

DEMOCRATIC MOBILISATION IN IMMIGRANT ORGANISATIONS

Abstract

By analysing the interactions between political opportunity structures and immigrant organisations' mobilising their members to political participation, this article suggests and applies a systematic classification comprising three forms of democratic mobilisation: immigrant organisations function as a public arena for their members; they increase knowledge of political participation among members; and they develop a political culture among members. The article concludes that open political opportunity structures offer scope for action to resourceful activists. These activists see that the local political opportunity structures allow scope for political participation by persons with immigrant background, and use the immigrant organisations as an arena to develop a political culture of political participation. Immigrant organisations can serve as agents of political integration through projects, which aim to mobilise members to political participation.

Keywords

Immigrant organisations • political opportunity structures • democratic mobilisation
• political participation

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1 Introduction

Recent studies conducted in several European countries show how structural conditions can either hinder or facilitate political participation by individuals with immigrant backgrounds. Based on the political opportunity structures of the respective countries, many researchers argue that political participation by immigrants in a majority society depends on how they are received by and integrated into the countries into which they immigrate (Bengtsson 2010; Koopmans & Statham 2000; Koopmans et al. 2005). Other researchers show that immigrants' participation in ethnic organisations leads to greater political participation in the majority society (Fennema & Tillie 2001; Jacobs & Tillie 2004). More recent studies argue that the membership of ethnic organisations leads to greater political participation in a majority society, but only if combined with an open political opportunity structure in the form of various group rights (Morales & Pilati 2011).

Structural conditions also prove decisive when Bay et al. (2010) establish the existence of a positive quantitative relationship between the membership of immigrant organisations and increased electoral participation in Norway. Based on this relationship, they conclude that immigrant organisations can serve as schools of democracy, but neither Bay et al. (2010) nor the other researchers examine what the immigrant organisations themselves do in terms of schooling their members in political participation. To expand on the findings of these

quantitative studies, it is necessary to conduct a closer study of the efforts of some immigrant organisations in mobilising their members to democratic participation and how political framework conditions might affect these efforts.

This article examines the interaction between local political opportunity structures and how immigrant organisations mobilise democratic participation among members. Two aspects of the local opportunity structures in Oslo are particularly relevant to the immigrant organisations' opportunities for democratic mobilisation. One is the right for individuals without Norwegian citizenship to participate in Norwegian local elections after 3 years residence in the country. The second is that immigrant organisations in Oslo can apply for financial support from the authorities to undertake projects to mobilise political participation among members.

This raises one fundamental question. How are some immigrant organisations adapting to these framework conditions by undertaking projects with the aim of mobilising members to electoral participation?

With the aim of analysing the interaction between local political opportunity structures and how immigrant organisations mobilise political participation among their members, I introduce a systematic classification comprising three forms of democratic mobilisation. The first is that each immigrant organisation *functions as a public arena for members* by drawing the members out of the private sphere and

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into public organisations in civil society and by using the members' network. The second form is that immigrant organisations *increase the knowledge of political participation and representation among members* by informing them about the majority society's political system. The third form is that immigrant organisations *develop a political culture among members* by implementing internal democratic procedures and/or by developing a political awareness over time.

Together, these three forms of democratic mobilisation refer to the inclusion of individuals in a democratic culture. These aspects are central to classical republican interpretations of participatory democracy (Barber 2003; Habermas 1992). They not only refer to types of political participation as voting or running for elections but also to lesser types such as taking part in public debates, interest groups, immigrant organisations, consultative bodies, contact with bureaucratic bodies or contact with bureaucratic officials (Dahl 1989; Norris 2011; Verba et al. 1995). This article concentrates on how immigrant organisations undertake projects with the aim of increasing the electoral participation among persons with an immigrant background. It examines how the three forms of democratic mobilisation might be decisive for such political participation.

The empirical basis for the study comprises 16 immigrant organisations. They gained financial support from the City of Oslo to undertake projects with the aim of mobilising political participation among members in the run-up to the 2011 local election. The sample is selected from the 300 or so local immigrant organisations registered in public registers in Oslo. These organisations are mostly ethnically and nationally based, and in line with the largest group of local immigrant organisations, the organisations examined in this study have members with African and Asian backgrounds. All immigrant organisations in Oslo can apply for funding. The study includes all organisations that received funding for political mobilisation, and it excludes organisations that received funding to create cultural collaboration between different ethnic or national groups or to hold courses related to health, education or employment (EMI 2011, 2012). The sample is selected with the aim of investigating how some immigrant organisations make use of the opportunities the authorities give for political participation for persons with an immigrant background. These organisations are probably the most politically active organisations among those that are not established as political organisations. They are not representative of all immigrant organisations in Oslo.

The empirical analysis covers a period of 1 year, from the organisations' applications for funding in spring 2011 to their submission of projects to the city administration in spring 2012. I have used document analysis and semi-structured interviews. The document analysis is based on material from the Unit for Diversity and Integration (EMI 2013), which administers the projects. This covers work in EMI's archives in June 2011 and September 2012. The documents comprise EMI's guidelines for applications, the applications for financial support submitted by immigrant organisations to EMI in spring 2011, EMI's justification for approving the applications, and the reports on the implementation of the projects submitted by the immigrant organisations to EMI in spring 2012. I conducted interviews with persons from immigrant organisations who were responsible for projects in 11 of the 16 immigrant organisations receiving financial support. The remaining five organisations declined to give interviews. The interviews were conducted in October and November 2011, after the local election had been held. I approached the interviewees by sending emails to the organisations in which I explained the aim of the project and the questions I wanted to ask. After 1 week, I phoned the organisations

and made appointments for the interviews. The interviews were conducted in cafés, at workplaces, and in three cases by phone. All interviewees told me that they played key roles in formulating the applications and the reports.

In addition to the city of Oslo's targeting policy towards immigrant organisations, Oslo is an interesting case for two reasons. Firstly, every third immigrant and Norwegian-born person with immigrant parents in Norway resides in Oslo. There are approximately 593,321 immigrants in Norway and 117,144 persons born in Norway of immigrant parents. Approximately 189,400 residents of Oslo are immigrants or Norwegian-born persons with immigrant background. These persons represent 30 per cent of the population, which is well above the national average of 14.1 per cent (Statistics Norway 2013). Secondly, the 2011 local election in Oslo resulted in 11 of the 59 representatives voted onto the new city council having immigrant backgrounds. This represents 28 per cent and is equivalent to both the percentage of persons with immigrant background who live in the city and to the percentage of those entitled to vote (Statistics Norway 2012a).

This article is divided into four sections: the first section discusses how previous studies found connections between membership of immigrant organisations and political participation and how these connections were interpreted in the light of political opportunity structures. The second section suggests three different forms of democratic mobilisation. The third section examines how the political opportunity structures in Oslo set guidelines for immigrant organisations' political mobilisation projects. The fourth section analyses some typical features regarding how immigrant organisations mobilise political participation among members.

2 Immigrant organisations and political participation

The concept of political opportunity structure was developed within the framework of studies of social movements and was subsequently adapted to studies of migration (Koopmans & Statham 2000). An example of such adaptation is the studies conducted by Koopmans et al. (2005) of how the combination of citizenship regimes and cultural group rights are decisive for immigrants' collective actions in several European countries. Studies of political opportunity structures argue that institutions created for receiving and integrating immigrants influence the way in which immigrants organise themselves and participate politically through collective action such as immigrant organisations (Bengtsson 2010; Predelli 2008; Togeby 2004).

In the tradition of Putnam (2000), several scholars focus on what role membership of ethnic organisations has for immigrants' political participation (Fennema & Tillie 2001; Jacobs & Tillie 2004). Studies from several European cities not only find that membership of ethnic organisations has a significant bearing on political participation but also reveals variations between different ethnic groups and different forms of political participation (Bay et al. 2010; Berger et al. 2004; Jacobs & Tillie 2004; Tillie 2004). In contrast, Strömblad and Adman (2010) find, by studying survey data from Sweden, that associations based on ethnic origin do not encourage political activity among immigrants, while general associational involvement leads to political participation.

More recent studies from several European cities combine these two approaches through analyses of how different compositions of political opportunity structures, organisation membership and individual factors influence political participation among immigrants

(Morales & Giugni 2011). Studies conducted within this analytical framework show that membership of ethnic organisations leads to increased political participation if combined with an open political opportunity structure in the form of multiple group rights (Morales & Pilati 2011; Myrberg & Rogstad 2011).

These European studies show that both the membership of immigrant organisations and the political opportunity structure of the organisations are decisive for political participation by persons with immigrant background. They do not, however, examine which conditions within the immigrant organisations may lead to the members participating in the majority society's political activities. Taking these findings, which are mostly based on quantitative studies, as the point of departure gives rise to a need to conduct a qualitative study of what immigrant organisations do to promote political participation among members. As Yurdakul (2009) argues, many researchers have attached considerable importance to immigrant organisations as actors for increasing the political integration of immigrants, but few have studied what immigrant organisations themselves initiate to gain political influence (see also Hunger et al. 2011). Although Yurdakul (2009) examines the interaction between immigrant organisations and political authorities in Berlin, she does not examine closely what the organisations do to motivate political participation among members. This is, however, emphasised in how Nordic research shows an increasing connection between the state's support of civil society institutions and an increasing involvement of civil society organisations to promote integration of ethnic minority groups into the majority society (Agergaard & Michelsen la Cour 2012; Kugelberg 2011; Pyykkonen 2007).

Taking previous studies of political opportunity structures as his point of departure, Bengtsson (2010) argues that one should examine not only the immigrant organisations' opportunities to gain collective influence but also the opportunities available to individuals through the immigrant organisations. Organisations, which are not primarily oriented towards gaining political influence, may play a political role by virtue of being arenas for socialisation and democratic mobilisation. Bengtsson's (2010) proposed analytical approach is a useful starting point with respect to the idea that immigrant organisations may encourage democratic mobilisation, but he, too, fails to take a closer look at how such mobilisation may take place. It is, however, necessary to develop a systematic classification related to democratic mobilisation.

3 Democratic mobilisation

To examine how immigrant organisations can encourage their members' political participation, it is expedient to introduce a systematic classification comprising three forms of democratic mobilisation. The first is that each immigrant organisation functions as an arena for their members. The central element is that the organisations draw individuals out of the private sphere and into public organisations in civil society (Habermas 1992). Such an action is in itself important for participation in civilian communities as arenas of identity formation, social integration and political engagement (Lorentzen 2004; Wollebæk & Selle 2003: 87). This form of mobilisation entails the establishment of civil society arenas and is independent of whether immigrant organisations mobilise politically (Schrover & Vermeulen 2005), or are interest- or identity-based (Fennema 2004). Such arenas give resourceful activists the possibility to reach persons with an immigrant background by using the established members' network. For electoral participation,

the significance of the role of individuals for political mobilisation is important, in line with classical election theory (Verba et al. 1995). Political mobilisation is only one of many forms of societal participation; the labour market and educational institutions are also important arenas of participation.

The second form of democratic mobilisation consists of what immigrant organisations themselves do in terms of informing their members about the majority society's political system and procedures for political representation. Moreover, it requires activists within the organisations who undertake projects with the aim of transferring this knowledge to the members. Whereas the first form is primarily oriented towards internal affairs within the organisations, the second form has an explicit goal of transferring knowledge of political participation and representation by its members in the majority society. How such information aimed at political participation in the majority society is conducted will, nonetheless, be related to the first form of mobilisation. It requires arenas where activists can reach members.

The third form is that immigrant organisations develop a political culture among members by implementing internal democratic procedures and/or by developing a political awareness over time. It can be based on a formalistic understanding of democracy and is contingent on the immigrant organisations being member-based and that all members have an opportunity to participate in the election of their organisation's leadership. The idea that voluntary organisations should provide such a form of democratic schooling is a central aspect of the Nordic tradition of the voluntary organisation, which is characterised by organisations with broad memberships and a democratic structure (Trägårdh & Vamstad 2009; Wollebæk & Sivesind 2010). This ideal is applied to the way in which the authorities envisioned that immigrant organisations should work, particularly in a Norwegian context (Report to the Storting no. 6 (2012–2013)). Accordingly, studies conclude that immigrant organisations serve as schools of democracy by virtue of the way in which members are socialised in a democratic culture through the organisations' rules of democracy (Bay et al. 2010; Predelli 2008). This form of democratic schooling requires immigrant organisations to comply with the rules of democracy, something Rogstad (2007: 117) doubts because many persons with immigrant background are used to making decisions on the basis of a consensus-oriented council of elders or the head of the family.

The third form of democratic mobilisation by developing a political culture does not necessarily require the existence of any internal democratic structure in the immigrant organisations, as in the Nordic tradition. It requires, however, a type of membership, or that individuals are affiliated to the immigrant organisations in such a way that they are exposed to political mobilisation. Even though the first two forms of democratic mobilisation may have an indirect impact on members' political participation in the majority society, it is mainly through this third form where it is expressly formulated as a goal to develop a political awareness over time.

4 Political opportunity structures in Oslo

Two aspects of local political opportunity structures are particularly relevant for immigrant organisations' opportunities to mobilise political participation among members, as mentioned in the introduction. First, individual rights that enable persons with immigrant background to participate in local elections. Secondly, immigrant organisations can apply for financial support for their activities and projects (see

Morales & Pilati 2011). Both aspects are managed at local level but are partly determined at national level.

There are three relevant aspects concerning the individual right to participate in local elections, the first of which is the right to vote at elections. In Norway, all foreign citizens aged 18 and above who have been registered as resident in Norway for three consecutive years preceding an election day may vote at local elections. In this respect, Norwegian policy is in line with the other Nordic countries such as Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Lithuania and Slovenia but differs from other European countries which forbid participation in local elections by persons without citizenship. Studies of Norwegian local elections show lower electoral participation among persons with backgrounds from Asia, Africa and Latin America than among the majority population, and reveal that differences have increased over time (Bergh & Bjørklund 2010).

The second aspect is that the right to participate in local elections also includes the right to be an elected representative of a political party. The outcome of the 2011 local election in Oslo means that, as mentioned in the introduction, the composition of the city council reflects the multicultural composition of Oslo.

The third aspect is that the right to participate in local elections also includes an opportunity to cast personalised votes. This enables voters to vote for persons with the same country background as their own, and raises the issue of the significance of descriptive representation, where elected representatives share key characteristics such as ethnic background, religion or gender with the persons they represent (Mansbridge 2000). Norwegian studies report that electoral participation increases if there are elected representatives with immigrant background in a local area, and conclude that descriptive representation is important for electoral participation (Bergh & Bjørklund 2013). In Oslo, persons with immigrant background are particularly evident in the social democratic Labour Party. The party ranked four candidates with immigrant backgrounds high on its ballot paper for the 2011 local election, while a further seven representatives were elected through personalised votes on election day. Consequently, 11 of the Labour Party's 21 city council representatives have immigrant background and they are, therefore over-represented.

Political opportunity structures also set guidelines through financial support, which are decisive for being able to establish immigrant organisations and the type of activities they undertake (Bloemraad 2005; Schrover & Vermeulen 2005). It is essential for the immigrant organisations' projects that the City of Oslo administers financial support schemes for local immigrant organisations and networks (Directorate of Integration and Diversity Circular 4/11). The requirement for collaboration has become increasingly strict in recent years because recent studies of local immigrant organisations in Norway characterise them as local associations that are formed primarily to preserve ethnic and religious identity, with little contact with others (Hagelund & Loga 2009; Nørdland et al. 2007; Ødegård 2010; Predelli 2008 Rogstad 2007). In a wider context, the tightening of the rules can also be understood in the light of criticism of multiculturalism across Europe (Bay et al. 2010; Vertovec & Wessendorf 2010).

Despite 190 immigrant organisations and networks receiving funding for various types of projects from the support schemes, few have given priority to political mobilisation. A total of 174 grants administered by the City of Oslo through these support schemes went to projects whose purpose is either to create cultural collaboration between different ethnic or national groups or to hold courses related to health, education or employment. A review of the funded applications for the three preceding years reveals a similar

pattern. While the City of Oslo did not fund any projects aimed at mobilising political participation in 2008, it funded eight such projects in the run-up to the general election in 2009 and three in 2010 (EMI 2011, 2012).

Within the scope of these political opportunity structures, 16 immigrant organisations in Oslo applied for funding for projects aimed at motivating their members to participate in the 2011 local election. All organisations that applied for funding projects with the aim of mobilising their members to political participation received funding, and none was rejected. That year the municipality allocated NOK 450,000 to these 16 immigrant organisations via these two support schemes. Each immigrant organisation received an average of NOK 27,000 to undertake its project. These are active organisations, which adapt to and make use of the political opportunity structures. The following analysis of their ways of mobilising their members shows how such activities can be understood and implemented.

5 Immigrant organisation projects

Although the Norwegian state and the City of Oslo set guidelines for the projects in the form of political framework conditions, the individual immigrant organisations initiated them and carried them out. These projects are not part of the authorities' information or training schemes for minorities, such as introductory programmes for immigrants. They also differ from the political parties' election campaigns as they are developed by local immigrant organisations. Consequently, the form and content of projects can be adapted to the particular needs, language and cultural codes of the respective groups. A common denominator for all projects is their objective of mobilising political participation among minorities in general and electoral participation in the 2011 local election in particular. The projects include information campaigns, meetings, seminars, radio programmes, and one song contest (EMI 2011, 2012).

5.1 Functioning as an arena for members

For these projects to mobilise participation among persons with immigrant background, the immigrant organisations must serve as arenas for their members, in line with the first form of democratic mobilisation. In order to disseminate knowledge, organisational structure is highlighted as important by all the respondents; first and foremost among members within the respective immigrant organisations and also among organisations. Most of the respondents emphasise that most of their members know each other and therefore have opportunities to get their information across via informal channels. Here is a typical comment from one respondent: 'Many know each other, and we encourage everyone to bring along people they know'.

The networks are not exclusively linked to the organisations' formal function as an arena for activists; they also cover private acquaintances. There are clear differences between private acquaintances and official contacts via an organisational network (Lorentzen 2004). Although these networks overlap, all respondents refer to their organisation's members as a distinct group. The group of members is an active category for all of them, irrespective of type of network. Many respondents stress that they have to personally call or urge their members to get them to attend meetings. This must be done shortly before a meeting is due to take place, and a typical statement in this regard is:

We sent an e-mail to the network. We gave information about our places, such as cafés and restaurants. We put up posters. On the day of the meeting we sent between 300 and 400 text messages to remind people about the meeting, because otherwise no-one would turn up. I sent 300 text messages to my contacts at 10 O'clock in the morning to remind them about a seminar arranged for later that day.

All immigrant organisations use multiple information channels. They send e-mails to members or other organisations, phone or send text messages to members, publish information on Facebook, create websites, hand out flyers, have stands at other events, and put up posters, particularly in restaurants frequented by members (EMI 2011, 2012). Only in one instance was a letter sent to members. Three respondents also mention the importance of immigrant radio stations, which broadcast information on elections in languages such as Turkish, Azerbaijani, Farsi, Albanian, Urdu, and Norwegian.

Networks between immigrant organisations are also highlighted as important for political participation, as reported by, among others, Tillie (2004) based on studies in Amsterdam. In Oslo, however, a network can be understood on the basis of the political opportunity structures, where the state requires multiple ethnic or national groups to cooperate to prevent segregation between ethnic groups (Bay et al. 2010). The majority of immigrant organisations cooperate with other organisations on projects. Only two immigrant organisations cooperate with organisations with the same country background, while three cooperate with organisations from the majority society.

All meetings arranged through the projects are in principle open to everyone, but many of them are in practice adapted to the respective immigrant organisations' members and internal network (EMI 2012). According to the respondents, all the projects are conducted in Norwegian, but almost all of them offered the opportunity to use interpreters according to the respective country backgrounds of the immigrant organisations. Furthermore, this study confirms the role of individuals for political mobilisation by using networks (Verba et al. 1995). Those with responsibility for the projects are resourceful activists who want to mobilise political participation among persons with immigrant background. A typical statement from an activist/respondent regarding members is that:

We want them to take an interest in Norwegian society. We say: 'You must show an interest in what is going on in the country you live in. We are part of this society; we must take an interest in what is going on around us'.

The role of the individual has been documented in Norwegian studies, which conclude that immigrant organisations are run by a few committed individuals (Nødland et al. 2007; Rogstad 2007). Yurdakul (2009) also shows from studies of immigrant organisations in Berlin that an organisation's elite is important for initiating projects and liaising between members and the country's political institutions. Whereas Yurdakul (2009) concludes the elite's reasoning in different immigrant organisations in Berlin varies, it is strikingly similar in Oslo.

This study shows that there are few differences in the reasoning of the immigrant organisations, despite the wide variety of country backgrounds. The similarity is particularly apparent in the organisations' applications and reports, where respondents display similar levels of situational awareness (EMI 2011, 2012). They all emphasise the low level of participation among minorities at local elections, and many refer to statistics. The following formulations in an application for financial support are typical:

The statistics on voter participation show that electoral participation by immigrants in Norway is generally low. Immigrants from the Middle East and parts of Asia have the lowest electoral participation. The statistics from the local election in 2007 show that 36 per cent of Turks, 45 per cent of Pakistanis and 32 per cent of Iraqis with Norwegian citizenship exercised their right to vote. The figures are even poorer for immigrants with foreign citizenship. We want to start a campaign to increase electoral participation among immigrants.

This might reflect an ambition to adapt for strategic reasons to general conditions for getting funding. Nevertheless, the mobilisation efforts depend on the existence of an organisational structure, a network and, for many immigrant organisations, a meeting place. In this context, the significance of the organisational structure for participating in formal organisational work representing the first form of democratic mobilisation is that the immigrant organisations serve as arenas or platforms for the activists' efforts to increase political mobilisation among members.

5.2 Knowledge of political participation and representation

The immigrant organisations provide information about three kinds of political knowledge, in line with the second form of democratic mobilisation. The first is to increase the knowledge of the Norwegian political system, which is highlighted as the main reason in most applications for financial support for projects. This concerns how the political system works, social participation, how public institutions work, what the right to vote means and the electoral system. The need for this type of knowledge is further emphasised by several respondents by explaining that it is difficult to motivate electoral participation if one does not know how the political system works. Here is a typical comment from one respondent:

It is important that we had someone there who could talk about how the election takes place, because many don't know that. We also managed to explain what to do with the voting slip.

The other type of political knowledge concerns the different political alternatives at elections, which is also emphasised as a general need in most applications (EMI 2011). Several respondents stress that one cannot simply encourage persons with immigrant background to vote; they must also receive information about which political alternatives they have in an election. Some respondents mentioned a general uncertainty among voters with immigrant background:

There is some confusion among voters with minority background. Many don't know what the political alternatives are, which politicians have kept their promises, and what priorities the parties have. To be able to vote, one must know what one is voting for.

To inform their members about the political alternatives, most immigrant organisations arrange for them to meet political representatives from several parties at seminars and public debates (EMI 2012). Several respondents view the immigrant organisations as a liaison between persons with immigrant background and politicians. Based on this reasoning, the respondents refute the argument that

ethnic organisations have a tendency to isolate their members and thereby constitute an obstacle to social and political integration into the majority society (Putnam 2007; Rogstad 2007). On the contrary, most respondents argue that the aim of their projects is to bridge the gap between ethnic organisations and the majority society. By informing their members about the Norwegian political system and the political alternatives, they aim to motivate them to adapt to the political opportunity structures by participating in elections.

The third type of knowledge the immigrant organisations aim to transfer to their members is related to political representation. This is related to the fact that the political opportunity structures allow voters to cast personalised votes in local elections. In the 2011 local election in Oslo, several persons with immigrant background were elected through personalised votes, as was also reported by Togeby (2004) in connection with Danish local elections. However, the casting of personalised votes for reasons of ethnic or national background conflicts with democratic ideals of representation. In such cases, the immigrant organisations introduce ethnic identity organisation into democratic structures (Fennema 2004). This contradiction is a key issue for one respondent, who also stresses the responsibility of the parties:

The parties also have a responsibility for recruiting within the parties. Most of those with immigrant background who were elected as representatives appeared way down on the ballot papers, but they were elected because they received a lot of personalised votes. It is positive that there is engagement and that many people vote, but it is negative if they only vote for someone simply because they know them.

The respondents give three reasons why voters with immigrant background vote for candidates with immigrant background. One reason given by several respondents is the importance of persons with immigrant background as role models. One respondent is particularly concerned that the candidates should show it is possible to stand for election:

The candidates with immigrant background who stood for election could show that they had the same background as the participants and that it was possible to stand for election.

The absence of role models was also underlined; respondents from Turkish and Vietnamese organisations attributed the low level of electoral participation by their groups to the lack of political representatives with their national backgrounds. According to these respondents, neither Turks nor Vietnamese have role models in the political system and are therefore in a weaker position than the Pakistanis, who have many representatives.

Another reason which some respondents mention derives from the idea that persons with immigrant background share the same interests. This, however, is not automatically the case, even if one is represented by someone who is similar to oneself (Mansbridge 2000). Both immigrant organisations and political parties often send representatives with immigrant background to the meetings arranged by the immigrant organisations. The idea is that these representatives know what others with immigrant background are concerned about. According to one respondent, a consequence of this situation is that a large proportion of members of immigrant organisations only meet candidates of immigrant background, and thus vote for them.

A third reason mentioned by the majority of respondents is the importance of the members' personal knowledge of candidates of the

same country background as their own. Some respondents describe how political representatives of immigrant background know how to convince others to vote for them. They make a point of how people from the same country background trust each other. This form of reasoning is linked to personal relations that surpass the boundary of organisational structure:

Candidates often have other forms of contact with voters. They use personal contact and say that they must vote for me. It is based on family ties or familiarity or on inviting people to dinner.

The opportunity to cast personalised votes can lead to a form of descriptive representation which does not necessarily mean that persons with immigrant background are politically integrated into the majority society (see also Bay et al. 2010; Rogstad 2007). In this situation, it appears that the immigrant organisations help candidates with immigrant background receive personalised votes. Although this implies that the immigrant organisations motivate their members to actively participate, they also introduce ethnic identity organisation into democratic structures. Similar voting patterns have been observed among other relatively deprived categories at different points of history (Mansbridge 2000).

5.3 Developing a political culture among members

The reports sent to the city administration (EMI) in spring 2012 referred to popular support for the projects; any report to the contrary is probably not to be expected. As they have received financial support, they might feel the need to gloss over challenges and inflate successes. The reports' descriptions of the participation do, however, reveal differences. The events arranged were attended by between 15 and 300 people. Attendance figures were highest where an election project was held in conjunction with other events, such as Eid celebrations. According to the majority of the reports, attendance figures for young people were generally low, and attendance figures for men were higher than for women. While most of the activists/respondents in this study are men, only two gender-based distinctions could be observed. In one organisation, the project was started by a women's organisation, while another organisation arranged events where women and men sit in separate rooms (EMI 2012).

All respondents believe the projects are important for political participation, but only one claims a connection between their project and participation in the 2011 local election. They are probably right. The awareness rising over time might be more important, in line with the third form of democratic mobilisation. Even if electoral participation in Oslo increased from 61 per cent in 2007 to 65 per cent in 2011 (Statistics Norway 2012b), this increase cannot be attributed to the projects because, among other reasons, they only cover a small proportion of those eligible to vote in the city. While some respondents stress that their projects are intended to mobilise electoral participation, others are more concerned with raising political awareness over time:

I have talked to a lot of people after the event and after the election, and many who had never previously voted did participate in the election. It takes time to convince people. It happens with time. Some people take things on board, while others who are a bit headstrong need more time, but they get something to think about.

While all organisations have in their statutes that they follow internal democratic procedures, this was not emphasised as decisive for democratic mobilisation. Many immigrant organisations have a strong membership of political refugees (including Afghanistan, Iraq, Kurdistan, Vietnam, Somalia, Sri Lanka) who should have knowledge about democracy, and engage in transnational politics that is not related to their country of settlement. They might not need schooling in democracy, but rather encouragement to participate in their country of settlement. A recurring argument is that if one is to live in Norway one must participate in order to have an influence in the majority society. Although several organisations have as their main purpose to maintain their transnational ties to their countries of origin, none of the organisations' applications or reports on the projects refer to these ties. Only one respondent refers to the political situation in their members' country of origin:

We have made comparisons with the areas from which we come and want to tell people how free we are in this country, and to explain that as long as we live in this country, we must participate. We have placed an emphasis on the social and personal aspects of participation while living in this country.

This might be understood within the framework of political opportunity structures, which give the activists scope for action because the activists can refer to opportunities for political participation and influence in the majority society. With respect to the goal of developing a political culture of democratic participation, 'Rapvalg' (Rap Election, a concert and competition aimed at promoting increased voter participation among the minority community in Norway) organised by OMOD (Organisation against Public Discrimination) is relevant. The initiators behind Rapvalg want to focus on making young people more socially aware through music. The website states that:

It is the power of words set to music that counts in Rapvalg. In this way we want young people to have a chance to express their views in a creative way and to have their message heard (Rapvalg 2011).

OMOD challenged young people to create music that dealt with social issues and submit them to Rapvalg. More than 68 young people between the ages of 13 and 29 submitted contributions. The songs were made available on the Rapvalg website for people to vote for them. The educational idea behind Rapvalg is schooling in democracy. The contributors are provided with training in how to win votes, while the voters are told that their votes decide who wins the competition. The idea is that this can be transferred to democratic participation.

Other respondents also underline the importance of the projects for developing a political culture over time. One respondent wants to see the big picture because this can both increase members' understanding of politics and mobilise electoral participation. Most of the respondents view electoral participation as one of several activities:

We get the chance to talk with representatives who are elected. They can show us the way and tell us what it's like being a politician. Things like that can be important to get across. They would be politically stimulating projects because they would get the ball rolling. Electoral participation is a result of multiple activities, and the foundation must be in place. The campaign

itself helped a bit, but we must keep pushing forward. We will work more systematically for the next election.

For some respondents the projects in the run-up to the local election in Oslo in 2011 were just one small step. Several activists stress the importance of showing the way. As one respondent says: 'It is important to get immigrants on your side if you want to mobilise political participation'. These activists see that the local political opportunity structures allow scope for political participation by persons with immigrant background, and use the immigrant organisations as an arena to develop a political culture of political participation.

6 Conclusion

This article confirms the conclusions reached in previous studies about connections between membership of immigrant organisations, the organisations' political opportunity structures and political participation (Bay et al. 2010; Morales & Giugni 2011). In addition, the article demonstrates how this comes about. It shows the usefulness of expanding on the findings of quantitative studies by examining more qualitatively what the immigrant organisations themselves do to encourage their members into political participation.

With the aim of analysing the interaction between local political opportunity structures and how immigrant organisations mobilise political participation among members, the article develops and applies a systematic classification comprising three forms of democratic mobilisation. The empirical analysis demonstrates how the combination of these three forms in practice can be understood within Oslo's political opportunity structures; the right to participate in local elections and the funding to undertake projects. These contextual conditions might be decisive for the findings that there are few differences in the reasoning of the different immigrant organisations, regardless of country background. All projects constitute a strong appeal for electoral participation, and political opportunity structures offer scope for action to resourceful activists. As the organisations receive financial support, it is easier for them to create an arena, which forms the basis of resourceful activists' training of members.

Due to this study's selection of immigrant organisations, one cannot draw conclusions about the situation in Oslo or Norway in general. The selected organisations are the most likely cases of all when it comes to democratic mobilisation. The findings show patterns of how the political opportunity structures give some immigrant organisations and activists within these organisations the possibility of democratic mobilisation.

The projects provide, however, little training in formal organisational activities, partly because recruitment mostly occurs via informal network structures. Although these projects do not necessarily work as schools of democracy in terms of organisational training, in line with the Nordic tradition of the voluntary organisation, such schooling can be an integral part of being a member of an organisation. The main objective for the projects is to mobilise participation in the local election by increasing knowledge of the political system and the available voting alternatives. This form of political information activity may appear to result in descriptive representation, whereby the immigrant organisations introduce an ethnic identity organisation to democratic structures. Such representation may have influenced the election result in the local election in Oslo in 2011.

The activists believe, however, these projects are a long-term investment in political education and part of the gradual development

of a culture of political participation. Over time, such a targeted policy towards immigrant organisations will lead to the organisations' own initiatives and projects encouraging their members into democratic mobilisation in the majority society. Such projects are important because they are adapted to the particular needs, language and cultural codes of the respective groups. If immigrant organisations are included in the political regime of integration within a nation state, they might have potential as agents of political integration. The pattern found among the organisations analysed in this study can form the basis for further research on how some organisations make use of political opportunities.

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