Ethnic minorities in local politics: comparing Amsterdam and Paris

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Chapter IV
Access to Local Politics

In this chapter, two questions will be answered with regard to the access that ethnic minority politicians have to local politics: who gets access and how? Both questions are dealt with in respect of three groups of interviewees. In Amsterdam, the issue is compared at two points (in the 1990s and 2006) to see if changes have occurred across time in the city, or if there are similarities. Then, access to politics in both Amsterdam and Paris is contrasted at a similar point of time (the 2006 elections in Amsterdam vs. the 2008 elections in Paris) to see if there are similarities despite the differences between the two contexts. In other words, this chapter contains both a diachronic and a synchronic comparison.

I. Access in Amsterdam in the 1990s

Twenty-three immigrants occupying an elected position in the city of Amsterdam were interviewed in 1990 (19 respondents) and 1994 (four other respondents). Six of these interviewees had been elected to the city council\(^1\), while the rest were representatives in the district councils. This group represents the entire research population; almost all of the councillors of foreign descent elected in Amsterdam in the early 1990s were interviewed.

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\(^1\) Five were city councillors at the time of the interviews (two of them being duo-councillors) while one had held a seat in the council between 1986 and 1990.
a. Who gets access?

The group of ethnic minority councillors elected in Amsterdam in the 1990s was predominantly male (19 men and four women). When compared to the share of women on the city council and the share of immigrant women living in Amsterdam, females were clearly under-represented among the ethnic minority councillors. The respondents appeared to be relatively young, the average age was 35, and a majority was aged 40 or less (17 respondents). It was not, however, possible to compare the ages of these respondents to those of other councillors.

The respondents had been well educated: 15 of them had either an academic degree or one from the HBO (higher vocational education). Moreover, five were still studying. Many of the respondents had studied social sciences, languages, or literature, or had a degree from the “sociale academie”, which provides social-cultural vocational training. All but one had followed higher education programmes in the Netherlands. A large majority were, therefore, highly educated. Indeed, only two respondents had undertaken a lower level of vocational training, while one said that he had received very limited schooling.

All of the respondents were born outside the Netherlands, although some had been born in the Dutch Antilles (which is part of the Dutch Kingdom), and others had been born in Surinam and Indonesia when these countries were still Dutch colonies. Not only had all of the respondents been born outside of the Netherlands, they had usually also been brought up elsewhere: 19 respondents arrived in the Netherlands as young adults (17 to 34 years old). Most came to the country for study or work, and only one respondent was a “traditional” guest worker (a Moroccan low-skilled worker who arrived in the Netherlands in the 1960s). Finally, four respondents arrived in the country as young children with their parents (when they were between four and 12 years old).

Nine respondents were born in former colonies before independence, and had thus been Dutch nationals since birth. Five were foreigners: two were Moroccan and three were Turkish. Nine had become naturalised by the time that they were interviewed (seven of them held both Dutch nationality and the nationality of their country of origin). If we consider the year of naturalisation, it appears that two respondents had acquired Dutch nationality before 1985, when foreign residents were enfranchised at the local level. As nine subjects were Dutch by birth, this meant that 11 of the 23 had been Dutch nationals before 1985; i.e. they were not excluded, a priori, from political participation. Five other respondents had acquired Dutch nationality before they were elected, meaning that 16 interviewees did not directly make use of the enfranchisement of foreign residents in order to become councillors.

Table 4.1 summarises the characteristics of the respondents and reveals that so far as issues of gender, level of education, migration and nationality are concerned, there are important similarities. This group is, however, also characterised by great diversity; firstly, with regard to ethnic background: those of Turkish (nine respondents) and Surinamese origin (six respondents) form a large majority of the sample. There are also four subjects of Moroccan origin, two from the Antilles, one from Tunisia, and one from Indonesia. Put in these terms, however, the extent of the diversity within each of these groups is

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2. Between 1986 and 2002, 24% of all city councillors in Amsterdam were women. Within the main immigrant groups the share of women is between 40 and 50% (see www.cbs.nl).
hidden. Among those of Turkish descent, for example, two stated that they were Kurds, and two referred to their Syrian orthodox origins. Among those from Surinam, three belonged to the Hindustani minority of that country, while two of the (four) respondents of Moroccan origin did not come from the Rif, unlike most of the Moroccan immigrants in the Netherlands. Furthermore, three respondents were the children of mixed marriages: two had an Antillean mother and a Surinamese father, and one respondent, who was born in Indonesia, had a Moluccan mother and a Dutch father.

In terms of the issue of social-economic background, two groups emerge: one with a modest background (eight respondents), and one with a middle-class upbringing (15). The former had parents who were unskilled workers in the Netherlands, or farm hands in the country of origin. Only a few of the interviewees’ mothers had had a paid occupation: 15 were housewives, particularly in the case of the Turkish and North-African respondents. Among the respondents who had a middle-class background, two had fathers who had received a university education, three had fathers who were teachers and five had fathers who had worked in the military or the police in the country of origin (including the father of the Indonesian respondent, who was a Dutch military man).

Table 4.1: Profile of the respondents interviewed in Amsterdam in the 1990s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>23</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>4 women, 19 men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age in 1990</td>
<td>Range: 24-58 average: 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>9 Turkish; 6 Surinamese 4 Moroccan; 2 Surinamese/Antillean 1 Tunisian; 1 Dutch-Indonesian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>8 working-class 13 middle-class 2 upper middle-class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of migration</td>
<td>All born abroad 19 migrated as (young) adults, 4 as young children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for migration</td>
<td>11 family migration/(re)unification 9 study/qualified work 1 unqualified work 2 political refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>20 higher education 2 vocational education 1 no education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>18 Dutch nationality (9 by birth; 9 naturalised) 5 foreigners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As noted above, a large majority (19) of the interviewees arrived in the Netherlands as young adults. Six came to study, three arrived to do qualified work, one came for unqualified work, two came as political refugees, and seven joined a partner or their family, who had already settled in the country.

Despite differences with regard to ethnic origin and social-economic background, it appears that the group of councillors interviewed in the 1990s in Amsterdam is relatively homogeneous, being predominantly composed of men in their thirties, who came to the Netherlands as young adults, where they obtained a higher education qualification and worked in the social-cultural sector. Almost all have Dutch nationality.

**b. How did these people get access to politics?**

As all of the respondents were born abroad, with a large majority of them coming to the Netherlands as young adults, it is important to consider the issue of their political socialisation in the country of origin. Eight respondents said that their parents had been politically active: five (of Turkish and Moroccan origin) stated that their parents were members of left-wing parties, two claimed (from Surinam) that theirs had been active within the Hindustani party of that country, and the only respondent of Indonesian descent explained that her mother and her mother’s family were active members of the nationalist (Moluccan) movement.

Nine respondents had been involved in political activities in their country of origin, mostly in left-wing movements (five of Turkish descent, two of Moroccan descent, and one of Surinamese origin). One respondent supported the Surinamese independence movement. Nevertheless, for a majority (14 of a total of 23), their political involvement started in the Netherlands.

A majority of the respondents joined left-wing political parties in the Netherlands: the social-democratic PvdA (eight), the green party GroenLinks (seven) and the social-liberal party D66 (two). Five respondents joined the Christian-democratic party, the CDA, and one the right-wing liberal party, the VVD. There had usually been a relatively brief period of time between party membership and the first successful election. Nineteen respondents had been party members for four years or less when they were elected for the first time. In the case of the women, they had to wait for an average of one more year than their male counterparts before becoming a councillor (3.5 years vs. 2.5 years).

Five respondents explained that their candidacy was borne of their own initiative. Most, however, had been asked to join the party list, either by party leaders, the candidacy committee, their section, or a party group. Three of these individuals were also pushed by their ethnic community to become involved. The reason why the respondents were asked to do this is not always clear, but a number of matters seem to have played a role. The 1990 elections formed a particular context: the establishment of 14 new councils in districts of Amsterdam in 1987 and 1990 led to the creation of many new political

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3. The procedure of candidacy slightly differs from one party to another (see Chapter III). However, we gather from the interviews that in the 1990s, there was a candidacy commission in all parties, which auditioned candidates and received support statements from the party sections of party groups.

4. The district councils were introduced gradually in Amsterdam: first, two in 1981 (Noord and Osdorp), followed by four new neighbourhood councils in 1987. In 1990, all neighbourhoods had their own council, except the city centre, which finally elected one in 2002.
positions, for which there were no incumbents, and parties appear to have had trouble finding candidates. As the creation of these neighbourhood councils coincided with the enfranchisement of foreigners (in 1985), the parties were eager to have immigrants on their electoral lists. The combination of new political positions and a new electorate was, thus, a factor in the access of immigrants to local politics. Four respondents explained that their origins were explicitly mentioned when they were asked to join the party list, and six others claimed that an ethnic minority background tended to be an advantage, both for them and, more generally, for ethnic minority politicians overall. One respondent explained that he was explicitly asked to stand in the election by the local party leaders because of his migrant background:

The board secretary of the party section here in the district wrote me a letter, saying that they needed... migrant candidates, and therefore they wanted to know if I was interested in standing in the election.5

Nevertheless, three of these respondents also stated that they had experienced specific forms of prejudice during the selection process. The lack of experience (of board membership, for example), ability (e.g. to speak or write Dutch, or draft memoranda) and the need to “learn the job first” were reasons used to dismiss ethnic minority candidates. One respondent, a member of the Christian-democratic party, did not have such an experience himself, but had witnessed it occurring:

You sometimes feel that some criteria are used more strictly for ethnic minorities than for autochthonous candidates, like the criterion of experience within the party, and that when it is useful for the white party leaders to use it, they use it at the cost of ethnic minorities. But I do not think that there is really any discrimination in the party, or in any other party.

Three respondents stated that civic activities, especially with and for migrants, were one of the reasons why they were asked by the party to join the list. However, 11 others were also members of migrant or ethnic-based organisations (those from Surinam), but they did not mention that these activities had played a role in the process of access.

To summarise, a large group of respondents had been involved with political activities in their country of origin, but the majority had begun their political activism in the Netherlands, joining left-wing parties and then being party members for a short period of time before they were elected. They were asked to join the party list, and apparently benefited from a favourable context in that there were many new political positions available, as well as a new electorate whose good will the parties tried to gain. These ethnic minority councillors were not themselves concerned about the enfranchisement of foreigners, as they were already Dutch nationals, but they were apparently considered by parties on the basis of their potential appeal to the ethnic minority electorate.

5. I translated all of the respondents’ quotes contained in this dissertation.
II. Access in Amsterdam in 2006

a. Who gets access?

In 2008 (after the 2006 elections), eight ethnic minority politicians held a seat in the city council (of a total of 45, i.e. 18 percent) and 75 were district councillors (of a total of 322, i.e. 23 percent). An overwhelming majority (seven in the city council, 50 in the districts) were elected for the social-democratic party, the PvdA. The number of ethnic minority councillors elected for the Green left party (GL; one in the city council, 11 in the districts) and the right wing liberals (VVD; six district councillors) were much smaller. Similarly, the other parties (Christian democratic CDA; Christian party ChU; socialist party SP; local parties) were marginally represented among this group of councillors. These figures reflect the domination of the PvdA on the city council and all of the district councils, with this party holding 45 percent of the seats on the former and 40 percent of the seats on the latter.

As far as the profile of these councillors is concerned, the picture is one of diversity and contrast. In terms of gender, there is a difference between the city council, where women dominate (six women, two men), and the district councils, where men are in the majority (43 men, 32 women). When looking at the councillors’ origins, those of Moroccan, Turkish and Surinamese descent are equally represented on the city council, both in relative and absolute terms. In the district councils, however, those of Turkish origin are the most numerous (21), followed by representatives with a Moroccan (19) and Surinamese (17) background. In certain district councils, some groups are well represented: councillors of Turkish and Moroccan origin are particularly present in the western district, while those with a Surinamese or Ghanaian background were mainly present in Zuidoost. This reflects the composition of the population in these areas. Nevertheless, other districts with a similar make-up of population have different types of political representatives in the district councils (Slotervaart and Osdorp, for example). It is noteworthy that for 18 councillors, the publicly available information (electoral material, newspaper articles, and council websites) did not provide any details of their origins, although their names and photographs suggested that they did belong to an ethnic minority. In other words, for almost a third of the ethnic minority councillors in the districts, ethnicity was not deemed to be relevant information in the electoral campaign, either by the candidates themselves, or their parties.

A large majority of the ethnic minority councillors were newly elected in 2006. None of those voted onto the city council had been elected in 2002 (the previous election), as was also the case for 53 of the 75 ethnic minority district councillors. There is no significant difference between men and women in terms of the rate of re-election, nor is

6. These figures are based on the study of the names of all councillors elected in Amsterdam, cross-checked with newspaper information and internet searches. The figures were collected at the beginning of 2008, and are therefore a snapshot of a particular point in time. There are many, rapid, changes in the composition of the Amsterdam councils, as councillors regularly step down and are replaced by others.

7. There is some evidence that the party sections of the PvdA are more or less open to newcomers in the different districts, and this is reflected in the candidate selection process and the composition of the district councils.
there a difference in terms of origin. Of those elected for the PvdA, there were, relatively, slightly fewer newcomers compared to the share for other parties.  

Fifteen interviews were conducted to gain more insight into the profile of the ethnic minority councillors and how they got access to the local political arena. All of the city councillors, except one, have been interviewed, along with eight district councillors. Among them, nine women are women and six are men, while four have Surinamese, four have Turkish and three have Moroccan backgrounds. Among the remaining respondents, one is from the Antilles (and has a Venezuelan father), one is from Bosnia, one is of Moluccan origin, and one has a Tunisian father and a Dutch mother. Eleven of the 15 respondents are members of the PvdA, three the GL and one the VVD. In terms of the features known about all of the ethnic minority councillors, this group of respondents is fairly representative of the overall population.

**Table 4.2 Profile of the respondents interviewed in Amsterdam in 2008**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>9 women, 6 men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at interview</td>
<td>Range: 26-48 average: 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origin (based on country of birth of respondents and country of birth of both parents)</td>
<td>4 Surinamese, 4 Turkish 3 Moroccan, 1 Moluccan, 1 Bosnian 2 mixed origin (Antillean-Venezuelan; Dutch-Tunisian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background (based on profession of parents)</td>
<td>9 working-class 6 middle-class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of migration</td>
<td>11 born abroad 7 came when young adults, 4 when young children 4 born in the Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for migration (11 respondents)</td>
<td>8 family migration or (re-)unification 2 for study, 1 as refugee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>13 higher education 2 vocational training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>All hold Dutch nationality (5 by birth, 10 are naturalised; 8 hold dual citizenship)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The respondents share two characteristics: they are highly educated (all but two of them have academic or higher vocational qualifications) and are Dutch nationals (five by birth, while 10 have been naturalised; eight have dual citizenship). As for other features, there is more diversity and contrast than there are similarities. In terms of age, there are

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8. When comparing the councillors elected in 2002 with those elected in 2006, the share of newcomers is slightly overestimated. Quite frequently, people got access to the council during the mandated term in office. The interviews reveal that this has been the case for three of the 15 respondents.
important differences, with the youngest being 26 and the eldest 58 (with an average age of 41). Four respondents were born in the Netherlands, meaning that a majority were born abroad (11). The reasons for their migration also differ: four came to the Netherlands as young children with their families, and four others came within the framework of family migration or reunification, but as young adults. Two respondents came to the Netherlands to study and one came as a refugee. Seven respondents are the children of guest workers, and two others had parents who had received little school education in their country of origin. In other words, nine respondents have a working-class background, while six could be described as middle-class.

To summarise (see Table 4.2), the large majority of the ethnic minority councillors elected in Amsterdam after the last local elections are affiliated with the social democratic party, and were elected for the first time in 2006. In terms of gender and origin, there is a fair balance between different groups. The interviews also highlighted the fact that the councillors are highly educated and are Dutch nationals. In terms of age, gender, social-economic background and history of migration, however, there is no typical profile of the ethnic minority councillors elected in the city in 2006.

**b. How did these people get access to politics?**

Two of the 15 respondents had been politically active in their country of origin. For the large majority, however, their political activities are based on the Dutch context. A few respondents began their political involvement many years ago, with three joining their party at the beginning of the 1990s. Nevertheless, this is not the case for the majority (nine), who joined their party no more than four years before the 2006 elections. Indeed, all of those elected to the city council had joined a party a relatively short time before their election. There is more diversity in terms of length of party membership before election among those elected to the district councils: it varies from two to 16 years. There were no obvious differences in terms of gender.

Despite their relatively brief party membership, most of the respondents said that politics was usually “never far away”, as one of them put it. Six explained that their parents had been politically active in the country of origin (only one has a parent who is a member of a Dutch political party), while five met politically active individuals in their parents’ close circle of family and/or friends. These respondents explained that their political engagement is largely a continuation of what they had experienced in their youth. For half of the subjects (eight), this political socialisation took place in the Netherlands.

Standing for election is a step that the respondents took in very different ways and at different times. Firstly, 11 of the 15 were elected for the first time in 2006, while three had joined the district council during the previous mandate. This trio of individuals had not, however, been directly elected in 2002, but had gone onto the council after elected councillors had left. Moreover, one respondent had briefly held a seat on a district council before 1990.

Secondly, the process leading to the candidacy also differs; for some, it was a rapid and natural step to take, while others needed some preparation. Four respondents explained that they had felt very distant from politics, and did not believe that they would ever get access to an elected role without a great deal of work. To cite one of the interviewees:
I had always been active within organisations, but I did not think about politics. I did not feel concerned... what should I do in politics? I was not trained for it... But when I started attending the party meetings, I got stimulated. And because I was already active within the organisation, I thought that it in fact, it is the same, but here [in politics] I may get more things done.

It appears from the interviews that the activities they had engaged in within their civic organisations played a kind a mediating role for six of the respondents; they became acquainted with certain rules and/or they got in touch with politicians. For four others, it was the fact that family members or friends had been elected that set an example.

Three respondents had been scouted and/or asked by party leaders to join the list. Three others had been asked to do so in the past, but had declined the invitation: two because they felt that they were being asked as a “token” immigrant woman, while one explained that he had previously wanted to stand in an election, but had been discouraged from doing so by the party leaders at that time. Despite these differences in pace and settlement, it is noteworthy that for a large majority of the respondents, the decision to join the electoral battle was a matter of individual choice. They were often supported by their family, friends, relatives and party members, but they were clear that they made an individual and well-considered decision.

One of the reasons for this is that a candidacy appears to need a source of legitimacy, as 10 respondents explained. Legitimacy to stand for election can be based on a number of different things. Either the respondents were long-term party members and/or very active within their party, or they were active members of a civic organisation.

The role of ethnicity in the process of becoming a candidate was raised during the interviews, and led to different reactions. For a majority of the respondents, belonging to an ethnic minority group was not a particular feature in the competition to secure places on party lists. Furthermore, the respondents did not have the impression that the parties needed them on the lists as “token” immigrants.

Nevertheless, ethnicity did play a role for several respondents, but in differing ways. For some, the issue raised its head in the process of becoming a candidate within the party. One respondent explained that she felt attracted by the party’s call for candidates: women and those from an ethnic minority were particularly asked to apply. Another respondent fought hard to get an eligible position on the list, and in doing so used the argument that she is of Surinamese descent. In her words:

I had to argue a lot to get a secure position on the list. I claimed an eligible position. I told them that they needed me much more than I needed the party!

Ethnicity also played a role during the election campaign, with three respondents using specific “ethnic” tools, such as going to mosques, issuing campaign material in their own language, visiting migrant broadcasters, or otherwise mobilising ethnic networks. These respondents thus chose to use these specific resources in their campaign. In contrast, another respondent did not want her ethnicity to play a role on the election trail, but felt that she had to prove that she had not only been chosen because of her background:

I believe that that is specific for the councillors elected in 2006, we were approached with suspicion, people wondered what education we had, whether our Dutch was good
enough, and whether we had been elected because we were woman and immigrants, because that has been suggested, that this was the reason why I was put high on the list.

The reason why this respondent felt misjudged was partly due to a statement made by the national leader of the social-democratic party (Wouter Bos) just after the local elections of 2006. Reflecting on the outcome, especially in Amsterdam, Bos expressed a fear that the large number of newly elected ethnic minority politicians, many of whom had benefited from preferential voting, would lead to problems for his party and for the governance of the city. During the interviews I conducted two years later, four respondents still felt angry about this statement, but only one felt that she had to prove herself because of it.

Overall, the impression given by the interviewees was that ethnicity played a role in their access to politics only to the extent that they wanted it to do so. If they wanted to be seen as a migrant, or an ethnic politician, the respondents could emphasise this (which they usually did not). Conversely, when they did not want their background to feature in their political activities, this was also possible. The interviews suggest that the Dutch political parties did not force the respondents to adopt an ethnically defined role.

The picture that arises, when we look at the issue of political socialisation and the partisan experiences of the respondents, is one of many contrasts. A few individuals had been socialised politically in their country of origin, but for most this occurred in the Netherlands. A large majority of the respondents had been party members for a brief period of time (four years or less) before they were elected, but they nevertheless identified different reasons for the legitimacy of their candidacy. Some had been asked to run for office and many were supported by friends and relatives; even so, a majority see their candidacy as an individual initiative. Finally, the issue of their ethnic background appears to have played a part only to the extent that the respondents wished it to during the process of becoming a candidate and in the election.

### III. Access in Paris in 2008

#### a. Who gets access?

After the March 2008 elections, of the 517 councillors elected in the 20 districts of Paris, 58 (i.e. 11 percent) could be identified as being either immigrants, having immigrant-origins, or being from overseas territories. Of these 517 councillors, 163 have a seat on both a district council and in the Conseil de Paris (see Chapter III) and, among them, 16 are ethnic minority politicians (i.e. 10 percent).

This group of (58) ethnic minority councillors is composed of 34 women and 24 men. Given that 50 percent of all Parisian councillors are women, it is noteworthy that

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9. I first did so by checking the names and photographs of the councillors on the districts' websites. I then ran the names that I had found in this way (those councillors who most obviously belonged to the research population) through a press database (Factiva) and the internet. This helped me to find information (date and place of birth, occupation, origin) on a number of people, but also helped me to identify a number of other ethnic minority councillors. Finally, via the interviews and discussions with a number of people, I gradually added other people to the list.
they outnumber men among these ethnic minority representatives. In terms of their party affiliation, an overwhelming majority of these councillors (43) were on the socialist party’s (PS) electoral list,\(^{10}\) while five were elected for the Green party, two were on competing left-wing lists, and eight are members of the right-wing UMP. Given the fact that the majority of the left-wing councillors elected in Paris belong to the left-wing majority party (312 of a total of 517), these figures are not surprising, but the ratio is worth noting: the left-wing orientation of this particular group of councillors is greater than for Parisian councillors overall.

For a majority of the councillors (41), their place of birth is known. Twelve were born in the French “Métropole”, six in the French Antilles, 15 in North-African countries, three in sub-Saharan countries, while the others were from Spain, Portugal, Lebanon and Haiti. On the basis of a number of different sources of information, it appears that 21 councillors have North-African origins, seven are Antillean and nine come from Sub-Saharan nations.

When comparing the names of those elected before and after the 2008 elections, it appears that 48 of the 58 ethnic minority councillors were newly elected in March 2008. Some of them may, however, have been elected in other cities or at an earlier time (I know that this is the case for two people). Nevertheless, it is clear that this group of councillors is predominantly comprised of newcomers.\(^ {11}\)

Despite their overall recent access to the local political arena, a significant proportion of the ethnic minority councillors occupy a position of power: 26 of the 58 (45 percent) are district mayors, district deputy mayors or deputies of the Mayor of Paris. This is particularly the case for women, half of whom are position holders, while this is only the case for a third of the men.

In order to obtain more information, a number of interviews were conducted with councillors elected in March 2008. These were carried out in two phases, both before and after the elections in March 2008: six people were interviewed in 2007 (these councillors were re-elected in 2008\(^ {12}\) and 11 councillors who were elected in 2008, but had previously held no electoral mandate, were interviewed in June and July 2008. Accordingly, 17 ethnic minority councillors elected in Paris have been interviewed. Of these representatives, three have a seat in the Conseil de Paris (and three others did during the previous mandate), 11 are women and six are men. In terms of party affiliation, 11 are members of the PS, while five belong to the Green party and one is member of the right-wing UMP. The sample is not representative of the total population in two respects: councillors elected to the Conseil de Paris and members of the socialist party are slightly under-represented.

In terms of their origins, two respondents are Antillean, six are from North-African countries (three from Algeria, two from Morocco and one from Tunisia), two are from the Lebanon and two are from Sub-Saharan African nations (Burkina Faso and the Ivory Coast). One interviewee was born in Morocco like her father, while her mother was born

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10. These lists, one for each district, are coalitions between the leading PS, a number of other left-wing parties and unaffiliated candidates (“candidats d’ouverture” or “de la société civile”).
11. Although it is not, strictly speaking, comparable, this figure can be contrasted with that relating to incumbents in the Conseil de Paris. Almost half of the 163 members of the Conseil (47 percent) were elected for the first time in 2008.
12. Two more interviews had been conducted in 2007, but these people were re-elected in 2008.
in Tunisia, but both parents are of Italian origin. Four further respondents have parents of different origins: a French mother (for three of them she was also of foreign origin: Czech, German and Spanish) and a Moroccan, Tunisian, Algerian or Ivorian father. One of them explained that it is important to not only look at her African origins (those of her father), since she was raised by her fully bilingual and bicultural French-German mother:

So in fact my background, the fact that I am... that I have multicultural ancestors, from other countries, it is indeed linked to the Ivory Coast, but it is mostly linked to the history of my mother... Eventually through experiences at school, during my studies... it is society that sees me as a “métisse” [half-breed], or as someone of African origin.

Among the first generation immigrant councillors, the reasons for their migration vary a great deal. Six respondents came to France as children, one to join family he had in the country, three within the framework of family reunification, and two migrated with their parents for personal or political reasons. On the other hand, seven respondents came to metropolitan France as young adults in order to study, or, for one respondent, to work.

### Table 4.3 Profile of the respondents interviewed in Paris in 2007 and 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>11 women, 6 men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at interview</td>
<td>Range: 26-59, average: 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origin (based on country of birth of respondents and country of birth of both parents)</td>
<td>3 Algerian, 2 Moroccan, 2 Lebanese, 2 Sub-Saharan African, 2 Antillean, 1 Tunisian, 1 Italian (but 2 generations in Morocco), 4 respondents mixed background.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background (based on profession of parents)</td>
<td>9 working-class, 6 middle-class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of migration</td>
<td>4 born in metropolitan France, 1 in Antilles, 12 abroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for migration (13 respondents)</td>
<td>6 family migration/reunification as children, 6 for study and 1 for work as young adults.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>16 higher education, 1 vocational training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>All hold French nationality (7 by birth, 10 are naturalised; 7 hold dual citizenship)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seven individuals are the children of guest workers and thus have a modest background (in France), while the parents of one respondent were farm hands in their country of origin. In contrast, nine respondents have a middle-class or upper middle-class background. All

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13. The French state has encouraged people from France and Southern Europe to move to its North-African colonies. The ancestors of this respondent moved from Sicily to Tunisia and Morocco on that basis.
are highly educated, except for one interviewee who underwent vocational training. All of the other respondents have a higher education qualification, ranging from the two-year graduation programme, the DEUG, to a doctorate. Most studied the social sciences (political science, educational science, sociology, geopolitics).

All of the respondents have French nationality, a prerequisite for standing for election. Seven are French by birth and 10 were born abroad and have acquired French nationality. Among this last group, seven have dual citizenship.

Table 4.3 summarises the information I have obtained on the profile of the group of ethnic minority councillors elected in Paris after the 2008 elections. This group is predominantly composed of women who were born abroad, were elected for left-wing parties and have had no previous electoral mandate. Seventeen interviews were conducted with Parisian councillors. The only characteristic that they share is that they are highly educated: all but one has an academic degree. In terms of socio-economic background and history of migration, there are no common features.

b. How did these people get access to politics?

When one looks at how the respondents gained access to politics, it appears that half of them were politically socialised within their family: seven have parents who have been politically active, while two have close relatives who were. In most cases (apart from two), this political engagement took place in, or was linked to, the country of origin.

The political activism of the respondents themselves began, and has continued, in France. Indeed, only one interviewee had had any political experience before arriving in continental France, namely an Antillean respondent who had been active within the Guadeloupe independence movement. Another individual had, however, been active within civic organisations in Lebanon before migrating to France.

The length of party membership varies greatly. A majority of the respondents (10) had been a party member for more than four years when they were elected for the first time. Among the 10 who were first elected in 2008,14 five had been party members for seven years or more (with this figure being up to 22 years for two individuals). One of the interviewees explained that he had not wanted to stand in an election before because he thought that he would return to his country of origin:

\[\text{Being an active member of a political party, the moment comes when you have to think about what you will do. So I wondered: shall I step into the decision-making process, or will I remain an active militant? And I thought that it was time for me to enter the decision-making process.}
\]

\[\text{Yes... but you never thought of doing that before?}
\]

\[\text{... Not really.}
\]

\[\text{So what made you change your mind?}
\]

\[\text{Well... I say not really, but to be honest... I always thought that I would be going back to Africa one day.}
\]

Among the six respondents who were interviewed before the 2008 elections, the length of their party membership varied from three to 18 years. This group was elected either

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14. One other respondent was interviewed in 2008, but he had been elected in 2001 in a distant suburb of Paris, before leaving the council after less than a year for professional reasons.
in 1995 (two) or 2001 (four). Gender makes a difference in terms of the length of party membership before the first election: on average, women had been a party member for six years, while this was 10 years for the men.

Most of the respondents (10 of the 17) have had responsibilities within the party, at least at the level of the local party branch, with five of them having held positions within the regional or national party assemblies. Party activism is an important source of legitimacy within the party in an election battle. Activities within civic organisations were another source of legitimacy proposed by the interviewees: eight of them said that this had played a role in the process of gaining access to politics. Indeed, in the competition for positions on the party list and/or during the electoral campaign, activity within an organisation had been a positive factor, demonstrating civic engagement and proving that the candidate was in contact with the population.

The initiative to enter the electoral battle within the party came largely as a result of a personal decision. Ten respondents stated that they had decided to become a candidate for a position on the party list; they told either the administrative body of the section or the leading candidate that they wished to stand in the election. Two respondents explained that becoming a candidate was a natural process because of their extensive activities within the local party branch. Conversely, five were asked to join the list by the person who led the party list at the elections. When asked in this way, the respondents were usually guaranteed a particular position on the list, while those who entered the selection process on their own initiative faced severe competition.

It appears from the interviews that the leading candidate (usually the incumbent district mayor) has played a key role in the decisions made about the formation of the party list. Although the party statutes of the socialist party clearly state that party members vote on the list, many respondents explained that they got a position on it because the leading candidate agreed. In the words of one of them:

**In practice, how does it work? Who did you let know that you wanted to stand in the election? The local branch?**

No, you apply. That’s it. You apply, you say: “I am a candidate” by sending a letter to the mayor... and then... then he selects you.

However, the mayor (when he wishes to be re-elected), or the leading candidate, do not always have absolute power over the local section. He/she thus has to take various factors into account in the selection procedure. The compiling of the electoral list is a complicated process, in which varying factors come into play. The following extract details some of these:

Different criteria come into play in the composition of a list. We have three sections [the respondent lives in a district that is divided in three local party sections], and each section must be represented. Secondly, there is the “parité” between men and women. So these are two criteria that do not concern the abilities of the candidate... there must be 50 percent of women, and there must be an equilibrium between the sections.

**What about the party factions?**

Indeed, in addition, there are the party factions, that must be represented each
According to their importance. And finally, an important criterion is whether the candidates... if we are responsible and we win the elections, the representatives must be serious-minded, active... they must have some skills in order to be credible for the population.

The respondents had different views about the personal features that had played a role in their access to politics. Knowing that the law on “parité” forces parties to include 50 percent of female candidates on the lists, it is noteworthy that among the 11 women who were interviewed, only three stated that they have benefited from their gender. Furthermore, these three respondents did not see gender as an adequate reason for getting on a list. One explained that four factors had played a role in her high position on it:

There are many versions that circulate about why I was the second candidate on the party list... But I see four [reasons]: I am young, there are not many women of 30 that wish to get elected, I am a woman, I am anchored locally, and I can stand for the population [in terms of origins]. All these factors played a role together, there is not one that was more important than the other.

So far as the issue of origin is concerned, and the extent to which it had played a role in the electoral battle, the interviews suggested that this had been a marginal factor. Four respondents believed that this had contributed to their success, although, again, it was not thought to be the only factor. However, the issue of origin does appear to be a positive feature: being of foreign descent is a distinctive element that can be mobilised as a resource by the respondent and/or the party. One subject explained how she had used this argument to get a position on the list:

The third argument that I used [when auditioned by the selection committee; the first being her civic activities and the second her contacts within a specific neighbourhood], and it was a bit of an unfair argument, but I thought: well, I have nothing to lose, I have to use it... It was an unfair argument and at the same time I sensed that it was an argument that could tip the scale... that was the argument of positive discrimination. I told them, I accused them, really, saying: I took a look at the electoral lists of the right wing party, they put people of foreign origin high on the lists, and I don’t know what the PS will do, but for the time being, it is doing bad. (...) They criticised me for using that argument... or well... they told me that I was not included on the list just because I am of foreign origin, but because they thought I was a good candidate. I am not fully convinced.

To summarise, it is possible to identify a common feature in the process of the Paris respondents gaining access to politics; they began their political activities in metropolitan France, although many have parents who were politically active in their country of origin. The length of party membership varies a great deal, and there was not one standard, pre-election career. Half of the group has had – or still has – responsibilities within the party. The candidacy itself was usually an individual initiative, but the support of the leading candidate, a party faction, or the local party section was an absolute necessity for someone to be included on the final candidate list. Belonging to a minority group...
appears to be of little importance. Women do seem to have an advantage: they are more numerous, have been party members for a shorter period of time before their election, and are more often a district deputy mayor or a deputy mayor.

IV. Comparing access across time and across cities

Two comparisons can be made here: one in which the context is the same (in Amsterdam) but the period of time is not (the 1990s vs. 2006), and another at a similar point in time but in two different contexts (Paris vs. Amsterdam). Important changes can be seen when comparing the ethnic minority councillors elected in Amsterdam in the early 1990s and those who succeeded in 2006: there was a large increase in the number of women, there was greater involvement of second generation immigrants, there is growing diversity in terms of ethnic background, and the number of “partisan” politicians (people who were long-term party members and/or held responsibilities within the party before their election) has increased. These changes are of different kinds. The increase of second generation immigrants, for example, reflects a societal change, while the other factors are a sign of an alteration in the recruitment practices (or strategy) within the political parties.

The most striking change, however, is that a relatively homogeneous group of councillors in the 1990s, composed of young men born abroad, with a middle class or upper middle class background, who migrated as young adults and have achieved a high level of education, was replaced (after the 2006 elections) by a group characterised by its diversity in terms of gender, origin, social-economic background and migration history. This change may be due to the significant increase in the number of ethnic minority councillors, but this cannot explain why no dominant profile emerges from the group of politicians elected after 2006. Nevertheless, a few features are central and have remained constant over time: a high level of education, Dutch nationality and the affiliation to the social-democratic party, the PvdA. These features point to consistent preconditions for access to the politics of Amsterdam over time: access is mainly possible within the dominant party in the city for those who are highly educated and have Dutch nationality.

The comparison of the situation in Amsterdam with that in Paris reveals, firstly, that in both relative and absolute numbers, more ethnic minority politicians are elected in Amsterdam. Then, if we compare those elected in Amsterdam and Paris, it appears that more women are successful in the latter. Moreover, these women have had an advantage over men: their access to local politics appears to have been easier; they have been party members for a shorter period of time before their first election success and they gain access to higher positions in the Parisian hierarchical political system. Furthermore, on average, the respondents in Paris have been party members for longer periods of time than their Dutch counterparts. On the other hand, the groups of respondents in both cities share a number of characteristics: their left-wing engagement, the diversity of their ethnic backgrounds, the high level of their education, the important presence of first generation immigrants and the high number of newly elected councillors. It appears that in both cities migration in adulthood, political socialisation in the country of origin, or even political activities in the country of origin are no impediment to a political career in
the host country (nor are these factors a necessary condition). It is also important to note that these highly educated, left-leaning politicians are active citizens, either within parties or within organisations. As a form of training, a resource and a source of legitimacy (whether as a complement to or, sometimes, a substitute for partisan legitimacy), activities within civic organisations tend to help in the process of gaining political access. In both cities, the respondents needed these sources of legitimacy before they decided, or were asked, to stand for election. One does not get a position on a party list “out of the blue.”

When contrasting the three groups of respondents and addressing changes and similarities over time, a few characteristics come to the fore: they are highly-educated, left-leaning and civically and/or politically active citizens. With regard to their education, ethnic minority politicians resemble politicians in general. In other words, the former fit into a more general pattern of the profile of the elected elite. The high level of education of the respondents is also a sign that these individuals distinguish themselves from ethnic minority and immigrant groups, which are not generally well educated. It is also important to highlight that even when possessing the nationality of the country of residence is not a prerequisite to getting elected (as is the case in the Netherlands), the ethnic minority representatives were Dutch nationals. Nationality and political participation are thus – whether by law or in practice – intimately linked.

More generally, the conclusion of this chapter is that ethnic minority politicians rarely correspond with the (caricature) image of immigrants: a male, unskilled guest worker with little schooling, an illiterate wife, and children who struggle in society. Even for the respondents who are the children of guest workers, their family background and history of migration are atypical: they have parents of different origins, they migrated with a single (divorced) parent, they moved in order to study, or their family travelled back and forth, etc. The respondents were often members of ethnic or religious minority groups in the country of origin, or are a minority within the immigrant group in the country of residence. Their exceptional family backgrounds, histories of migration, scholarly and professional careers and civic activities are the signs of their particular position with regard to ethnic minority groups in both cities. This status of exception appears to favour their access to the elite of the country of origin, while it distances them from those that they stand for in the eyes of so many.

As these practices of access to local politics, both over time and in two cities, have now been described and analysed, they can be linked to the insights in Chapter III so as to address the issue of the interaction between structure and practices. Some changes over time, or across the two cities, can be linked to differences in terms of the structural features. With regard to the presence, in absolute and relative numbers, of ethnic minority politicians in Amsterdam and Paris, the empirical facts presented here fit well with the features of the structure described in Chapter III; Amsterdam does indeed have a more favourable context for the inclusion of ethnic minorities in politics than Paris. The proportional electoral system urges parties in Amsterdam to constantly appeal to voters, among whom are enfranchised foreigners. This is particularly the case for the social-democratic party, the PvdA; if it wants to maintain its dominance in the city council and district councils, it must remain open to all of society and include minorities on its lists. Parties in Paris do, however, seem to have more latitude when it comes to their recruitment strategy; the electoral system gives almost absolute power to the winning list and, more particularly, to the leading candidate on it. This is reflected when looking
at the access that ethnic minority politicians in Paris have, which largely depends on the willingness of party leaders to include them on lists.

The comparison of Amsterdam over time also highlights the role of structure. The 1990 election was atypical for a number of reasons (weakened position of the PvdA, new district councils, enfranchisement of foreigners), and this relates to some of the characteristics of the councillors elected at that time; parties proactively sought out ethnic minority candidates, thereby recruiting people with little political and/or partisan experience. Those elected in 2006, however, are both more embedded in their parties and more concerned with the issue of their legitimacy to stand in an election. Furthermore, an ethnic minority background played a much more enabling role in the recruitment process in the 1990s than in 2006.

Nevertheless, other outcomes are difficult to link with structural features. Despite the difference in structure of the two cities, the characteristics shared by the respondents over time, and in both Amsterdam and Paris (the high level of education and the atypical background, family history and process of migration), are puzzling in this respect. These characteristics point to there being other mechanisms at play that do not depend on the electoral system, the political system and the political culture in each city. Indeed, as I will argue in my conclusion, these similarities among the ethnic minority councillors in Amsterdam and Paris are best explained by looking at the functioning of representative democracy and elite recruitment.