Research Questions

The research project aims at both a broader and deeper understanding of the parliamentary representation of immigrant-origin citizens. The main research questions are:

- How well are citizens of immigrant background represented in parliaments?
- What are the factors determining the parliamentary representation of immigrant-origin politicians?
- Do members of parliament of immigrant background make a difference in the policy-making process and with respect to policies?

These research questions on descriptive and substantive parliamentary representation are treated in cross-country, cross-national, cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses including various political levels (national, regional, local). It combines quantitative with qualitative approaches.

Differences in descriptive and substantive representation of immigrants and migration-related issues are expected to be explained by:

- personal background (e.g. visibility of background, immigrant generation, socio-structural factors)
- opportunities (esp. openness and strategic considerations of parties and their leaders, stage of parliamentary career)
- context (e.g. immigrant-origin population in constituencies).

Note: Since the VW grant holder and researcher has been visiting professor in Mannheim (2009/10) and Heidelberg (2010/11) and is now working in a state ministry, the project could only been carried on part-time since September 2009.

Some Findings

- Over the last decades, most European parliaments have seen an increase in the descriptive representation of immigrant-origin MPs. While the rise is primarily due to parties of the political left, center-right parties have also increased their number of immigrant-origin parliamentarians.
- Cross-sectional data from the national parliaments of France, Britain, Sweden and Germany show that the share of the immigrant-origin or foreign population among the electorate decreases the likelihood for immigrant-origin politicians to represent a constituency (see right).
- However, especially Germany’s mixed-member electoral systems indicate that more immigrant-origin politicians are elected via list than in a single-member constituency. This finding supports the hypothesis that national and regional party leaders are influential in nominating immigrant-origin candidates for party lists. In 24 personal interviews, especially the female representatives mentioned mentoring as an important factor for their career.

Selected Publications


Some Findings

- A comparative analysis of immigrant-origin candidates’ success on open lists with preferential voting in four German cities further implies that immigrant-origin candidates tend to lose votes compared to equally positioned native candidates, even though they seem to be more strongly supported by immigrant-origin voters (see left).
- In an experiment in Heidelberg, the electorate of a conservative party (CDU) proved more reluctant to support a fictitious immigrant CDU candidate than to support a fictitious native CDU candidate. The Social-Democratic electorate did not show this tendency to the same extent. This pattern might make the nomination of immigrant-origin politicians for the center-right parties more difficult.

Table 2: Hypothetical representation of immigrant-origin MPs across countries (UK, France, Germany and Sweden combined).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>MP's party in government or opposition</th>
<th>content of PQs</th>
<th>regional, local</th>
<th>own constituency (see right)</th>
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<td>B1.4</td>
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Some Findings

- Pertaining to substantive representation, various parliamentary activities can be analyzed. Project research shows that immigrant-origin MPs are more frequently members of migration-related or transnational parliamentary committees (domestic, justice, social, foreign, EU) than native parliamentarians.
- Since the instrument of individual parliamentary questions (PQ) is frequently used by MPs, available in most parliaments and least restricted by parliamentary parties or groups, analyses of PQ content were promising concerning the measurement of substantive representation.
- A cross-sectional analysis of PQ for the UK, France and Germany in a random group of non-immigrant-origin MPs shows that only a ‘visible’ immigration background and not an immigration background per se is a significant and stable factor for such MPs asking more migration-related PQs.
- While contextual and parliamentary factors (e.g. MP’s party in government or opposition) influence both the number and the content of PQs, an immigration background is a significant predictor for the share of migration-related content.
- A longitudinal analysis of Germany (federal and state parliaments since 1987) corroborates the findings of the aforementioned cross-country comparisons and proves that the effect for MPs who visibly have an immigration background is stable over time (see right). There also is no significant decrease of the share of migration-related PQs over generation. A parliamentary position and belonging to a center-right party do however significantly reduce the share of migration-related PQs asked.