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Diversity in Germany's Political Life?  
Immigrants in City Councils



Karen Schönwälder / Christiane Kofri  
*Diversity in Germany's Political Life? Immigrants in City Councils*

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## Abstract

The incorporation of persons with a migration background into political life in Germany is an under-researched theme. This paper will help to fill this gap by analyzing the political incorporation of immigrants at the local level in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany's largest regional state; a *Bundesland* in which immigrants make up a large share of the population and a very considerable portion of the eligible voting population. Despite their weighty presence, immigrants come nowhere close to parity representation in the 29 big cities of NRW. Although Germany has come to see itself as a country of immigration, it is far from achieving the equal political incorporation of all of its citizens. Still, overall levels of immigrant representation are on the rise. Notwithstanding this overall pattern, there are strong variations both between different municipalities and between the different political parties. This paper offers a detailed picture of these phenomena and develops several hypotheses about the dynamics of political participation and political representation.

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Apart from the authors, other people have contributed to the research reported in this paper: THORSTEN WALBOTT, ANNE KÜHN, GÜLTEN KARA and UFUK OLGUN helped compile candidate lists and analyze newspapers. SÖREN PETERMANN provided indispensable advice on the design and analysis of our survey.



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## I. Introduction

Ten years after the introduction of a liberalized citizenship law, 20 years after the formation of a unified German state and 55 years after the formal beginnings of a labor-market induced mass immigration into (West) Germany, it seems appropriate to assess the political incorporation of Germany's immigrant population. Almost twenty per cent of Germany's population has some kind of migration background.<sup>1</sup> Although many are foreign nationals, a large share are Germans, and we should expect to find these Germans with a migration background represented among the political elites of the country.

To what extent is this actually the case? Have the immigrants of the postwar decades managed to gain access to positions of political influence or power? Have they joined political parties or founded their own, mobilized supporters and gained seats in leadership bodies and parliaments? This paper approaches these questions by way of a case study. It looks at the situation in Nordrhein-Westfalen, the biggest of Germany's sixteen regional states, and it focuses on the state's largest cities and their elected bodies, or *Stadträte*.<sup>2</sup>

No systematic investigation of the local political representation of immigrants in Germany has thus far been undertaken.<sup>3</sup> Immigrant political incorporation is altogether a little researched topic for Germany (but see Wüst, 2002; Wüst/Heinz, 2009; Schönwälder, 2010). This study aims to extend our empirical knowledge of the extent of political incorporation, specifically the parliamentary representation, of people with a migration background in Germany. Unlike many other studies, we are interested in immigrants and their descendants – and not in ethnic minority members or “visible” minorities. While the groups usually overlap in reality, the reasons for their potential under-representation systematically differ: for ethnic and “visible minorities” the effects of racism and discrimination are central, while for immigrants they

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1 In Germany this term usually refers to foreigners and to people who themselves have immigrated to Germany as well as the children of foreigners or immigrants. In this text, we will use the terms immigrant and person with a migration background interchangeably.

2 Municipalities are part of the *Länder*, the council or *Rat* is the highest executive body in a municipality. The councils are referred to as Parliaments here in order to highlight their decision-making and representative functions. They take important decisions in the areas of infrastructure as well as educational and cultural life. See Wollmann, 1999, on the status of the councils.

3 Roth, 2009, offers a general discussion of immigrant participation at the local level, but makes little mention of elected representatives.

(also) include all aspects of acculturation and socialization into a new political system and culture as well as the effects of transnational links. Although it is desirable to study both, it is necessary to distinguish between the effects of ethnic or racist discrimination and the effects of immigration.

Furthermore, this paper aims to contribute to a more precise evaluation of the relevance and peculiarities of the local level. Cities, and sometimes the local level more generally, are often ascribed a particular role in the process of immigrant incorporation. As is commonly claimed, “Integration takes place at the local level” (MGFFI, 2007: 25). In the academic debate, it has been suggested that political incorporation proceeds from the bottom up. With reference to the US, Michael Jones-Correa has argued that participation in the local context “serves as a gateway into participation in the larger national polity” (Jones-Correa, 2001: 2). This reiterates the widespread view of the local level as the “school of democracy” (Pähle, 2008: 249).

Indeed, it is plausible to assume that the local level may be more accessible to newcomers: The immediate context in which people live should be more familiar to them. Advisory bodies like the German Foreigners’ Councils (*Ausländerbeiräte*) may have provided the opportunity to gain some experience with the political system and its actors and thus they may have fostered the political socialization of these newcomers into a new framework. Furthermore, local representative bodies are less exclusive in their social composition than regional or federal ones (Holtkamp, 2008: 137)<sup>4</sup>, and competition for seats is less intense. Finally, cities are assumed to have a more liberal political culture than more rural regions, and the residential concentration of immigrants as well as the existence of stronger community structures may provide a more favourable background for their political representation in mainstream bodies. If these assumptions are correct, we should assume an earlier beginning and higher levels of representation in elected bodies at the local level as compared to the regional and federal levels.

This paper will outline how advanced immigrant representation in fact is at the local level. Before we turn to the composition of the city councils, section II of this paper will give some background information on the state of Nordrhein-Westfalen (NRW, North Rhine-Westfalia) and its electoral system. Section III will briefly discuss to what extent the representation of immigrants has become a topic of politi-

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4 However, council members are often employed in the civil service or are self-employed. A survey of 3557 council members in the state of Baden-Württemberg in 2008 revealed that about half had higher education certificates, almost one third were university educated, and only 3.3% described themselves as workers (Witt/ Krause/ Ritter, 2009).

cal campaigns and the public debate. In section IV we turn to an evaluation of the election results: we will analyze the overall level of immigrant representation and describe and discuss differences between cities as well as between political parties. In this context, we will also evaluate the role of independent lists (*Wählergruppen*) with large numbers of immigrant candidates. Furthermore, we will comment on the characteristics of the immigrant councilors, in particular their national origins.

Because immigrants are more concentrated in larger cities and for practical reasons our study focuses on cities with at least 100,000 inhabitants. We thus capture 8.1 of the state's 17.9 million inhabitants and 6.3 of 14.2 million potential voters (IT NRW 2009; IM NRW, 2009). Our study investigates the results of the local elections held on 30 August 2009 and compares them with the situation after the previous election held in 2004.

## II. The Setting: Population Structure and Electoral System in Nordrhein-Westfalen

Nordrhein-Westfalen prides itself on having a particularly vivid immigration history (MGFFI, 2007). Local academics claim a “pronounced integration culture” and a tradition of openness (Korte, 2009: 214-215). While these claims lack an empirical basis and may be deemed expressions of regional patriotism, the state does have an unquestionable history of major and diverse immigration.

Nordrhein-Westfalen is the most highly and densely populated regional state in Germany. In 2008 it inhabited 22% of Germany's total population. Twenty-nine of Germany's ca. 80 largest cities (cities with at least 100,000 inhabitants) are located in this state. No other German regional or city state comes even close to this order of magnitude in its urban structure. Köln is the largest city, with roughly one million inhabitants; Düsseldorf is the capital.

The Ruhr Region in Nordrhein-Westfalen was once a major industrial and mining hub of Germany. In the 1960s and 1970s hundreds of thousands of guest workers were recruited to work in the mines and industrial firms of this state, followed later by ethnic German and refugee immigration. Nowadays, 4.38 million or 24.5% of the almost 18 million inhabitants in Nordrhein-Westfalen have a migration background. As major immigration movements were fairly recent, 2.8 million are foreign-born.

About 2.4 million are German citizens (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2010: 40, 42, 117).<sup>5</sup> The share of individuals with a migration background in Nordrhein-Westfalen is slightly higher than the proportion in Germany as a whole, which is about 19%, but slightly lower than in the regional states of Baden-Württemberg and Hessen and in the city-states of Hamburg, Bremen and Berlin, where it ranges from 25 to 28 per cent (own calculations based on Statistisches Bundesamt, 2010: 116-117). Still, more than a quarter of Germany's immigrant population lives in Nordrhein-Westfalen, and in absolute figures it hosts the largest immigrant population of all German states.



**The regional state of  
Nordrhein-Westfalen in  
Germany**

- 17.9 million inhabitants
- 4.4 million inhabitants with a migration background

About one third of Germany's population with Turkish roots lives in Nordrhein-Westfalen. In Köln, Duisburg and Dortmund the share of Turks in the immigrant population is much higher than, for instance, in the south German cities of München and Stuttgart. The immigrant population is thus less diverse than in other German regions. Generally, however, ethnic concentrations are not as distinctive in Germany

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<sup>5</sup> Estimates of those with a migration background are usually based on the microcensus. NRW statistics give slightly differing numbers because definitions of migration background differ.

as in the US or Britain (Schönwälder/Söhn, 2009). In spite of their relative dominance, no more than about one fifth of those with a migration background have Turkish origins. Other major groups are ethnic German immigrants from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.<sup>6</sup> Like in Germany as a whole, immigrants originating in other European Union countries account for a large share (28%) of the immigrant population (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2010: 117).

The population with a migration background includes German and foreign citizens. A bit more than half of the immigrant population holds German citizenship. The increase of immigrants with German citizenship is a recent phenomenon and – apart from ethnic German immigration – largely a result of the reform of the German citizenship law in 1999 (Worbs, 2008; Green, 2006). Even though naturalization rates have remained moderate, the liberalized nationality law opened the doorway to full political participation for millions of foreigners. Of the naturalized foreigners in Nordrhein-Westfalen, close to 70,000 were naturalized before 1990, but almost 570,000 have become German since then, after the introduction of the first moderate reforms of naturalization law (MGFFI, 2008: 101). Indeed, the reformed law and the ensuing increase in the number of naturalized immigrants over the years, have secured the relevance of the immigrant electorate.

Of the total electorate, comprising 14.15 million, those with a migration background are estimated to number more than two million or 14 to 15%.<sup>7</sup> This relatively high share is partly due to the fact that, in local elections, the electorate includes residents with EU-citizenship. The latter were estimated to number 0.57 million potential voters. Furthermore, since 1999, voting starts at the age of 16 in Nordrhein-Westfalen. Due to the differing age distribution patterns of persons with and without a migration background, this peculiarity of the electoral system systematically augments the importance of the immigrant electorate as compared to those states that accord suffrage to their residents at the age of 18.

Table 1 shows the distribution of the voting age population in the cities analyzed. The inhabitants with a migration background make up from 7% to 26% of the total number of potential voters. Thus, in most cities the share ranges from 13% to 21%, including the cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants.<sup>8</sup> These figures illustrate that in big cities in particular, the potential voters with a migration background account

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6 Figures for this group are unreliable. Between 1989 and 2007, 656,000 Ethnic Germans (Aussiedler) immigrated to NRW (MGFFI, 2009: 6).

7 Data provided on request by IT NRW. These are estimates based on the microcensus 2008.

8 Microcensus estimates are only available for the district-free (*kreisfreie*) cities.

for a considerable share of the electorate and that the political parties can no longer afford to ignore this segment of the voting population.

The municipal election system in Nordrhein-Westfalen is a mixed system based on a combination of majority and proportional representation.<sup>9</sup> Voters are accorded a single vote. With this vote, they simultaneously vote for a direct candidate in their constituency and for the list of that candidate's party. Approximately one half of the councilors are elected directly in the electoral constituencies according to a majoritarian principle. The other half of the councilors is elected according to the proportion of a party's or a list's overall votes in the city from a city-wide list (the so-called *Reserveliste*). The number of seats on the council mainly depends on the size of the city.<sup>10</sup> In the cities investigated, city council size ranged from 54 to 96 seats in 2009.

In Nordrhein-Westfalen, municipal elections operate on the basis of closed lists. The placing or order of the candidates is thus decided upon by the parties and may not be influenced by voters. As emphasized by Pippa Norris: closed lists "allow party officials control over who gets elected and their subsequent political careers" (Norris, 2004: 12).<sup>11</sup> In section IV we will come back to the effects of institutional structures on the opportunities of immigrant candidates.

Thresholds are another important aspect of electoral systems. At the municipal level in Nordrhein-Westfalen, unlike in federal elections, there no longer exists a formal threshold (Korte, 2009: 22, 28).<sup>12</sup> The absence of thresholds systematically augments the electoral chances of smaller parties and independent local lists as they may be entitled to seats without having to receive a specified minimum share of votes. This may provide better opportunities for new formations, including immigrant lists, as less than one per cent of the vote can secure a seat on the council. In fact, several such independent lists (*Wählergruppen*) stood in the 2009 local elections.

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9 There exists no common municipal electoral system in Germany. Instead, the local electoral systems in place in the German states (*Länder*) all differ with respect to a variety of factors.

10 The size of a city council depends mainly on the number of residents in a given municipality. A council may collectively decide to reduce its own size (by either two, four or six seats). Seats may also be added to the council through the addition of "overhang" mandates. This is the case when a party receives a higher number of mandates than its party-list votes would entitle it to.

11 Closed lists exist at the municipal level in only a few German *Länder*: NRW, Saarland and Schleswig Holstein. In all other states, some system of preferential voting exists.

12 In 1999 the regional constitutional court ruled that the 5% hurdle inhibited the chances of smaller parties and groups making it unconstitutional.

**Table 1: Population and electorate in 29 cities in NRW**

City	Total population <sup>1</sup>	Electorate total <sup>2</sup>	Voting-age population with a migration background, Germans and EU-foreigners <sup>3</sup>	
			Total	in % of electorate
Aachen	259 269	187 618	35 439	19
Bergisch Gladbach	105 901	88 273	n/a	n/a
Bielefeld	323 615	251 782	51 275	20
Bochum	378 596	298 427	44 577	15
Bonn	317 949	233 485	39 660	17
Bottrop	117 756	95 039	10 190	11
Dortmund	584 412	449 606	71 310	16
Duisburg	494 048	368 259	54 047	15
Düsseldorf	584 217	460 691	84 756	18
Essen	579 759	459 246	59 497	13
Gelsenkirchen	262 063	198 087	28 761	15
Hagen	182 459	152 513	29 152	19
Hamm	182 459	136 063	22 469	17
Herne	166 924	124 526	18 236	15
Köln	995 420	764 878	142 207	19
Krefeld	236 333	181 360	37 719	21
Leverkusen	161 322	126 769	25 770	20
Moers	106 645	84 198	n/a	n/a
Mönchengladbach	258 848	207 856	28 398	14
Mülheim an der Ruhr	168 288	134 866	11 529	9
Münster	273 875	221 698	29 096	13
Neuss	151 254	118 278	n/a	n/a
Oberhausen	215 670	167 744	12 093	7
Paderborn	144 811	113 025	n/a	n/a
Recklinghausen	120 059	96 083	n/a	n/a
Remscheid	112 679	88 442	22 890	26
Siegen	104 419	81 796	n/a	n/a
Solingen	161 779	125 691	28 345	23
Wuppertal	353 308	262 653	57 191	22

Sources:

<sup>1</sup> IT.NRW 2009 (figures for 31 Dec. 2008)<sup>2</sup> IM NRW 2009<sup>3</sup> Microcensus estimates (2008) provided to the authors from IT.NRW. Microcensus estimates are only available for the district-free (*kreisfreie*) cities.

### III. The Local Elections of 2009: Media Coverage and Campaign

The nomination of immigrant candidates is a relatively new phenomenon in Germany. To what extent is this issue addressed in the public debate? Do the media contribute to spreading awareness about this phenomenon? Are these candidacies controversial? Is the election of immigrant councilors regarded as noteworthy?

As we found, local elections are not a major theme for the media. In the regional newspapers, other topics were given more prominence. The specific topics of immigrant participation and representation were rarely mentioned. Only *WDR Funkhaus Europa*, the former guest worker radio station, broadcasted a series of interviews and reports. In two daily newspapers we analyzed in the period of about four weeks before and after the election,<sup>13</sup> we found only a couple of relevant texts. With the exceptions listed below, it can be concluded that neither did the newspapers examined here to any relevant extent discuss the role of immigrant voters and candidates, nor were such candidates specifically introduced. This implies that we did not find any negative reporting.

The Turkish-language newspapers, however, adopted an active role in publicizing immigrant candidates and in trying to mobilize voters.<sup>14</sup> Although local elections in one of the German states were not treated as a major political theme, a couple of articles were published announcing candidates of Turkish origin. The Turkish-language papers reported exclusively about candidates of Turkish national background, while commonalities of immigrants in a more general sense were not evoked. Politicians of the two major parties CDU and SPD received particular attention. The papers appealed to readers to take part in the election, but refrained from explicit calls for an “ethnic vote”. No analytic text or commentary could be identified; the typical article was a report about campaign activities of candidates. Altogether we can conclude that the Turkish-language newspapers may have helped mobilize voters to take part in the election and raise their awareness of the existence of candidates of Turkish origin.

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13 We analyzed the Duisburg edition of the *Neue Ruhr Zeitung* and the Essen edition of the *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* from 18 August to 15 September 2009.

14 We analyzed the *Hürriyet* and *Sabah* in the months of August and September 2010, the monthly *Haber* in the same months as well as random issues of *Türkiye Gazetesi* and *Milliyet*.

### Municipal elections in Nordrhein-Westfalen: German press coverage

In the Duisburg Edition of the ‘Neue Ruhr Zeitung’, only a single article could be identified dealing explicitly with the candidacy of persons with a migration background for local election. The article reported on the existence of the ‘Duisburger Alternative Liste’, a local independent list, consisting almost solely of immigrants (“Die Jungen und die Zuwanderer”, 25 August 2009). Another article, reporting implicitly on the candidacy of persons with a migration background, introduced Yulia Shevchenko as one of the several new, young municipal councilors (4 Sept. 2009). Similarly, other Duisburg candidates were introduced without specifically alluding to their Turkish migration backgrounds („Die Grünen und die SPD“, 28 August 2009; „Mehr soziale Gerechtigkeit“, 22 August 2009).



In the Essen edition of the ‘Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung’, only two articles appeared addressing these issues. The first article reported that a “Muslim” list was standing in Bonn: „Muslimvereinigung tritt zur Wahl an“ (20 August 2009). The other dealt specifically with the political presence of persons with a migration background. Candidates with a migration background for the

municipal council in Essen were the theme of the article, which was accompanied by a photo. In this photo, these politically active immigrants who reportedly had not encountered distinctive obstacles to their candidacies or made any negative experiences during their election campaigns, were depicted („Wir sitzen alle im selben Boot“, 20 August 2009).<sup>15</sup> A commentary positively assessed the engagement of these individuals as being ‘an important step forward’ („Ein Schritt nach vorn“, 20 August 2009).

<sup>15</sup> In fact, only the candidates of Turkish background were introduced.

### Municipal elections in Nordrhein-Westfalen: Turkish press coverage

#### CDU Campaigning with Mayor Sauerland and Turkish-German Candidate

## NRW SEÇİME GİDİYOR



Selgün Çalışır, Belediye Başkanı Adolf Sauerland, Hamborn İlçe Belediye Meclisine aday Deniz Güner ve Duisburg Belediye Meclisine aday Rainer Enzweiler Türk kökenli seçmenlerden oy istediler (sağdan sağa).

## Seçmenlerden oy istediler

Hürriyet, 27 August 2009

Other newspapers, such as *Türkiye Gazetesi*, *Sabah*, *Milliyet*, the monthly periodical paper *Haber* also featured a few reports on the municipal elections in NRW. All articles that appeared were similar in nature. One article in *Sabah* (5 August 2009) with the headline: “Kumru wants votes” informed

that Turks were amongst the candidates nominated for the coming election. The accompanying photo, depicted campaigning activities of Sinan Kumru, a candidate in Essen. Similarly *Milliyet* reported on 17 August 2009 that for several different parties, Turkish candidates were standing for election. Another article featured Volkan Baran, a candidate standing in Dortmund, on a mosque visit where he announced the release of subsidies for youth work.

Although the Turkish language newspapers did feature the municipal elections in NRW, the reports were sporadic as well as scarce. In its ‘Europe’ section, *Hürriyet* reported on the municipal elections mainly in the week directly preceding election day. Between the 25th and the 28th of August, nine relevant articles appeared. Typically, either candidates stemming from Turkey were presented, or visits of politicians to mosques as well as their calls to vote were depicted.

#### SPD Campaigning with Turkish-German Candidate

## SPD adayı Volkan Baran sahaya indi

SPD'nin Dortmund belediye meclis adayı Volkan Baran, DİTİB Ayasofya Camii ziyaretiyle seçim kampanyasını başlattı



Dortmund milletvekili adayı Ulla Burchardt, belediye meclis adayı Michaela Wolff, SPD Dortmund Borsigplatz belediye meclis adayı Volkan Baran (ön sıra, soldan sağa), Dortmund SPD Genel Başkanı Franz-Josef Drabig ve Schornhorst Belediye Başkan adayı Rüdiger Schmidt (arka sıra), Ayasofya Camii ziyaretiyle seçimin startını verdiler.

Milliyet, 17 August 2009

For the political parties, election campaigns for municipal elections are very much a local affair (Gehne/Holtkamp, 2002). Financial resources are limited. The political parties concentrate their publicity in the cities on the election of the majors. Generally, it can be observed that all parties are now paying some attention to the immigrant vote. This is a fairly recent development. They field immigrant candidates, publish material in Turkish and Russian and on rare occasions, they advertise in Turkish-language papers. But altogether such activities remain extremely limited.

In Nordrhein-Westfalen the regional SPD organization produced a leaflet in Turkish and Russian and supported a meeting of local immigrant politicians (Interview Tsalastras).

The CDU left targeted activities to two networks, one with members of Turkish origin, and another “network for young Germans from Russia” that produced flyers and organised a small number of events during the campaign.<sup>16</sup>

Altogether, it seems safe to assume that specific activities targeting immigrant voters were in the hands of the local party organisations and/or the individual candidates who sometimes produced leaflets in immigrant languages.

Specific activities targeting immigrant voters by non-partisan initiatives are, to our knowledge, rare.<sup>17</sup> To date, the mobilization of the immigrant electorate in Germany has not become a major subject of non-partisan campaigning.

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16 „Aktivitäten des Netzwerks für junge Deutsche aus Russland in der CDU Nordrhein-Westfalen und des Deutsch-Türkischen Forums der CDU Nordrhein-Westfalen“, undated.

17 The regional organization of the foreigners' councils provided a sample text for motions appealing for larger numbers of immigrant candidates (see [www.dvv-vhs.de](http://www.dvv-vhs.de)). In 2004, the union of municipalities (*Städte- und Gemeindebund NRW*) distributed a CD in 21 EU languages encouraging EU citizens to participate in the local elections (StGB, 2004).



Campaign posters around the mosque in Duisburg.

Campaign advertisement in the Haber Newspaper for the mayoral candidate of the CDU in Duisburg.

**Муниципальные выборы 2009 года**

**Дорогие сограждане,**

**30.8.2009 года состоятся муниципальные выборы.**

При этом решается, на кого в нашем городе будет возложена ответственность в будущем.

Вы голосуете за то, какой бургомистр или какие партии в ближайшие годы будут решать судьбу города.

Право участия в выборах имеют все немцы и все граждане ЕС, которые

- достигли возраста 16 лет
- по меньшей мере в течении 16-ти дней до проведения выборов имеют постоянное место жительства в избирательном округе
- не исключены избирательным правом.

**NRW SPD**

**30 Ağustos'da CDU'yu seçin**

**Adolf Sauerland**  
Duisburg Büyükşehir Belediyesi için

**X JA**

Haber, August 2009

**HIER SIND WIR ZU HAUSE  
BİZ BURDA EVİMİZ DEYİZ  
ЗДЕСЬ МЫ ДОМА  
QUI SIAMO A CASA  
EM LI VIRA MALA XWE NE  
وطننا هنا**

**DIE LINKE.**

[www.dielinke-niedersachsen.de](http://www.dielinke-niedersachsen.de)

#### IV. Levels and Patterns of Representation

While the representation of the immigrant population was not a major theme of the campaign or the media, its actual development was marked by significant changes.

Looking at the overall results of the August 2009 election, we found that in 26 of the 29 cities at least one councilor with a migration background was elected. Altogether, we could identify 79 such immigrant councilors. This represents almost 4% of the total number of 1995 councilors elected.

We identified “councilors with a migration background” or “immigrant councilors” as both people who themselves immigrated to Germany as well as the children of immigrants. It is not possible to rely on any official information on the immigrant status of candidates or councilors, as such information is unavailable. However, the official lists of candidates do contain information about their date and place of birth, which allowed us to identify the primary immigrants among the candidates and councilors. We identified second-generation immigrants on the basis of names and additional information from websites, publications or the individuals themselves.<sup>18</sup>

Overall, there was an increase in 2009 in the number of immigrant councilors in the cities studied. As shown in Table 2, a total of 44 councilors with a migration background had been elected in 2004, a significantly lower number than the 79 councilors of the year 2009. This overall trend towards an increase was, however, not mirrored in all of the 29 cities analyzed. Eight cities reached the same level of immigrant representation in 2009 as in 2004, and three cities even experienced a decrease. The number of cities without any immigrant councilor sunk from eight to three. Still, it would be premature to assume a stable trend towards increased immigrant representation.

If we look at candidate-nominations we find an overall increase, although for the Green Party and the Liberals, the numbers only increased moderately. The CDU even put up fewer candidates than in 2004. The SPD clearly increased its efforts to nominate immigrant candidates, and the Left nominated more immigrants than the PDS in 2004. While in 2004 a total of 327 immigrants were nominated by the five

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<sup>18</sup> For the elected councilors this was usually done by directly asking the individuals concerned about their backgrounds. For all candidates this was not practicable. We excluded foreign-born individuals whose names suggested German origins (but not for those born in Austria and Switzerland as here names do not provide clues to the national origin of the individual). We base our analysis on those initially elected. During a legislative period, councilors step down and others take their place, possibly including immigrants. It is hardly practicable to trace such changes comprehensively.

**Table 2: Municipal councilors with a migration background (MB) in 29 cities in NRW**

City	2004			2009			Voting-age population with MB, Germans and EU-for-eigners in % of electorate	Trend 2004-2009
	Council seats	Councilors with MB	%	Council seats	Councilors with MB	%		
Aachen	58	1	2	74	2	3	19	+
Bergisch-Gladbach	66	0	0	62	1	2	n/a	+
Bielefeld	60	1	2	66	3	5	20	+
Bochum	76	3	4	82	4	5	15	+
Bonn	66	1	2	80	5	6	17	+
Bottrop	58	0	0	54	1	2	11	+
Dortmund	88	1	1	96	5	5	16	+
Duisburg	74	4	5	74	8	11	15	+
Düsseldorf	82	3	4	92	6	7	18	+
Essen	82	3	4	82	3	4	13	=
Gelsenkirchen	66	0	0	66	3	5	15	+
Hagen	58	0	0	58	0	0	19	=
Hamm	58	2	3	58	4	7	17	+
Herne	66	2	3	64	3	5	15	+
Köln	90	6	7	90	6	7	19	=
Krefeld	62	0	0	58	1	2	21	+
Leverkusen	66	2	3	68	1	1	20	-
Moers	54	2	4	56	4	7	n/a	+
Mönchengladbach	76	0	0	66	0	0	14	=
Mülheim an der Ruhr	52	1	2	58	1	2	9	=
Münster	74	1	1	80	3	4	13	+
Neuss	58	0	0	62	1	2	n/a	+
Oberhausen	58	0	0	62	3	5	7	+
Paderborn	58	1	2	68	1	1	n/a	=
Recklinghausen	58	1	2	54	1	2	n/a	=
Remscheid	58	1	2	54	1	2	26	=
Siegen	62	1	2	70	0	0	n/a	-
Solingen	68	5	7	72	6	8	23	+
Wuppertal	74	2	3	69	2	3	22	=
<b>Total</b>	<b>1926</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>+</b>

Source: Municipal councilors 2004 and 2009: MPI-IMCO Database.

major parties (those parties that are represented in the federal parliament) 383 immigrants were nominated in 2009 to stand for election. These figures correspond to a 17% increase. However, among the elected councilors the increase of 80 % was markedly larger. Apparently immigrant candidates were now placed higher on the lists or stood as direct candidates in safe constituencies.

In none of the municipalities analyzed did persons with a migration background come close to parity representation, or representation in correspondence to their proportion of the electorate.<sup>19</sup> Duisburg is the city where the share of immigrant councilors at 11% comes closest to the share of those with a migration background in the voting-age population (15%). For all cities analyzed, the share of immigrants among the total number of councilors is 4%, while in the electorate of the state the share of EU-citizens and Germans with a migration background is estimated at 14 to 15%. The big cities in Nordrhein-Westfalen are still far from parity representation.

**Table 3: Immigrant candidates nominated per political party in 29 cities in NRW**

Year	CDU	SPD	Greens	FDP	PDS/ Left	Total
2004	55	66	67	41	98	327
%	13	16	16	10	24	79
2009	46	92	72	45	128	383
%	8	17	13	8	23	69

Source: MPI-IMCO Database

### *Differences between cities*

There are strong variations in the level of political representation attained by immigrants in the different cities. As already mentioned, three cities have no immigrant councilor at all. A number of cities have only a single councilor with a migration background, the highest figure is eight.

There is no readily available explanation for such differences. Neither the size of the city, nor the share of the immigrant population can solely explain them. In the cities where those with a migration background account for 20% or more of the elec-

<sup>19</sup> There are different ways of measuring parity representation. Some authors take the proportion of immigrants in the population as the standard, i.e. including foreign citizens.

torate (Bielefeld, Krefeld, Leverkusen, Solingen, Wuppertal, Remscheid), the number of immigrant councilors is 3, 1, 1, 6, 2 and 1 respectively. The share of the Turkish population and more generally the presence of relatively large national groups in the immigrant population are possible factors, but we lack information about the breakdown of those with migration background according to national origins. If we take the population of foreign citizenship as an indicator, we find cities with very large shares of Turks having low immigrant representation (Gelsenkirchen, Herne, Bottrop)<sup>20</sup> as well as others with higher representation levels. The strength of left-of-centre parties also does not provide an apparent explanation.<sup>21</sup>

Political factors may account for differences. Duisburg is the city that performs best in terms of immigrant representation. A recent city-wide debate about a new mosque, which was conducted in a fairly harmonious manner, may have contributed to this development by raising awareness for immigrant issues, by mobilizing the immigrant population itself and/or by bringing elites of the different population groups in touch with each other. Duisburg is also the German city with the highest share of Turks. Group size may also contribute to mobilization. An increased sensitivity to immigrant participation may also exist in Solingen, which was the site of a deadly arson attack in 1993. This event acquired symbolic meaning as representing the threats of racism beyond the city borders. This led to intensified integration efforts. The city performs relatively well with a 8% share of immigrant councilors. Essen, often praised for its exemplary integration policy (Ireland, 2004: 63-74; Krummacher/Kulbach, 2009: 386), has three immigrants among 82 councilors (4%), which is not particularly poor, but also not particularly impressive. Future research will have to clarify the structural and political conditions, or combination of such conditions, interacting together to foster immigrant political careers.<sup>22</sup>

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20 In all three cities, the Turkish nationals account for more than half of the foreign population. This is also the case in Duisburg and Hamm, where representation levels are relatively high, MGFFI, 2009 (data for 31 Dec. 2007).

21 There are relatively well-performing cities where the CDU is the strongest party (Bonn, Düsseldorf, Solingen) and where Green Party and The Left hardly or not at all contribute to immigrant representation levels (Bonn, Düsseldorf, Köln, Moers).

22 Christiane Kofri, a doctoral candidate at the MPI, is currently researching the political incorporation of persons with a migration background at the local level in Germany. Her dissertation will explain existing variations in levels of immigrant incorporation in municipal councils by examining differences across cities with respect to such aspects as: the characteristics of the immigrant population, the existing political and institutional framework, cultural factors, approach to integration and economic strength.

*And differences between parties*

The political parties contributed very unevenly to immigrant representation. With its total of 30 immigrant councilors, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) was responsible for bringing in the largest number of this group. This result is relativized, however, when set in relation to the total number of mandates secured by that party, which was 633. Of the total number of SPD councilors, immigrant councilors only make up 5%. The SPD immigrant councilors were successful in 16 of the total 29 cities. In a number of cities, this party was able to secure success for several candidates with a migration background; three were elected in Duisburg, and four in Köln and Moers respectively. In contrast, several large SPD factions include no immigrants at all, e.g. the 32-member-strong Bochum faction, the 34-member faction in Gelsenkirchen and the 31-member faction in Essen. In Dortmund there is one immigrant among 37 Social Democratic councilors. These are four cities in the traditional industrial heartland of the Ruhr, all with significant immigrant populations. Nevertheless, compared with the situation in 2004, it is noticeable that the SPD is making efforts to diversify its social basis. Given the strong working class background of the immigrant population and its large trade union membership, the Social Democrats in particular should be expected to find resonance among the immigrants. Surveys conducted among those of Turkish background consistently show high rates of support for the SPD (Sauer, 2009: 170).<sup>23</sup> However, solidified internal structures and established claims to positions of influence were and still are the most likely obstacles to an inclusion of new groups within this party. It seems to have taken the shock of repeated defeats in regional and local elections in Nordrhein-Westfalen to spur the targeted mobilization of immigrants. Thus the SPD in Duisburg and in Cologne, where the position of mayor had been lost to the conservatives in the preceding years, now brought three and four immigrants into the city councils.

The second-largest number of immigrant representatives was brought into the councils by a relatively new party, The Left. Of its 99 councilors in the 29 cities, 15 have a migration background. From the total, of 79 immigrant councilors, 19% originate from this party. Holding seats in 13 different city councils, they are relatively widely distributed. As depicted in Graph 1, The Left (*Die Linke*), a party that stood for the first time in this form, contributed significantly to the increase of immigrant representation from 2004 to 2009. Looking at the candidates in Nordrhein-Westfalen

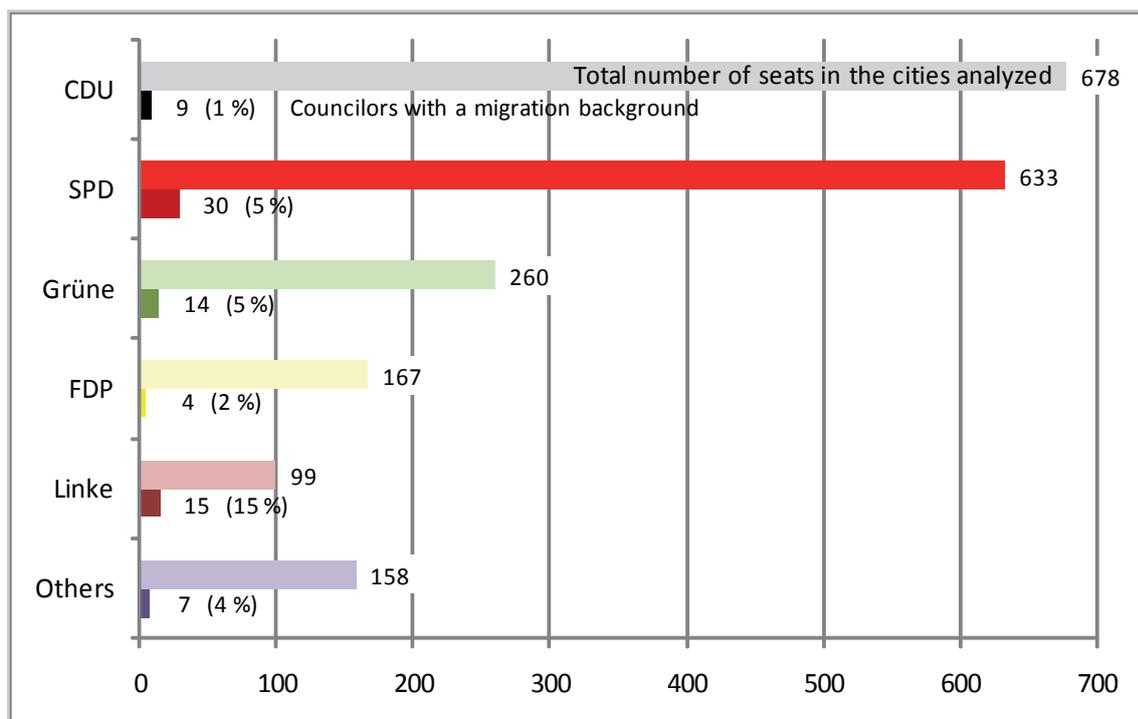
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23 In a survey conducted among Turks (Turkish and German nationals) in NRW in June 2009 by the Zentrum für Türkeistudien, 40% expressed a preference for the SPD and only 4% for the CDU while 19% declared that they would vote for the Green Party.

cities, it is remarkable that the Left was able to field as many as 128 immigrants. Obviously, this new socialist party is particularly open to immigrant politicians and possibly also particularly attractive for some groups of left-wing immigrants. Kurds, for instance, are believed to be strongly represented here. Founded in June 2007, as a merger of the East German socialist PDS and West German formations, The Left attracted, amongst others, former Social Democrats who turned away from their party in protest against a social welfare policy perceived to be deeply unjust (Schoen/Falter, 2005). Such motives possibly apply to immigrants in particular. Nordrhein-Westfalen was one key basis for the emergence of the WASG (in 2005) that later became part of The Left.

The Green Party, which is a major conduit of immigrant representation on the regional and federal levels, secured 14 seats for immigrants in the big cities of Nordrhein-Westfalen. Nine of the 29 Green Party factions have immigrant members and 5% of all seats secured by the party as a whole are held by councilors with a migration background. This proportion is the second highest of the five major parties. However, a lack of immigrant representation is striking in cities with strong Green Party factions,

**Graph 1: Party affiliation of municipal councilors in 29 cities in NRW, 2009**



Source: MPI-IMCO Database

such as Köln and Düsseldorf, where the party managed to secure a total of 20 and 14 seats respectively, but did not bring in a single immigrant councilor. Between 2004 and 2009 the Greens only slightly increased the pool of immigrant candidates who stood in the cities analyzed. In order to explain this relatively disappointing picture, more detailed local studies are required. Possibly, the structure of the immigrant population in Nordrhein-Westfalen is less compatible with the libertarian and ecological profile of the Green Party than in other regions.

The conservatives and the fairly conservative German liberals also have immigrant councilors in Nordrhein-Westfalen. Of the total 79 immigrant councilors, only nine originate from the Christian Democratic Party (CDU). This result is especially meager when one considers this figure in relation to the total number of mandates secured by this party. In the cities analyzed, the CDU came out as the strongest party with a total of 678 seats. Of these, only 1% went to candidates of immigrant origin.

The Free Democratic Party (FDP) was almost as unsuccessful as the CDU with respect to elected immigrant candidates. In three cities, only four immigrant councilors were able to secure council seats. This makes up only 2% of the total number of FDP seats (167), and only 5% of the total number of immigrant councilors.

The reasons for this minimal representation of immigrants are different for the two parties. The FDP has supported relatively liberal immigration policies; here the social profile of the party that is seen as representing the interests of the wealthier professionals is probably crucial. For the Christian Democrats their religious profile and their traditionally staunch restrictive course with regard to immigration, immigrant rights and citizenship, may limit their ability to attract members from the immigrant population. On the other hand, the Ethnic German Immigrant population is usually regarded as conservative in their outlooks. This is not yet reflected in the composition of CDU councilors. However, the number of CDU-candidates with a migration background, albeit low, suggests that the supply of such candidates and the ability of the Christian Conservatives to attract an immigrant following are not the main bottleneck.<sup>24</sup> Rather, the low level of immigrant representation in this party indicates that the inner-party barriers may be more decisive.

Apart from the standard “pathway to power” through the main political parties, several immigrants secured council seats through independent lists. Before the election, several lists, deemed “immigrant” or even “Muslim” attracted considerable

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24 It could of course be the case that people are prepared to stand as candidates but do not want to become councilors. To date, there is no empirical knowledge on this.

media attention (see e.g. *Zeit Online* 28 August 2009 “Türkischstämmige Kölner wollen mitmischen”; *Der Tagesspiegel* 31 August 2009 “Muslimenvereinigung holt Sitz in NRW”). While the candidature of independent groups is pretty common in



German cities, the organization of immigrants in such lists raised worries about their potential non-integration into the political mainstream. None of these groups indicated in their names that they wished to be seen as immigrant or ethnic groups. In four of our 29 cities, individuals with a migration background were elected for *Wählergruppen*. In Gelsenkirchen two of the three elected immigrant councilors belong to the BI Gelsenkirchen; in Bonn, two of the five immigrant councilors represent the *Bündnis für Frieden und Fairness (BFF)*.<sup>25</sup> Both lists fielded mainly candidates with a migration background. Two other immigrant councilors were elected for groups not marked by a significant immigrant presence or profile (*SOZIAL* in

Bochum, *Unabhängige Wählergemeinschaft für Düsseldorf (Freie Wähler)*). A number of other groups, also fielding mainly immigrant candidates, were unsuccessful (*ABI Köln*, *DAL Duisburg*, *IWI Recklinghausen*, *BUND Bochum*). In addition to these lists, there were also mixed lists fielding many immigrant candidates (*Europäische Liste Aachen*, *Essen steht auf*). While the candidature of immigrants in independent groups does not seem to be a mass phenomenon, the existence of such groups indicates the presence of a pool of activists with immigrant backgrounds, who do not feel represented by the established parties. In Gelsenkirchen, 32 candidates with a migration background stood for the *BIG*, and only 11 for the five major parties. In Bonn, the *BFF* fielded 31 candidates with a migration background, the five main parties, on the other hand, only nominated 10. In these two cities the new groups were successful. In Recklinghausen, 26 of the 32 immigrant candidates stood for the

25 The leader of the BFF, Haluk Yildiz, in 2010 stood for the regional parliament with a new “*Bündnis für Innovation und Gerechtigkeit*”, see [www.derwesten.de](http://www.derwesten.de), 28 April 2010.

*Interkulturelle Wählerinitiative IWI*. From 2004 to 2009 the number of independent lists largely formed by immigrants clearly increased. It will be interesting to see whether in future the major political parties will co-opt this pool of activists, or whether the independent immigrant lists will become an established feature of local political life with an increased share of voters. Of these lists, the BIG in Gelsenkirchen scored the highest share of the vote with 3.7% in 2009. Other “immigrant” lists attracted only a few hundred votes (139 for ABI Köln, 428 for IWI Recklinghausen). Apparently, not many voters believe that they should be represented by specific immigrant lists. As yet, these lists are mainly remarkable because of the number of activists they mobilize as candidates, and not the number of voters they attract.

#### *Institutional frameworks and interactions between parties, candidates and voters*

Significant attention in electoral research has been devoted to the influence of institutional features of the electoral system on the chances of underprivileged groups. With regard to women's representation, it is an established finding that proportional representation systems, where women stand on a list of candidates, are more conducive to equal representation than majoritarian systems, where women have to secure nomination and election as the single party candidate in a constituency.

This is assumed to be the case because party leaderships may be interested in compiling a list of candidates that represents the diversity of the population and thus be prepared or even actively motivated to place women – or immigrants – on these lists (Paxton et al., 2007: 269). For local party organizations nominating only a single candidate per constituency, there is no strong incentive to contribute to an overall balancing of the party ticket in order to represent the diversity of the electorate (Norris, 2006: 205). Local party organizations want to field candidates for the constituency who can win the seat. If they assume a negative voter response to a female or immigrant candidate, they may refrain from nominating such candidates. However, as has been argued for the United States, “when underrepresented groups are highly concentrated and compose moderate portions of the population”, they can be successful in a system based on single constituency representatives (Trounstine/Valdini, 2008). Here, numbers count and large mobilized groups can succeed in getting their candidate nominated and elected.

To what extent do such general findings and considerations apply to the German case and to local elections in Nordrhein-Westfalen?

German electoral systems usually mix PR and majoritarian elements, so that we cannot assume to find the “pure” logics of either of the two systems (Hennl/Kaiser, 2008: 322). Direct candidates in a constituency are nominated by the local party membership. As regards the placement of candidates on the party list, it is generally assumed that at least in the CDU and the SPD this is negotiated in informal leadership circles at the city level before the formal vote (Holtkamp, 2007: 154). In both cases, the higher party leadership bodies seem reluctant to intervene i.e. in favor of a balanced representation of particular groups because this would be met with resistance (Woyke, 2005: 107-108). Thus the regional steering committee of the SPD in Nordrhein-Westfalen (*Landesvorstand*) points out that it is in the hands of the local organisations whether they deliberately search for candidates with a migration background (e-mail 13 July 2009). The CDU similarly refers to the responsibility of the district organisations (*Kreisverbände*). The representation of ‘all relevant social groups’ is described as desirable but in the hands of the party’s basis (mail 19 August 2009). Still, at the city level, the party leaderships might try and compile a list of candidates representing the diversity of the population. Indeed, in Duisburg, the leadership of the SPD (*Unterbezirksvorstand*), before the 2009 election pushed for a nomination of immigrants (and young people) on the party list in order to show that ‘we do not only talk about migrants, we also engage them’ (Interview SPD Duisburg). And yet, given that successful candidates usually compete both in a constituency and on the list, the constituency organisations play a key role. In our analysis we found that of 79 elected immigrant councilors only seven did *not* stand in a constituency. This means that anyone who wants to become a councilor is well advised to seek nomination as a constituency candidate – and that, without this nomination, it is difficult to get an attractive place on a party list.

Sometimes a party may struggle to find enough candidates, but in larger cities it is more likely that candidatures are contested. Local party organizations in Germany have been shown to nominate candidates that have earned their nomination through long-term party engagement (Holtkamp, 2007). Indeed, the parties may place less emphasis on the personal ability of candidates to attract support when they can assume that the votes are in the first place shed for the party. As has been explained above, voters in local elections in Nordrhein-Westfalen have a single vote that goes to a constituency representative and his or her party at the same time. This may reduce fears that voters could react negatively to an immigrant candidate. If the party is

assumed to win the votes, calculations with regard to interactions between the individual candidate and the voters become less important.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, we should distinguish between mechanisms working in large catch-all parties (*Volksparteien*) on the one hand, and the ones functioning in smaller parties, on the other. Constituency seats are overwhelmingly won by the CDU and the SPD. In the smaller parties, the city-wide lists are decisive. Here, constituency nominations may be less contested and the city-wide party structures should be assumed to have more influence on the composition of the council faction.

In our NRW cities, all immigrant councilors who were directly elected represent the two biggest parties. With two exceptions, the nine CDU immigrant councilors were elected directly. Here, it is more likely for an immigrant councilor to be a constituency representative than for other councilors. This may indicate that city-wide party organizations are not (or rarely) willing to give their factions a more diverse appearance by ensuring the election of immigrant candidates via their lists.

Among SPD immigrant councilors, 16 of 30 were elected in the constituency which roughly equals the balance for all councilors (IM NRW, 2009: 122).<sup>27</sup> Thus we find no indication here that it is more difficult for immigrants to get elected directly. Of the few directly elected Green Party councilors none has a migration background.<sup>28</sup>

Altogether about one third of immigrant councilors secured seats as directly elected constituency representatives, while the majority was elected via party lists. This predominance of the list representatives reflects the relative importance of smaller parties.

As the necessary statistics are unavailable<sup>29</sup>, we cannot tell whether the parties tend to field immigrant candidates in areas with a significant immigrant electorate or whether constituencies won by immigrant candidates are generally areas with high shares of immigrant voters. Due to low levels of immigrant concentration, it is hardly conceivable that candidates can win a council seat based on the immigrant vote alone. In German cities, it is rare that a district (*Stadtteil*) has more than 50% immigrants.

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26 Based on a large-scale survey in 1999, Bovermann (2002: 154, 144) concludes that party orientations are by far the strongest influence on local voting behavior in NRW. Most voters do not know individual candidates.

27 Based on 22 district free cities, the share of directly elected councilors is 67 and 69% for CDU and SPD, see IM NRW, 2009.

28 In 22 district free cities the Green Party won 18 constituency seats, 11 of them in Köln.

29 No figures for those with a migration background are available for constituencies. Only some cities have compiled estimates for their districts. Figures differ slightly from those based on the microcensus as the cities use their population registers.

In Cologne, eleven of the 86 districts (Stadtteile) have an immigrant share of the population that exceeds 50% (data for 2007, Stadt Köln, 2009). At the same time, only about half of the immigrant population holds German citizenship, which means that probably no constituency in Cologne has an electorate in which immigrants and EU-citizens form the majority.<sup>30</sup> Still, the additional mobilization of immigrant voters can be decisive for a candidate's success. The following examples illustrate that, by fielding immigrant candidates, parties can mobilize additional votes. But they also indicate that this is not necessarily the case and that the results for immigrant candidates are not uniform.

In Köln where the Social Democrats lost in all but six of the 45 constituencies in the 2009 local elections, they secured a slightly higher share of the vote in two of the three districts won by immigrant councilors. With a 3.9% improvement, Malik Karaman (a Turkish-born candidate) had the highest gain. Susana dos Santos, the daughter of Portuguese immigrants, represents the constituency with the highest SPD share of all 45 Cologne constituencies (42%). Both constituencies have large immigrant populations (Stadt Köln, 2008, 2009).

In Duisburg, a city where about 30% of the population has a migration background, one of the eight immigrant councilors was elected directly. Gürsel Dogan (CDU) won the Dellviertel-West/Hochfeld-Nord constituency. In 2004, this constituency had been won by the SPD. In Hochfeld, 66% of the population have a migration background, in the Dellviertel 42% (including foreigners, the areas are not identical with the constituency).<sup>31</sup> The CDU increased its result by 4.7%, while it lost 2.5% in the city overall, and in only three of 37 constituencies the CDU-share increased (Stadt Duisburg, 2009). This exceptional result for Dogan suggests a mobilization of additional voters from the immigrant population by the new candidate.

In three of the four constituencies in Moers, on the other hand, where immigrant councilors were elected for the SPD,<sup>32</sup> the losses were higher (3.6%, 5.4% and 6.3%) than in the city overall (-2.7%), although the SPD share in these constituencies was above its city result.

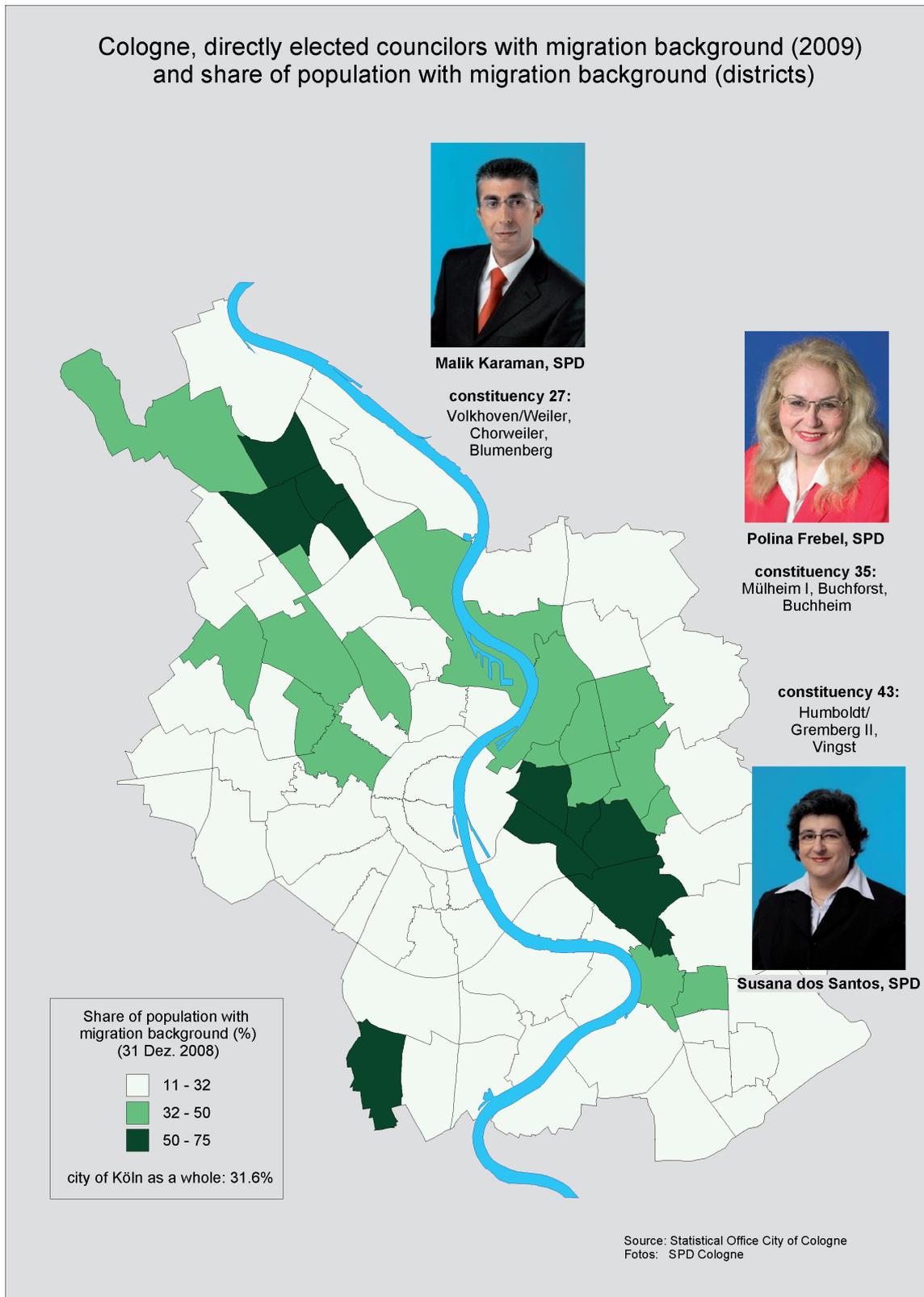
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30 Thus in one constituency in northern Cologne (no. 27) that combines three districts with extremely high immigrant shares, Germans with a migration background and EU-citizens account for 42% of the population (own calculation based on Stadt Köln, 2009). The definition of migration background used here is not identical with that of the *Statistisches Bundesamt*. The city has not published figures for constituencies and voters.

31 Stadt Duisburg, *Einwohner mit Migrationshintergrund 2008*, table provided on request, not dated.

32 All elected SPD councilors won direct seats.

### Cologne, directly elected councilors with migration background (2009) and share of population with migration background (districts)



As we do not have detailed population breakdowns for constituencies, it is impossible to offer precise evaluations of links between the availability of immigrant candidates and the voting behavior of the immigrant population. For the US, Matt Baretto (2007: 64) has argued that “ethnic candidates increase the level of psychological engagement and interest in the election among ethnic voters”. Do immigrants in Germany identify with immigrants or Italians with Italians, Poles with Poles etc., i.e. to what extent is group consciousness on the basis of migration background or ethnic background a factor in elections? In a survey conducted in Nordrhein-Westfalen immediately before the 2009 local elections, we asked prospective voters with a migration background whether they would prefer to vote, in the coming local elections, for a candidate who also had a migration background.<sup>33</sup> More than 40% of the respondents said yes. But were voters also aware of the existence of such candidates? Asked about the existence of immigrant candidates in their city, 41% said yes, they believed that such candidates existed. This suggests that, in order to exploit the mobilizing potential of immigrant candidates, their existence needs to become more widely known; in fact, such candidates existed in all of the sampled cities.

There is further evidence pointing at an as yet limited mobilization of the immigrant population within Germany's political system. Forty-seven % of those with a migration background declared that no party in their city represented their political views. Of those who felt represented, 36% mentioned the SPD, 23% the CDU, 20% Green Party, 7% FDP and 5% The Left.<sup>34</sup> The most striking detail here is the fact that about half of the immigrant respondents could not name any political party as representing their political views. It is not possible to evaluate the extent to which this limited identification is caused by the low immigrant representation, but it is plausible that a link does exist.

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33 The representative survey was conducted in August 2009 in four cities for the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity. It comprised 1026 interviews; half of the respondents were German citizens of immigrant background and EU-citizens, half were non-immigrant Germans.

34 As exit polls in Germany in general do not distinguish according to migration background, our knowledge of voting preferences among immigrants is extremely limited. The city of Dortmund, however, on election day conducted a poll with 2000 participants in which EU-citizens and naturalized Germans were identified. It provides some evidence on party preferences, but not on reactions to immigrant candidacies. According to this study, the immigrant voters in Dortmund had to a greater extent voted for the SPD (43 versus 38% achieved in the election) and The Left (10 versus 5.5%) than other voters, but the CDU-vote was – at more than 25% – only slightly below the actual election result (28.7%) (Stadt Dortmund, 2009: 22, 27).

### *The immigrant councilors*

Who are the elected councilors? As seen in Table 4, the category of elected councilors with a migration background is characterized by the preponderance of councilors stemming from Turkey.

More than 40 of the total number of elected immigrant councilors have a Turkish background. Indeed, the group is the largest of all national-origin groups in Nordrhein-Westfalen, however, as pointed out above, those of Turkish background account for only about one fifth of the immigrant population and an even smaller proportion of the immigrant electorate.

Four councilors have an Italian and four a Greek background, Italy and Greece being amongst the main countries from which guest workers originated.

With 21 councilors, those with a current-EU-member-state background are well represented. Still, given their privileged legal position, one might have expected an “over-representation” compared with their share of the immigrant electorate (the EU-nationals account for about one quarter, in addition there are German nationals with a background in one of the other EU-states). Apparently the political parties do not specifically target EU-foreigners. For Nordrhein-Westfalen it is unknown to what extent these individuals participated in the election.

Only eight councilors have east European backgrounds – in spite of the huge number of *Aussiedler*.<sup>35</sup> The recent nature of this immigration may serve to explain this phenomenon, but it is also possible that Ethnic German Immigrants, socialized in the “socialist” dictatorships of Eastern Europe, are reluctant to actively engage in Germany’s political life.

Nine councilors have non-European origins. This is lower than their share of the immigrant population; parity representation would be reached with 13 councilors from this group.<sup>36</sup> As this group is heterogeneous, it would be unwise to offer one general explanation: the rate of naturalizations and discrimination play a part. Also, immigration processes are often fairly recent, and the small size of the different national-origin groups may also have an impact.

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35 Here, however, our analysis may have overlooked councilors born in Germany. Names in these cases often do not hint at an immigration background, and ethnic German immigrants often do not themselves identify as immigrants.

36 According to the microcensus 2009, about 700.000 NRW-inhabitants – of 4.3 million with an identifiable migration background – originated in America, Africa and Asia (16%). This includes foreign nationals.

**Table 4: National background of immigrant councilors in 29 cities in NRW, 2009**

National background	Number of councilors
<b>Turkey</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Other 'Guest Worker' States</b>	<b>13</b>
Greece	4
Italy	4
former Yugoslavia	3
Spain	1
Portugal	1
<b>Eastern Europe</b>	<b>8</b>
Poland	3
former Soviet Union	2
Bulgaria	2
former Czechoslovakia	1
<b>Other European States</b>	<b>6</b>
Austria	2
Netherlands	2
Albania	1
United Kingdom	1
<b>Asia</b>	<b>4</b>
Iran	3
India	1
<b>Latin America</b>	<b>3</b>
Argentina	1
Columbia	1
Peru	1
<b>Africa</b>	<b>2</b>
Congo	1
Morocco	1

Source: MPI-IMCO Database

The most striking aspect regarding the national backgrounds of the immigrant councilors is the large share of those with a Turkish background. This is not a phenomenon specific to Nordrhein-Westfalen or to local elections<sup>37</sup>, although on the level

37 In Denmark as well, the Turks are particularly well represented. In 2001 about half of the ethnic minority representatives (note: not of all immigrants) in local councils had a Turkish background (Togebly, 2008: 336). In the Netherlands, Michon (2010) also found high numbers of Turks among elected representatives.

of state parliaments, for instance, the over-representation of those of Turkish background is not quite as pronounced. Empirically grounded explanations do not yet exist. Hypothetically four explanatory factors may be advanced:

First, those of Turkish background have the strongest community structures. As for instance researchers in Amsterdam have argued (Tillie, 2004; Vermeulen/Berger, 2008), ethnic organizations represent social capital that can foster an increased participation in the institutions and political processes of the immigration country. Further, regarding Turks the means for a targeted mobilization exist. While Turkish-language newspapers are available across Germany and believed to be widely read, of other immigrant languages only Russian is represented on a considerable scale (Geißler/Pöttker, 2005).

The Turks in Germany are also a highly politicized group, and a pool of potential activists in German politics may be more readily available than in other groups.

Additionally, the disadvantaged position of the Turkish population and the experience of discrimination may provide a stronger motivation to become active than among better-placed immigrant groups. Also, it has been suggested, that for those for whom other career opportunities are difficult to attain, politics is more attractive than to others who can also choose to pursue a, say, business career (Togebly, 2008: 340; Lee, 2008).

Finally, the parties may be particularly interested in fielding Turkish candidates because they believe that this group has a strong group consciousness and that for Turkish-Germans identification with “one of their own kind” is a relevant factor in their voting decisions. They may also overestimate the share of Turkish-origin voters, as the public debate, to a great extent, focuses on Turkish immigrants.

Astonishing is not only the high proportion amongst the political elite with a migration background, of Germans stemming from Turkey. The group of politically active immigrants is also made up of a surprisingly high share of women. In Nordrhein-Westfalen, 37 of the total 79 immigrant councilors in 2009 were women. This is higher than the percentage of women amongst the total number of councilors.<sup>38</sup> For the Netherlands, Laure Michon (2010) has made similar observations. Here 35% of the immigrant local councilors are women, compared with 26% of all councilors. For Norway it has been suggested that the selection policies of the parties are responsible

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<sup>38</sup> This proportion ranges from 32% to 36% for cities with more than 100 000 residents (DJI, 2005: 373, 376).

for a relatively high share of women among immigrant councilors (Bergh/Bjorklund, 2010: 135).

The diversification of the group of immigrant councilors according to generation is also noteworthy. 56, or more than two thirds of the immigrant councilors were born in countries other than Germany. This roughly represents the share of the foreign born in the migrant population. It is remarkable that political participation on the level of local politics does not seem to require an adjustment process over generations.<sup>39</sup> As similar observations have been made in the Netherlands and France (Michon, 2011: 90), we may have to rethink assumptions about processes of transnational political socialization.

## V. Conclusions

Overall, we can conclude that the immigrant presence in Germany's political life – in this case the local councils – is becoming an issue. The number of local politicians with a migration background is increasing. In the larger cities of Nordrhein-Westfalen, the level of immigrant representation in the councils is about 4% of the available seats. This is on a par with England in 2006, where a 4.1% share of ethnic minority councilors was found (House of Commons Library, 2008: 8). However, we have to keep in mind that in Germany we only looked at the big cities where representation levels may be higher than in small towns. Furthermore, the concept of “immigrant” used in our study is not identical with the British concept of “ethnic minority”. Figures for first and second generation immigrants in England are unavailable. Thus the comparison probably sheds a misleadingly positive light on the German situation.

In the Netherlands, an analysis for the year 2006 found 302 councilors of foreign origin, equaling 3% of all municipal councilors (Michon/Tillie/van Helsum, 2007). Akin to our study, “migrant councilors” are first and second-generation immigrants. Still, the results are not directly comparable, as the Dutch study includes all municipalities, and not only the large ones.

Immigrant representation has increased from 2004 to 2009, confirming the expected effect of the citizenship reform and the growth of an immigrant population

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<sup>39</sup> We may however overlook some second-generation immigrants as they are more difficult to identify.

with German citizenship and voting rights. As our analysis only accounted for two electoral periods, and found the levels of immigrant representation to be highly variable across the cities selected, the stableness of this trend is uncertain. Furthermore, we should also be aware that German cities are still far away from a level of representation that equals the size of the immigrant population.

Compared with the regional (2.1% in 2009) and national levels (3.2%)<sup>40</sup>, the immigrant share of seats in the local parliaments is slightly higher. These differences, however, do not justify the conclusion that the political incorporation of immigrants proceeds more rapidly at the local level. In fact, given the higher share of immigrants amongst the electorate in the big cities, as well as the additional immigrant electorate formed by EU-citizens in local elections, such divergences are to be expected (the size of the immigrant electorate in national elections has been estimated at 9% whereas it ranges between seven and 26% in the cities analyzed here).

The considerable differences we found between the 29 cities suggest that local conditions form part of the factors that drive immigrant representation. No single socio-demographic factor seems to solely explain these differences. Qualitative studies will have to explore the specific interactions of structural conditions, social formations (community structures) and politics that in all likelihood lead to different degrees of mobilization and of openness or closure towards immigrant politicians.

Further research is needed to see whether the specific institutional features of the electoral system applied in this German state have an impact on the opportunities of immigrant politicians. The evidence presented here forms part of a larger project that will produce comparable evidence on all big cities in Germany and on the situation in states with different electoral systems.

The high number of local councilors with Turkish backgrounds suggests that ethnic community structures (such as the availability of specific media) play a part in creating a pool of activists available to stand for election. This phenomenon also belies complaints about a lack of engagement of Turks within German society.

As distinct from other European countries, access to political influence in Germany has not been primarily facilitated by social democratic organizations. While for instance in Denmark 60% of local councilors belonged to the Social Democratic Party in 2001 (Togeby, 2008: 334), in Germany the Left party as well as the Green Party are particularly important. Together, they brought almost as many immigrants into the councils as the SPD – although they hold a much smaller number of seats.

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40 Own calculations.

Future research will hopefully provide a more extensive picture of local representation across Germany. With respect to its driving factors, more knowledge of immigrant activists and voters as well as of the political factors fostering and hindering immigrant representation would be particularly desirable. Furthermore, systematic international comparative studies could help to isolate both the general and the specific mechanisms at work, as well as the conditions promoting the equal representation of different groups amongst the population.

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