Immigrant Politics: Race and Representation in Western Europe

edited by
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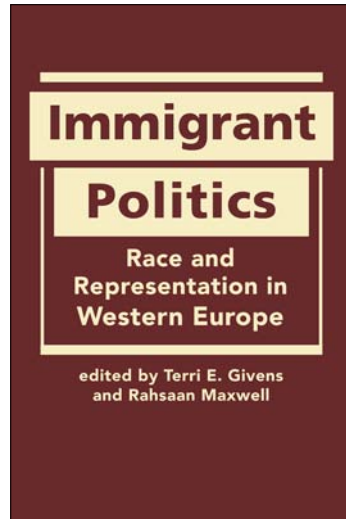
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Ethnic Minorities and Political Participation in Europe

Terri E. Givens and Rahsaan Maxwell

In March 2011, at a conference in Brussels, ethnic minority elected officials from across Europe discussed their experiences in politics. As ethnic minorities, most were nonwhite and all were either immigrants or descendants of immigrants. They had spent most of their lives in European countries with few (if any) nonwhite elected officials as role models. The fact that there were now enough nonwhite politicians to hold a conference was a positive sign that barriers for representation were beginning to fall. Yet, many expressed frustration at the slow pace of progress and the lack of access to high-level political power for nonwhite ethnic minorities in contemporary Europe.

Nonwhite immigrant-origin communities are at the center of many political debates in Europe. In particular, many native Europeans are concerned that nonwhite immigrants and their descendants are failing to integrate. One of the most contentious examples is the debate over how to accommodate Muslim religious practices to a largely secular and historically Christian Europe. At times, this has led to legislation that limits the ways in which Muslims can practice their religion. In 2009, a Swiss referendum banned the construction of new minarets atop mosques, and several countries have either passed or debated restrictions on wearing headscarves, veils, and burqas (Moore 2010). Another point of concern is whether nonwhite immigrants and their descendants

suffer intractable discrimination. This has led some European govern-
ments to debate whether official forms of "affirmative action" should be
adopted or discouraged (Calvès 2008). Other political actors claim that
the problem lies with nonwhite ethnic minorities who have failed to suf-
ficiently adopt European norms. This has prompted some governments
to restrict access to citizenship and more actively promote assimilation
(Joppke 2007a, 2007b).

All of these concerns generate intense policy debates. The fear that
ethnic minority immigrants are ruining European society has provided
fertile ground for xenophobic far-right political parties to insert them-
selves into the mainstream agenda (Givens 2005). In some countries,
these far-right parties have claimed up to 30 percent of the vote and
become part of the national government. However, on the other side of
the debate, there is relatively little ethnic minority representation, par-
ticularly in national parliaments. This raises questions about whether
the interests of ethnic minority immigrant-origin communities are being
adequately represented in contemporary European politics.

In this book we examine political participation among nonwhite
immigrant-origin ethnic minorities in contemporary Western Europe.
Drawing on media discourses, public opinion data, and elite interviews,
we analyze how European publics feel about nonwhite politicians, how
political parties are reaching out to nonwhite communities, and how
nonwhite communities feel about their political influence. Country-
specific chapters focus on Britain, France, Germany, and the Nether-
lands, the four countries with the largest nonwhite ethnic minority
communities in Western Europe. Underlying the analysis of Western
European developments is an implicit comparison with the United
States. In 2008, the United States elected its first black president,
Barack Obama, who promised to be a political "game changer." In
Western Europe, many nonwhites are hoping for similar opportunities.
In the chapters that follow, we reflect on the possibilities and the prob-
lems that nonwhites face in Western Europe and offer insight on what
countries on both sides of the Atlantic can learn from each other.

Immigration and the Development
of Minority Communities in Europe

One of the biggest challenges for nonwhite political participation in
Europe is the fact that most nonwhite communities in Europe are the re-

sult of post–World War II immigration. Most of these immigrants arrived without citizenship and could not vote in European countries. Moreover, in the early years of migration, European governments were not very aggressive about incorporating these immigrants into the mainstream political system. In part, this was because most nonwhite immigrants who arrived in Europe during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s were temporary workers. They were not expected to stay, so most governments did not plan for their integration. Yet by the 1980s and 1990s it became clear that these were permanent communities, and since then West European governments and societies have become more focused on promoting their full inclusion (Castles and Miller 2009).

It is important to note that European societies have dealt with the difficult issues of immigration, integration, and diversity for centuries. Yet prior to World War II, those migration flows were primarily within Europe. European migrants usually faced intense discrimination after arrival but over time and across generations were able to blend in with their fellow Christian Europeans. The new nonwhite immigrant communities in Europe challenge this trajectory because they are unable to physically blend in, even across several generations. Racial diversity is now a social and political issue in Europe in ways that are fundamentally different from the past.

Despite this increasing importance of racial diversity, however, issues of racism and discrimination have only recently gained the attention of policymakers in many European countries. Even throughout the centuries of colonialism, slavery, immigration, and ethnic conflict, European policymakers have consistently avoided addressing the issues of racism and discrimination. Britain is the one exception, where policymakers began developing race relations policies in the 1950s and 1960s. But from the more general legal architecture of the European Union (EU), it would appear that until recently most Europeans felt that race was not an important issue. For example, it was not until the 1999 Treaty of Amsterdam that the European Council empowered the European Commission to "take appropriate action to combat discrimination" based upon "racial or ethnic origin." Soon after, in 2000, the EU quickly developed an antidiscrimination policy, known as the Racial Equality Directive (RED), which has been transposed into national law in EU member states (see Chapter 7).

One main reason why European countries have been so reluctant to address the issue of race is the legacy of the Holocaust. During World War II, the concept of race was used to exterminate entire communities,

and people at all levels of society were complicit. After the war, Europeans understandably wanted to prevent such atrocities from occurring again. Many countries responded with formal restrictions on the collection of racial data and informal taboos on using race as a concept in social life. Another reason for Europeans' hesitancy to embrace the notion of race is their criticism of US race-conscious policies that legitimize the (supposedly mistaken) notion that biological differences divide the population. In addition, even when Europeans acknowledge that the black-white racial divide is a real social issue in the United States, they claim that cultural differences—that cut across supposed racial categories—are more relevant in European societies. Moreover, European critics claim that because Americans' focus on race reifies the category, it makes it more difficult to fight any racism that does exist.[1]

All of these factors created the tricky situation in which nonwhite ethnic minorities in many European countries could not use race as a basis for political mobilization despite facing racial discrimination that impeded their integration. For decades, this reinforced the poor political integration outcomes for nonwhite ethnic minorities across Europe (Messina 2007). However, there is evidence that things may be changing. France is often considered the European country with the most intense and ideological opposition to using racial categories, and in particular to collecting statistics on racial differences in the population.[2] Yet even in France, there is increasing pressure to find some way of accounting for the experiences of nonwhite ethnic minorities that cannot be reduced to class or national-origin–related factors (Héran 2010; Maxwell 2009; Simon 2010). More broadly, across Europe there is a recognition that long-term racial and ethnic cleavages may be emerging and that something must be done to combat this trend. In part this is because the rise of radical right anti-immigrant parties (like the French National Front and Joerg Haider's Austrian Freedom Party) forced Europeans to become serious about dealing with the divisions. In addition, riots by ethnic minority youth in the British Midlands and France's *banlieues* have provided dramatic examples of the dangers of not addressing racial disadvantages.

Today, in the first part of the twenty-first century, race has gained acceptance as a legitimate, if still controversial, social and political issue in Europe. Even if it is clear that race is not a biological fact but rather a social and cultural construction, it is useful for understanding how

racism and discrimination operate (Durkheim 1964). As George Frederickson argues,

> Race . . . is commonly used as a criterion to justify a dominant and privileged position—"accompanied by the notion that 'we' are superior to 'them' and need to be protected from real or imagined threats to our privileged group position that might arise if 'they' were to gain in resources and rights. Here we have 'racism' in the full and unambiguous sense of the term." (quoted in Foner 2005: 12)

This perspective highlights the power relations that influence Europeans' fears of losing cultural homogeneity to nonwhite immigration. Even if Europeans are more willing to speak openly about racial issues, the conversations are not always amenable to ethnic minority political empowerment because of the implicit struggle for how Europe will be defined in the future. For example, one might imagine that Germans' open atonement for the sins of the Holocaust would make them especially sensitive to potential discrimination against contemporary immigrant-origin ethnic minorities. Yet there is a deep reluctance to completely abandon ethnic conceptions of German identity. As Michelle Wright notes, "The Americans, French, and British, to one degree or another, most often pretend to (and to some degree do) overlook race in determining national belonging, instead bringing in a different set of signifiers such as political beliefs, cultural mores, and economic status. . . . Germany, on the other hand, while not prohibiting all non-Germans from becoming citizens, nonetheless has trouble viewing those who do not share a specific racial heritage as 'true' Germans" (Wright 2004: 184–185).

Discrimination directly affects the ability of minorities to participate politically. Although many European countries have only recently begun to grapple with racial discrimination, it became an important issue during the 1980s in the European Parliament (EP), where efforts were made to counteract the influence of racist anti-immigrant political parties who had won seats in the 1986 EP election. Although the parliament itself still has a small number of recognizable ethnic minorities (nine were elected in the 2009 EP election[3]), the EP took the lead in addressing racial violence and antiracism, which led to the Racial Equality Directive in 2000. This type of legislation may eventually impact the ability of ethnic minorities to address discrimination in society and in politics.

Despite legislation like the RED, white European resistance to the growth in ethnic minority political presence will likely continue for the foreseeable future. Even in Britain and the Netherlands, where nonwhite ethnic minorities have the highest levels of political representation in Europe (often equal to the ethnic minority percentage of the population), there are still significant barriers to ethnic minorities' full acceptance in mainstream politics. As subsequent chapters in this book argue, ethnic minority elected officials in both countries are often considered powerless tokens that were chosen by the parties for their symbolic value to concentrated ethnic minority electorates. In addition, despite well-developed sensitivity to multiculturalism and racial difference in both Britain and the Netherlands, those discourses of diversity often marginalize nonwhite communities by not allowing them to operate on the same playing field with mainstream political actors (Duyvendak, Pels, and Rijkschroeff 2009; Small and Solomos 2006: 249–250). Moreover, recent terrorist attacks and the general international political climate have intensified Islamophobia, which some argue is an example of "cultural racism" against Muslims whose values are considered incompatible with European society (Modood 2005). At the same time, immigrant-origin Muslims are increasingly likely to get elected to political office and engage in productive ways with mainstream European politics (Laurence 2012; Modood 2005). All of these trends suggest that the incorporation of nonwhite ethnic minority migrant-origin communities in Europe will remain a central political issue for years to come. This book attempts to make sense of recent developments, by comparing and contrasting political dynamics across a range of countries and examining whether existing academic literature on minority political participation and representation is adequate.

Existing Literature

Academic research on minority political participation in Europe often focuses on why voter turnout rates are lower than among the majority population. One standard explanation is that minority communities often suffer from socioeconomic disadvantages that dampen turnout rates. In addition, migrant minority communities may face cultural barriers that inhibit their full participation in mainstream society. Yet research also suggests that minority and migrant communities can benefit from co-ethnic networks that provide unique resources for political mobiliza-

tion, at times leading to turnout rates higher than those of the majority population (Cutts et al. 2007; Fennema and Tillie 1999; Leighley and Vedlitz 1999; Maxwell 2010; Messina 2007).[4] The chapters in this volume engage these debates by examining different forms of political participation, including not only mass political behavior but also formal and informal lobbying among minority political activists. This volume also provides a broader perspective on the ways in which minority political participation varies across national contexts. The findings support some of the conventional wisdom but also provoke new ways of understanding minority political participation.

Literature on migrant and minority representation in Europe also tends to start from the empirical baseline of a lack of representation and then analyzes numerous explanations for this dynamic. One of the main insights is that minority communities by definition have small population numbers, and when that is compounded with socioeconomic disadvantages and low participation rates it will be very difficult to obtain significant representation. However, research suggests that different institutional and contextual settings can make those disadvantages more or less easy to overcome (Banducci, Donovan, and Karp 2004; Bird, Saalfield, and Wüst 2010; Gay 2001; Garbaye 2005; Messina 2007; Maxwell 2012). In addition, there are debates about whether descriptive representation (having elected officials who look like their constituents) is necessary for substantive representation, that is, allocating political resources in the best interests of certain constituents (Mansbridge 1999). The chapters in this volume engage research on political representation by providing an overview of the ways in which it varies across specific geographic contexts. Moreover, the chapters suggest that a range of successes and failures are occurring in Western Europe, which provides support for contending perspectives on the opportunities and challenges of minority political representation.

Chapter Overview

In Chapter 2, Jonathan Laurence and Rahsaan Maxwell provide an overview of immigrant incorporation into West European political parties. They argue that the increased salience of immigration has led to two-sided pressures for the diversification of political parties. On the one hand, political parties are increasingly looking to diversify their ranks and developing programs to recruit activists and candidates from

different origins. On the other hand, ethnic minority immigrant activists are increasingly organized in their efforts to pressure political parties into diversifying. They consider how these two-sided pressures are creating more opportunities for ethnic minority migrant-origin political actors as well as creating new sources of frustration and tension. One of these sources of frustration is the gap between rhetoric and action among the political party leadership in Europe. They conclude that while minorities now have a foot in the door, increased emphasis on forcing immigrants to assimilate may slow the progress of minority candidates in the future.

James Hampshire's chapter examines the issue of all-black and minority ethnic (BME) shortlists for parliamentary seats in Britain. He argues that a growing consensus on the importance of demand-side obstacles has shifted advocacy from (relatively uncontroversial) proposals for more equality rhetoric and promotion to (more controversial) proposals for equality guarantees such as BME shortlists. However, the 2010 parliamentary election indicates that just as BME shortlists have become more high profile, the need for them may be diminishing.

In Chapter 4, Vincent Geisser and El Yamine Soum provide an in-depth examination of ethnic minority political integration in France. They argue that France has embraced a new rhetoric of diversity and antidiscrimination that purports to offer better prospects for minority integration. However, Geisser and Soum claim that this new rhetoric also leads to new forms of discrimination and ethnic segmentation. In particular, French parties often confine ethnic minority activists to ethnic functions of a lesser value, asking them to be leaders of their supposed communities, while at the same time stigmatizing the notion of a communitarian politics. This limits migrant-origin activists to a devalued ethnic subspace of politics. It also establishes an implicit distinction between "normal elites" and "diversity elites," which renders the latter less legitimate.

Germany's restrictive citizenship laws have created an immigrant-origin electorate that is much smaller than one might expect, as Karen Schönwälder explains in her examination of German minority representation in Chapter 5. She argues that the electoral system, settlement structures, and the lack of group consciousness and mobilization of the immigrant population suggest that the driving forces of immigrant political representation are very different from the situation in the United States and Britain. However, despite being at a relatively low level, the numbers of immigrant representatives have grown significantly over

the past two decades. Yet, for the future, no party has an explicit policy to promote immigrant careers within the organization or to secure a number of places on candidate lists. She concludes that minority representation is likely to remain low and that growth will come slowly.

The situation in the Netherlands is in sharp contrast to the German case, as explained in Chapter 6 by Laure Michon. The Netherlands is one of the few European countries in which the political integration of non-Western immigrants can be characterized as being successful. In Parliament, foreign-born members of Parliament (MPs) have been present in significant numbers for twenty years. Similar success can be found at the local level. In the main cities, Amsterdam and Rotterdam, some non-Western immigrant groups are even overrepresented on local councils when compared to their share in the population. However, Michon finds worrying trends in anti-immigrant rhetoric and the high turnover rate of minority politicians. She argues that while some of the data presented would point to the successful assimilation of non-Western immigrants into the Dutch political elite, other elements suggest that non-Western immigrant politicians hold a subordinate position in Dutch politics. In combination with the change in the public discourse on integration, and the turn away from multicultural policies, there are clear challenges for the political integration of non-Western immigrants in Dutch politics.

In Chapter 7, Terri Givens and Rhonda Evans Case outline developments in antiracism and antidiscrimination policy in the European Parliament. As Europe moves toward closer integration, EU-level policy plays a greater role in determining the initiatives that will be taken at the national level in regard to immigrant integration and race relations. The authors describe how the rise of the radical right in countries like France, Germany, and Austria played a key role in moving forward initiatives like the EU's Racial Equality Directive. The political response to racism was a key factor placing these issues on the agenda and in the development of policy at the EU level, which is now in the process of being implemented by member states.

In the conclusion, Martin Schain makes an explicit comparison of ethnic minority political participation and representation across the four countries examined in this volume. All too often, political integration is analyzed from within one nation-state, but Schain highlights the similarities and differences across countries. In addition, Schain places recent European developments in perspective with similar issues in the United States.

The goal of this book is not to provide definitive answers about the future of ethnic minority migrant political integration in Western Europe. Nor is it to posit a model that would predict successful (or unsuccessful) migrant political integration at all times and in all places. Instead, this book offers careful empirical analysis of recent political developments in four countries and situates them in the broader framework of how race, ethnicity, and immigration are changing European societies. On a theoretical level, the contributions in this book suggest that a combination of national, local, group, and individual-level factors are all relevant for understanding political integration. For example, different national institutions (e.g., electoral systems, nationality law) shape the ways in which migrants relate to the political system. Yet there is also considerable subnational variation according to the political, economic, and social particulars of the local community. Group-level factors are important, as different migrant communities have various types of resources and relationships to the mainstream culture. Yet individual-level factors also shape political outcomes, from educational and occupational attainment to the personality and charisma of an individual candidate. Finally, there is important variation in political integration over time. The most obvious time-related factor is that as migrants acquire citizenship and more familiarity with the host society over time, they will be better able to influence the political system. Yet things do not always improve over time, and the contributions in this volume highlight the importance of contingency and broader political and economic developments that can make integration more difficult for migrant-origin communities. We submit that this book is a helpful guide for anyone seeking to understand the complexities of contemporary political dynamics in Europe.

Notes

1. These contrasting approaches have created significant transatlantic disconnect among academics over the years. For example, Gary Freeman's 1979 book on Britain and France, *Immigrant Labor and Racial Conflict in Industrial Societies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press)*,* was very well received in the United States but highly contested in Europe. Freeman's book tried to chart out the racial and economic aspects of immigration to Europe but critics claimed it was a misguided attempt to import US categories where they did not apply.

2. For more on this debate, see Amiraux and Simon 2006, Simon 1998, or the May 2009 special issue of *Esprit*.

3. Patrick Barkham, "Minority Report," February 14, 2007, www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/feb/14/race.eu?INTCMP=SRCH, accessed July 13, 2009.

4. See also the 2004 special issue of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*: "Social Capital and Political Integration of Migrants."