

## EDITORIAL

# Unpacking Migrant Political Integration

## An Introduction

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Among the many challenges that globalization poses, migration is, without a doubt, a prominent one. Increasing fluxes of people moving from one country to another have indeed stimulated a lively debate on perspectives of integration on many levels and their concrete (or potential) consequences for migrants and receiving and sending societies. Along with pressing issues of cultural, social and economic inclusion, the question of migrants as *political agents* has emerged as one of utmost importance. Interestingly, in the Political Science literature this topic has so far been widely explored from the perspective of the receiving political systems, i.e. by laying strong emphasis on mobile citizens as *immigrants*. Most of the extant studies have indeed tried to give different explanations to migrants' sociopolitical integration (or lack thereof) within the host country. According to the resocialization perspective, "following their arrival in a new receiving society, immigrants tend to loosen their political loyalties to their homelands in order to acculturate and integrate successfully into the socio-economic, political and civic life of the receiving society" (Chaudhary, 2018: 438). Other studies maintain, instead, that the main driver of migrants' political participation in the host country is the same sense of 'self' that they develop in the homeland and that they bring with themselves throughout their journey (Jensen, 2008). According to some, this also applies to ideological predispositions, which could be predicted based on migrants' prior orientations in the country of origin. Other studies have focused on the political consequences of immigration, such as the rise of anti-immigrant sentiments and its mobilization by increasingly successful far-right anti-immigrant parties in many countries, which has resulted in the substantive transformation of many political landscapes over the last couple of decades, firstly in western countries (e.g., Damstra et al., 2021; van Spanje, 2010) and, more recently, also in Central and Eastern Europe, where the western agenda was borrowed and amplified by eastern nationalists as a consequence of the refugee crisis (Enyedi, 2020).

Nonetheless, recent studies have argued that migrants – by their very nature – are multitasking political actors, who can develop and claim political interests in multiple arenas (Finn, 2020; Joppke, 2019; Kernalegenn & van Haute, 2020), i.e.

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both in their sending and host political systems (Bauböck, 2005; Krawatzek & Sasse, 2018). In this sense, studying them exclusively as immigrants of a specific host country is most likely to be too short-sighted. For this reason, an increasing number of scholars has endeavoured to shed light on the other part of the picture, namely on mobile citizens as ‘emigrants’, and reached the conclusion that – especially under certain circumstances – they can maintain meaningful political ties with their country of origin. Focusing particularly on political elites, Østergaard-Nielsen and Ciornei (2019) have shown that parties are more likely to represent emigrants’ interests in parliaments when their electoral incentives are stronger (see also Østergaard-Nielsen & Camatarri, 2022). In another study, they also show that right-wing parties generally tend to be more supportive of emigrant voting rights in their programmatic platforms compared with left-wing parties (Østergaard-Nielsen et al., 2019). With respect to electoral participation, Burgess and Tyburski (2020) showed, instead, that parties’ campaign efforts abroad have the effect of increasing migrant voters’ turnout at home country elections.

Overall, extant findings seem to confirm that mobile citizens are indeed able to develop and maintain political interests both ‘here’ and ‘there’, i.e. both as immigrants and as emigrants. Not only that, but it also appears that the extent to which migrant citizens succeed (or not) in developing and/or maintaining political ties is somehow related to the opportunities provided to them by political actors in both the sending and receiving country. This makes migrant political integration the outcome of a process that is played out both ‘here’ and ‘there’ not only at a spatial level but also at a political level, where the demand and supply sides of politics (i.e. citizens and political actors, but also rules and institutions) are in constant interaction (e.g. Schmitt et al., 2021). Interestingly, such interaction, although largely explored in the field of electoral behaviour, is still rather underdeveloped when it comes to studies of transnational politics. This Special Issue is meant to offer a meaningful opportunity to investigate more closely migrant political integration as part of the more general process of coordination (and communication) between citizens, on the one hand, and political elites (i.e. representatives, candidates, parties) and institutions on the other. To do so, it combines different empirical perspectives (i.e. more centred on electoral contexts and party behaviour around migrant integration or more oriented towards individual-level attitudes and choices), empirical techniques and (original) data sources, the outcome being four research articles laying the ground for a methodologically heterogeneous research agenda. Consistently with the geographical scope of this Journal, each piece focuses on at least one between Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg as contexts of *immigration*, most of the times in comparative perspective with one or more other Western European scenarios. Such case selection gave to the authors the chance to deepen extant knowledge on a region (Benelux) that despite having become an established context of settlement for different types of migrants (thanks to both relatively flexible work-permit schemes and to European institutions as an opportunity to gather an international EU-based labour force) is still less studied as a context of immigration compared with wider territorial areas (Petrovic, 2012).

Against this background, the first piece, by Dandoy and Umpierrez (2022), uses a quasi-experimental design to show that political-institutional factors such as compulsory voting *matter* for transnational political participation. Indeed, their analysis clarifies that the degree of voting obligation – either in the country of residence or in the country of origin (or both) – positively affects the turnout at homeland elections of Latin American immigrants located in Belgium, Luxembourg and Netherlands respectively. Azabar and Thijssen (2022), instead, narrow down their focus on Belgium and explore the voting behaviour of the Muslim religious minority based on structural equation techniques. Their analysis, relying on exit poll data on the 2018 local elections, shows not only that Muslims tend to vote for left-wing parties (a finding also rather in line with previous literature on migrant political behaviour, e.g. Strijbis, 2014, but also that their preferential votes are driven mainly by considerations on specific policy issues such as socio-economic (in)equality (see also Camatarri et al., 2022). The contribution by Sijstermans and Favero (2022) reverses this individual-level perspective by examining how immigrants are portrayed in parties' public discourses, focusing on two cases of so-called populist radical right parties (PRRP): the Belgian *Vlaams Belang* (Flemish Interest, VB) and the *Schweizerische Volkspartei* (Swiss People's Party, SVP). Based on in-depth interviews with representatives and members of both political organizations, the authors find that each of them tends to draw a line between 'good' (and thus acceptable) and 'bad' (and thus to-be-excluded) migrants and that such categorization relies quite systematically on specific rhetorical tools such as doublespeak and euphemism. To conclude, Rashkova's (2022) piece shows that non-citizen residents' party support in the Netherlands tends to be rather skewed towards non-established parties such as Groen Links and D66, which suggests that their electoral choices might have some visible consequences on election outcomes if they were allowed to vote.

Clearly, much still needs to be done, especially in terms of bridging individual and macro levels of analysis. Scholars will have to carefully explore how the discursive and competitive strategies of political elites, as well as institutional frameworks, enhance (or reduce) opportunities for migrants' political integration and/or influence their political attitudes and behaviour. Nonetheless, we believe that this collection can represent a first interesting attempt in this direction, which will hopefully raise awareness of the importance of combining different levels and perspectives of analysis to understand migrant political integration.

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