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POLITICAL SYSTEMS, PARTIES AND DIVERSITY

The case of Amsterdam

Floris Vermeulen

Introduction

Cities in Europe have become more diverse and more unequal in social economic terms. A low social economic status is often strongly correlated with a specific ethnic background. In cities like Paris, Brussels, Berlin or Amsterdam, most poor neighbourhoods have a majority of inhabitants with origins in the guest worker or post-colonial immigrant groups that arrived in the 1970s and 1980s. Among these groups, unemployment levels, social problems and, for instance, school drop-out rates are significantly higher than among groups living in other parts of the city. Participation in political systems is a crucial means to improve a group's position in society and address perceived group injustices (Bloemraad and Vermeulen, 2014). Studies of immigrants' political integration in Europe have emphasised the importance of voting and subsequent political representation as ways to counter disadvantaged socio-economic positions. Levels of participation determine to a large extent the opportunities immigrant communities have to influence policies affecting their lives in many different ways, for example, in terms of social welfare, education, housing, the labour market and security. It is therefore relevant to study the extent to which immigrant groups are able to integrate in the local political systems (Fennema and Tillie, 1999) and identify possible obstacles and opportunities for this process. There are signs that immigrant voters in many European cities increasingly face particular obstacles and, as a result of that, more and more immigrant voters refrain from participating politically (Cesari, 2014; Michon and Vermeulen, 2013; Just *et al.*, 2014; Vermeulen, 2018). This makes it even more relevant to look into this and also study the strategies used by immigrant voters to overcome possible obstacles.

In this chapter, I take the Dutch capital Amsterdam as a case study to identify obstacles, opportunities and strategies. It provides a relevant case study for this for several reasons. First, Amsterdam is an increasingly diverse city. For a few years a majority of its population has been of immigrant background, meaning either that they themselves were born abroad or that at least one of their parents were born outside the Netherlands. In addition to that, poverty is disproportionately present among particular immigrant groups (Vermeulen, Michon and Tillie, 2014). Second, Amsterdam provides, for several reasons discussed in more detail below, a relatively open political system for minority representation and especially immigrant minority representation. If indeed the political participation of voters with an immigrant background in Amsterdam

is declining, this would be of importance for contexts outside the Netherlands in which the environment for minority representation and participation is more difficult. Third, much systematic and detailed research has been carried out on this topic over the last 20 years (Fennema and Tillie, 1999; Van Heelsum, 2005; Michon and Vermeulen, 2013) comparing the levels of political integration of different immigrant groups in Amsterdam. This allows us to study the long-term effects of a changing political opportunity structure on immigrant political integration at the local level. The question I intend to answer in this chapter is: “To what extent are immigrant voters and representatives of immigrant background able to enter the precincts of power in Amsterdam in order to influence policies that will improve their social economic position in the city?”

This chapter, furthermore, compares the politics of Amsterdam’s three main immigrant groups (Turks, Moroccans and Surinamese) in order to illustrate the effect of the Amsterdam opportunity structure and the different strategies by groups to gain political access. I use these categories as shorthand to refer to three communities comprising migrants from Turkey, Morocco and Suriname to the Netherlands, as well as their Dutch-born descendants. Each group has its own migration history and levels of in-group solidarity, self-identification and immigrant organisation density, which has, in itself, an influence on the strategies used by immigrant groups (high levels of in-group solidarity and immigrant organisations can facilitate ethnic mobilisation). Furthermore, I focus, in this chapter, on different elements of immigrant politics. First, I consider voting levels and voting behaviour of the immigrant electorate as the basis accessing and influencing the local political systems. Second, I study the level of immigrant political representation. A political appointment allows the representative to have a direct voice in political decisions that affect their constituencies (Heath *et al.*, 2013). Research shows that when minorities are represented in government by individuals who share their demographic background, it enhances public deliberation and makes it more likely that government policies and practices reflect these groups’ substantive interests. Given immigrants’ unique needs and circumstances, a demographic representation argument probably also applies to them. The link between voting and representation is partly influenced by the level of ethnic voting among immigrant voters, the extent to which they vote for candidates with a similar ethnic background. Preferential voting in the Amsterdam political context allows higher rates of immigrant political representation. I will compare the level of ethnic voting among the three largest immigrant groups and look at the effect of neighbourhood concentration on this. Ethnic voting can be understood as a specific strategy to use ethnic mobilisation to increase the level of representation of the group, and embeddedness in an immigrant community/neighbourhood may enhance these strategies. In order to better understand the developments of the political participation and integration in Amsterdam, I further analyse the results and immigrant constituency of the largest (until recently) and, for immigrants, most important party in Amsterdam, the social-democratic PvdA (Partij van de Arbeid, Labour Party). Finally, I look at levels of political power and executive of the different immigrant groups. To what extent have immigrant politicians in Amsterdam been appointed to executive positions in which they have political influence and do we see differences between groups? For all elements, I look at the development over time in order to see possible effects of a changing Amsterdam opportunity structure on obstacles, opportunities and strategies. I will conclude with a description of how the Amsterdam case may be relevant for other European cities.

Surinamese, Turkish, and Moroccan immigrants in Amsterdam

The main immigrant groups in Amsterdam have, as mentioned, rather different backgrounds and characteristics. I will just mention some key differences and characteristics important for their political position and behaviour. Immigration from Suriname to the Netherlands has a long history, intimately tied to the countries' colonial relationship. Suriname's population comprises several distinct ethnic groups, the largest being Afro-Surinamese or "Creoles" (descendants of African slaves) and the Indo-Surinamese or "Hindustanis" (descendants of contract labourers brought mainly from India to Suriname after the Dutch colonies abolished slavery in 1863). After the Second World War, Surinamese migration became more ethnically diverse and economically driven. The prospect of Suriname becoming independent, which it did in 1975, caused great economic and political uncertainty, resulting in more people leaving the country. An exodus of over 50,000 people occurred between 1974 and 1975. Many moved to Amsterdam, with over 10,000 settling in the Dutch capital in 1975 alone (Vermeulen, 2006). As of 2017, about 8 per cent of Amsterdam's population was of Surinamese origin.

Both Turks and Moroccans, mainly males, arrived as guest workers in the late 1960s to take up low-skilled jobs in Amsterdam's heavy industry. After the economic crisis of early 1970s and the closure of most of the city's factories, many became unemployed. At the same time, a large percentage decided not to return, but rather to send for their families to join them in Amsterdam, which was enabled through family reunification. The presence of Turks and Moroccans thus grew rapidly over the next decades, mostly in similar post-war neighbourhoods in the city's west. Turks now represent about 5 per cent of Amsterdam's population and Moroccans, about 9 per cent. Both groups are predominantly Muslim, making them a religious minority in a highly secular city. There is ample evidence that Turks still constitute the strongest ethnic community in Amsterdam, followed by Moroccans, with Surinamese showing the lowest level of ethnic identification among the groups we analysed. The Turkish immigrant community is characterised by strong ideological polarisation between religious and secular groups, different ethnic subgroups and different religious denominations at the same time, a majority of the community strongly identifies with their national origin. The Turkish community is also the most organised in Amsterdam, having formed the most immigrant organisations. These are densely connected through inter-organisational networks (Vermeulen, 2006; Michon and Vermeulen, 2013), and Turks are significantly more often members of an immigrant organisation than Moroccans and Surinamese (Vermeulen, Michon and Tillie, 2014).

Amsterdam context for minority participation and representation

Amsterdam constitutes a favourable context for minority representation because specific features of the city's political system (and, for that matter, of the Netherlands overall) permit minority groups to mobilise easily. I will mention the most relevant and important features. Elections occur through a party list system, with pure proportionality and very low thresholds. Parties make lists of candidates to be elected, and seats are allocated to each party in proportion to the number of votes. Effectively, there is a low threshold, so that a party or a candidate must receive a minimum percentage of votes to obtain seats (around 2 per cent). Another important feature fostering a favourable context for minority groups is the ability to cast preferential votes; this means that on election day, the voter not only chooses a party, but also votes for a specific candidate within it. Prior to elections, each party is responsible for ranking their candidates and determining the order in which they appear on the ballot; however, voters can select any listed candidate, who will simply earn a seat if enough votes are cast. The ability to cast a preferential

vote implies that minority candidates who are placed at seemingly hopelessly low positions on electoral lists might still win if a significant group of voters mobilises for their election. Furthermore, in 1985, the Netherlands began allowing non-citizens to participate in local elections after completing five years of legal residence in the country. It is unnecessary for them to even register: the municipal administration automatically mails voter registration cards to all inhabitants entitled to vote. The enfranchisement of foreigners has had a direct effect on electoral politics via participation in elections, as well as an indirect effect in that parties list immigrants to appeal to the foreign electorate.

Finally, Amsterdam meets the three criteria that de Graauw and Vermeulen (2016) identify as positive for immigrant participation and representation. Amsterdam is traditionally a city with a majority of left-leaning politicians. Since 1953, left-wing parties have consistently held more seats than the right in Amsterdam's municipal council, and the social democrats have remained dominant except for the last elections in 2014. For the last 20 years, the social democratic PvdA has always come out first in elections, followed by the social-liberal D66, the right-wing VVD and the green party, GroenLinks. Coalitions formed for the executive have changed regularly over the past years, though the PvdA has always played a pivotal role, deciding which other parties it would govern the city with. In the last elections, however, the social democratic PvdA lost five seats and was not included in the coalition. The second element mentioned by de Graauw and Vermeulen (2016) is the presence of an immigrant-origin electorate. Amsterdam has, as already described, a sizeable immigrant-origin electorate (15–20 per cent of the Amsterdam electorate is of immigrant origin). Finally, Amsterdam has a well-developed infrastructure of community-based organisations that actively represent immigrants' collective interests in local politics and policymaking that are attentive to immigrants' group interests and concerns. Many of the local politicians with an immigrant background links with one or more of these organisations (Michon and Vermeulen, 2013). This will further increase the political participation and representation of immigrant-origin electorates.

Now that we have briefly described the context (the electorate and political opportunity structure), I present some of the main elements of the formal political participation and representation of the three main immigrant communities in the Dutch capital: (ethnic) voting, representation and executive positions held by the politicians of immigrant origin.

Political participation of immigrant voters in Amsterdam

Voting

An important and crucial element in the political participation of the immigrant-origin electorate refers to the question whether this group actually uses their political rights and votes in local elections. We have studied the turnout rates of this group during local elections since 1994.

Figures on these electoral turnouts for immigrants – defined as individuals who are foreign-born or have at least one foreign-born parent – for five consecutive local elections (1994–2014) demonstrate first that immigrant turnout is almost always lower than overall turnout (see Table 9.1).

Table 9.1 also reveals that Turks have greater participation in elections than Moroccans or Surinamese. Moreover, in some cases, their turnout rate has been comparable to – if not higher than – overall turnout (in 1994 and 2006). The Moroccan turnout rate has been substantially lower than the overall rate with rates during certain elections around 20 per cent. The Surinamese turnout rate has been the lowest among all immigrant groups in the city overall and

Table 9.1 Percentage turnout of immigrant-origin voters in Amsterdam, 1994–2014

Background	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2014
Morocco	49	23	22	37	39	24
Suriname	30	21	26	26	26	26
Turkey	67	39	30	51	46	34
Overall turnout	57	46	48	51	51	51

Sources: Michon and Vermeulen, 2013; Kranendonk *et al.*, 2014.

shows little variation, three-quarters of this group do not participate during elections. The elections of 2006 and 2010 seem to display significant higher turnout rates for voters with Turkish and Moroccan background compared to elections before and the most recent election (2014).

Ethnic voting and the role of neighbourhood networks

Ethnic voting, whereby immigrants and their descendants vote predominantly for candidates of an ethnic background that is the same as their own, can play an important role in the level of political representation of minority groups. In general, voting for a co-ethnic candidate is explained by strong in-group solidarity and/or out-group hostility towards a different ethnic community (Fisher *et al.*, 2015). Based on exit polls during the 2010 and 2014 Amsterdam municipality elections, we can conclude that ethnic voting is mostly prevalent among the Turks, with 42 per cent of the Turkish respondents indicated to have voted for someone with a Turkish background. Among the Moroccans, this is around 21 per cent and among the Surinamese, only around 15 per cent (Vermeulen *et al.*, 2017). It is interesting to see whether the neighbourhood context plays a role in this, as these processes of politicised self-identification occur in particular relevant contexts of which the immigrant neighbourhood seems to be one. Vermeulen *et al.* (2017) examined whether the size of the immigrant population in an Amsterdam neighbourhood had an independent effect on the extent to which its inhabitants vote in local elections for candidates of the same background. Based on political geography, literature and studies of ethnic voting and ethnic bloc voting, they identified two possible mechanisms that can yield this effect: social interaction and party/candidate neighbourhood mobilisation. Both processes lead one to expect that the size (absolute and perceptual) of an immigrant group in a particular neighbourhood to independently influence the degree of ethnic voting. For Amsterdam, Vermeulen *et al.* (2017) found that the percentage of eligible Turkish voters had a stronger effect on the percentage of ethnic votes in neighbourhoods than was the case for Moroccans or Surinamese, a similar pattern found for ethnic voting at the individual level. They also found that the percentage of eligible Turkish voters has a non-linear effect on ethnic voting. Amsterdam neighbourhoods with a high percentage of Turkish voters facilitate political conversations, leading to greater political conversion of neighbourhood dwellers. At the same time, the neighbourhoods become more attractive for parties and candidates to conduct campaign activities. For Moroccans or Surinamese voters, both of whom have lower levels of ethnic identity, fewer ethnic networks and lower immigrant organisation density, these effects were not found.

Elected representatives

The turnout rates and ethnic voting patterns result in a particular number of representatives of immigrant background in the Amsterdam city council. This 45-seat city council has important

powers: it sets the agenda, passes regulations and controls the actions of the executive (mayor and aldermen/women). The executive has to abide by the decisions of the council and needs the council’s support for new policy. The number of councillors of immigrant origin has risen gradually in the last decades, as Table 9.2 shows. The highest share of immigrants elected to Amsterdam’s city council was in 2006, when a fifth of local councillors were either born abroad or were the children of immigrants.

Compared to their share of Amsterdam’s general population, Turks were proportionately represented in the city council between 1994 and 2014. Moroccans have always been statistically under-represented. Yet in 2010, for the first time, more Moroccans were elected to the council than Turks. Although Surinamese were well-represented in the city council (compared to their share of Amsterdam’s population) in the 1990s, since 2002, they have been statistically under-represented.

Executive positions of politicians with an immigrant background in Amsterdam

When it comes to political influence of this group of politicians, the picture is rather different than the situation concerning political representation. We measure political influence of immigrants in Amsterdam by taking into account the number of individuals with an immigrant background in executive positions, which also provides an indication of the responsiveness of political parties to immigrant groups (Vermeulen, Michon and Tillie, 2014). By executive positions, we refer to the positions of mayor, deputy mayor at the city level, and district mayor or district deputy mayor (until 2010) at the city district level (until 2010). The mayors of Dutch municipalities are not elected by either the population or the municipal council. Instead, they are appointed (for a period of six years) on the basis of the choices made by a commission of the council. Dutch mayors, particularly in big cities, can be characterised as professional managers. Their main duty is to secure public order and provide leadership in the everyday executive functions of the city. Deputy mayors are appointed by the winning coalition. A coalition refers to those political parties that agree to govern the city until the next elections and who have together a majority of all seats in the city council (at least 23 seats). The deputy mayors have different domains for which they are politically responsible. At the district level (until 2010), the party list’s leading candidate who wins the most votes in a district nearly always becomes district mayor. In other words, while the district mayor is elected, the mayor and the deputy mayors (whether at the city or district levels) are appointed.

Table 9.3 provides information about Amsterdam’s executive position holders of Surinamese, Turkish and Moroccan origin since 2002. The most famous of them is Ahmed Aboutaleb, an immigrant from Morocco. He was the first city deputy mayor of Moroccan origin in

Table 9.2 Immigrant-origin city councillors in Amsterdam, 1990–2014

<i>Background</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>1994</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2014</i>
Morocco	0	1	2	1	2	3	2
Suriname	3	2	4	2	3	2	1
Turkey	1	3	3	4	3	2	4
Other	0	0	0	1	1	0	1
Total	4	6	9	8	9	7	8
% of city council (N = 45)	9	13	20	18	20	16	18

Sources: Michon and Vermeulen, 2013 and De Graauw and Vermeulen, 2016.

Table 9.3 Number of position holders of Surinamese, Turkish and Moroccan origin in Amsterdam, 2002–2014

	Of Surinamese origin			Of Turkish origin			Of Moroccan origin		
	Deputy mayor	City district mayor (until 2010)	City district deputy mayor (until 2010)	Deputy mayor	City district mayor (until 2010)	City district deputy mayor (until 2010)	Deputy mayor	City district mayor (until 2010)	City district deputy mayor (until 2010)
2002	2	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1
2006	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	2	3
2010	0	1	2	0	0	1	0	2	1
2014	0	–	–	0	–	–	1	–	–

Source: Vermeulen et al., 2014 and own calculations.

Amsterdam (2004–2007). He subsequently became Secretary of State of Social Affairs (2007–2008) and Mayor of Rotterdam (since 2009). In 2014, Abdeluheh Choho, also of Moroccan descent, was appointed. It is striking that there are many more Moroccan and Surinamese than Turkish executives. Amsterdam has had a city-level deputy mayor of Moroccan origin twice and a city-level deputy mayor of Surinamese descent three times, though never one of Turkish origin. The same holds true for district mayors. After the 2010 elections, two of the seven city district mayors were of Moroccan descent and one of Surinamese descent, whereas no city district mayor of Turkish descent was ever elected. Typically, the city district mayors of Surinamese descent are elected in the city district Zuidoost, where the largest Surinamese constituency lives. Politicians of Turkish origin have been present as district deputy mayors, though to a lesser extent than Moroccans or Surinamese.

Overall then, entry (access) into the Amsterdam political arena has been most successful for politicians of Turkish descent. Compared to Surinamese and Moroccans, they display higher voter turnout rates over time and, with the exception of the 2010 election, have had higher rates of elected representation at the city and city district levels. The data, however, also indicate that the Turkish representatives failed to get appointed to executive positions. Moroccan- and Surinamese-origin voters, by contrast, show low rates of political participation and representation. On the other hand, these two groups delivered six deputy mayors in the last 10 years, indicating a significant level of political influence. Michon and Vermeulen (2013, p. 608) argue that political parties in the Netherlands fear that giving politicians of Turkish descent an influential position will automatically bring in ethnic group-based interests into their parties. They identify increasing hostility of parties towards immigrant group-based mobilisation of especially Turkish politicians and this has a negative effect on political influence of this group. Turkish politicians' access to politically influential positions becomes obstructed. The electoral system, in contrast, is less influenced by this, given that the electoral system includes party lists and preferential voting, group-based resources can still help garner votes and seats on council, thus keeping the door relatively open to Turkish immigrants' political participation and representation in Amsterdam.

To further understand this specific development in Amsterdam politics, we will analyse the party choice of voters with an immigrant background and especially focus on the position of the social-democratic PvdA. This also allows us to make sense of the emerging parties based on ethnic or religious identities that are popular especially among second-generation immigrants in Amsterdam (but also in other cities and, most likely, also at the national level with the new party DENK, the first immigrant party to gain three seats in the most recent national elections of 2017). We take the 2014 local election as an example to better understand the reasons why an increasing part of the immigrant voters in Amsterdam is dissatisfied with the social-democratic party.

The 2014 election and the declining popularity of the social democratic PvdA among immigrant voters

The social democratic PvdA lost 5 of the 15 seats during the last local election in Amsterdam (2014). If we analyse further the loss of the Social Democratic Party and compare the situation in earlier elections, it becomes clear that a large part of this loss is the result of a decreasing popularity of this party among voters with an immigrant background. Figure 9.1 shows that the Social Democratic Party in Amsterdam has lost many immigrant voters since 2006. Among voters with a Surinamese background, more than 80 per cent voted for the Social Democratic Party in 2006, while in 2014, only 35 per cent did. Voters with a Moroccan background voted

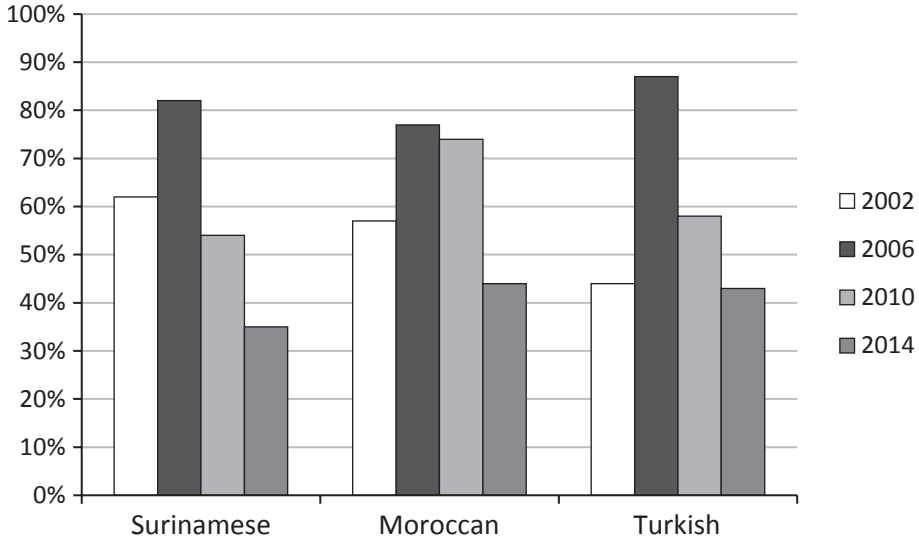


Figure 9.1 Percentage of voters with Surinamese, Moroccan or Turkish background who voted for PvdA during Amsterdam elections, 2002–2014.

Source: Kranendonk *et al.*, 2014.

76 per cent for the Social Democratic Party in 2006. Eight years later, this percentage dropped to 44 per cent. Among voters of Turkish descent, we see a similar development (87 per cent in 2006 to 43 per cent in 2014). Even if we accept that 2006 was an exceptionally successful election for the social Democratic Party, the overall trend is clear: the party has become less popular among voters with an immigrant background.

It has not only been the declining popularity of the Social Democratic Party among this group of voters that made a difference. The declining political participation among this group also affected the number of seats for the Social Democratic Party in the Amsterdam Council. As mentioned earlier (Table 9.1), for most immigrant-origin groups the turnout rates have been declining rapidly since 2006. If we compare 2010 with 2014, we see a drop among voters of Moroccan descent from 38 per cent to 24 per cent; among voters of Turkish descent, from 44 per cent to 34 per cent; and among voters of Surinamese descent, it remained stable around the very low percentage of 26. If we combine these trends in loss of popularity and lower turnout rates, we can conclude that the Social Democratic Party lost three of five seats due to these reasons.

What do we know about the reasons why the Social Democratic Party was less attractive for this group of voters? We know that several political topics were important for them during the last elections, such as the economic crisis and the high unemployment levels among people with an immigrant background (especially youth unemployment); high levels of discrimination in the labour market, schools and in the public debate; anti-Islam and anti-Moroccan statements and sentiments voiced by the populist Wilders and his Freedom party (PVV). We identified two specific reasons why the Social Democratic Party is no longer seen by voters with an immigrant background as the most obvious political party that can represent the interests of this group. These reasons relate to (1) the position of the Social Democratic Party in discussions concerning Islam, integration and diversity, and (2) policies and positions concerning the country of origin (Vermeulen, Kranendonk and Esajas, 2014).

Because of the emergence of a strong populist movement in the Netherlands after 2001, progressive left-wing parties have used a more anti-multicultural discourse in which diversity is primarily seen as a problem and not as an asset (van Heerden *et al.*, 2014). Many voters with an immigrant background feel disenfranchised in such discourse (Michon and Vermeulen, 2013; Santing and Vermeulen, 2015). Amsterdam presents a clear example of this development. Leaders of the Social Democratic Party have, since the late 1990s, formulated an integration policy in which target policies for groups categorised on the basis of an ethnic or religious identity should be avoided. Former minister of Social Affairs and Integration Lodewijk Asscher, as former Social Democratic Party leader in Amsterdam, said the following in a political meeting: “We should not reduce people to their ethnic background. We are a party that is colour-blind, regardless of the person. (...) We should be on our guard against false ethnic preachers”.¹ However, many voters with an immigrant background felt that exactly this position is problematic as it ignores their daily reality. They feel that local politicians deny the reality of a multicultural diverse city in which a majority of the population is of immigrant background. Most politicians in Amsterdam, but also at the national level, are still primarily white men in their late forties with whom this group of voters cannot relate, identify or have the feeling that they will understand their lives (Vermeulen, Kranendonk and Esajas, 2014).

Insights from studies on candidate selection help to illuminate the dynamics behind the more limited efforts to include immigrants in the recent period. The procedure of candidate selection is more or less the same for all significant parties in Amsterdam: a selection committee auditions candidates, receives support statements from individuals or party groups and then drafts a list of candidates. Party members consequently set the final candidate order, as they vote on each position on the electoral list. The composition and functioning of the selection committees is thus crucial. Studies have shown that it is precisely at this stage that obstacles to the inclusion of immigrants arise, as the committees are predominantly composed of white, middle-aged men who use limited means to scout candidates. While in the past selection committees prioritised the inclusion of more immigrants on party lists, this has not been the case more recently. A study conducted on the 2009 candidate selection process within the local branches of six parties in Amsterdam showed that selection committees were not encouraged to take ethnic diversity into account: none of the major parties had strict rules concerning the inclusion of immigrants (or women) (Michon and Vermeulen, 2013). Parties officially stated that they wanted to include minorities, but were generally unsuccessful, and did not try to correct or vary the composition of their lists in order to achieve more balanced representation. If we compare the list of candidates for the local elections of the main parties in 2010 and 2014, two things become clear. One, the number of politicians with an immigrant background remains rather stable, but the position on the list for those who are selected is somewhat lower in 2014 than in 2010. Most importantly, the overall position is low and reflects the lack of visible and popular politicians with an immigrant background in current Amsterdam political life (Kranendonk *et al.*, 2014). In 2006, it was not difficult to name a half dozen influential and well-known politicians of immigrant background. They have all left, either to become politicians at the national level or because they have left politics all together.

Conclusion

European cities have become more diverse and more unequal. One of the consequences of this is that the electorate in these cities will have more voters with an immigrant background. A majority of this group also has a low social economic situation. The urban level therefore constitutes the most immediate arena in which minorities look for political representation and

incorporation. Recent developments illustrate, however, that immigrant voters in Europe are less politically active and more frustrated with mainstream parties. Participation is at the heart of a democratic system and political apathy leads easily to political isolation and segregation. Minority groups may need better political representation to influence political decisions that affect their daily lives immediately and fundamentally. In this chapter, we took Amsterdam as an example to make better sense of this. The open political system and the availability of data allows us to study some of the factors that play a role in the opportunities and obstacles for immigrants to participate politically.

The Amsterdam case illustrates that group-based resources, defined as ethnic/religious network/organisations and a strong identification among the members of the group with the group itself, can play an important role in the politics of immigrants in European cities, both positively and negatively. Positively, it provides minority groups the opportunity to mobilise and activate a large part of their community to participate. This leads to higher turnout rates, a larger percentage of voters voting for a co-ethnic candidate, which leads to more votes and eventually higher levels of representation. However, the downside of this is that these things make parties not only cautious, but often also unreceptive to the claims and ideas of immigrant politicians who have strong links with immigrant communities. Eventually, immigrant politicians' access to politically influential positions becomes obstructed. In sum, the result is high levels of representation, but low levels of political influence.

Recently, in the Dutch case, several immigrant politicians, both at national and local levels, have left mainstream parties to form their own immigrant parties partly because of these developments. In these parties, ethnic and religious identifications and ties to related immigrant communities are not problematised, but rather celebrated. These parties seem to have some electoral success, winning seats in city councils and recently even in the Dutch parliament. The question remains, however, as to how successful and effective these parties can be with just a few seats and a highly mobilised but isolated constituency. These new parties may provide an alternative option for immigrant voters, but only those voters who are strongly embedded in immigrant communities and who identify with their immigrant group. All those who do not identify strongly with an immigrant or religious community are left with two options in an increasingly polarised political landscape: refrain from participating (isolation) or assimilate on an individual basis into mainstream parties, losing any visible ties with immigrant constituencies.

Note

- 1 “We moeten mensen niet reduceren tot een etnische klasse. We zijn een partij die kleurenblind is, zonder aanzien des persoons. (...) We moeten op onze hoede zijn voor de valse etnische prekers” (Vermeulen, Kranendonk and Esajas, 2014: 55).

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