

Participation in Local Elections: Why Don't Immigrants Vote More?

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Abstract

Why do immigrants vote less in local elections when they have the right to vote? I present a new representative survey on participation in the 2015 municipal elections in the Canton of Geneva, Switzerland, and predict electoral participation with logistic regression models. Most immigrant groups vote less than the majority population. Four explanations are tested for this difference: social origin (resources), political engagement, civic integration and networks, as well as socialisation. Individually, all these explanations are associated with differences in electoral participation, but contrary to some recent studies, substantive differences between nationalities remain.

PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL ELECTIONS: WHY DON'T IMMIGRANTS VOTE MORE?

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Keywords: political participation, immigration, local elections, turnout

A principle of modern democracies is that the population 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 do not want to vote (motivation), or nobody asked them to vote (mobilization, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995).

Typically, foreign citizens are not entitled to vote in elections (Earnest 2015), but when they *are* entitled, they often do not vote (Rooij 2012; Bird, Saalfeld, and Wüst 2010). To many this is puzzling, as one politician I talked to during the study exclaimed: “Why don’t they vote now that we have given them the opportunity?”. Clearly formal franchise is not enough, but the reasons for lower turnout are not well understood. A common explanation are ‘resources’ linked to social origin: In Western countries immigrants are on average less educated, younger, and have lower incomes than the majority population – all factors commonly associated with lower turnout (Smets and van Ham 2013; Cancela and Geys 2016). Other common explanations are civic integration and socialization: As immigrants live in the country of destination and become full members of society, they become increasingly interested and involved in political questions and become motivated 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). Voicu and Comşa (2014) refer to ‘exposure’ and ‘transferability’ to describe these mechanisms. None of these

explanations, however, differentiates between not being motivated to vote and the absence of sufficient mobilization.

This article uses new individual-level data to examine the correlates of electoral participation in a specific local election. It follows recent work by Wass et al. (2015), with a focus on immigration-related variables not well captured in register data. The Canton of Geneva provides an excellent case to compare correlates of electoral participation between immigrants and the majority population. Around 40 per cent of the population are foreign citizens with many nationalities present. Many of the immigrants have arrived as so-called guest workers and have lived in Switzerland for a long time. The largest immigrant groups are Italians, French, and Portuguese; there are relatively few refugees among the eligible electorate. Levels of diversity are relatively constant across the canton (compare Fieldhouse and Cutts 2008). Since 2005, foreign citizens who have lived in Switzerland for at least 8 years are entitled to vote in local elections in the Canton of Geneva – compared to 12 years residence and explicit integration requirements for naturalization.

This article contributes to the literature with its specific immigration-related variables and by adding a fresh case. Typically, voting rights are reserved to naturalized citizens, and many contributions on immigrant participation focus on Nordic countries where immigrants can vote in local elections (Bevelander and Pendakur 2011; Wass et al. 2015), or the United Kingdom where many eligible voters have historical ties to the country (Fisher et al. 2015). With a focus on a single election – the 2015 municipal elections –, institutional and many political variables are controlled for by design. As part of an effort to encourage participation, every foreign citizen entitled to vote

received a personalized letter from the chancellor to invite them to participate. Campaign material was available in seven languages, something likely to facilitate participation (Cho 1999). Combined with the automatic registration in Switzerland – a major reason for different voter turnout in the US (Xu 2005; Lien 2004) – and the fact that the ballot is sent to the eligible population, we can rule out that the respondents did not vote because they were completely unaware of their right to vote. Put differently, many structural influences are accounted for by the research design. This leaves us with *not being motivated* to vote – a common phenomenon across wide parts of society and not necessarily a conscious choice. With specific immigration-related variables I examine why this motivation to vote appears to be lower among immigrants, thus refining the explanations by Wass et al. (2015) who used register data. While the different explanations can account for some of the difference in electoral turnout, the explanations tested are only able to account for part of the observed differences between nationality groups.

1. Electoral Participation of Immigrants

Not all sections of society are equally likely to vote in elections (van 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, and 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 – commonly referred

to as resources – is predicted to participate less; the lower turnout of immigrants is frequently explained this way.

Recent contributions highlight that the association between these ‘classic’ predictors and 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, and indeed the heterogeneity within nationality groups (Lien 2004). In this article, four explanations are examined, notably immigration-related ones (Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001): differences in social origin – probably the staple explanation for turnout differences between groups in society, including (naturalized) immigrants –, political engagement, social networks and civic integration, and socialization.

Smets and van Ham (2013) highlight that variables of social origin are consistently associated with turnout, especially in sub-national elections (Cancela and Geys 2016). People with higher levels of education, older age, and higher income are more likely to vote. The intuition is that social origin provides resources that facilitate participation. Although they can be measured at the individual level, individuals typically only have a limited capacity to change (access to) these resources. Heath et al. (2011) examined the participation of ethnic minority voters in the British General Election, finding that these ‘resources’ seem to be less important for ethnic minority groups than for the majority population. Echoing work in the US (e.g. Xu 2005), Wass et al. (2015) find positive associations with resources in Finland – using register data –, but also that they are somewhat weaker for foreign citizens than for natives.

Social Origin Hypothesis: Older, more educated, richer individuals, and those active in the labour force are more 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 van Ham 2013).

A different set of explanations revolves around political engagement and political knowledge (Cowley and Stuart 2015). The intuition is that people with greater engagement in the community are more interested in political decisions. Interest in politics and political knowledge are consistently linked to electoral participation (Smets and van Ham 2013). While interest in politics and party identification may be mutually constitutive, both are associated with turnout. Particularly relevant for immigrant voters may be the perception of being part of a community, having a stake in the political life where they live. This sentiment is likely to be higher for individuals actively participating in civic associations (Bevelander and Pendakur 2009). Indeed, participation in any kind of association is positively associated with participation (González-Ferrer 2011; Tran 2017), although for minority organizations the evidence is mixed (Heath et al. 2011).

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

One reason for lower engagement may be the social network immigrants are located in, and civic integration more generally (Klofstad and Bishin 2014; Bueker 2005; Logan, Darrah, and Oh 2012). The intuition remains that individuals with a greater stake in the

local community are more interested in politics and thus more likely to vote. This is likely to reflect the different costs and benefits of voting for different immigrants (Cho 1999), and immigrants planning to return to their country of origin are less likely to perceive having a stake in the community. Bevelander and Pendakur (2011) found that individuals with local spouses are more likely to vote, Wass et al. (2015) also looked at families with small children (in local school), or Cutts et al. (2007) highlighted the role of family networks, all indications of involvement in the community. Wass et al. (2015) suggest that 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; Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001). Using agent-based models, Ruedin (2007) suggests that the relevant variable is not the time spent in a community as such: Personality traits seem to interact with the time spent in the community to create relevant personal contacts and emotional ties (compare Foschi and Lauriola 2014; Gerber et al. 2011). These ties may be approached via identity with the current country (Scuzzarello 2015; Wass et al. 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 Network Hypotheses: 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 van 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 also whether they come from a democratic country where political participation carries different meaning than in autocratic states. This is a different form of socialization, and more electoral participation can be expected from individuals from democratic countries. Pre-migration beliefs conducive to political participation can be 'transferred' to the country of destination (Wass et al. 2015; White et al. 2008), although Ramakrishnan and Espenshade (2001) find no association with a simple coding of origin in a 'repressive regime'.

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

2. Data and Methods

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 the sampling frame for a representative sample of eligible voters, and 832 interviews were completed using computer-aided telephone interviews (CATI) in October 2015 (AAPOR response rate 4 = 22.2%). Given that the target population have lived in Switzerland for at least 8 years, and in consultation with the survey firm, we

decided to use only French interviews: Non-contact was a more important issue than non-cooperation (which could indicate language problems among other things). When designing the questionnaire, I drew heavily on that of the 2011 *Swiss Electoral Studies* 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 relevant for foreign citizens. See supplement S1 for a description of the representative sample and supplement S2 for full question wordings; the complete data and replication material will be made available to all researchers.

The outcome variable asks whether respondents voted in the municipal elections (“In the municipal elections, less than half of voters actually vote. Which of the following statements best describes you?” – voted, did not vote, wanted to vote but ended up not voting, normally votes but not this time), a question designed to reduce over-reporting in surveys (Morin-Chassé et al. 2016). 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, combining the three response categories capturing broad reasons for not voting.

For the analysis, the nationality of respondents is grouped into a reduced set of nationalities and groups of nationalities because of sample size (supplement S1). Nationalities were grouped according to their relative size in the general population of the Canton of Geneva and similarity in typical migration histories: 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. Because of the modest sample size, in the multivariate

regression analysis, all foreign nationalities are combined (35 per cent of the sample), although the results can be replicated substantially with nationality groups.

Social origin is captured using age (in years), education, monthly income, being active in the labour market, and gender. Income was set to the mean of the response category (e.g. a respondent earning between CHF 4,000 and 5,000 is allocated an income of 4,500). The highest response category (more than 12,000) was set to 18,000, a plausible value given the distribution of incomes¹. The survey asks about the highest level of education completed, which is converted into years, following typical length of education. 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.

Political engagement and knowledge is captured using objective political knowledge, and participation in human rights associations. Two questions measure political knowledge: knowing the president of the federal government, and knowing the number of EU member countries. The question on the number of EU countries was included to identify politically knowledgeable immigrants who are not much interested in national and local politics. In pre-testing, questions on the local level were answered incorrectly by most respondents. 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

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

in human rights associations was deemed most appropriate for the analysis, as it is less likely to select certain kinds of individuals or occupations (political left-right for unions, age for sports; ethnic minority associations are unequally distributed across nationality groups; more details in supplement S2). All kinds of participation (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 reliably.

Civic integration and social networks are captured using the (lack of) a return project to the country of origin (Bueker 2005 refers to ‘reversibility’), a longer residence in the canton (in years), and contact with Swiss nationals (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, and aspirations to return can be found both in free and unfree countries (supplement S2). Frequency of contact with Swiss nationals is measured using five response categories and treated as continuous. The survey asked all respondents about contact with different nationalities, including their own. Two further variables capture the strength of identification with the municipality (four response categories, treated as continuous), and trust in municipal authorities (11 response categories, treated as continuous).

Socialization is captured with whether the father voted when the respondent was 14 years old, and whether the respondent was born in a free democracy. Parental vote is about habituation into participation. The dataset includes a question on whether the mother voted, but not all women had the right to vote at the time – in Switzerland

women's suffrage was introduced only in 1971; in Portugal women gained full electoral rights only in 1976. Political freedom is about meaningful politics. The country of birth was used to determine whether a respondent was born in a free democracy, using data from Freedom House. 'Political Rights' scores – more relevant than the overall score provided by Freedom House – of the year the person moved to Switzerland are used to capture likely socialization (7-point scale). The score for Kosovo was set to that of Serbia (=3); the score for Germany before 1990 was coded as missing since it is not determined; individuals who migrated before 1973 were classified according to the 1973 values. In the analysis, all countries identified as completely free were set to 1 (free), with all other countries set to 0 (not completely free).

The analytical approach is twofold. On the one hand, I show that the variables identified above are associated with voting in general – all nationalities pooled. Each of these logistic regression models includes the predictor variables associated with a particular hypothesis. To render results accessible, predicted probabilities are calculated by setting all other variables to the mean, or 0 in the case of binary variables. I then show that immigrant groups tend to differ on these variables. For instance, it will be shown that age is associated with turnout, and immigrants are on average younger. On the other hand, I use logistic regression analysis with a wider range of predictor variables to control for group differences, and observe whether nationality remains a significant correlate when accounting for each of the explanations considered – separately and jointly. Although missing values are not a major problem, multiple imputation with 30 imputations was used in the regression analyses to maintain the sample size (supplement S3).

3. Results

3.1. Immigrants Vote Less

Overall, 59 per cent of respondents state that they participated in the municipal elections, but there are significant differences between nationalities (Table 1): Electoral participation is higher for Swiss nationals than for foreign nationals. This different turnout has important repercussions because the political preferences of Swiss nationals and foreign nationals are not necessarily the same (Strijbis 2014; supplement S4).

TABLE 1 AROUND HERE

As is commonly observed, self-reported turnout greatly overestimates actual turnout (Cutts et al. 2007; Sciarini and Goldberg 2016). This is due to social desirability, but also the over-representation of certain kinds of respondents in surveys – people more likely to vote are also more likely to participate in surveys (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 no attempt is undertaken to correct the overestimation.

3.2. Four Explanations for Lower Turnout

All the four explanations examined in this article can account for differences in turnout. To begin with social origin, the probability to vote in the municipal elections is higher for older individuals, for those with more education, and for those with higher incomes. In a model of turnout with the predictor variables mentioned in this paragraph, the

predicted probability to vote for a 20-year-old is 30 per cent, while the predicted probability for an otherwise equivalent 60-year-old is 60 per cent. 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. 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 vote (64%) compared to those not active in the labour market (57%). There are no clear gender differences (57% for both).

Foreign nationals differ in social origin (Table 2) – 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 14 years for the Swiss. Similarly, median incomes are substantially lower for traditional immigrant groups. Supplement S5 shows 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 when considered in separate regressions; differences in social origin are therefore likely to translate into differences in turnout.

Political engagement and knowledge are similarly associated with turnout. In a model with political knowledge and participation in human rights associations as predictor variables, individuals who answered both objective knowledge questions incorrectly have 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. Moreover, 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% predicted probability) than those not active in human right associations (43%).

Foreign nationals tend to be less knowledgeable about politics, and are clearly less likely to participate in human rights associations (Table 2) – and are for these reason less likely to vote. For instance, Spanish nationals on average scored 0.32 out of 1 on the political knowledge questions, compared to 0.40 for Swiss nationals; or 29 per cent of Spanish nationals participate in human rights associations, compared to 57 per cent of the Swiss. Supplement S5 shows that the sign of the associations tends to be the same for all nationality groups.

TABLE 2 AROUND HERE

More specific to immigrants, civic integration and having social networks with the majority population are associated with electoral participation. In a model of turnout with the variables mentioned in this paragraph as predictors, a person who is not at all considering to permanently return to the country of origin has a 44 per cent probability to vote, whereas one clearly considering doing so has a 37 per cent probability to vote. Similarly, individuals with frequent contact with Swiss nationals have a 62 per cent probability to vote, whereas individuals without frequent contact with Swiss nationals have a 43 per cent probability to vote. Individuals with the least trust in municipal

authorities 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%).

There are differences between nationality groups in the extent to which they are integrated and have networks involving the majority population (Table 2). 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 nationals: 66 per cent of Italians report frequent contact, compared to Swiss individuals with 84 per cent. The base line 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. Levels of trust in municipal authorities tend to be somewhat higher for foreign nationals than for Swiss nationals (on a scale from 0 to 10: mean response 7.9 for Eastern Europeans, 7.2 for Italians, 6.7 for Swiss). This variable is therefore not suited to explain why immigrants vote less. Similarly, there are no clear differences in identification between Swiss nationals and immigrants, and these two variables are not considered in the combined models below. Supplement S5 shows that the sign of the contact variable is the same for all nationality groups when considered separately.

Turning to socialization, individuals whose parents voted when the respondent was 14 years old are more likely to vote, irrespective of the parent considered. In a model of turnout with father's vote and political freedom as predictors, the predicted probability to vote is 58 per cent if the father voted, and 53 per cent otherwise. The corresponding

values are 57 and 51 per cent in the case of mothers. In line with Spierings (2016) the influence of parental vote is relatively strong for most immigrant groups, but is not significant for Swiss nationals. Individuals from countries not classified as completely free have a predicted probability to vote of 53 per cent, compared to 63 per cent for individuals from free countries.

There are differences between nationality groups in the extent to which they have been socialized into voting (Table 2). 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, suggesting that this variable – albeit probably measuring an important factor – may have little statistical sway. Supplement S6 finds no evidence that the association with parental vote would differ for immigrants coming from free and unfree countries.

3.3. Combined Models

In a final step, I consider the different covariates jointly in a series of logistic regression models, Swiss and foreign nationals combined (Table 3). These models consider the four explanations for differences in turnout separately and finally jointly. In each case, a variable is included to identify Swiss nationals – and by inference foreign nationals – and it is examined whether this control variable adds substantive information. To make the results for this control variable more accessible, I present the difference in the predicted probability to vote between Swiss nationals and foreign nationals. The smaller this difference in predicted probability, the less weight have national differences in models considering the four different explanations.

Variables capturing social origin are associated with a higher probability of voting (M1). Once all other variables including nationality are taken into consideration (M5), the coefficient for education is no longer clearly different from zero, in line with findings by Heath et al. (2011) on national elections in the UK. The coefficients for political engagement, civic integration and networks, as well as socialization remain in the same direction as in the previous section (M2—M4). The standard errors for these variables are large, and apart from political knowledge and contact with Swiss nationals generally include zero. Notably the coefficients on socialization could credibly be zero. Put differently, the combined models support three of the four explanations. Supplement S7 demonstrates that this does not change when individual nationality (groups) rather than foreign nationality are used in the model; supplement S8 includes a Bayesian replication.

TABLE 3 AROUND HERE

The predicted probabilities in the first row of Table 3 suggest that the participation gap between Swiss and foreigners is reduced most when social origin is considered (M2). Contrary to studies on the Nordic countries or the UK (e.g. Wass et al. 2015, Heath et al. 2011), in the Swiss context, the difference between being Swiss or a foreigner remains a substantively important factor after differences in social origin have been accounted for: The difference in predicted probabilities is reduced from 25 per cent in a model considering only nationality (M0) to 22 per cent in a model also considering nationality (M1). For the other factors considered, the reduction of the difference in the predicted

probability to vote is even more modest. Supplement S9 demonstrates that the reported associations can also be found in separate models for Swiss and foreign voters.

Even if all four explanations are included (M5), variables capturing foreign nationality or specific nationality groups (supplement S7) remain substantively important correlates. The four explanations are able to statistically predict turnout (supplement S10), with substantively equivalent coefficients for Swiss and foreign nationals (supplement S9). This means that, in the Swiss context, 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 (Bueker 2005). While nationality remains statistically important, in terms of *understanding* differences in electoral participation we do not learn anything on the basis of this variable.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This article has examined the electoral participation of foreign nationals in a new context: the municipal elections in the Canton of Geneva, Switzerland. There is clear evidence that Swiss nationals are more likely to vote than foreign nationals, despite the suggestion that cities with large immigrant population – like Geneva – would encourage immigrant voting (Bevelander and Pendakur 2011). Indeed, the results from a representative survey suggest that in the Canton of Geneva even after accounting for different reasons why people are less likely to vote, nationality remains an important

covariate – even though this does not help us understand why there are differences in turnout.

Four explanations were examined for the difference in turnout between Swiss and foreign voters: social origin, political engagement, civic integration and social networks, and socialization. By using a survey of the eligible population, I could refine immigration-related factors compared to Wass et al. (2015) who used register data in Finland, especially at the individual level. In particular, I included questions that attempt to measure whether people *feel* that they have a stake in society. As a downside, I have to rely on stated participation and have a modest sample size. While all explanations help understand differences in electoral participation – including resources associated with social origin in the present case –, the two variables capturing socialization credibly include zero when other explanations were accounted for, notably social origin. On this broad level, the factors associated with electoral participation in the Canton of Geneva were the same for different nationalities, including Swiss voters.

Because the survey was focused on the electoral participation of immigrants, I included questions that have been suggested as relevant for immigrants in addition to resources related to social origin, political engagement, and socialization. The perception of belonging to the society, having a stake and caring about the place was captured with a question on having a project to eventually return to the country of origin. In the multivariate regression model, this factor credibly includes zero. By contrast, having frequent contact with Swiss nationals is associated with a greater turnout (compare van der Meer 2016; Foschi and Lauriola 2014). This suggests that social networks play an important role for electoral participation, notably also for immigrants. These findings

are in line with the argument that ‘roots’ in the society matter for participation – not just time spent in the community (Ruedin 2007). This is particularly relevant for cities like Geneva with many so-called ‘ex-pat’ workers (and workers in international organizations) who may be eligible to vote given the time they have lived in the country, but usually have no stake in the local community. The presence and level of organization of ‘ethnic’ associations – itself to some degree shaped by the size of the immigrant group – is likely to influence the level of contact immigrants have with the majority population. Unless individuals actively seek out a particular network (and gain access), we can expect that these networks are to a large extent outside the individual’s control.

Despite adding immigration-related questions to the survey, a substantive participation gap remained in models accounting for measurable reasons of electoral turnout. In fact the remaining difference in turnout was larger than typically reported in other contexts (e.g. Heath et al. 2011; Wass et al. 2015). Further research is necessary to understand the persistently lower turnout of immigrants across models in the present case. In the following, I discuss possible reasons for this difference: problems of reported turnout within nationality groups, interactions between variables, missing variables, the immigrant groups in Geneva, and insufficient mobilization.

To begin with reported turnout, I have shown that the over-reporting of voting is similar in all nationality groups in the survey. However, 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 (Sciarini and Goldberg 2016). It may be possible that other – relevant – characteristics of voters are

over-represented within nationality groups, and only further research can establish if this is the case and whether this would influence the substantive findings.

A different possibility concerns missing variables, including interaction terms that 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 (see also Bueker 2015). Here I am limited by the modest number of observations and few indicators in the existing literature what these interactions are likely to be. There might also be relevant factors not covered by the survey, like the reciprocal influence of immigrants and their children (Spierings 2016). It may be that for some immigrants voting is influenced by the household rather than individual factors. Similarly, focusing on the US, Humphries et al. (2013) suggest that socialization in schools may be relevant alongside parental socialization. Further research is also necessary to better measure and understand who considers having a stake in society, whether this is related to reasons to migrate (compare Bueker 2015), and how this sentiment can be fostered among immigrant groups. Important lessons may also 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.

With relatively few places allowing non-citizens of all nationalities to vote in local elections, it is possible that differences in the immigrant population in the Canton of Geneva (compared to other contexts examined so far) highlights gaps in the explanations available for differences in turnout. Among those eligible to vote in the Canton of Geneva, many are ‘established’ and have lived in the canton for many years.

For these immigrants, felt discrimination may be a reason not to feel part of the society they otherwise belong to. Because of negative attitudes towards them – made visible in political campaigns against migration –, immigrants may not feel welcomed and invest less in local affairs. With discrimination commonplace as in other Western countries (Zschirnt and Ruedin 2016), this could lead to political disengagement and withdrawal in a way poorly captured with the social network variables in the current dataset.

A final factor I wish to discuss is mobilization. At the outset I have argued that because the chancellery personally invited all eligible voters of foreign nationality to vote, we can rule out that they were completely unaware of their right to vote. Such a letter, however, may be insufficient to truly mobilize immigrant voters and compensate for the relative lack of high-profile candidates who are immigrants or children of immigrants. Future research should examine the presence of co-ethnic candidates, something which may counter such disengagement: Logan et al. (2012) highlight that the presence of co-ethnic minority candidates (or office holders) can encourage voter turnout. However, Fisher et al. (2015) demonstrate that not all ethnic minority groups are affected by this to the same extent, and it seems unlikely that this factor can ‘explain’ the remaining differences attributed to nationality in the regression models.

In conclusion, as immigrants increasingly become enfranchised – be this through naturalization or an extension of political rights – it is important to understand why they do not participate as much as members of the majority population. Drawing on a new survey of electoral participation in the 2015 municipal elections in the Canton of Geneva, Switzerland, I introduced a new case to the literature. While the factors highlighted in the literature also ‘work’ in the Canton of Geneva, we are left with a large

unexplained gap in electoral turnout. Contrary to for instance Heath et al. (2011) or Spierings (2016), social origin and resources seem to matter for foreign nationals in the Canton of Geneva just like they do for Swiss nationals. I have argued that foreign nationals may perceive themselves as having less of a stake in society – despite economic integration –, although with somewhat different stated political preferences they may have political clout (Strijbis 2014). The large unexplained participation gap in the present case suggests that further research is necessary to understand factors associated with lower turnout. Continued engagement with different immigrant groups seems to be a promising avenue, and future research should probably examine the role of social networks between foreign and Swiss nationals more closely.

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TABLES

Table 1 Self-reported and measured turnout by nationality

<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Measured (OCSTAT)</i>	<i>Self-Reported (Survey)</i>	<i>Overestimation</i>	<i>N in Sample</i>
Switzerland	42%	76%	1.8	252
Other Western Countries	39%	65%	1.7	89
France	38%	61%	1.6	99
Italy	34%	60%	1.7	121
Rest of World	27%	45%	1.6	55
Spain	22%	44%	2.0	79
Eastern Europe	–	40%	–	43
Portugal	17%	36%	2.1	93
Overall	38%	59%	1.6	832

Notes: Sorted by turnout; official statistics from OCSTAT; Eastern European countries are not identified by OCSTAT – their category ‘rest of Europe’ has a turnout of 32%, but includes other Western European countries; ‘rest of world’ refers to ‘other continents’ in OCSTAT.

Table 2 Differences on predictor variables by nationality (group)

	Social Origin					Engagemen	Integration			Socialization			
	Age	Education	Income	Female	Active	Political Knowledge	Association	Return	Contact	Trust	Attachment	Father Voted	Free Country
Switzerland	59	14	7,500	58%	47%	0.40	57%	1.4	84%	6.7	2.2	82%	100%
Eastern Europe	41	12	5,000	44%	64%	0.31	37%	1.4	67%	7.9	2.7	85%	2%
Spain	56	10	5,500	53%	67%	0.32	29%	1.8	68%	6.8	2.5	55%	29%
France	62	14	6,500	59%	36%	0.43	41%	1.4	81%	6.9	2.4	86%	100%
Italy	62	11	4,500	60%	34%	0.33	31%	1.4	66%	7.2	2.4	79%	94%
Portugal	44	10	6,500	42%	74%	0.35	19%	1.9	70%	6.9	2.3	72%	89%
Rest of World	49	13	4,500	55%	54%	0.35	29%	1.8	64%	7.3	2.4	67%	9%
Other Western	59	16	9,500	49%	44%	0.53	56%	1.4	72%	6.9	2.3	74%	94%

Notes: given are for social origin: mean age, mean years of education, median income, percentage female, and percentage active in the labour market; for political engagement and knowledge: mean political knowledge, and percentage active in human rights associations; for integration: mean score on return perspective, percentage with frequent contact with Swiss nationals, mean trust in municipal authorities, mean attachment to the municipality (identity); for socialization: percentage whose father voted when the respondent was 14 years old, the percentage coming from a free country, each time by nationality (group), N=832.

Table 3 Logistic regression by hypothesis and combined

	M0	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
Δ Pred. Probability [†]	25.3%	21.8%	24.6%	27.5%	22.4%	20.2%
Foreign Nationality						
Non-Swiss National (ref.)
Swiss National	1.119 *	0.945 *	1.040 *	1.139 *	1.026 *	0.925 *
Social Origin						
Age		0.028 *				0.024 *
Education		0.061 *				0.039
Income (CHF 1000)		0.076 *				0.063 *
Engagement						
Political Knowledge			1.065 *			0.725 *
No Participation (ref.)			.			.
Association Participation			0.516 *			0.343
Integration						
Return Perspective				-0.129		-0.036
No Contact (ref.)				.		.
Contact with Swiss				0.628 *		0.546 *
Socialization						
Did Not Vote (ref.)					.	.
Father Voted					0.186	0.200
Non-Free Country (ref.)					.	.
Free Country					0.370	0.119
Mean AIC	1076.5	1015.5	1043.3	1060.6	1073.8	999.0

Notes: † = difference in predicted probability to vote, not a coefficient in the model, * = significant at $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed); outcome variable = voted in municipal election; logistic regression model; predictor variables given on the left; shown are the log(odds); standard errors and intercepts are not shown; data were multiply imputed and the combined results are shown ($N=832$). For comparison, mean AIC for a model with only nationality (groups) as predictors = 1067.8.