

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277572958>

# Engaging Immigrants? Examining the Correlates of Electoral Participation among Voters with Migration Background

Article in *Journal of Elections Public Opinion and Parties* · March 2015

CITATIONS

4

READS

74

4 authors, including:



**Hanna Wass**

University of Helsinki

26 PUBLICATIONS 281 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)



**André Blais**

Université de Montréal

391 PUBLICATIONS 7,217 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)



**Alexandre Morin-Chassé**

Université de Montréal

10 PUBLICATIONS 22 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



Making Electoral Democracy Work [View project](#)



Studying the correlates of voter turnout [View project](#)




## Engaging Immigrants? Examining the Correlates of Electoral Participation among Voters with Migration Backgrounds

Hanna Wass, André Blais, Alexandre Morin-Chassé & Marjukka Weide


To cite this article: Hanna Wass, André Blais, Alexandre Morin-Chassé & Marjukka Weide (2015) Engaging Immigrants? Examining the Correlates of Electoral Participation among Voters with Migration Backgrounds, Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties, 25:4, 407-424, DOI: 10.1080/17457289.2015.1023203


To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2015.1023203>

 View supplementary material 

 Published online: 23 Mar 2015.

 Submit your article to this journal 

 Article views: 420

 View related articles 

 View Crossmark data 

# Engaging Immigrants? Examining the Correlates of Electoral Participation among Voters with Migration Backgrounds

HANNA WASS\*, ANDRÉ BLAIS\*\*,  
ALEXANDRE MORIN-CHASSÉ\*\* & MARJUKKA WEIDE†

\*Department of Political and Economic Studies, P.O. Box 54, FI-00014 University of Helsinki, Finland; \*\*Research Chair in Electoral Studies, Département de Science Politique, Université de Montréal, C.P.6128, Succ. Centre-Ville, Montreal, Canada; †Centre for Research on Ethnic Relations and Nationalism (CEREN), Swedish School of Social Science, P.O. Box 16, FI-00014 University of Helsinki, Finland

**ABSTRACT** *An increasing number of eligible citizens in North America and Europe were born outside of these countries. As remarked by Heath et al. [2011. “Ethnic Heterogeneity in the Social Bases of Voting at the 2010 British General Election.” Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties 21 (2): 255–277], in the case that voters with migration background respond differently to established correlates of turnout, understanding the role of immigration-specific factors becomes particularly important. On the basis of individual-level register data from the 2012 Finnish municipal elections (n = 585,839), we examine whether the effect of socioeconomic status on turnout differs according to citizenship status and test which indicators of social and political integration boost participation among foreign-born voters. We find, in line with the different response model, that the impact of age and education is weaker among voters with migration background. In addition, having a native spouse and minor children, past eligibility and being born in a democratic country increase turnout among foreign-born voters, lending support for the assimilation, exposure and transferability models. Finally, the findings concerning the resistance model were opposite to our expectations. Older age at the time of immigration increases participation, but only among migrants born in a democratic country.*

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

A recent meta-analysis of individual-level studies of electoral participation established that turnout is related to a vast number of factors (Smets and van Ham 2013). Age, socioeconomic resources, religiosity, party identification, civic duty,

---

Correspondence Address: Department of Political and Economic Studies, P.O. Box 54, FI-00014 University of Helsinki, Finland. Email: [hanna.wass@helsinki.fi](mailto:hanna.wass@helsinki.fi)

political interest and political knowledge and a sense of political efficacy are each shown to have a positive impact on voting (also Blais 2006; Wass 2008). Most of the effects of various explanatory variables have been tested within industrialized democracies and the analyses are based on the assumption that the findings are relatively constant across subgroups of the population. An increasing number of eligible citizens in North America and Europe were, however, born outside of these countries. As remarked by Heath et al. (2011, 261), the question is thus whether the existing models of participation apply to ethnic minorities. If voters with migration background respond differently to established correlates of turnout, understanding the role of migration-specific factors becomes particularly important. Lower turnout among enfranchised immigrants,<sup>2</sup> fewer mobilization attempts by political parties (Sobolewska, Cutts, and Fieldhouse 2013) and under-representation of new ethnic minorities among candidates and legislators (Bird, Saalfeld, and Wüst 2011) further highlight the relevance of such information.

Utilizing individual-level register data from the 2012 Finnish municipal elections, we examine which aspects of social and political integration increase turnout among foreign-born voters. The contribution of this study to the existing knowledge of the relationship between migration and voting is twofold. Our first contribution is related to the character of the data. Although voter registers have been used in Denmark (e.g. Togeby 1999; Elklit et al. 2000; Bhatti and Hansen 2010, 2014) and validated votes in the UK (Heath et al. 2011), most previous analyses have relayed on surveys. These are typically constrained by limitations such as self-reported turnout and relatively small samples. Our large-scale register-based data set enables us to test multiple models of immigrant political participation with reliable estimates of turnout and large number of observations. The second contribution relates to model building since we do not only test the established models but elaborate them by adding interaction effects and specifying an integrated model of correlates of electoral participation among foreign-born voters.

## Models of Immigrant Political Participation

Previous research has proposed a number of models of the development of political participation among voters with migration background. The main question concerns the conditions under which socialization into a new political system is expected to take place (White et al. 2008, 268–269). According to the *exposure model*, political engagement will rise as immigrants become more experienced with the political system of the new home country (White et al. 2008, 269). For its part, the *assimilation model* suggests that the key factor is whether the newcomer is integrated into the social milieu in the new home country (Bueker 2005, 117–118). Finally, according to the *transferability model*, a lot depends on how the political experience and learning acquired in the country of origin can be transferred into the new environment (Black 1987).

While the exposure, assimilation and transferability hypotheses all assume that turnout among immigrants will eventually approach the participation level among

native citizens, opposite views have been proposed. A clearly negative view on immigrants' participation potential is offered by the *resistance model*, which emphasizes the hurdles connected to re-socialization (White et al. 2008, 269). Reflecting the substantial influence of past learning, people have a tendency to overlook the type of political information that is not aligned with their previous views (for review, White et al. 2008, 270). It is thus suggested that the longer the migrants have been living in their country of origin, the more challenging their adaptation into the political environment of the new home country. In fact, past political activity may constitute an additional obstacle as a person migrating into a new environment may have to first "unlearn" the participatory patterns adopted in the previous context (Black 1987, 736). The effect is supposedly conditioned by the level of similarity between the political systems of the country of origin and the country of residence.

## Hypotheses

In the following, we associate the variables used in this study with the various models of immigrants' political participation. We first discuss the expected mechanisms linking these variables with turnout and shortly review previous empirical findings. After each section, the hypotheses are formulated. The summary of our hypotheses is presented in Table 1.

Beginning with the resistance model, it can be expected that those who immigrate at an old age adapt less easily to the new context because they have become habituated to ways of doing politics in the country of origin. Correspondingly, re-socialization is more complicated at older age (Black 1982, 21; White et al. 2008, 272). The findings from three Canadian studies that include this variable are, however, inconsistent. In the oldest study, age at the time of immigration had a positive effect, contrary to what was expected (Black 1982). White et al. (2008), in turn, did not find a statistically significant effect in their analyses. Finally, Bevelander and Pendakur (2009) showed that voters who immigrated at the age of 20–29 or 40 and older had a lower voting propensity than those who migrated younger or were born in Canada. This is also our expectation, namely *the older the age at the time of migration, the lower the turnout (H1)*.

The assimilation model can be differentiated into several aspects (Gordon 1964) of which two are tapped in this study. Marriage with a native citizen reflects identificational assimilation (Gordon 1964, 80) and signals that a migrant spouse is both economically and politically absorbed into the new home country (Qian and Lichter 2007, 70). The stakes in elections may thus seem higher. Having a native spouse also lowers the language barrier to political information. In addition, marriage may accelerate social exchange with native citizens. A study of migrant women from the former Soviet Union showed that a migrant's marriage with an ethnic Finn is linked to more contacts to Finns compared to those migrants who have a spouse from one's own ethnic group (Jääskeläinen 2003, 45–47). In line with the classical contact hypothesis, interaction with native citizens might

**Table 1.** Summary of the hypotheses

Resistance model	Assimilation model	Exposure model	Transferability model
Being older at the time of migration decreases turnout among foreign-born voters (H1)	Having a native spouse increases turnout among foreign-born voters (H2)	The length of eligibility in municipal elections increases turnout among foreign-born voters (H4)	Origin in a democratic country increases turnout among foreign-born voters (H5)
	Parenthood of minors increases turnout among foreign-born voters (H3)		Being older at the time of migration increases turnout among foreign-born voters with origin in democratic countries and decreases it among voters from non-democratic countries (H6)
			The length of eligibility in municipal elections increases turnout more among foreign-born voters with origin in non-democratic countries than among voters from democratic countries (H7)

enhance understanding of the salient issues and thus increase attention paid to elections.

Parenting of minors can be treated as an indicator of structural assimilation which refers to a large-scale entrance to the institutions of the host society (Gordon 1964, 71). Private schools are few in Finland, and the clear majority of children (over 97%) go to public schools (Kumpulainen 2012, 70).<sup>3</sup> The school is obliged to collaboration with the pupils’ parents. This regular contact, facilitated by an interpreter if needed, forms a social bond between the parent and the public institution (Säävälä 2012, 65–82).

Based on the aforementioned groundings and in line with previous empirical findings from the Nordic contexts (Togeby 1999; Bevelander and Pendakur 2009), we thus hypothesize *that having a native spouse and minor children increase turnout among foreign-born voters (H2 and H3, respectively).*

Past eligibility in municipal elections can be conceptualized as a component of the exposure model, also indicating length of residence. A longer stay in the new home

country enhances one's access to political information (Uhlener, Cain, and Kiewiet 1989, 203). Many different studies lend support for a positive association between length of residence and electoral participation (e.g. Uhlener, Cain, and Kiewiet 1989; Togeby 1999; Bass 2001a, 2001b; Jones-Correa 2001; Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001; Lien 2004; Xu 2005; Messina 2006; Bevelander and Pendakur 2009; White et al. 2008). Yet, it could be argued that past eligibility captures even better those effects that are relevant in terms of *political* exposure. Noteworthy, those who were entitled to vote in previous Finnish municipal elections as foreign residents have received a multilingual information letter describing the electoral system already once or twice before, and might thus be better informed than freshly enfranchised voters. Consistent with the findings by Bueker (2005), *a positive association between the length of eligibility in previous municipal elections and turnout* is hypothesized (H4).

The level of democratization of the country of origin can be used to test the transferability model. Compared to their counterparts from non-democratic countries, migrants from democratic regimes have more political knowledge, interest and skills that facilitate participation in the new context (Black 1987, 738–739). Given the habitual character of voting (Aldrich, Montgomery, and Wood 2011), once acquired, the voting habit can be transferred into participation in the new home country. Even less active citizens from a democratic country of origin are arguably more familiar with the electoral process than immigrants from non-democratic political systems.

In his study of the 2000 Canadian federal elections, Pikkov (2011) has shown that although the positive effect of level of democracy in the country of origin attenuates over time, it is still evident after several decades spent in the new environment. Correspondingly, an analysis based on the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES) shows that voters from non-democratic countries had lower propensity to participate in the 2009 federal elections, although the observation was restricted to first-generation immigrants (Wüst, 2012). Consequently, we expect that *those foreign-born voters with origin in democratic regimes have a higher propensity to vote than their counterparts from non-democratic countries* (H5).

The level of democratization of the country of origin may also have interactions with indicators of resistance models and exposure. While longer exposure to political information in a new environment expectedly facilitates participation among all voters with foreign origin, it is probably especially important for those immigrants who have not acquired civic values to the same extent people migrating from democratic countries (also White et al. 2008, 272). This assumption is supported by empirical findings from the Canadian context, showing that the effect of years of residence on turnout is stronger among immigrants arriving from countries with low level of democracy (Pikkov, 2011, 52–53).

In a corresponding manner, resistance may be conditioned by previous democratic experience. Whereas immigrants from non-democratic countries need to first “unlearn” their previous political dispositions (Black 1987, 736), which is more difficult at older age, their counterparts born in democratic countries can more directly

transfer previously acquired participatory habits into a new regime (Black 1987). In fact, older age at the time of immigration might only make adaptation into a new political system easier among the latter group. Consequently, we expect that *older age at the time of immigration increases voting propensity among voters born in democratic countries but decreases it among those born in non-democratic regimes (H6) and that the positive impact of past eligibility on current turnout is more pronounced among foreign-born voters with origin in non-democratic countries (H7).*

### **Context of the Study: Migration to Finland and Foreign Residents' Voting Rights**

Finland remained largely a country of emigration (and return of the emigrants) until the 1980s and 1990s. In 1990, only 0.5% of the Finnish population was composed of foreign residents. The share is still as low as 3.6% at the reference point of this study, the 2012 municipal elections in which foreign-born individuals (i.e. including naturalized citizens) accounted for 5.3% of the population (Statistics Finland 2014a, 2014b). Compared to other Nordic countries, the share of resident foreigners and naturalized citizens in the population is low.

Due to late industrialization and economic growth after the devastating war, Finland never experienced a “guest worker” era as a receiving country. It was not until the global upheavals of the 1990s that inbound migration became noticeable. While Finland belongs to the few countries that are committed to receiving a (very small) fixed quota of refugees through the UNHCR, the policy towards asylum seekers has long been restrictive (Saukkonen 2013, 86–88). The numerically most significant reasons for migrating to Finland are family ties, work and studies. More than half of the foreign-born population comes from other European countries (Martikainen, Saari, and Korkiasaari 2013, 39–40).

Overall, the largest foreign-born group, and the only one that exceeds 1% of the total population, is formed by people born in the former USSR or the present day Russia. This category consists of various ethnic groups. In terms of Finnish migration history, the most distinct group is formed by the Ingrian Finns who have been allowed to migrate to Finland under more favorable rules since 1990 (it was decided in 2011 that the arrangement will be closed). Although many Ingrian Finns may use Russian as their first language, they tend to know Finnish due to their Finnish heritage (and the language test required for immigration) (Miettinen 2006). Many USSR/Russian-born people live in Eastern Finland, but their share does not exceed 3% in any single province (Statistics Finland 2014a). The social integration of Estonians, the second largest group, is facilitated by the fact that Estonian shares some grammatical structures and vocabulary with Finnish.

The most noteworthy group with background in humanitarian migration is the Somalis. They are the most visible and widely known refugees in Finland, and experience more ethnic discrimination than other groups (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2009). Despite, or because of, their vulnerable position, especially Somali men are known to be active in forming civic associations



(Pirkkalainen 2013) and participating in local politics in Finland (Rask, Nieminen, and Solovieva 2012).

Foreign residents have gradually gained electoral rights in municipal elections, organized every fourth year by the d'Hondt's method. Nordic citizens with permanent residence were the first to be enfranchised in the 1970s, followed by all foreign residents in 1992. According to the current legislation, Nordic and EU citizens have electoral rights on equal terms with Finnish citizens, whereas other foreign residents are required to have a domicile in Finland continuously for two years and 51 days prior to an election in order to be eligible to vote and/or run as a candidate (L1647/1995). Eligible foreign residents receive by mail a leaflet which contains electoral information in a number of languages. The public elections portal (vaalit.fi) offers basic information about municipal elections (in 21 languages in 2012). The Ministry of Justice also produced short films about voting procedures in plain Finnish and Swedish before the 2012 municipal elections and an NGO campaigned for raising electoral awareness amongst resident foreigners. Compared to electoral systems using closed or semi-open lists where minority candidates risk being placed in unfavorable positions (Soininen and Etzler 2006), the Finnish open-list system is expected to encourage migrants to run as candidates. In practice, however, new ethnic minorities remain seriously underrepresented. In the 2012 municipal elections, only 1.8% of the candidates and 0.4% of the elected MPs were native speakers of other languages than Finnish Swedish or Sami, compared to 4.1% of the electorate (Official Statistics of Finland 2012).

## Research Design

Our analyses are based on individual-level data on turnout in the 2012 Finnish municipal elections. The data were compiled from those electoral wards that utilized electronic voter register ( $n = 585,839$ ).<sup>4</sup> The data, administrated by the Ministry of Justice, were released to Statistics Finland after the elections. In Statistics Finland, the information on whether a person voted or not was linked to various indicators of the individual's socioeconomic status and migration history with the help of personal identification numbers. In compiling the variables, the electronic election data provided by the Ministry of Justice were used as the primary data source, supplemented by the data provided by Statistics Finland. The Statistics Finland data are from 2011 for most of the variables and from 2010 in a few cases. In 491 cases, linking was not possible. In addition, there were a few inconsistencies with respect to the definitions of variable. For example, the citizenship information provided by the Ministry of Justice produced 685 inconsistent values when compared to the data collected by Statistics Finland.

Our study population is composed of eligible voters born outside Finland, excluding Finnish citizens born in Sweden along with Swedish citizens from any origin ( $n = 23,160$ ). Of these, 7813 are naturalized citizens<sup>5</sup> and 15,347 foreign residents. Turnout among these groups were 35.5% and 20.9%, respectively, compared to 58.7% among native citizens in our sample ( $n = 557,249$ ).<sup>6</sup>

The reason to exclude citizens born in Sweden and Swedish citizens is related to cultural and historical similarity between Finland and Sweden. For most immigrants, learning Finnish is an important barrier to social integration. Migrants from Sweden benefit from the fact that Swedish is the other official language of Finland. Swedish remains the mother tongue of a significant minority group in Finland (around 5%). Mobility between Finland and Sweden was enhanced by the 1950s' and 1960s' labor shortage in Sweden and facilitated by Nordic cooperation that, for example, enabled intra-Nordic travel without passport already in the 1950s (Korkiasaari 2001, 11–12). In this sense, people with Swedish citizenship or those who were born in Sweden stand out as a very particular immigrant group. Merging them with other immigrant groups would not make sense. As a consequence, 5386 individuals were discarded from our original data set.<sup>7</sup>

In compiling the independent variables, a number of different sources were used. For instance, information about gender and age was derived from the Population register while education was retrieved from the Degree registry of Statistics Finland. In the case of non-native citizens and foreign residents, the information preceding arrival to Finland is self-reported (e.g. gender, age, previous citizenship, education). Variables indicating immigration status were provided both by the Ministry of Justice (citizenship, year of arrival) and Statistics Finland.

The indicator of the resistance model, age at the time of immigration, is calculated by subtracting the immigrant's year of birth from the year of arrival. Past eligibility in the 2004 and 2008 municipal elections is used as a proxy for length of residency (exposure). While the data also include a direct indicator, past eligibility in two previous municipal elections is a more accurate measure since an individual may have moved to another country and returned between elections. If a person has been entitled to vote in both past elections, we can be more certain that he/she resided in Finland at least 11 years before the 2012 elections. The variable is coded to range from 0 to 2 (0 = eligible in neither election, 1 = eligible in one election and 2 = eligible in both elections).

In order to test the transferability hypothesis, a variable indicating the level of democracy in the country of birth at year of birth for each individual born outside of Finland or Sweden was constructed.<sup>8</sup> This measure is based on the Freedom House database. For each year since 1973, the Freedom House uses a checklist approach to provide estimates of the level of *political rights* and *civil liberties* in each country of the world. Such coding results in two scales, ranging from 1 to 7, 1 indicating the highest level of political rights or civil liberties and 7 the lowest level. For each country/year unit, Freedom House also calculates the average score on these two scales and uses this mean value to classify countries as being "free" (between 1 and 2.5), "partly free" (between 3 and 5) and "not free" (between 5 and 7). These three categories are used as dummies in our analysis. For each foreign-born voter, the level of democracy in the country of origin at year of birth was computed (0 = not free, 1 = partly free, 2 = free). Since very few successful democratic transitions occurred before the 1970s, individuals who were born before 1973 were classified according to the 1973 Freedom House scores.<sup>9</sup> The

descriptive statistics for the index are shown in Table A1 and the coding of the variables is reported in Table A2 in the online appendix.<sup>10</sup>

All the analyses were conducted using logistic regression. In order to facilitate the interpretation, the results of the final step in our analyses, namely the integrated model, are reported as marginal effects. These were calculated by shifting each variable from one value to another while holding all variables at their mean values. For the estimation of the marginal effects, the variables were categorized and included in the logistic models as dummy variables. Due to that procedure, the interpretation of the marginal effect is the same for each variable, namely the estimated change in the probability of voting in a given category compared to the reference category.

## Results

Our main results are reported in Table 2. The indicator of the resistance model, age at the time of immigration, seems to have an impact on turnout, but in a direction opposite to what was expected in hypothesis 1. Like Black (1982), we find that those immigrating at older age are more inclined to vote. While the difference is most noticeable between those who were youngest and oldest at the time of immigration, less variation can be found between middle groups and the difference between the second youngest and youngest group is not statistically significant.

The effects of spousal citizenship, defined in the data set to include only married people, and having children are in line with our expectations (*H2–H3*). The observation that having a native spouse enhances integration (Togeby 1999; Bevelander and Pendakur 2009) is clearly supported by our findings. Having children per se has only a small effect, but having a large family substantially increases the propensity to vote. The difference in turnout between voters with no children and five or more children is 22 percentage points.<sup>11</sup> This intriguing finding is, however, not restricted to voters with migration background. The corresponding gap (18% points) is also evident among native citizens. This might be related to fact that parents with large families have high stakes in decision-making concerning social policy, which is in turn reflected in active participation. Such tendency could be particularly pronounced in municipal elections since municipalities are responsible for organizing health and child-care service as well as schooling.<sup>12</sup>

Our indicator of exposure, length of eligibility in municipal elections, is positively associated with turnout among voters with migration background. The effect is, however, modest. In line with Pikkov (2011) and Wüst (2012) and hypothesis 5, turnout among foreign-born voters is strongly connected to the level of democracy in their country of birth. This is indicated by a difference in turnout of 12 percentage points between voters from democratic and non-democratic regimes.

The interaction with the level of democracy in the country of origin clarifies the puzzling finding related to the main effect of age at the time of immigration.<sup>13</sup> As suggested in *H6*, older age has a positive impact when a person was born in a democratic country. The effect is not linear, however. What seems to make a difference is whether a person was an adult at the time of immigration. This is consistent with the

**Table 2.** The effect of social and political integration on turnout among foreign-born voters in the Finnish municipal elections of 2012 (%)

	Resistance model	Assimilation model	Exposure model	Transferability model	Inter-active model 1	Inter-active model 2	Integrated model
<i>Age at the time of immigration</i>							
18–24	0.14 (0.12)				–0.08 (0.15)		
25–34	0.30* (0.13)				0.08 (0.16)		
35 or older	0.37* (0.17)				0.12 (0.19)		
<i>Spousal citizenship</i>							
Finnish		0.80*** (0.05)					
Not married		0.28*** (0.07)					
<i>Number of children</i>							
1–4		0.14** (0.04)					0.15** (0.05)
5–9		1.03*** (0.16)					1.09*** (0.17)
<i>Eligibility in the 2004 and 2008 municipal elections</i>							
Eligible only in one elections			–0.00 (0.05)			–0.15* (0.07)	0.02 (0.07)
Eligible in both elections			0.20*** (0.05)			–0.05 (0.06)	0.13* (0.06)
<i>Level of democracy in the country of origin</i>							
Partly free				0.25*** (0.05)	–0.06 (0.22)	0.07 (0.08)	0.33*** (0.06)
Free				0.60*** (0.05)	–0.80 (0.61)	0.11 (0.10)	0.63*** (0.06)

*Age at the time of immigration x the level of democracy in the country of origin*

18–24, partly free	0.30 (0.26)
18–24, free	1.56* (0.64)
25–34, partly free	0.18 (0.25)
25–34, free	1.23 (0.63)
35 or older, partly free	0.60* (0.28)
35 or older, free	1.31* (0.64)

*Eligibility in the 2004 and 2008 municipal elections x the level of democracy in the country of birth*

Eligible only in one elections, partly free						0.19 (0.13)	
Eligible only in one elections, free						0.47** (0.15)	
Eligible in both elections, partly free						0.34** (0.12)	
Eligible in both elections, free						0.70*** (0.12)	
Constant	–2.98*** (0.29)	–2.85*** (0.20)	–2.92*** (0.15)	–3.20*** (0.17)	–3.02*** (0.33)	–2.87*** (0.18)	–2.70*** (0.22)
N	8,160	13,759	19,577	15,315	7,299	15,315	10,837
Log likelihood	154.17	1171.44	1146.89	840.67	170.74	890.21	661.37

Notes: The table presents unstandardized logistic regression coefficients (b) with standard error in parenthesis. All models include gender, age, age square and occupational status as control variables. All variables except age and age squared were treated as dummy variables with the following reference categories: male, no education after comprehensive level, blue-collar, 17 or younger, spouse with other citizenship, no children, eligible in neither elections, and not free. The coding of the variables is presented in Table A2 in the online appendix.

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

\* $p < 0.05$ .

transferability model. In order to transfer past behavior, a person needs to learn it before migration, namely, to be old enough to vote. Among migrants from non-democratic regimes, age at the time of immigration does not have a statistically significant effect on voting. Thus, the latter part of *H6*, suggesting a negative effect of age, is not supported.

The interaction of past eligibility with the level of democracy turns out to be opposite to what was expected in *H7*. Past eligibility seems to facilitate participation only among those foreign-born voters who were already familiar with democratic elections. One interpretation is that although voters from non-democratic regimes might benefit more from a longer exposure to political information in the new home country, those who already have experience of democratic structures might be more receptive and easily mobilized.

We finally construct an integrated model. In specifying such a model, each variable was added separately. Parenthood of minors was selected as an indicator of assimilation since its effect on turnout is even stronger than that of marriage with a native spouse. The indicator of the resistance model, age at the time of immigration, was omitted because of its high level of collinearity with eligibility in previous municipal elections. The final integrated model thus includes indicators of assimilation, exposure and transferability, producing the lowest possible VIF values. In order to simplify the interpretation of this integrated model, only the main effects were included. [Table 3](#) shows the marginal effects estimated on the basis of this model. It is evident that when all three components are addressed simultaneously, parenthood of multiple minors and origin in a democratic country are the most influential factors in accounting for turnout among foreign-born voters whereas past eligibility has only a limited effect.

## Conclusions

This study examined the 2012 Finnish municipal elections, in which foreign residents were entitled to vote. Overall, our results bear out several models presented in the literature. This is particularly noteworthy since the context of the study substantially differs from the North-American one where most of these hypotheses were originally formulated.

Strong support was found for the assimilation model, illustrated by positive effects of marriage with a native spouse and parenthood of multiple children on turnout among foreign-born voters. The findings also lend initial support to the exposure model. Eligibility in past municipal elections proved to have a positive, although relatively small effect on electoral participation. In line with the transferability model, the level of democracy in the country of origin is positively associated with participation in a new environment. Although the size of the effect was moderate, it is worth notifying that two-thirds of foreign-born voters in our data set were born in a country that was coded as not free. Consequently, previous democratic experience is definitely a relevant factor in the analysis of turnout among voters with migration background.

**Table 3.** The marginal effects of social and political integration on turnout among foreign-born voters in the Finnish municipal elections of 2012

	Marginal effects
<i>Number of children (assimilation model)</i>	
1–4	0.03*** (0.01)
5–9	0.24*** (0.04)
<i>Eligibility in the 2004 and 2008 municipal elections (exposure model)</i>	
Eligible only in one elections	0.00 (0.01)
Eligible in both elections	0.03* (0.01)
<i>The level of democracy in the country of origin (transferability model)</i>	
Partly free	0.07*** (0.01)
Free	0.13*** (0.01)

Notes: The column entries indicate the estimated change in the probability of voting compared to the following reference groups: no children, eligible in neither elections, and not free. The standard errors are shown in parentheses. The marginal effects were estimated on the basis of the integrated model shown in Table 2.

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

\* $p < 0.05$ .

We were also able to make two important adjustments to existing models. Past eligibility, which can also be considered as a proxy for length of residence, is only relevant for voters born in democratic countries. Correspondingly, our finding that age at the time of immigration *increases* turnout, which at first glimpse seemed to challenge the resistance model, turned out to apply only to voters coming from democratic countries. These two interaction effects suggest that the impact of exposure or resistance is conditioned by the type of country (democratic or not) that one comes from. Finally, our integrated model indicates that social inclusion, namely parenthood of multiple minors, and previous experience in democracy are the strongest correlates of turnout among foreign-born voters.

These results highlight the usefulness of large-scale individual-level register data, which are becoming increasingly common in electoral research. While high-quality data sets such as EMBES and GLES enable nuanced analyses of electoral participation among voters with migration background, their sample size is often too small to test various models simultaneously or to include interaction effects. On the other hand, register-based data include only factual attributes, whereas the effect of attitudinal factors, such as various kinds of identities, interest in politics in the new home country and indicators of social capital such as membership in co-ethnic organizations (Togeby 1999; Bevelander and Pendakur 2009; González-Ferrer 2011; Heath et al. 2011) cannot be

captured. An additional restriction concerns the composition of foreign-born voters. Due to data secrecy, only the four largest groups were identified by nationality. The analysis could thus not be differentiated by the size of the group, something that has been proven to be relevant for turnout among voters with migration background (Wüst 2012).

Finally, there is the question of generalizability of our results to other contexts. Given that migration is a relatively recent phenomenon in Finland and new ethnic minorities are rather poorly incorporated in terms of political engagement, the factors tested in this study may have a more pronounced effect on voting than in countries with a longer migration history. From this perspective, Finland constitutes a less stringent test for the effect of assimilation and exposure.

In sum, our results demonstrate that political participation among immigrants is a multifaceted phenomenon. Many of the models found in the literature account for turnout in a complementary fashion and seem to cover different dimensions of social and political inclusion. Some of the factors examined in this study are obviously out of reach for policy-makers interested in activating foreign-born voters. One of the aspects that can be addressed is facilitating political socialization at an adult age. The fact that the level of democracy in the country of origin is connected to turnout implies that newcomers whose political socialization process started in non-democratic regimes could benefit from political education. Our finding that past eligibility in previous municipal elections increases turnout propensity among voters from democratic regimes further suggests that enfranchisement soon after immigration has a positive effect for the forming of political citizenship in the new home country. Of the 40 (mostly European) countries covered by the 2010 Migrant Integration Policy Index, 18 countries had “a critically unfavorable policy” in the area of foreign residents’ right to vote in local elections. This basically means no voting rights for the third country citizens in the context of the EU countries, and no voting rights for any foreign residents in the non-EU countries (MIPEX 2014). Since low participation often implies under-representation, voters with a migration background thus risk becoming politically excluded (e.g. Bäck and Soininen 1998, 47). Like any other systematic bias in the participation pattern, this may influence negatively the overall quality of democracy in the political community under scrutiny.

## Acknowledgements

The authors thank Petri Palmu and three anonymous reviewers and the editor of *JEPOP* for their valuable comments and suggestions. They also appreciate the thorough work by senior actuaries Tuukka Saranpää and Satu Heinonen from Statistic Finland in the data production.

## Funding

This work was supported by the Academy of Finland under grant no. 273433. Also Ministry of Justice and The Swedish School of Social Science, University of Helsinki contributed to data costs.



## Supplementary Material

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed at doi: 10.1080/17457289.2015.1023203.

## Notes

1. This article makes reference to supplementary material available on the publisher's website at <http://dx.10.1080/17457289.2015.1023203>
2. Studies that report turnout differences among native and foreign-born voters include Bäck and Soininen (1998), Fennema and Tillie (1999), Togeby (1999), Aalandslid (2008), Bhatti and Hansen (2010, 2014), Ahokas, Weide, and Wilhelmsson (2011), Bevelander and Pendakur (2011), González-Ferrer (2011), Heath et al. (2011), Wüst et al. (2011) and Sanders, Fisher, Heath, and Sobolewska (2014).
3. Furthermore, the majority of private schools licensed to give a basic education in Finland are not specially oriented towards ethnic minorities. There are, for example, only two Russian–Finnish comprehensive schools in the entire country. Also religious schools are very few, most of them being Christian (Ministry of Education and Culture 2014).
4. The pilot for the use of electronic voter registers was launched in the parliamentary elections of 2011. It is voluntary for the municipal authorities to start using the electronic register on the polling day. Municipalities can also decide in which electoral wards the electronic register will be applied. In the 2012 municipal elections, an electronic register was used in 211 out of 265 electoral wards. Even in these electoral wards, voting still takes place using paper ballots.
5. As Finnish citizenship is granted to a child of a Finnish citizen irrespective of the place of birth, this group may include some who are not naturalized foreigners but who were considered “expatriate Finns” at birth and who later moved to the country of their parents’ origin. Excluding Sweden-born Finnish citizens, however, significantly reduces the number of such cases.
6. This group also includes individuals who were born in Finland as foreign citizens (i.e. born to parents who were foreign citizens) and were naturalized by the time of the elections. They might be called the “second-generation Finns”. As migration of foreign citizens to Finland significantly increased only at the beginning of 1990s, the second generation that has reached the voting age is still rather small. The effect of parental example may be different for them than for young voters with native Finnish parents, but the second generation can be considered similar to native-born Finns in terms of political socialization.
7. As a robustness test, we also ran each analysis including voters born in Sweden and Swedish citizens. The results remain practically the same. These analyses are available from the authors upon request.
8. Due to ethical reasons, the database released from Statistics Finland included information about country of origin only for four largest migration groups, namely Swedish, Russian, Estonians and Somalis. The democracy variable had thus to be computed by Statistics Finland.
9. For immigrants who were born in Yemen, Vietnam and Germany, Statistics Finland does not distinguish those who came from the North and the South part (Yemen and Vietnam) or from the East and West part (Germany). Voters who were born in one of the two regions of these countries were coded with a valid value for our level of democracy variable only if they were born in a year where the two regions had identical scores on the Freedom House index.
10. Available at <http://dx.10.1080/17457289.2015.1023203>
11. In order to facilitate the interpretation of the results presented in logistic regression models (Table 1), we have also calculated the estimated turnout probabilities. These are available from the authors upon request.
12. We also tested the effect of another potential indicator of structural assimilation, namely employment status. Surprisingly, among foreign-born voters those being unemployed are almost as likely to vote as those who are employed or not part of the labor force. This is particularly noteworthy given the noticeable gap in turnout between the unemployed and employed among native citizens (48% vs. 58%) and the previous finding concerning the mobilizing effect of employment among naturalized citizens (González-Ferrer 2011, 77–78). The results are available from the authors upon request.

13. Since there is collinearity between eligibility in previous municipal elections and age at the time of immigration, their interactions with the level of democracy in the country of origin had to be tested in two separate models.

## References

- Aalandslid, V. 2008. "Political Participation and Representation." In *Immigration and Immigrants 2008*, edited by G. Daugstad, 123–134. Oslo–Kongsvinger: Statistics Norway.
- Ahokas, L., M. Weide, and N. Wilhelmsson. 2011. *Maahanmuuttajien yhteiskunnallisen osallistumisen tukeminen julkishallinnossa ja puolueissa*. Selvityksiä ja ohjeita 9. Helsinki: oikeusministeriö.
- Aldrich, J. H., J. M. Montgomery and W. Wood. 2011. "Turnout as a Habit." *Political Behavior*, 33 (4): 535–563.
- Bäck, H., and M. Soininen. 1998. "Immigrants in the Political Process." *Scandinavian Political Studies* 21 (1): 29–50.
- Bass, L. E., and L. M. Casper. 2001a. "Differences in Registering and Voting Between Native-Born and Naturalized Americans." *Population Research and Policy Review* 20 (6): 483–511.
- Bass, L. E., and L. M. Casper. 2001b. "Impacting the Political Landscape: Who Registers and Votes among Naturalized Americans?" *Political Behavior* 23 (2): 103–130.
- Bevelander, P., and R. Pendakur. 2009. "Social Capital and Voting Participation of Immigrants and Minorities in Canada." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32 (8): 1406–1430.
- Bevelander, P., and R. Pendakur. 2011. "Voting and Social Inclusion in Sweden." *International Migration* 49 (4): 67–92.
- Bhatti, Y., and K. M. Hansen. 2010. *Valgdeltagelsen ved kommunalvalget 17. november 2009: beskrivende analyser af valgdeltagelsen baseret på registerdata*. Arbejdspapir 2010/0. Copenhagen: Københavns Universite.
- Bhatti, Y., and K. M. Hansen. 2014. *Hvem stemte og hvem blev hjemme?* CVAP working paper series 2/ 2014. Copenhagen: Københavns Universite.
- Bird, K., T. Saalfeld, and A. M. Wüst, eds. 2011. *The Political Representation of Immigrants and Minorities: Voters, Parties and Parliaments in Liberal Democracies*. London: Routledge.
- Black, J. H. 1982. "Immigrant political adaptation in Canada: some tentative findings." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 15 (1): 3–28.
- Black, J. H. 1987. "The Practice of Politics in Two Settings: Political Transferability among Recent Immigrants to Canada." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 20 (4): 731–753.
- Blais, A. 2006. "What Affects Turnout?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 55: 425–441.
- Bueker, C. Simpson. 2005. "Political Incorporation among Immigrants from Ten Areas of Origin: The Persistence of Source Country Effects." *International Migration Review* 39 (1): 103–140.
- Elklit, J., B. Møller, P. Svensson, and L. Togeby. 2000. *Hvem stemmer – og hvem stemmer ikke? En analyse af valgdeltagelsen i København og Århus ved kommunal-bestyrelsesvalgene i 1997*. Aarhus: Magtudredningen.
- European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2009. "EU-MIDIS at a Glance. Introduction to the FRA's EU-Wide Discrimination Survey." Accessed December 18, 2014. [http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/414-EU-MIDIS\\_GLANCE\\_EN.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/414-EU-MIDIS_GLANCE_EN.pdf)
- Fennema, M., and J. Tillie. 1999. "Political Participation and Political Trust in Amsterdam: Civic Communities and Ethnic Networks." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 25 (4): 703–726.
- González-Ferrer, A. 2011. "The Electoral Participation of Naturalized Immigrants in Ten European Cities." In *Social Capital, Political Participation and Migration in Europe. Making Multicultural Democracy Work?* edited by L. Moralas and M. Giugni, 63–86. New York: Palgrave.
- Gordon, M. 1964. *Assimilation in American Life*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Heath, A. F., S. D. Fisher, D. Sanders, and M. Sobolewska. 2011. "Ethnic Heterogeneity in the Social Bases of Voting at the 2010 British General Election." *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 21 (2): 255–277.

- Jääskeläinen, A. 2003. "Intermarriage and Segmented Integration into Finnish Society: Immigrant Women from the Former Soviet Union." *Finnish Yearbook of Population Research* 39: 33–54.
- Jones-Correa, M. 2001. "Institutional and Contextual Factors in Immigrant Naturalization and Voting." *Citizenship Studies* 5 (1): 41–56.
- Korkiasaari, J. 2001. *Suomalaisten Ruotsiin suuntautuneen siirtolaisuuden yhteiskunnalliset syyt 1900-luvulla*. Turku: Siirtolaisuusinstituutti.
- Kumpulainen, T., ed. 2012. *Koulutuksen tilastollinen vuosikirja 2011. Årsbok för utbildningsstatistik 2011*. Koulutuksen seurantaraportit. Helsinki: Opetushallitus.
- Lien, P. 2004. "Asian Americans and Voting Participation: Comparing Racial and Ethnic Differences in Recent U.S. Elections." *International Migration Review* 38 (2): 493–517.
- Martikainen, T., M. Saari, and J. Korkiasaari. 2013. "Kansainväliset muuttoliikkeet ja Suomi." In *Muuttajat. Kansainvälinen muuttoliike ja suomalainen yhteiskunta*, edited by T. Martikainen, P. Saukkonen, and M. Säävälä, 23–54. Helsinki: Gaudeamus.
- Messina, A. M. 2006. "The Political Incorporation of Immigrants in Europe: Trends and Implications." In *The Migration Reader: Exploring Politics and Policies*, edited by A. M. Messina and L. Gallya, 470–493. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- Miettinen, H. 2006. "Peillistä näkyy muuttunut kuva. Ajatuksia ja havaintoja 2000-luvun inkeriläisyydestä." In *Ylirajainen kulttuuri. Etnisyys Suomessa 2000-luvulla*, edited by T. Martikainen, 144–167. Helsinki: Suomen kirjallisuuden seura.
- Ministry of Education and Culture. 2014. Perusopetuksen järjestämisluvat. Unpublished list of licensed private comprehensive schools.
- MIPEx. 2014. "Migrant Integration Policy Index." Accessed December 18, 2014. [www.mipex.eu](http://www.mipex.eu)
- Official Statistics of Finland. 2012. Municipal Elections. 1. Background Analysis of Candidates and Elected Councillors in Municipal Elections 2012. Helsinki: Statistics Finland. Accessed December 18, 2014. [http://www.stat.fi/til/kvaa/2012/kvaa\\_2012\\_2012-11-02\\_kat\\_001\\_en.html](http://www.stat.fi/til/kvaa/2012/kvaa_2012_2012-11-02_kat_001_en.html)
- Pikkov, D. L. 2011. *The Practice of Voting: Immigrant Turnout, the Persistence of Origin Effects, and the Nature, Formation and Transmission of Political Habit*. Toronto: University of Toronto. Accessed December 18, 2014 [https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/31900/1/Pikkov\\_Deanna\\_L\\_201108\\_PhD\\_thesis.pdf](https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/31900/1/Pikkov_Deanna_L_201108_PhD_thesis.pdf)
- Pirkkalainen, P. 2013. *Transnational Responsibilities and Multi-Sited Strategies: Voluntary Associations of Somali Diaspora in Finland*. Jyväskylä Studies in Education, Psychology and Social Research 489. Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä.
- Qian, Z., and D. T. Lichter. 2007. "Social Boundaries and Marital Assimilation: Interpreting Trends in Racial and Ethnic Intermarriage." *American Sociological Review* 72 (1): 68–94.
- Ramakrishnan, S. K., and T. J. Espenshade. 2001. "Immigrant Incorporation and Political Participation in the United States." *International Migration Review* 35 (3): 870–909.
- Rask, S., T. Nieminen, and T. N. Solovieva. 2012. "Osallistuminen ja luottamus." In *Maahanmuuttajien terveys ja hyvinvointi. Tutkimus venäläis-, somalialais- ja kurditaustaisista Suomessa*, edited by A. E. Castaneda, S. Rask, P. Koponen, M. Mölsä, and S. Koskinen, 219–228. Helsinki: Terveiden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos.
- Säävälä, M. 2012. *Koti, koulu ja maahan muuttaneiden lapset. Oppilashuolto ja vanhemmat hyvinvointia turvaamassa*. Väestöntutkimuslaitos. Katsauksia E 43/2012. Helsinki: Väestöliitto.
- Sanders, D., S. Fisher, A. F. Heath, and M. Sobolewska. 2014. "The Democratic Engagement of Britain's Ethnic Minorities." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37 (1): 120–139.
- Saukkonen, P. 2013. "Maahanmuutto- ja kotouttamispolitiikka." In *Muuttajat. Kansainvälinen muuttoliike ja suomalainen yhteiskunta*, edited by T. Martikainen, P. Saukkonen, and M. Säävälä, 81–97. Helsinki: Gaudeamus.
- Smets, K., and C. van Ham. 2013. "The Embarrassment of Riches? A Meta-analysis of Individual Level Research on Voter Turnout." *Electoral Studies* 32 (2): 344–359.
- Sobolewska, M., D. Cutts, and E. Fieldhouse. 2013. "Taking Minorities for Granted? Ethnic Density, Party Campaigning and Targeting Minority Voters in 2010 British General Elections." *Parliamentary Affairs* 66 (2): 329–344.

- Soininen, M., and N. Etzler. 2006. *Partierna nominerar. Exkluderingens mekanismer – etnicitet och representation*. Stockholm: Statens offentliga utredningar.
- Statistics Finland. 2014a. "Country of Birth According to Age and Sex by Region 1990–2013." Accessed October 13, 2014. [http://193.166.171.75/Dialog/varval.asp?ma=040\\_vaerak\\_tau\\_103\\_en&ti=Country+of+birth+according+to+age+and+sex+by+region+1990+%2D+2013&path=../Database/StatFin/vrm/vaerak/&lang=1&multilang=en](http://193.166.171.75/Dialog/varval.asp?ma=040_vaerak_tau_103_en&ti=Country+of+birth+according+to+age+and+sex+by+region+1990+%2D+2013&path=../Database/StatFin/vrm/vaerak/&lang=1&multilang=en)
- Statistics Finland. 2014b. "Nationality According to Age and Sex by Region 1990–2013." Accessed October 13, 2014. [http://193.166.171.75/Dialog/varval.asp?ma=020\\_vaerak\\_tau\\_101\\_en&ti=Nationality+according+to+age+and+sex+by+region+1990+%2D+2013&path=../Database/StatFin/vrm/vaerak/&lang=1&multilang=en](http://193.166.171.75/Dialog/varval.asp?ma=020_vaerak_tau_101_en&ti=Nationality+according+to+age+and+sex+by+region+1990+%2D+2013&path=../Database/StatFin/vrm/vaerak/&lang=1&multilang=en)
- Togeby, L. 1999. "Migrants at the Polls: An Analysis of Immigrant and Refugee Participation in Danish Local Elections." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 25 (4): 665–684.
- Uhlener, C. J., B. E. Cain, and D. R. Kiewiet. 1989. "Participation of the Ethnic Minorities in the 1980s." *Political Behavior* 11 (3): 195–231.
- Wass, H. 2008. *Generations and Turnout. The Generational Effect in Electoral Participation in Finland*. *Acta Politica* 35. Helsinki: Department of Political Science, University of Helsinki.
- White, S., N. Nevitte, A. Blais, E. Gidengil, and P. Fournier. 2008. "The Political Resocialization of Immigrants. Resistance of Lifelong Learning?" *Political Research Quarterly* 61 (2): 268–281.
- Wüst, A. M. 2012. "Dauerhaft oder temporär? Zur Bedeutung des Migrationshintergrunds für Wahlbeteiligung und Parteiwahl bei der Bundestagswahl 2009." In *Wählen in Deutschland*, edited by R. Schmitt-Beck, 157–178. Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Wüst, Andreas M., J. Bergh, K. Bird, C. Diehl, D. Jacobs, M. Jenny, M. Méndez Lago, et al. 2011. "Voter Turnout among Immigrants and Visible Minorities in Comparative Perspective." In *The Political Representation of Immigrants and Minorities: Voters, Parties and Parliaments in Liberal Democracies*, edited by K. Bird, T. Saalfeld, and A. M. Wüst, 25–65. London: Routledge.
- Xu, J. 2005. "Why do minorities participate less? The effects of immigration, education and electoral process on Asian American voter registration and turnout." *Social Science Research* 34 (4): 682–702.