

The Political Participation and Representation of Migrants: An Overview

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Abstract

This thematic issue covers the participation and representation of migrants in contemporary politics. It focuses on two interconnected analytical dimensions: countries of residence and countries of origin, as arenas of political engagement and the supply and demand sides of political representation. The articles in the thematic issue advance the existing knowledge in migration studies and party politics both theoretically and empirically. They do so by proposing innovative analytical frameworks to assess the extent of participation and representation and by bringing evidence that fosters a better understanding of the intricate relationship between migration and politics.

Keywords

democracy; elections; migrants; political participation; representation

1. Introduction

The theory of democracy underscores the connection between liberal democracy, citizens’ participation, and representation. At the core of this relationship lies the responsiveness of government to its citizens and the quality of democracy (Sartori, 2006). The variation in political participation has been frequently linked to citizens’ support for democratic institutions, norms, values, and principles (Almond & Verba, 1963; Dalton, 2019). Central to this concept is the idea that political participation reduces the gap between citizens and institutions and contributes to reinforcing social cohesion and democratic quality (Norris, 2011; Putnam, 2000). Although migrants form a relevant share in contemporary societies (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2022), their demographic weight is not reflected in democratic institutions and policies. The identification of

a representation gap underlines a notable disparity in the political participation of migrants (Dancygier et al., 2021). Initially considered politically passive due to their limited electoral engagement, more recent evidence reveals that migrants' political engagement has gradually expanded and reached beyond conventional arenas (Finn, 2020; Mügge et al., 2021; Tsuda, 2012; Vintila & Martiniello, 2021). Examples include unconventional forms of political participation such as demonstrations, protests, boycotts, or sit-ins (Gherghina, 2016; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Pilati, 2016). This emphasizes the need to consider alternative avenues through which migrants actively contribute to the contemporary political landscape.

Previous research about the multifaceted aspects of migration (Römer, 2023; Yeung, 2021) covers the supranational, national, and local political dimensions, but often maintains an exclusive focus on the conventional state-centered hierarchy of power. The migration scholarship acknowledges that migrants maintain ties to their countries of origin while actively participating in their countries of residence (Gherghina & Tseng, 2016; Green et al., 2014; Lafleur & Sánchez-Domínguez, 2015; Peltoniemi, 2018; Umpierrez de Reguero & Finn, 2023). This perspective outlines the multi-dimensional processes of migration, generating diverse connections, contiguities, and identities across borders (Grzymala-Kazłowska & Ryan, 2022). The interaction between countries of origin, settlement, and transnational networks has an impact on the migrants' sense of (political) belonging and their political participation (Mişcoiu et al., 2024).

Political parties adjusted their discourse to address the widespread migration process. On the one hand, there is political conflict around migration, which is often used by radical right parties for mobilization purposes (Art, 2011; Grande et al., 2019; Hatton, 2016; Pirro, 2015; Shehaj et al., 2021). Some Eurosceptic messages make direct reference to the threats of migration to the formation of national identity (Marian, 2018; Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2018). On the other hand, political parties in both the country of residence and the country of origin tailor their messages to appeal to immigrants or emigrants (Burgess, 2018; Dancygier, 2014; Dancygier et al., 2021; Gherghina et al., 2022; Østergaard-Nielsen & Ciornei, 2019).

2. Content of the Thematic Issue

Building on these strands of literature, this thematic issue covers the participation and representation of migrants in contemporary politics. It focuses on two interconnected analytical dimensions: countries of residence and countries of origin, as arenas of political engagement and the supply (political parties and politicians) and demand (migrants) sides of political representation. The articles provide a nuanced understanding of the intricate relationship between migration and politics. They advance the existing knowledge in migration studies and party politics both theoretically and empirically. First, they propose innovative analytical frameworks to assess the extent of participation and representation. Second, they reflect empirically on the intertwined nature of migration and politics in contemporary societies. In doing so, the thematic issue proposes three main lines of inquiry that are discussed briefly in the following subsections.

2.1. External Voting

Finn and Ramaciotti (2024) offer fresh perspectives on the reluctance of certain countries to extend external voting rights. Their legal historical analysis of the Chilean case advocates for a nuanced understanding of external voting bill failures. The comparison of proposals dismisses simplistic reasoning and highlights a

deficiency in political consensus akin to Uruguay. Soare's (2024) study focuses on parties' operational behavior abroad and introduces a typology based on the party's origin and degree of formalization. This conceptual framework enhances comparability between organizational configurations abroad and the existing research on party structures.

2.2. Migrant Communities' and Their Countries of Origin

Yener-Roderburg and Yetiş (2024) delve into transnational political mobilization within the Turkey-originated diasporic community in Europe. Their study underscores the influence of diaspora groups on Turkish voters abroad, emphasizing the pivotal role of organizations' activities and mobilization capacities. Gherghina and Basarabă (2024) contribute to transnational political participation literature and explore the individual determinants based on migrants' experiences and ties. Their analysis challenges the idea that voter turnout is linked exclusively to poor integration in the country of residence and shows that ties to home country politics and engagement in host communities boost electoral participation.

Boldrini (2024) provides insights into home parties' interactions with overseas communities, examining how Italian political parties select candidates for reserved parliamentary seats. This analysis reveals distinct career trajectories and capacities among different types of politicians elected abroad. Umpierrez de Reguero and Navia (2024) adopt a similar approach by examining the descriptive representation of citizens residing abroad in elections for extraterritorial districts. Their case study on Ecuador reveals advantages for non-resident candidates, contributing to understanding factors influencing the election of emigrants in extraterritorial seats.

2.3. Challenges of Migrants' Representation

The article authored by Vintila et al. (2024) scrutinizes migrants' descriptive representation in Spain with a focus on the party characteristics' influence on minority representation. Their analysis underscores the underrepresentation of migrant groups in Spanish local politics and the pivotal role of party features. In a complementary effort, Lazarova et al. (2024) explore the role of political parties in the democratic representation and political integration of individuals with immigrant backgrounds. Their results indicate positive effects of exposure to a democratic regime and internal efficacy on immigrants' party membership.

Zogu and Schönthaler (2024) provide a distinct understanding of the topic and investigate how political parties serve as gatekeepers to immigrant political participation in Bolzano, Northern Italy. Despite the limited impact on party recruitment, a nuanced pattern emerges with a tendency toward selectively including certain immigrant groups. Pacześniak and Winćawska (2024) contribute substantively to the debate by examining opportunities and constraints surrounding migrant political participation and representation in Polish society. Their findings show how the Polish political parties instrumentalize the migrant issue during election campaigns. The article by Kelbel et al. (2024) analyzes the voting rights of EU citizens in European and local elections within the member state of residence. Their study emphasizes the pivotal role of contextual factors as predictors in understanding participation dynamics.

3. Conclusions

This thematic issue provides rich insight into the landscape of transnational political dynamics. It focuses on the interaction between the communities of migrants and countries of origin, with particular attention paid to the opportunities and challenges of participation and representation.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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