesirable.” Students of immigrant political incorporation may therefore find that an assimilationist national ethos may matter less than do electoral institutions and group mobilizational capacity on the ground.

On the flipside, the model of political incorporation presented in this chapter suggests that the capacity of groups to organize collectively may promote immigrants’ electoral incorporation only provided that institutions are responsive to such behavior (arrow C). In France, for instance, even groups that are characterized by dense social networks and high organizational capacities confront a closed political environment. The example of the French Maghrebian population is instructive here. This group is relatively rich in community associations and has created an array of social organizations that

16 See also Togeby (1999, 2008); Boussetta, Gair, and Jacobs (2005); Dekker and Fattah (2006); and van Londen, Phalet, and Hagendoorn (2007).
political actors—immigrant and native alike—can liaise with to coordinate political actions in the electoral arena.\(^\text{17}\) Yet, evidence from localities across France demonstrates that established party elites sideline this group’s attempts to gain access to city hall. In Lille, for example, a majoritarian electoral system and a powerful Socialist establishment inhibited minority electoral participation in the 1980s and 1990s (Garbaye 2005). Attempts to increase the number of ethnic minority candidates have similarly been thwarted by local elites who ultimately control selection procedures (Bird 2005). Though Maghrebians’ mobilizational capacity has increased electoral incorporation when compared to Caribbean immigrants who are (as in the United Kingdom) less likely to be connected to such networks, at-large elections and the dominance of incumbent party elites are some of the institutions that have helped stunt the impact of group mobilizational capacity on immigrant inclusion. As Maxwell (2012) has shown, Maghrebian turnout only exceeds that of French Caribbeans by a few percentage points and falls significantly below that of native-born white French voters. Moreover, rates of Maghrebian descriptive representation have generally been lower than those of South Asians in the United Kingdom. These outcomes are in line with the prediction of this chapter’s model of immigrant political incorporation embodied by arrow C.

**Conclusion**

Diverse outcomes of immigrant political incorporation in Europe are products of culture and context. In this chapter, I have highlighted how group-level mobilizational capacity can promote immigrant turnout and descriptive representation when paired with institutions that allow immigrants to utilize their organizational resources for electoral purposes—provided immigrant groups have an interest in such mobilization.

Though ethnically based electioneering has been associated with raised electoral participation and representation in these settings, as mentioned earlier, this road toward immigrant inclusion may not necessarily be accompanied with incorporation in other domains. While facilitating immigrants to have a political voice, it may also reinforce ethnic cleavages and engender conflictual intergroup relations.\(^\text{18}\) Assimilation and political incorporation thus do not move in tandem. Likewise, in light of the diversity in group traits, electoral institutions, and their combinations across contexts, we should not

\(^{17}\) This discussion is necessarily stylized. For more details on the development of Maghrebian organizations see Wihtol de Wenden and Leveau (2001) and Maxwell (2012).

\(^{18}\) See Dancygier (2010a) for an account that links immigrant political power to immigrant-native conflict.
assume linear processes of integration, whereby immigrant political inclusion correlates with variables such as time in the adopted home country or socio-economic characteristics. Nor would it be reasonable to presume that political incorporation tracks integration in other domains. Indeed, the confluence of economic advancement and political participation—so prevalent in studies of voting behavior of nonimmigrant populations—appears to be absent in the case of immigrant electorates, at least in European cities. As seen earlier, for example, British voters of Pakistani and Bangladeshi descent have particularly high turnout and representation rates, but they are among Britain’s most economically disadvantaged groups. Similarly, economic achievements among Turks and Moroccans in the Netherlands and Belgium still have to catch up with these groups’ advancements in the political arena. That political incorporation does not go hand in hand with other aspects of incorporation should in turn lead to interesting and challenging questions when it comes to the substantive representation of minority interests. Do groups that successfully participate in politics on an ethnic basis diminish their members’ chances of integration in other realms? Or does ethnically based electoral inclusion deliver the policy gains that groups require for social integration and economic advancement?  

Another set of interesting questions pertains to the role of electoral institutions in shaping intergroup and intragroup relations. Do electoral institutions that place a premium on the mobilization of co-ethnics inhibit the formation of intergroup coalitions between different immigrant groups or between immigrants and the native population? In the case of list-based preference voting, for instance, aspiring candidates still rely on (mostly nonimmigrant) elites to secure a place on the ballot, but once nominated their campaigns may exclusively target the immigrant vote. By contrast, in ward-level elections in areas of high immigrant concentration, immigrant politicians may not have to depend on native elites or voters, especially when local ward members decide selection outcomes.

In this chapter I have largely examined the implications of a model in which institutions and group attributes affect immigrant political incorporation in the short term, viewing group identities as more or less fixed. Taking a more dynamic view, one could extend the model presented in Figure 7.1 to further explore which identity categories gain salience given varying electoral arrangements. Research on the political mobilization of ethnic groups has shown that electoral institutions can powerfully shape voters’ identity choices and politicians’

---

19 See Maxwell (2012) for a stimulating discussion of these potential trade-offs.

messages (e.g., Fearon 1999; Chandra 2004; Posner 2005). Do electoral rules play similar roles with respect to immigrant communities in European cities? For example, do immigrant-origin politicians competing for the immigrant franchise in ward-level elections play up regional or religious differences that set immigrant candidates apart? Do immigrant voters respond to such more differentiated appeals because they prefer to be members of a minimum-winning coalition rather than of a more undifferentiated immigrant electorate?

Questions such as these imply that the model of immigrant political incorporation presented here can include additional analytical steps. For instance, if groups grow in size over time, arguments about minimum-winning coalitions would imply that differentiation—rather than assimilation—becomes more likely as time passes. Further, this differentiation should occur sooner the smaller the electoral arena relative to the group size. Additionally, external developments that are exogenous to local political events and that are not captured in the model offered here may guide which identity categories have the potential of being politicized. Attention to how such dynamic processes and external events influence the identity of groups, as well as the effects of group traits and electoral institutions, can provide additional richness and complexity to our understanding of immigrant political incorporation.

References


