

*30 years of voting rights for immigrants in
Swedish local elections*

- but still not voting

Maritta Soininen, Ph.D.

Associate professor
Department of Political Science
University of Stockholms
106 91 Stockholm
Sweden
Tel: +46 8 16 2641
Email: maritta.soininen@statsvet.su.se

Not for circulation or citation without the permission of the author.

Paper presented at the Institute de Dret Públic, Institute of Public Law, University of Barcelona, Barcelona 19-20 July 2007.

Introduction

The ongoing de-territorialisation of work, economics and politics forces democratic institutions to deal with a new kinds of socio-political landscape. Migration, migrant populations and new ethnic minorities are a crucial part of this development and raise the question of formal and substantial political rights for these minority groups and their equal right to political representation.

The paper discusses the implementation of formal political rights for immigrants that are non-Swedish citizens and the lack of equality in electoral participation. Its empirical focus is on the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion of immigrant minorities in Swedish politics. It also brings up the question of exclusion due to institutionalised routines and values. Furthermore, an important development affecting how the political parties handle the issue of immigrant under-representation is the increasing political polarisation around the multicultural/-ethnic order in Swedish politics as in rest of the Europe.

What is the problem with immigrant minority participation?

It is difficult to image the representative democracy of today without a vital electoral system that aggregates and channels the interests of its citizenry. However, the increasing internationalisation and de-territorialisation of work, economy and politics creates new challenges for the political parties as key actors in the representative democracy. Not only is politics formulated by multiple actors in new arenas and contexts (Scholte 2005), it also results in groups that are excluded from democratic political influence, either because they lack formal political rights due to international migration, or, in the case they are guaranteed formal political rights, find it hard to implement them in practice. The new political inequality, in terms of the difficulties immigrants face to gain political influence, is a contemporary problem that is part of a wider democracy problem.

As a result of these developments, the Swedish political system, although historically characterised by stability and continuity, faces emerging patterns of political inequality among the Swedish citizenry not based on social class cleavages but on cleavages in ethnic terms. Given the historical background of Swedish democracy this situation obviously puts a great deal of adaptational pressure on both the government and the political

party organisations to adjust to and to cope with contemporary diverse society. This raises further important questions about how the central institutions like for example political parties go about performing their traditional central functions, to recruit and socialise members and nominees, and to channel interests in a society that on the one hand celebrates individualism, difference and internationalisation and on the other hand includes new groups with poor opportunities to enjoy equal political influence. However, the focus of the following discussion is limited in the first place to immigrant electoral participation in Sweden.

Problems of political inequality in Sweden

The Swedish research on minority political participation and representation shows distinct gaps between the levels of electoral participation, party membership and representation in political constituencies, between the native-born Swedes and those with immigrant minority background. Moreover, when we look at the recent investigations, we see that this gap has tended to widen (Adman & Strömblad 2000). The problem of ethnic minority under-representation is of course not a specific characteristic of Swedish political life but a general problem in Western politics (Norris & Lovenduski 1995; Solomos & Back 1995; Rushanera & O’Cinneide 2002).

What is then the response of the Swedish political parties to the ongoing internalisation and globalisation of politics? What do they do about it? Interestingly enough, when facing the new conditions, political parties belong to those organisations in a society that are *least* influenced by the internationalisation of politics; instead they keep safely to the national political arenas (Ahrne, Rydgren & Sörbom 2005). Moreover, Swedish political parties have successively become more exclusive as the numbers of active party members decline (Petersson 2000, eds). The increasing difficulties recruiting new members will according to present calculations based on the falling membership numbers (even if perhaps exaggerated) result in the last party member of a Swedish political party leaving by 2017 (Petersson 2005). These developments illustrate some of the central problems the Swedish representative democracy faces today.

The Swedish migration – from labour market recruitment to refugee and economic migration

Four phases of immigration

Sweden has gone from being a country of emigration where one third of its population emigrated during the latter half of 1800s and beginning of the 1900s, to a country of immigration.

Post-war immigration to Sweden can be divided up into four distinct phases each of which its own characteristic type of immigration and immigrant. According to Westin's (1996) classification, the first phase covers the period from 1940 to 1948, and was dominated by the refugee immigration from the neighbouring countries. The second period witnessed immigration from Finland and Southern Europe during the period of 1949 to 1971 when the modern welfare state was growing and the post-war economic expansion created a growing need for labour force. The common Nordic labour market was established in 1954 at the same time as Swedish companies began an active policy of recruiting workers from countries like Italy, Greece and former Yugoslavia.

Interestingly enough there exists historically a close link between Swedish gender equality policy and immigration policy, as a result of the labour market developments during the 1960s. When the Swedish government had to choose between either bringing in women into the labour market or continuing to recruit foreign labour the decision was in favour of recruiting women rather than immigrant labour. This policy was largely a result of the demands put forward by the Trade Union Confederation. The concern for future wage development - wage dumping due to foreign labour recruitment - and competition of vacant jobs led to demands that the non-Nordic workers had to have employment and resident permits in order before arrival in Sweden. The non-Nordic labour immigration ceased in the beginning of the 1970s (Hammar 1991).

The third phase of the immigration was characterised by family reunification and refugee immigration from third world countries during the period from the beginning of 1970s to late 1980s. In the 1970s immigration was dominated by the South American refugees who fled as a result of the military coup in Chile.

In the 1980s the picture was a different one and most of the asylum-seekers came from Middle East. The number of people in need of asylum increased several fold toward the end of 1980s. The war between Iran and Iraq was a major contributing factor. The

year 1989, non-Nordic migration accounted for 70 percent of the total immigration to Sweden. The fourth phase of immigration began in early 1990s with large numbers of refugee immigration from former Yugoslavia. The number of refugees had grown from a couple of hundreds per year during the first half of the 1970s to over 30 000 seeking asylum each year in the beginning of 1990s. Given the total population of approximately 9 million Sweden has received relatively large numbers of refugees (Graham & Soininen 1997; 2000).

Immigration today

The Swedish EU-membership 1995 gave citizens of other EU member states right to work or study in Sweden. No working permit is needed, only a permit to stay for period longer than three months (The National Migration Board).

During 2003, as well as during the year before, approximately 64 000 immigrated to Sweden. A majority of them, 19 500 came from non-Nordic European countries, 18 400 from Asia and the rest, 14 300 from Nordic countries. About half of them were between 20 and 39 years old. The number of asylum seekers was that year just about 31 000. Further, according to the National Migration Board approximately 26 000 persons acquired Swedish citizenship during 2003.

Immigration from countries that entered the EU in May 2004 continued to increase during 2005 (Statistics of Sweden and the National Migration Board). Polish citizens stood out from the general pattern in that 45 percent of them were granted residence due to employment. However, in an international perspective, Sweden has received only relatively small numbers of persons from the new EU member states, immigrating for work.

Among the 41 541 immigrants who were non-Nordic nationals, most were granted residence permits because of family reunion – 54 percent. Much smaller proportions immigrated for work – 13 percent – and education – 9 percent. Around 9 percent were given the residence permit for humanitarian reasons and the share of refugees, according to international agreements, was 8 percent. In 2005, 17 530 persons sought asylum in Sweden. The largest group of asylum seekers was, for the fourth year, citizens from Serbia and Montenegro followed by the Iraqi citizens.

In the following year, 2005, the number of immigrants increased to 65 229, with 165 citizenships represented among them. The most frequent groups, after Swedish and other Nordic citizen, that comprised roughly one third of them, were persons with Polish or Iraqi citizenship. Net migration in 2005 was 27 111 persons (meaning that roughly 27 000

persons more moved to Sweden than from Sweden). Since the natural population growth is low in Sweden, increase in the population is mainly due to net migration.

As a result of the developments described above - the immigration to Sweden is today in the first place refugee and family reunion migration - the composition of the immigrant population in Sweden has changed radically during the last four decades. In 1970 60 percent of the foreign born population in Sweden was from other Nordic countries and more than 90 percent were born in Europe while in the beginning of the 2000 approximately 30 percent of the foreign born were from other Nordic countries, 35 percent were born in another European country and just under 40 percent were born in non-European countries.

Immigration regulation policy too has changed during the last decades. The traditional stress on solidarity with refugees has been called into question, although the opinions in the Swedish society have been strongly divided in this issue. The succeeding governments have tighten asylum regulations from a more liberal interpretation of the meaning of political refugee to a narrower definition based on Geneva Convention, thus following more closely the international praxis. Further, the family reunion principle has been redefined and it is today more restrictive than before, only allowing a reunion of the closest family members.

According to the Swedish legislation a person is entitled to be granted a residence permit if he/she is married to, have entered into partnership with or are co-habiting with someone who lives in Sweden. A residence application can be rejected if, for example, it is based on incorrect information, if it is a bogus relationship or the couple in question do not intend to live together. Furthermore, children under the age of 18 years are entitled to be reunified with their parents, assuming that the guardians have given their written consent.

When it comes to close relatives the policy states that only in exceptional cases a residence permit can be granted if the relative applying has lived together in the home country with the person who is now resident in Sweden. This category includes children over the age of 18 years and parents of persons who are resident in Sweden. It is required that you can show that you have lived with your relative immediately before you moved to Sweden and that you had a dependency relationship in the home country which makes it difficult to live apart (financial, social or emotional dependence) (National Migration Board). In practice, as we have seen, the cases of reunion of families represent a big part of the current immigration to Sweden.

Separate rules apply for EU/EEA citizens and for those who are long-term resident in another EU member state. Moreover the Nordic citizens are free to settle in any other Nordic country.

Among the factors that explain the harder regulation - more in line with the development the policy of 'fortress Europe' – as the critics have described it, we can identify the significant increase in numbers of asylum seekers, the mixed political/economic motives of the asylum seekers, the increased influence of anti-immigrant and xenophobic movements and parties in politics (New Democracy and Sverigedemokraterna) and their influence on established major parties' refugee policies - the problematic economic and labour market developments in Sweden, and finally the EU initiatives to harmonise the European migration/immigration policies. In fact, the first EU initiative on the voluntary harmonisation of member states' migration policies through setting up a Communication and Consultation Procedure can be traced back to the mid 1980s, in the context of the Single Market initiatives. The majority of the member states were however unenthusiastic about the proposal. It was taken to the European Court that declared that the regulation of immigration as well as the conditions of the immigrants in receiving countries was solely an internal concern for each member state and fall outside of the competence of the EU. A new initiative of voluntary co-ordination was put forward by the Commission in 2001, now following the example of Open Method of Co-ordination in EES employment policies, and covering issues of migration regulation, inclusive future labour migration to the ageing Europe, and immigration and integration policies.

Sweden has experienced large refugee immigration in relation to its population. Moreover, 2006 was an exceptional year as more than 96 800 persons immigrated to Sweden as a result of a temporary amnesty law. The law gave people – in the first place with families with children - who had been denied residence permits and who had stayed in Sweden for a long period of time the right to new assessment. This increased the number of immigrants with 48 percent compared with the year before. A majority of the applying 32 000 illegal asylum seekers/immigrants got permanent residence permits (SCB).

Taken the whole Swedish population in 2006 - 9 100 000 – 16,7 of the population had a 'foreign background' (either born abroad or at least one of the parents born abroad), 12,9 were born abroad and 5,4 were foreign citizens (SCB). Approximately just below 70 percent of the foreign born are naturalised Swedish citizens (Sainsbury 2005). Could the lack of the interest of the remaining 30 percent to acquire Swedish citizenship be explained by a restrictive Swedish citizenship policy?

Rules for citizenship

In an international perspective, the Swedish citizenship legislation is liberal. There exist several ways to become a Swedish citizen. First, you can become a Swedish citizen automatically by birth or adoption. The two other forms are application or notification. The last one, notification is applied for children, young adults and Nordic citizens.

Naturalisation means that a person becomes a Swedish citizen by applying for Swedish nationality. This can be done if a person has been living in Sweden for at least five years, or at least for four years if he/she is a stateless or a refugee. For Nordic countries apply other, even more liberal rules and if you are a Danish, Finnish, Icelandic or Norwegian citizen, two years will suffice.

The further requirements for a naturalisation include that the person can prove his/her identity (which of course creates special difficulties in the case of political refugees) and have a clean record in Sweden. However, a person who has committed a criminal offence can still become a Swedish citizen, although he/she will have to wait for a while depending on how serious the crime in question was (penalty: 30-day fine, 1 year after the crime; prison for 6 years, 10 years after the sentence has been served) (National Migration Board). The requirements for the naturalisation are with other words relatively limited.

Notification is a simplified application procedure – not an application but just a ‘notification’ – which can be used when the applying person satisfies certain legal requirements. Thus, if you are a Swedish citizen with a child born abroad – in that case you can seek citizenship on the child’s behalf (before the child turns 18). The same applies if a person has a custody of a stateless child who was born in Sweden, has a permanent residence permit and lives in Sweden (before the child turns 5). Further, for a stateless person that is over 18 but under 20, and have been permanent resident in Sweden since the age of 15, it is possible to acquire Swedish citizenships through notification.

Also the citizens of other Nordic countries, residing in Sweden, can use the institute of notification. With a clean record and a proven identity they can after five years in Sweden just let the county administration to record the change of citizenship.

Under which conditions will you lose your Swedish citizenship? This is for example the case when a person turns 22, through what is termed statutory limitation: If he/she was born outside of Sweden, has never lived in Sweden, and has not stayed in Sweden under circumstances indicating an attachment to the country (National Migration Board).

Then, to what extent is Swedish citizenship required for a person to hold a political and social position in the Sweden? Before the constitutional reform in 1974 the law stated that in order to become a government member a person had to be born as a Swedish citizen. This regulation was nevertheless abolished in the 1974 new constitution (Hammar 1991). According to the changed rules it is enough to have acquired the Swedish citizenship ten years before an appointment to hold a position in the government. Also a number of higher positions in the state administration require that a person has Swedish citizenship. This category includes among others judges. Finally, to vote in national elections and candidate for a seat in the Swedish parliament is only possible for Swedish citizens. Moreover, for a considerable number of positions in public administration it is required that you pass a special 'security' test regardless if you are a Swedish citizen or have a non-Swedish citizenship.

The Swedish immigrant policy – from Immigrant and Minority policy to Integration policy

Integration Policy is characterised by its own historical, institutional legacies (Hall and Taylor 1996, Immergut 1998, Pierson 2004, Steinmo et al. 1992; In Sweden, this legacy includes a relatively ethnically homogeneous class society and the presence of the ideal of public administration by people and for people. A key value in its philosophy has traditionally been equality and 'just institutions' (Rothstein 1998) in the service of a universal welfare state, although we have seen during last decades an increasing influence of more market oriented models - of New Public Management - in the organisation of public sector activities for service production.

National integration policies display considerable variation (Bauböck 1994, Anwar et al. 2000, Brubaker 1992, Favell 2001, Janoski 1998, Kymlicka and Norman 2000, Soysal 1994). Sweden has adopted an immigrant policy which has kept the difference in terms of political, social and civil rights between citizens and non- citizens to an absolute minimum. Access to social services, education, health care, and, after 1975, the right to vote in local and regional council elections, are legal entitlements. With few exceptions there is no formal exclusion of immigrants or refugees from the major institutions of the Swedish welfare state and society. There have been efforts made to ensure that immigrants be served by the existing welfare state services and specific policies for immigrants, with the exception of specific measures reserved for refugees during their first year or so in the country have been kept in minimum.

The 1975 goals of Sweden's *Immigrant and Minority Policy* – 'equality', 'freedom of choice' and 'partnership' – express an approach to social, political and cultural rights of immigrants which by international standards has been a very generous one (Graham & Soininen 1998; Soininen 1999). The *adaptation* of the immigrants was a central question according to the 1974 parliamentary inquiry (reg. prop 1975:26; SOU 1974). Sweden was to be 'prepared to receive and to educate newly arrived immigrants' as they were believed to have 'problems of adaptation of a special character', which were related to being accustomed to other social and living conditions or having another religion (SOU 1974 (69): 448 ff). For the government, the issue of adaptation included both a temporal and spatial dimension: the length of stay in Sweden and the distance from the country of origin. According to the government, apart the Saami, the new linguistic and ethnic minority groups were comprised of immigrants and their children in Sweden. Consequently, the government argued, a distinction between the treatment of immigrant questions and minority questions was not appropriate for the Swedish context. Unlike in many other countries where a coupling together of minority and immigrant questions was not seen as a possible solution, conditions in Sweden were different – according to the government – and the initial problems of adaptation among immigrants would eventually result in 'established ethnic and religious minority problems' (rep. prop. 1975:26).

Thus, *equality* meant living conditions for immigrants comparable to those of the rest of the population. Through political and social measures, such as right to 'home language' tutoring in the public school and generous grants to ethnic immigrant associations, immigrants and their children were to be given a real possibility to retain their own language, practice their cultural activities, and maintain contact with the country of origin. The government took action to give the 'linguistic minority groups the possibility to maintain and create respect for their own linguistic cultural identity within the framework of a community of interests that includes the entire Swedish society' (reg. prop. 1975:26).

An important condition for this generous *Immigrant and Minority Policy* was that the immigration to Sweden was strictly regulated, stated the government. In practice this meant a stop for labour migration in the beginning of the 1970s.

The government's position on immigrant and minority questions exuded an optimistic faith in planning and a strong belief in the ability of the state to manage the future development of society; Immigration to Sweden could and would be regulated, as would the living conditions of the immigrants (Soininen 1999). This optimism can be understood against

the background that the majority of the immigrant population was still in the early 1970s comprised of immigrants from Finland.

In 1986, the Swedish government clarified and reassessed the status of the immigrant groups; they *cannot* have the status of ‘ethnic minorities’ with special needs and interests protected by the constitution. The main question for the Swedish state was now to respond to the changing nature of international migration. Therefore, migration and the position of immigrants and minorities were international questions requiring international co-operation. Furthermore, labour immigration had been replaced by refugees and their dependents, the number of refugees arriving to Sweden was high compared with other countries in spite of difficulties in the Swedish labour market, and the immigration was increasingly from less developed countries in other parts of the world (rep. prop. 1985/86:98). The guidelines for the Immigrant and Minority Policy were seen as too broad and ambitious, especially regarding the goal of cultural freedom of choice. Instead, the time was now to ‘express more clearly the basic views of Swedish society on a number of issues of principle’ (reg. prop. 1985/86: 98). As a result, the Immigrant and Minority Policy was rechristened *Immigrant Policy*.

Up until the 1980s, the Swedish (social democratic) model was judged to have been highly successful in terms of high employment levels, moderate income differentials, and economic growth. However, the situation changed rapidly and in the beginning of 1990s – with high levels of unemployment for the population as a whole and in particular so in the case of immigrants – and several state inquiries pointed out a clear risk of the emergence of an ethnically and socially segregated labour market, resulting in a society divided by ethnic lines. During 1990s and 2000s we have witnessed unemployment that is three-four times higher among immigrants, and in particular among those born in non-European countries. Also among the naturalised Swedes the employment is generally high, up to 15 percent higher than among the native Swedes (Rapport Integration 2005).

Traditionally, denizens have been an equal target group for the comprehensive Swedish labour market measures that historically are an important component in the over all economic policy. Some of the employment policy measures designed for immigrants could in an international perspective be defined as ‘affirmative action’ or ‘active measures’ (Graham & Soininen 1997; 2000).

In late 1990s it was time for a third major reorientation in Swedish immigration policy. The new *Integration policy* of late 1990s was a response to increased ethnic segregation and exclusion defined and it defined as its main objectives to make immigrants

'self-sufficient' or 'self-supporting' and to encourage their 'participation' and 'joint responsibility' in social life, regardless of ethnic, cultural and social background. The Integration Policy intends to enable immigrants to 'acquire the Swedish tools which can be needed to manage on one's own in Swedish society' (SOU 1996 (55): 309).

Today Sweden's Integration Policy explicitly requires that 'diversity ought to be the point of departure when forming policy in general and when implementing it in all social areas and at all levels' (Prop. 1998: 16, Bet. 1997/98:reg. Sfu6; Rskr 1997/98:68).

Furthermore, 'the authorities must continually take note of society's ethnic and cultural diversity, both when shaping their activities and when carrying them out. They shall work for equal rights and opportunities for all, regardless of ethnic and cultural background, and combat discrimination and provide services of equal value regardless of ethnic and cultural background' (Förordning 1986:856 [updated 1999]).

The integration policy measures have nevertheless turned out to be less successful. The annual Report Integration that has been published by the National Integration Board since year 2003, reveals that there exist large gaps in actual living conditions between the immigrants, the 'new Swedes', and the native Swedish population (Report Integration 2003-2006). In particular the called 'visible minorities', with origins in countries outside of the Europe, have been hit hard by the exclusion from the labour market. What is even more serious is that the unemployment is also exceptionally high among the second generation of 'visible minorities' (Rapport Integration 2005; Behtoui 2006).

Thus, segregation in housing, as many immigrants live highly concentrated in bigger city suburban areas in Malmö, Gothenburg and Stockholm, and in the labour market has successively increased when Sweden has turned from a country of recruiting and receiving labour migration from the nearby Nordic and European countries, to a country of more truly international migration that receives asylum seekers with both political and economic motives, also from third worlds areas outside of the Europe.

In the public debate these developments have been discussed as an expression of an integration policy failure. In particular, the conservative and non-socialist parties have used this argument against the social democratic governments. Although there has been traditionally a high consensus in Swedish politics about immigration policy, the new 2006 non-socialist government stresses in the first place integration in working life rather than general (welfare) integration policies.

What is the problem of immigrant inclusion - the issue of terminology is a significant issue

What is then the problem regarding inclusion of immigrants in Swedish society and political life? The discussions about the right terminology tell a great deal about what is conceptualised as the main problem in the Swedish immigration policy. The shifts in official policy definitions – from Immigrant and Minority Policy to Integration Policy - illustrate well the governments struggle to design and implement a policy for immigrant minorities. Also, during the last decades we have seen a shift in the official definitions of ‘immigrants’.

The widest definition of immigrant included during the 1980s and 1990s all who were born in another country and their children, including also persons that had at least one of the parents born abroad, although many in this category would not define themselves as such. This definition yields approximately up to 20 percent of the total population. A narrower definition includes non-Swedish citizens born abroad. By first generation immigrants is usually meant persons born abroad, regardless of whether they are foreign citizens or have acquired Swedish citizenship. Persons born in Sweden, but with one or both parents born abroad, comprise according to this terminology second generation immigrants.

Originally, the term immigrant was introduced in 1960 to make the ‘foreign’ more familiar (Hammar 1979). An immigrant – or denizen, an immigrant with a permanent residence permit - was regarded as a more preferable term as the term ‘foreigner’ could be associated with a person being an ‘intruder’ and a ‘stranger’, i. e. being a non-natural element in the Swedish society.

However after the 1990s Integration policy review the government introduced the term ‘foreign background’. In the public debate questions has been raised such as how long you actually needed to be member of the Swedish society in order to stop to be an immigrant and become a Swede? Moreover, the term immigrant was in the media discourse frequently associated with different kinds of problems - ‘immigrant’ had become a term that was used to make a distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’, the latter ones often being members of the ‘visible’ immigrant minorities. With other words, the term itself appeared to be discriminatory, representing a negative and diminishing social identity (Bäck & Soininen 2004). The new term, ‘foreign background’ or ‘people with foreign background’ covers today officially any kind of foreign background – from being born as a foreign citizen to be born in Sweden with one foreign born parent. In that way the reform brings us back to a modified use of the terminology that the government wished to avoid in late 1960s when it first launched the use of the term ‘immigrant’.

The Swedish electoral system - Eligibility and the right to vote

One of the most important elements of a democratic regime is the electoral system. Moreover, by looking at the construction of the electoral system, it is possible to see how governments define such concepts such as ‘the people’ and ‘the will of the people’. The following description the Swedish electoral system is based on Larsson and Bäck (forthcoming 2007).

Usually there are two main criteria that defining who has the right to vote and who is eligible in general elections on the national level – citizenship and age. In Sweden, elections are held to four assemblies, parliament (Riksdag), European Parliament, county councils and municipal councils. The following summary by Larsson and Bäck illustrates differences between the four electoral systems.

The four electoral systems in Sweden

	EU-Parliament	Riksdag	County Council	Municipality
System	PR	PR	PR	PR
Voting age	18	18	18	18
Eligible age	18	18	18	18
Threshold	4%	4% (12%)	3%	non
Constituencies	1	29	yes but varies	varies, not always
Adjustment seats	No	49	yes, 1/10	no
Preference vote	yes (8%)	yes (8%)	yes (5%)	yes (5%)
Period	5 years	4 years	4 years	4 years
No. of seats	19	349	31-101	1/5000
Average turnout	40%	80%	78%	78%
Eligible and right to vote	EU citizen	Citizen	EU citizen, Nordic citizen and three years residence	EU citizen, Nordic citizen and three years residence

As regards the technical aspects of the electoral system, Sweden applies a proportional system in all four systems and the seats are distributed with the help of the odd integer principle, with the exception of the first integer which is 1.4 instead of 1 – an adjustment of the principle that works to the disadvantage of smaller political parties. Multi-member constituencies are used in the elections to the Riksdag, to the county councils and to some of the municipality councils but not to the European Parliament. The seats in the Riksdag and in the county councils are allocated on a strictly proportional basis among the political parties, provided they cleared the threshold of four percent to the Riksdag or twelve percent in one constituency, for county councils the threshold is three percent. How seats are

allocated in elections to the municipalities differs from one local government to another, mainly depending on how many constituencies are being used; only big municipalities must use constituencies.

Another important aspect of the Swedish electoral system is that since 1973 elections to the Riksdag, the county councils and the municipality councils all take place on the same day every four years. This arrangement has been assumed to contribute to good concordance between national and local politics. Elections to the European parliament are coordinated with the other EU member states.

Historically, the voting rights have been a privilege for a small minority of the population. Before the democratic reforms in the 20th century only those with a certain income and wealth and paying taxes was eligible and allowed to vote. Thus, in 1872 only 5.7 percent of the population had the right to vote. Until the franchise reform of the 1920s, local voting rights were restricted and unequal. The number of votes per voter was decided by income and property, i. e. a voter had to have paid local tax for the last ten years. As there was a general deduction applied to income before taxation, those with a low income did not pay tax, and consequently did not have the right to vote. The franchise reform implied that the link between income and local voting rights was broken and new groups in the society were successively guaranteed the voting rights. The age criteria was lowered to 23 years and the taxation criteria abolished, but you were still excluded from voting if you were permanently on social welfare, had gone bankrupt or had been declared legally incompetent.

Since 1974 constitutional reform the age criteria has been 18 years both for the right to vote and for being eligible. Moreover, nobody can be declared legally ineligible anymore in Sweden; once you have reached the age of eighteen and as long as you remain a Swedish citizen your democratic rights of eligibility and voting can never be taken away from you.

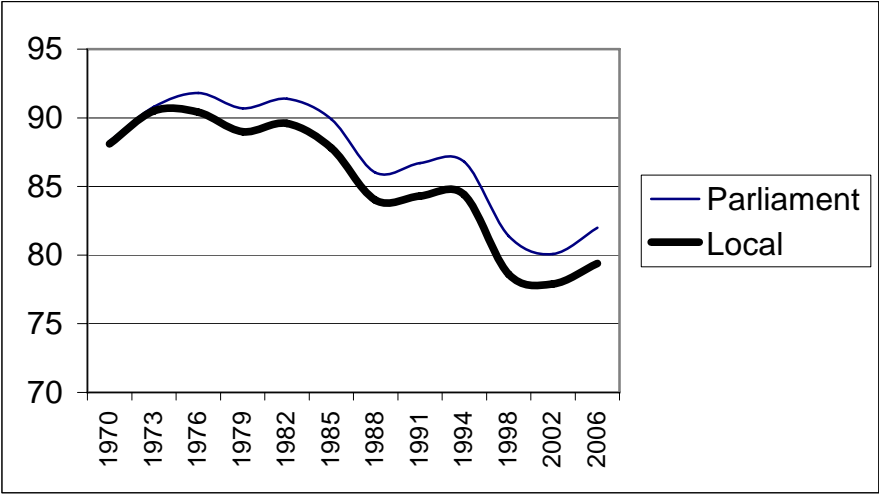
The latest reform year 1998 gives a voter in Sweden the possibility of expressing personal preferences of the candidates they favour. On the lists provided by the political parties – the Swedish electoral system is highly party centred - the candidates are ranked and the voters may indicate their favourite candidate: the candidate who gets most votes then becomes the top candidate, given that the support passes the threshold of eight percent in national elections and five percent in the county council the municipal elections. Each voter can chose one candidate only, and it is not compulsory. In practice, there has been only a very modest interest among the voters to use this possibility.

One of the aspects of the electoral system of Sweden is that it promotes on the one hand multi-party system, while it operates on the other hand like a two-party system, with

a left and a right block. Paradoxically, with the existing division of party politics into two blocks there has simultaneously been a significant change in voting behavior over the years: voters are now shifting their voting preferences more frequently, as a result of the weakening of party loyalty.

The electoral turnout has traditionally been high in Sweden, especially if you take into account that voting is not compulsory. Instead, to take part in the elections is largely understood as a norm, a civic virtue. However, participation has recently gone down compared to elections during 1980s when more than 90 percent of the electorate went to the polls. Still, around 80 percent today is high – especially for county councils and municipality councils – compared to many other countries.

Turnout in parliamentary and local (municipal) elections 1970-2006



It could in fact be expected, according to the ‘second order election hypothesis, that the electoral participation in the local elections would be even lower. Thus, the critics have pointed out that the local turnout has been kept up artificially by having national and local elections same day.

However, there is an exception from this general picture of high electoral participation: as in many of the EU member states the turnout in the European Parliament election is significantly lower than in elections to the national parliament. Interestingly enough, while Sweden is one of the countries in Europe with the highest turnout in elections to the national parliament, the county councils and the municipality councils, it is close to the bottom of the list in terms of participation to the European Parliament, 40 percent. Lack of interest among the general public for the EU-project, in addition to scepticism towards EU institutions is manifested in low electoral participation.

Another exception is the electoral participation among the foreign citizens in the local elections. In the first election foreign citizens were entitled to participate in 1976 their electoral participation was around 60 percent. After that it has steadily dropped to below 40 percent.

Voting rights for immigrants

In 1975 local voting rights were extended to foreign citizens who had been residence in Sweden for at least three years. Foreign citizens, constituting some five percent of the whole population, have the right to vote in local - county and municipal - elections, but not in parliamentary elections. How was then the argumentation around the introduction of the local voting rights to immigrants?

After the consensus was reached in 1975 to give immigrants resident in Sweden right to vote and candidate in municipal and county elections, the decision was described as being one very much in line with the new Swedish Immigrant and Minority Policy. The reform would contribute to guarantee immigrants equal living conditions in comparison with native Swedes and more than that, it would be a concrete way to implement the political goal of equal participation. What were then the main arguments against this in a historical perspective a relatively radical reform that disconnected (local) voting rights from the citizenship?

Interestingly enough the questions of ‘national security’ and ‘terrorism’ have played an important role when the political rights of foreign citizens have been discussed in Sweden. The Swedish legislation in 1937 and 1945 gave the government the right to deport a foreigner who was politically active. In 1936 a government inquiry stated clearly that a foreigner is not allowed to get involved in Swedish politics – and particularly so if the person is a political refugee (SOU 1936:53, in Bäck & Soininen SOU 1992:162). As late as in 1953 the Swedish Foreign Policy Minister declared that it was forbidden for political refugees that were given asylum in Sweden to be politically active. The main reason for this was the concern for foreign policy security; there was a risk that Sweden could get involved in a conflict with another country as result of political activities carried out in the Swedish territory. Still in 1960s this perspective was the dominating one and the idea of foreign citizens to be politically active was consequently rejected.

The first initiatives to give the immigrants voting rights were put forward in the late 1960s. To begin with, the opinions were strongly divided. On the one hand there was a

significant consensus regarding that immigrants should participate actively in organisations and even in political parties – for example, the trade union organisations were keen to be able to involve immigrants in their activities. On the other hand it was very clear that the idea of giving immigrants right to vote was to go too far. The initiative faced strong political resistance (Hammar 1979). The dominating principle was that citizenship and voting rights were seen as un-separable.

The political opinion remained overwhelmingly negative until 1972. The parliamentary inquiry that prepared a reform of the Swedish constitution – the new constitution that was lunched 1974 - it was not possible to guarantee immigrants local voting rights: the main argument was that it simply was not possible to separate state and municipal issues because these were so closely interrelated in the Swedish political system. As the right to vote in national elections was out of the question, so was also the right to vote in local elections.

In the following debate the National Immigrant Board formulated an opposite argument, to support a reform of local voting rights for foreign citizens resident in Sweden. In short, immigrants comprised in many municipalities a considerable part of the total of taxpayers, up to 20 percent in some cases, it was therefore difficult to justify why they would be excluded from having political influence over the local government policies and public economy. According to this argument to separate the national and local voting rights was just a *technical matter*. The argument for voting rights was then both about justice and democracy (Beckman 2006). Although the principal argument of the National Integration Board won large political support, the parliamentary inquiry to reform the Swedish constitution was not prepared to change its negative view on extending the voting rights to non-Swedes citizens.

After having reconsidered the question of immigrants' right to vote in municipal elections, the government concluded that the question was not a constitutional matter. This 'redefinition' of the problem opened up the possibility for the government to remove the issue from the agenda of the constitutional inquiry (Bäck & Soinenen SOU 1996:162). Soon after that the social democratic government appointed – with a support of the parliament - a new parliamentary inquiry to analyse how to implement a reform of local voting rights for non-Swedish citizens residing in Sweden.

In 1973, with exception for the Conservative party, all the political parties in the Swedish parliament were positive to a special reform for local voting rights for immigrants. According to Tomas Hammar, the Finnish government, which was concerned about the Finnish immigrant minority in Sweden, played a significant role, both directly in bilateral

contacts with the Swedish government – referring to the need of political will to solve the problem of local voting rights - and indirectly through the Nordic Council – by bringing up there the issue of general Nordic local voting rights (Hammar 1979). Also the Finnish immigrant association in the social democratic party had taken action to promote the voting rights reform.

In 1975 the decision was finally taken by the parliament to grant foreign nationals who had been registered residents in Sweden for a continuous period of three years before the election day the right to vote and candidate for a political position in municipal and county council elections.

The issue of the three year qualification time was discussed again two decades later when the EU Directive of the EU nationals extended right to vote in the member states was introduced into the Swedish law in an amendment to the Election Act (reg. prop. 1996/97:70, bet. 1996/97; KU16, rskl. 1996/97:177) 1 June 1997. The three-year qualification period was abolished for EU citizens as well as for Norwegian and Icelandic citizens. For other foreign nationals residing in Sweden, the Swedish government decided – with the support of the parliament – that the three-year rule would remain

The local government system

What are then the local voting rights about? With other words, what kind of issues is it possible for you to influence when you have the right to vote in local government elections and hold a political position in the local government? In Sweden the upper level of the administrative division of the territory consists of counties and overlapping division into 20 county councils, on the lower level there are 290 municipalities. The county councils and municipals are formally independent of each other. Although both levels are multifunctional, the activities of county councils have a strong emphasis on provision of health care and public transports.

Historically the division of the country into municipalities can be traced to the first local government decrees issued in 1862, creating around 2,500 local authorities. The successive reduction in the number of local authorities to 290 is mirrored in their increasing size, with an in average population of approximately 30,000 (Larsson & Bäck, forthcoming).

In the Swedish Constitution the local government is emphasised as one of the cornerstones of Swedish democracy. While the Constitution stresses that the local government formally enjoys constitutional protection, in practice however the central government interferes to a considerable extent with local government organisation and its activities, which

are defined in the Local Government Act. The local self-government is based on the on the right to levy taxes on the local population. As these make around 60 percent of the average municipal budget they are thus the dominating source of funding for local authorities. In addition considerable parts of the activities are funded with central government grants within the system for equalisation of costs and incomes – around 16 percent.

What are then these activities? The main task of local government is to provide the services of the welfare state, such as primary and secondary school, child care, care of the elderly and health care, but also cultural and recreational services. Moreover, almost all municipalities have some responsibility for local housing through their publicly owned housing companies, in addition to the private home ownership. Another important area is technical infrastructure, including local roads, water, electricity etc. Also physical and environmental planning has been delegated from central to local governments.

The provision of the welfare services comprises almost 90 percent of the total municipal budget which is a result of characteristics the Swedish ‘Social Democratic welfare regime model’: welfare services are a public sector responsibility, rather than being a task for families, voluntary organisations or the market, and the production of these services is allocated to local government. As the services offered are labour intensive the governments are also important employers. As New Public Management and its private sector inspired solutions have since late 1980s gained increasing popularity in Swedish municipalities, it is quite usual that the local authorities rely also on private service providers.

It is then hardly surprising that local government accounts for a considerable share of the Swedish national economy, with some 20 percent of the gross national product. This is a high number when compared with the 10-15 percent in central and east European countries and the Netherlands, and many other countries where the share is even much lower (Larsson & Bäck, forthcoming 2007). Local income tax is fixed by the local council - in most municipalities around 20 percent and in most county councils around 10 percent.

The central political institutions in local government are the council and the committee structure. The executive committee is the most central one and all decisions to be taken by the council must be prepared by the executive committee. The committees, including the executive committee, are elected by the council applying a proportional representation method. As also local citizens not being councillors are eligible, relatively large numbers of citizens hold directly or indirectly elected public office in local government: ”local politicians” consists of some 100-150 people in most municipalities, while the directly elected council has some 30-50 members. Local governments cannot therefore be characterised as

parliamentary systems. Instead a “quasi-parliamentary system” has been introduced in most local authorities. In this system all committee leaders, including the leader of the executive committee, are appointed by the majority party or by a majority coalition (Larsson & Bäck, forthcoming).

Democracy – stress on the electoral participation

Participation in elections, since the universal right to vote took effect in the 1920s, increased steadily in Sweden for many years. It climbed from below 80 percent in 1950s and reached over 90 percent in 1970s. A decline was first seen in 1988 elections when voter participation dropped with 4 percents and in 1998 by another 5 points. Thus, there has been a negative long term trend in the Swedish voter turnout, although it is still high in the international perspective. In the parliamentary elections the electoral participation dropped from just above 90 percent in 1979 elections to 80 percent in 2002 elections. In municipal and county council the decline in participation has been from just below 90 percent to below 80 percent. In 2006 elections slight increase in the electoral participation was registered. The turnout was 82 percent in the election to the parliament and 79 percent in the municipal elections (SCB ME 13 SM 0701).

Furthermore, if we look at the Swedish parliamentary elections 2002 the voter turnout among the naturalised Swedish citizens was 67, to be compared with the overall average turnout on 80 percent.

According the government (Skr. 2003/04:110) a high voter turnout at elections is one of the central long term objectives of the government’s democracy policies. In its democracy bill of 2003, the government sees the high electoral turnout as important for several reasons: it confers legitimacy on elected assemblies and gives more citizens an opportunity to take part in social and political affairs, instead of being excluded from the process. According to the government one the purposes of a general election is to give concrete, representative expression to the political divisions in society. Moreover, from the perspective of democracy theory (Phillips 1995) it is possible to argue that different kinds of minority experience, for example related to gender and ethnicity, must be represented in political constituencies.

The voting rights in practise - low participation

How successful has the reform of immigrant voting rights been in terms of immigrant participation and representation? The first municipal election where the foreign

citizens were entitled to vote was the 1976 election, when the general voter turnout in Sweden was still very high. It was thus seen a disappointment that the electoral participation among the new 'immigrant' voters only reached the level of 60 percent. While the voter participation in Sweden has fallen successively since 1970s, the electoral participation of non-Swedish citizens has dropped even more dramatically, from 60 percent to 35 percent in 1998 and 2002 municipal elections. Historically, the opposite is usually the case when the new groups - workers, women and younger people - have gained voting rights; electoral participation among them has tended to increase successively.

The fact that the electoral turnout among non-Swedish citizens in local elections stabilised in 2002 elections was seen as a positive sign, although the continuing decline in participation among first-time voters and rising disparities in turnout between different population groups have been a concern according to the government (Skr. 2003/04:110). In the 2006 local election the turnout increased to 37 (36.9) percent (SCB ME 13 SM 0701).

The analysis of 2006 municipal elections showed interesting differences among the voting non-Swedish citizens: While 39 percent of the women voters used their voting rights only 35 percent of the men went to the polls. Turnout among the people in ages 18-29 with non-Swedish citizenship was as low as 26 percent.

Participation in the elections to the Municipal Councils 2006 for foreign citizens by sex and country of citizenship

Country of citizenship	Electoral participation		
	Men	Women	All
Nordic countries excl Sweden	34,7	40,7	37,9
EU25 excl Nordic countries	38,6	41,9	40,0
Europe excl EU25 and Nordic c	27,1	31,3	29,2
Africa	31,0	36,0	33,2
Asia	30,2	35,9	33,2
North-America	37,1	42,6	39,6
South-America	40,9	42,6	41,6
Rest	31,3	32,3	31,6
No information	20,9	34,0	26,9
Total	34,6	39,3	36,9

The statistics reveal further interesting differences, for example as regards the country of citizenship. The electoral participation is above the average among the citizens from other Nordic countries, 37.9 percent, and EU25 exclusive the Nordic countries, 40 percent as well as among the South-American citizens that represent the highest turnout of all, 41.6 percent. Also the North-Americans demonstrate a relatively high turnout, 39,6, meanwhile the opposite is true for immigrants with the background from African and Asian countries, among which the electoral participation was as low as 33.2 percent. The lowest participation can be registered among Europeans from non-EU25 and non-Nordic countries.

The studies on immigrant electoral behaviour from late 1970 through 1990s have claimed that some of the factors that are generally associated with low political activity have an especially strong impact on immigrant electoral participation. Due to the fact that immigrants are newcomers in Swedish society there is among them an overrepresentation of persons who are not active in associations and organisations, young people, unmarried, persons with lower education and persons that have recently moved to a new area. Moreover, as newcomers they naturally have a more limited knowledge of Swedish society and the Swedish political system, accompanied with language difficulties that make it harder to follow political debates (Hammar 1985, 1990, Bäck & Soininen 1994; 1999).

Analysis of electoral participation in Sweden in 2002 Municipal elections – among the total population - (Ds 2003:54, An Analysis of Voter Turnout in the 2002 Municipal Elections), show that the positive correlation between the general voter turnout and factors such as education, age and income loses much of its explanatory value when controlled for other factors such as activity in voluntary associations and other community-based organisations, degree of political interest and identification with a political party. One of the conclusions of the study is that the likelihood to vote – the voter turnout – is not a function of socio-economic conditions as such but that it is rather determined by personal values and other attributes. Among other things, these include voting as a norm is a central ‘civic virtue’ However, as the study further reveals that such attitudes are to a large extent related to the socio-economic living conditions. Two factors do however not follow this logic, namely civil status and citizenship: The voter turnout is higher among married people and cohabitants, as it is among those with Swedish citizenship.

While there has been a strong downward trend in party identification in Sweden generally - resulting a lower turnout - this seems to have been compensated by an increasingly stronger support for the idea of voting being a civic virtue – leading to a higher turnout. The latter development then compensates for the former (Ds 2003:54, An Analysis of Voter

Turnout in the 2002 Municipal Elections).

Although integration, including political integration, takes time research results clearly indicate that factors like the length of the stay in Sweden, labour market status or knowledge in Swedish language, only have a very limited capacity to statistically explain the differences in immigrant and native Swedes political participation and representation (Teorell & Westholm 1999). However, the electoral participation was lower among the immigrants that reported that they had experienced discrimination, according to a survey that was carried out to study the impact of the information targeted to immigrant voters in 2002 elections (Bäck & Soininen 2004).

How to increase the participation and effectively implement the legislation of voting rights for immigrants? Given the low electoral participation among the immigrants the government has made efforts to tackle the problem through funding measures that cover a wide range of activities from information campaigns, including both technical information of the Swedish electoral system as well actual political information, to projects, run by the parties, authorities and to some extent also by immigrant organisations. For example, the parliamentary parties have received special funding to design and implement information campaigns especially targeted to voters with immigrant background (Bäck & Soininen 2004).

Other forms of political participation

The lower political participation among the non-Swedish citizens also applies for other forms of political participation than taking part in the elections. According to the general pattern of political activity between elections, the native born Swedes have a significantly higher level of participation than foreign born Swedish citizens who in turn are more politically active than non-Swedish citizens (Skr 2003/2004).

Research results indicate that as in the population as a whole, political participation has declined also among those with immigrant background. For example, the proportion of naturalised immigrants belonging to a political party has declined. But there are also exceptions from this rule. Taking part in a demonstration, contacting administrative officials or elective representatives, or participating in a debate in a (local) newspaper, are all activities where a certain increase in interest has been registered, both among the native born Swedes as well as among those with immigrant background (2000-2001).

There are major gender differences in participation; while approximately 16 percent of male non-Swedish citizens contact an administrative official or an elected representative, only 8 percent of women do that. Also, while up to 14 percent of the male non-

Swedish citizens had taken part in a demonstration, this was true for only 7 percent of women. On the other hand women write slightly more often editorials to local newspapers than men – around 5 and 4 percent respectively.

Representation

Then, how about the *representation of* immigrants among those elected and holding a political position? In 2003, non-Swedish citizens occupied just 1 percent of the Swedish municipal council seats while they comprised some four percent of the electorate. The ratio was the same at county council level. Among county councillors, the proportion of foreign born citizens has risen over the past two decades, particularly at the three most recent elections (Skr 2003/2004:110). A number of research reports and government inquiries testify that the share of elected politicians with immigrant background (i. e. persons born abroad) is low. There exists a clear pattern of under-representation in terms of ethnic background on all levels in the political decision making hierarchy (Dahlsted 2005, Bäck och Öhrvall 2004).

In 2002, foreign-born citizens (either naturalised or foreign citizens) held almost 7 percent of all municipal council seats in Sweden, an increase of just under 3 percentage points compared over a ten-year period since 1982 election. The result is especially interesting if we consider that the proportion of the foreign born citizens in the electorate increased from 9 percent to 13 percent during the same period. Thus, the level of representation – the relative representation - of the immigrants in municipal councils increased only marginally, in particular if we take into consideration the degree of under-representation. Given that, it is then not surprising that the share of foreign born holding a political position is relative to the status of the political body: the under-representation is more significant for example in the powerful executive committees in municipalities in comparison with other politically less prestigious committees (Dahlstedt 2005).

Some of the explanations for the under-representation of politicians with immigrant background can be found circumstances such as in the candidate nominations. Research into party internal candidate nomination processes (Soininen & Etzler 2006) indicate how the institutional arrangements surrounding candidate nominations in party organisations are highly disadvantageous for potential immigrant candidates. While the local party organisations compensate for a ‘disadvantageous’ or ‘discriminatory’ treatment based on gender - partly as consequence of ageing and therefore increasingly conservative party organisations - similar ‘affirmative action’ measures are not applied in the case of immigrant representation (Soininen & Etzler 2006).

But also factors that are directly related to the formal institutional rules of the Swedish political life have a negative impact on the electoral participation of the immigrants and their representation; the fact that the voting rights are limited to municipal and county council elections is one of them. Because the elections take place on the same day, the national political issues usually strongly dominate in the media as well as in the political debate, both the national and the local one. Thus, as the local issues are then downplayed in the political debate which strengthens the feeling of only being allowed vote in the ‘second order’ elections.

Additionally, the immigration policy issues have traditionally not been issues where the parties differ. In the contrary, the Swedish immigration and integration policy has been characterised by high party political consensus. First with beginning during the 1990s there has been more distinct political profiling concerning integration and immigration issues. At least to some extent this is a result of the extreme right wing mobilisation that has also had an impact on the strategies of the major political parties; They have become increasingly sensitive to immigrant negative and xenophobic opinions among their party members and voters (Soininen & Etzler 2006).

Individuals and resources: Political consequences of the resource approach

An interesting question is how the policy making, public discourse and social science research are closely interrelated. In particular, this question could be said to be even more interesting when we discuss the problems that are related to how to implement substantial equal political rights.

The choices of approaches to conceptualise and make sense of a current societal problem often have an important impact on the public discourse and through that guide and legitimate the problem framing that underlies the political action taken. The research helps to provide an understanding of what the ‘real problem’ is, how it could be addressed and which kind of political measures appear to be adequate and appropriate. Seen in that perspective, the theoretical and methodological choices are not only an internal issue for the research community, they have also an important bearing on public policy making, if not always immediately then in a longer time perspective.

More specifically, the different theoretical understandings of political exclusion can be expected to influence the everyday political framing of the participation and under-representation of immigrant minorities, in the public debate. The question is then what kind of political consequences different perspectives might have?

The 'SES', Socio Economic Status Model, has historically been the dominating approach to study of political participation and representation (Almind & Verba 1963; Verba & Nie 1972; Brady, Verba & Schlozman 1995). Therefore, it has naturally also largely influenced the political science research on immigrant political participation. The explanation for differences in and patterns of political participation are here sought in individuals' different access to social and political resources. These include both material and social resources, like income, education, time, administrative and other skills and competencies. The normative orientations of the individual also play an important role. It is of central value that he or she has been socialised to have a positive orientation towards political participation and political institutions as well as that he or she has trust in politicians, political institutions and her/his capacity to influence political decision makers. Access to such resources is in other words an important explanation for those differences in political participation that we can observe between different groups in a society.

The SES Model has logically taken a central role in studies of immigrant and minority participation as the research in this area has naturally been incorporated into the broader research tradition; to explain differences in levels of political activity, between immigrant minorities and the majority, and between different immigrant minority groups. In the Swedish context, this means, as we have earlier discussed, that explanations for immigrant exclusion from the political arena have been sought in circumstances like status in the labour market, status as labour or refugee migrant, civil status, membership in majority and minority organisations, media consumption, not to mention the length of stay in Sweden, citizenship and education (Bäck & Soininen 1992, 1996, 2004; Teorell & Westholm 1999; Adman & Strömblad 2000). In short, the lack of different kinds of resources – from normative orientations to social and material resources – will explain the lower levels of electoral participation and under-representation in political constituencies among the immigrants, when compared with the majority population.

A special kind resource is ethnic group identity and belonging. Leighley and Vedlitz (1999) have paid attention to minority ethnicity based resources – promoting the ethnic group identity and belonging – that have been shown to have a positive impact on levels of minority participation, through contributing to political mobilisation among the minority members. Social capital and culture are other kind of factors that can be used to explain variations in activity levels between the ethnic majority members and immigrant minorities. The political cultures do differ, and while in some of them place more stress on political compromising, this does not need to be the case in other cultures (Togeby 2003). In

a recent Swedish study on immigrant participation in organisations and associations, the results revealed that individuals access to social networks, besides the level of knowledge and interest, were the most decisive factors behind the membership in organisations (Borevi & Strömblad 2004). Furthermore, the findings from research on the Swedish political parties and their efforts to mobilise immigrant voters in the 2002 election, showed that networking between the representatives of the immigrant associations and the local political parties, was seen as a factor having a positive mobilisation effect on immigrant involvement in local politics (Bäck & Soininen 2004).

What can we say about the political consequences of the theoretical models that take their point of departure in factors like individuals resources, either material, cultural or social, as main explanatory variables? I would like to problematise the resource perspective on immigrant political participation and how it leads us to a number of politically interesting conclusions.

First, when the problem of inequality in political activity and influence is in the first place conceptualised in terms of access to resources of different kind, this then also informs the solutions to inequality. Naturally, the political solution at hand is to provide the individuals and groups that lack behind with adequate resources, from technical and political information to those training skills and capacities that are needed to be politically active, and to influence the individual attitudes and norms in a direction that affects positively political activity. For instance, as we earlier mentioned the Swedish government regularly allocates funding for electoral information campaigns directed to immigrant groups (Bäck & Soininen 2004).

The ‘resource solution’ can then said to be very much in the heart of the general welfare policies. The societal problems can be best solved - or if not at least regulated – through allocating material and other resources to narrow the social gaps and in doing so to contribute to regulating potential social conflicts. In such a perspective, the ‘welfare of political participation’ is part of the general welfare policies. Such a policy aims to strengthen the individual political resources. Therefore it is easy to view it as a positive, consensus oriented, solution that does not challenge any of the central values or institutions in society. This also guarantees it broad political support.

I would like to argue that there are two problems with this politically smooth approach. First, in the public debate the ‘lack of adequate resources’ explanations for political exclusion of women, immigrants or other minorities, often tend to produce negative identity politics (Connolly 1991). In other words, the target groups for policy measures are in the first

place identified in terms of the problems *they* have, and the resources *they* lack. In short, immigrants are not integrated enough to be politically active or women are not ambitious enough to pursue careers. In that way, such groups are easily attributed less positive qualities – in opposition to what are seen as socially highly valued qualities. Moreover, especially in the case of persons with immigrant background, generalisations are easily made about all ‘immigrants’, although the empirical results actually may cover a sample of immigrant groups. A part of the picture is that often, the main emphasis is put on *differences* between categories ‘immigrants’, ‘foreign born’ born and ‘native Swedes’, in that way actively constructing these groups, even though more detailed analysis reveal that the in-group variation is far higher than variation between categories.

Finally, in political perspective – when discussing political inequality in terms of access to individual resources, there is the risk of ‘blaming the victim’. Certainly, the resource approaches are needed, among other things to evaluate the effects of different public policy measures. It is only when they are used unreflexively to contribute to negative identity politics that they become a political problem.

A different but central problem with the resource approach is that although it relies on political solutions on the inequality problem it misses the question of political institutions. It leaves unexamined the workings of political institutions and how their rules and routines might contribute to political inequality in a society.

Institutional factors - Party systems and political mobilisation

Instead of focusing on the individual resources, or rather the lack of them as the main explanatory variable for immigrant participation and representation, other approaches have been introduced that highlight the effects the political and social institutions have on activity levels. Examples of this kind of studies include research on how the electoral systems influence the immigrant minority participation. For instance, the candidate centred electoral system in Denmark makes it relatively easy for immigrant nominees in local elections to get elected (Togeby 2003). Similar results are reported from Norway, and especially from the local elections in the city of Oslo, where the combination of the electoral system, together with an active role of immigrant associations has contributed to a high level of minority representation (Brochmann & Rogstad 2005).

Thus, when comparing the electoral participation of foreign citizens and naturalised citizens in Nordic countries it clearly is the case that the electoral system makes a difference. Some important explanations to the relatively higher electoral participation in

Denmark, among Turkish and Pakistani populations, in comparison with the levels of immigrant electoral participation in Sweden can be found in the Danish personal election system as it encourages collective mobilisation (Togeby 1999). For certain ethnic groups in some Danish cities this mobilisation has led to voter participation higher than that of native Danes. Also in Sweden it has been possible to see some positive effects of 1998 electoral reform of preference voting that introduced an element of person vote, on immigrant participation (Bäck & Soininen 1999); It contributed to increased political mobilisation around immigrant candidates, among immigrants who otherwise would hardly taken part in the in the election.

Another factor that probably contributes to higher denizen participation in Denmark - in comparison to Sweden - is that parliamentary and municipal elections are on separate dates. Because of this more issues find their way onto the local agenda. Moreover, the fact that immigrants are concentrated to metropolitan areas seems to be a positive factor for electoral mobilisation both in Denmark and Norway (Togeby 1999, Brochmann 20003). The existence of social networks has a positive impact on mobilisation.

Taken together, in comparison to the system in Sweden the Danish political structure is thus more open for new groups while the Swedish electoral system favours continuity and stability with exclusionary effects for new voter groups.

Concluding remarks

It is sometimes argued that citizenship, as an indicator of integration into society, is a good explanatory variable for electoral participation. However, we could also argue, hypothetically, that both naturalisation and electoral participation are good indicators of (political) integration. Citizenship makes a difference in the level of electoral participation but the question is if the correlation is not more complicated: there might be a third factor, a feeling of being included in a society, that 'explains' both the naturalisation and the interest to take part in the elections. Could the Swedish case be a good test case for this question? First, the citizenship legislation is liberal, the qualification time is relatively short and the requirements for acquiring the Swedish citizenship are kept to a minimum: Second, voting rights in local elections for non-Swedish citizens have been in place for thirty years, since 1975.

As we have seen, the interest to acquire Swedish citizenship is nevertheless rather low at just below 70, as is electoral participation among the non-Swedish citizens. In

fact, as a result of how the Swedish Integration policy is designed, guaranteeing the non-Swedish citizens residing in the country equal social, civil and political rights – there are only a limited number of *practical* reasons for acquiring Swedish citizenship, including factors like the citizenship legislation in the country of origin. At the same time there might be *emotional* arguments against naturalisation. Swedish citizenship is still today highly characterised, not by expressing an identity of a multi-ethnic and multicultural society, but by symbolising a majority ethnic Swedish identity. Given that, it might be difficult for member of a ‘visible’ immigrant minority to identify with it. You can easily acquire Swedish citizenship but it is rather more difficult – if not impossible – to become a ‘Swede’.

The fact that formal inclusion in society and politics does not guarantee substantial inclusion in practice, from citizenship to position in the labour market and housing, might well be reflected in low interest in electoral participation. Following this line of argumentation, the non-participation might then represent a form of political activity.

One way of making sense of such an argument is to compare the electoral participation among the non-Swedish citizens with electoral turnout among the Swedish citizenry in European parliamentary elections. As we earlier noted, Sweden is one of the countries in Europe with highest electoral participation in elections to the national parliament, but is close to the bottom of the list when it comes to electoral participation in the election to European parliament. Here, the usual explanations include disinterest among the general public for the EU-project, in addition to scepticism towards the EU and lack of trust in EU institutions as well as the absence of shared European identity. The question is to what extent a similar explanation applies for immigrant electoral participation?

Political systems face a new task in today’s increasingly multicultural and ethnically diverse societies; it is not only about managing the representation of traditional class interests but also about being able to represent, aggregate and channel a much wider interest representation in a society as the political mobilisation is increasingly based on new combating conflict lines; not least on ethnicity and race, religion and gender but also on sexual orientation. Indeed, it is easy to argue why the democratic platforms could, through offering a shared platform for a dialogue around key political, ethical and moral values even play a more vital role in today’s diverse societies than in culturally more homogenous societies. An important requirement is then that different societal groups are actively present in these democratic platforms.

A related and central question is the intensified mobilisation around the ‘multiethnic order’ in today’s diverse societies. It is an issue that is closely related to the

representation of social interests and the role of different group interests in politics, and how this is regulated institutionally. The mobilisation around the multiethnic order is manifested among other things in how the xenophobic right wing parties have successively become a significant element also in Swedish politics. For instance, in 2006 the Sverigedemokraterna won seats in around one third of the local constituencies, and in many cases they have played a key role because neither any of the two blocs, socialist and non-socialist, gained enough electoral support to win the election. As part of this increasing mobilisation the established political parties have successively taken a more restrictive approach to issues of immigration and integration.

The institutionalised understandings about the political conflict lines have had an impact on how we conceptualise political problems. So, the low electoral participation of immigrants is often understood as an ‘immigrant issue’ - in the dominant public discourse conceptualised as a socio-economic problem of integration - while the right wing xenophobic and anti-immigration mobilisation is easily viewed as a deviation/exception from normal and as regards minority ethnicity - neutral - politics.

The argument here is that there is risk that this kind of conceptualisation of the problem contributes to concealing the fact that both the immigrant absence in politics – and the growing presence of xenophobic streams in politics, are two sides of the same coin of political mobilisation around the issue of multiethnic order. Rather, both the ‘political marginalisation’ and the ‘anti-immigrant and -immigration mobilisation’ can be seen as constituting a larger pattern of a political conflict lines.

Seen from that perspective, institutional solutions are of key importance, among them having an electoral system that promotes minority inclusion and mobilisation and the promotion of party-internal arrangements to regulate candidate nomination processes.

References

Adman, Per och Strömblad, Per (2000) *Resurser för politisk integration*, i Utanför Demokratin: Del 3, Integrationsverkets rapportserie 2000:16. Norrköping: Integrationsverket.

Ahrne Göran, Rydgren Jens & Sörbom, Adrienne (2005) *Politics and Globalisation: Bringing Parties In*. Score rapportserie 2005:7. Stockholm: SCORE.

Almond, Gabriel & Verba, Sidney (1963) *The Civic Culture. Political attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

Borevi, Karin & Strömblad, Per (2004) ”Engagemang, mångfald och integration – en

introduktion”, i *Engagemang, mångfald och integration: Om möjligheter och hinder för politisk jämlikhet*, SOU 2004:49, Rapport från Integrationspolitiska maktutredningen. Stockholm: Fritzes.

Brady, Henry, Verba, Sidney och Schlozman, Key Lehman (1995) “Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Political Participation”, i *American Political Science Review*, 89 (2): 271-294

Brochmann, Grete & Jon Rogstad (2005) ”På sidelinjen? Villkår for deltagelse i politikk og organisasjonsliv i Norge.”, i Bo Bengtsson, (red.) *Föreningsliv, makt och integration* i Ds 2004:49, Integrationspolitiska maktutredningens forskningsprojekt. Stockholm: Fritzes

Bäck, Henry och Soininen, Maritta (1996) *Invandrarna, demokratin och samhället: om invandrarnas politiska deltagande i dagens Sverige*. Göteborg : Förvaltningshögskolan, Göteborgs universitet.

Bäck Henry & Maritta Soininen (1998) *Den kommunala invandrapolitiken. Arenor, aktörer och barriärer*. Stockholm: SNS Förlag

Bäck Henry & Maritta Soininen (1999a), ”Invandrarnas deltagande i det politiska livet” i SOU 1999:8 *Invandrarskap och medborgarskap* - dokumentation från ett seminarium. Demokratiutredningens skrift nr 13

Bäck Henry och Maritta Soininen (1999b) ”Invandrarkandidaterna i personvalet” i Holmberg, Sören och Möller, Tommy (red.) *Premiär för personval*. SOU 1999:92, Rådet för utvärdering av 1998 års val.

Bäck Henry & Maritta Soininen 1999 'Electoral Participation among Immigrants in Sweden: Integration, Culture and Participation' in Steven Vertovec (ed), *Migration and Social Cohesion*, Edward Elgar Publishing.

Bäck Henry & Maritta Soininen (2004) *Politisk annonsering eller nätverkande? Uppföljning och utvärdering av partiernas särskilda informationsinsatser till invandrarväljare i 2002 års val*. Göteborg: Förvaltningshögskolan

Connolly William (1991) *Identity – Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press

Dahlstedt Magnus (2000) ”Marginaliseringens politiska konsekvenser”, i *Utanför demokratin?*, del 5, Integrationsverkets rapportserie 2000:18. Norrköping: Integrationsverket.

Dahlstedt Magnus (2005) *Reserverad demokrati: Representation i ett mångetniskt Sverige*. Umeå: Boréa Bokförlag (avhandling).

Dryzek John (2000) *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond. Liberals, Critics, Contestations*. New York: Oxford University Press

Goodin Robert (2003) *Reflective Democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press

Gidlund Gullan & Tommy Möller (1999) *Demokratin trojänare: Lokalt partiarbete förr och nu*, i SOU 1999:130, Demokratiutredningens forskarvolym 10. Stockholm: Fritzes

Graham M & M Soininen (1998) A model for immigrants? The Swedish corporate model and prevention of ethnic discrimination, in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* vol .24 No. 3 523-539.

Graham M & M Soininen (2000) 'Positive Action in Sweden: from Central Solutions to Local Responsibility for Combating Ethnic Discrimination' in Erna Appelt (ed), *Combating Racial Discrimination: Affirmative Action as a Model for Europe?* Oxford: Berg.

Hadenius, Stig (1995) *Svensk politik under 1900-talet: konflikt och samförstånd*. Stockholm: Tiden.

Hall Peter A och Rosemary Taylor (1996). *Political Science and the Three New*

- Institutionalisms, in *Political Studies*, XLIV, p 936-957.
- Immergut Ellen M (1998). The Theoretical Core of the New Institutionalism, in *Politics and Society*, vol 26(1): 5-34.
- Leighley, Jan och Arnold Vedlitz (1999) 'Race, Ethnicity, and Political Participation: Competing Models and Contrasting Explanations' *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 61(4):1092-1114, November 1999
- Lukkarinen Kvist Mirjaliisa (2001) "Etnisk mångfald i politiken", i *Att vara med på riktigt – Demokratiutveckling i kommuner och landsting*, Bilagor till betänkande av Kommundemokratikommittén, SOU 2001:48.
- Norris Pippa & Joni Lovenduski (1995) *Political Recruitment: Gender, Race and Class in the British Parliament*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Peters Guy (1999) *Institutional Theory in Political Science. The 'New Institutionalism'*. London: PINTER, A Cassell imprint.
- Petersson Olof, Hernes Gudmund, Holmberg Sören, Togeby Lise och Anders Westholm (2000) *Demokrati utan partier? Demokratirådets rapport 2000*. Stockholm: SNS Förlag
- Petersson Olof (2005-10-24), DN Debatt "Partiernas medlemsantal halverat på drygt tio år"
- Rushanera Ali & Colm O'Conneide (2002) *Our House? Race and Representation in British Politics*. Institute for Public Policy Research
- Saggar Shamit (2000) *Race and representation*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Scholte Jan Aart (2005) *Globalization. A Critical Introduction*. New York: Palgrave
- Soininen Maritta (1999) The 'Swedish Model' as an institutional framework for immigrant membership rights, in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* vol 25 No.4 685-702.
- Soininen Maritta (1999) 'Refugee Care in Sweden: the Problem of Unemployment and anti-Discrimination policies' in John Wrench (eds), *Migrant, Ethnic Minorities and the Labour Market - Integration and Exclusion in Europe*, McMillan Press Ltd.
- Soininen Maritta (2004) The measures implemented by the political parties in Bäck & Soininen (eds) *Politisk annonsering eller nätverkande? (Political Advertising or Networking?)* Report 61, School of Public Administration, University of Gothenburg.
- Soininen Maritta & Etzler Nils (2006) *Partierna nominerar. Exkluderingens mekanismer – etnicitet och representation*. SOU 2006:53. Edita Sverige AB: Stockholm
- Solomos, John & Back, Les (1995) *Race, politics and social change*. London: Routledge.
- Teorell Jan (1999) "A Deliberative Defence of Intraparty Democracy", *Party Politics* 5:363-382, 1999
- Teorell Jan och Anders Westholm (1999) "Var det bättre förr? Politisk jämlikhet i Sverige under 30 år", i *Medborgarnas erfarenheter*, SOU 1999:113, Demokratiutredningens forskarvolym 5
- Togeby Lise (2003) *Fra fremmedarbejdere til etniske minoriter*. Århus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag
- Togeby, Lise, Jørgen Goul Andersen, Peter Munk Christiansen, Torben Beck Jørgensen och Signild Vallgård (2003). *Magt og demokrati i Danmark. Hovedresultater fra Magtudredningen*. Aarhus: Aarhus universitetsforlag.
- Verba Sidney & Norman Nie (1972) *Participation in America*. New York: Harper and Row

RRV 1996:50 *Förvaltningspolitik i förändring – en kartläggning och analys av regeringens styrning av statsförvaltningen*. Stockholm: Riksrevisionsverket.

SOU 2000:1, *En uthållig demokrati: slutbetänkande från Demokratiutredningen*. Stockholm: Fritzes

SOU 2004:22