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Cities and the politics of immigrant integration: a comparison of Berlin, Amsterdam, New York City, and San Francisco

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ABSTRACT
This article examines how the urban context, rather than national or regional context, shapes local immigrant integration policies. We draw on the integration experiences of four large European and American cities—Berlin, Amsterdam, New York City, and San Francisco—to develop a basic inductive framework for explaining when and why city officials enact and implement policies that promote immigrant integration. Our framework highlights the importance for cities to have (1) left-leaning governments, (2) immigrants who constitute a large part of the city electorate and are part of local decision-making structures, and (3) an infrastructure of community-based organisations that actively represent immigrants’ collective interests in local politics and policy-making. We show that when these three factors exist synergistically, cities are more likely to commit themselves to policies that promote immigrant integration even when the national context is not very hospitable to immigrant rights.

KEYWORDS
Immigration; integration; politics; cities; Europe; USA

Introduction
Sustained migration in recent decades has prompted the authorities of many large European and American cities to develop policies and practices that promote immigrant integration. Such local integration policies seek to reduce the segregation, inequality, discrimination, and poverty experienced by ethno-racial immigrant groups, as well as make city institutions like schools, hospitals, and social service agencies more demographically representative and accommodative of newcomers’ needs and interests. In this article, we seek to explain when and why cities develop integration policies and practices in which immigrants’ group-based characteristics such as their national origin, documentation status, ethnicity, religion, and/or socio-economic status play important roles in defining common policy interests and solutions (Bloemraad 2007). In particular, we examine how the urban context, rather than national or regional context, shapes the kinds of integration policies that city officials adopt and implement.

While acknowledging the urban context in which cities are embedded, our inductive framework highlights three local-level factors that are critical for the enactment and implementation of city integration policies. One, it is important that cities have left-
leaning governments. Two, immigrants and their direct descendants should constitute a
sizeable share of the city electorate and be part of local decision-making structures such
as city councils and city administrative agencies. Three, it is important that cities have
an infrastructure of community-based organisations that actively represent immigrants’
collective interests in local politics and policy-making. When these factors exist synergis-
tically, cities are more likely to commit themselves to policies and practices that promote
immigrant integration even when the national context is not very hospitable to immigrant
rights.

Our inductive framework draws from 10 years of empirical research into immigrant
integration dynamics in several large European and American gateway cities. Our frame-
work adds to European scholarship by emphasising the importance of local, and not only
national, factors that drive local integration policies and practices. With a focus on
explaining local integrative approaches that emphasise group-based policies, it also pro-
vides a vital complement to the burgeoning U.S. literature on local policy activism
aimed at excluding certain immigrant groups from local civic and political life (e.g.
Hopkins 2010; Varsanyi 2010). The framework we present here draws on the integration
policies and practices in two large European (Berlin and Amsterdam) cities and two
American (New York City and San Francisco) cities, with a focus on the period starting
in the 1970s. All four cities have experienced sizeable influxes of newcomers in recent
decades and today have large and diverse immigrant populations. They differ, however,
in the extent to which immigrants have voted in local elections and assumed local govern-
ment positions, as well as the extent to which there is a strong field of community-based
organisations that advocate for immigrants’ rights. These differences help to explain why
some of these cities have adopted more integration policies that emphasise group-based
characteristics in some time periods, but not others.

Towards a framework for understanding city integration policies

Scholars on both sides of the Atlantic recognise that cities are an important locus for
immigrant integration (e.g. Garbaye 2005; Good 2009; de Graauw forthcoming; Jones-
Correa 2011; Koopmans 2004; Nicholls and Uitermark 2013; Vermeulen 2006). For
most immigrants, the lived experience of integration is inherently local: they work in
the city, pay local taxes, are homeowners, tenants, or landlords in the city, send their chil-
dren to local schools, attend city churches, and use government services locally. City of-
ficials and agencies—compared to those at the national, state, or provincial level—are also
relatively more accessible to immigrants, and they administer more of the programmes
deliver more of the services critical to immigrants’ daily lives. Yet we lack a framework
for understanding what factors influence the development of city integration policies,
especially ones that acknowledge or valorise group-based interests.

A framework for understanding local integration policies must acknowledge that cities
do not operate in a vacuum. National (and state or provincial) policies have an impact on
city policies, and cities are largely subservient to the nation-state. Koopmans (2004) argues
that city officials are constrained in the type of integration policies they can adopt because
such policies have deep roots in national traditions of citizenship and notions of national
identity. While local policy-makers may deviate from national repertoires, they generally
do within limits so that local integration generally occurs along nationally defined paths.
In the case of the USA, there is no coherent national integration programme, and in recent years national policies and practices have emphasised immigration enforcement, not immigrant integration (Bloemraad and de Graauw 2012). The national governments of many European nations, Germany and the Netherlands included, have become increasingly critical of ‘multicultural’ or group-based integration efforts (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010; Wright and Bloemraad 2012). It thus appears that the push for European and American cities to develop group-based integration policies is not coming from their respective national governments.

In their comparison of integration policies of 10 European countries between 1980 and 2008, Koopmans, Michalowski, and Waibel (2012) identify additional variables that can explain when and why cities develop immigrant integration policies. They point to electoral and partisan drivers of countries’ responses to immigrant diversity. They show that countries with sizeable or growing immigrant electorates and no strong right-wing, anti-immigrant political party—like in the Netherlands before 2002 and Sweden—are more likely to adopt an inclusive approach to immigrant integration with more wide-ranging rights for immigrants. Yet when right-wing populist parties are strong and successfully mobilise native voters to support their anti-immigrant agenda—like in Denmark, the Netherlands after 2002, and Austria—countries will see a slowing or contraction of immigrant rights. Large cities, in comparison to countries, tend to have larger shares of immigrant voters, although national citizenship and voting rights legislation influences the actual size of the local immigrant electorate. Large cities also tend to be governed by left-leaning politicians. This may explain why such cities often develop immigrant integration policies and practices even when the national political mood is anti-immigrant.

Besides electoral participation, we argue that it is also important that immigrants and their direct descendants have won seats on city council and been appointed to city administrative posts. Research shows that when blacks, Latinos, and women 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 (e.g. Mansbridge 1999; Meier 1993). Given immigrants’ unique needs and circumstances, a demographic representation argument likely also applies to them. Government officials who are immigrants (or their direct descendants) tend to better understand immigrants’ needs and interests, and immigrant constituents and advocacy groups may find it easier to approach them with immigrant-group-specific policy ideas. This puts immigrant-origin officials in a strong position to advocate for immigrant integration policies. Although immigrants are still underrepresented in European and U.S. national governments, they have attained relatively more representation at the local level (Bloemraad 2006, 2013). This helps explain why cities are often more likely to develop integration policies and practices where immigrants’ national origin, documentation status, ethnicity, religion, and/or socio-economic status define common policy interests and solutions.

Although we believe that especially large cities provide opportune contexts for group-based politics that can result in the enactment and implementation of integration policies that address the needs and demands of immigrant groups, this need not be uniformly true across different immigrant groups or cities. In their research on Moroccan and Turkish immigrants in Amsterdam, Michon and Vermeulen (2013) argue that differences in
group-based resources influence the political incorporation trajectories of immigrant groups in the same city. The Turkish community, which has a relatively large number of ethnic organisations and a relatively strong sense of a shared group identity, displayed higher levels of political participation and electoral representation in Amsterdam politics than the Moroccan community. In their study of Amsterdam and Los Angeles, Nicholls and Uitermark (2013) similarly show that when immigrant organisations are well organised and collaborate, they can play a key role in the development of local group-based integration policies. This organisational capacity to influence local policy-making, however, can vary from city to city. In Los Angeles, where many immigrant organisations work in coalition with each other, community advocates have played an influential role in shaping local policies that benefit immigrant communities. In Amsterdam, by contrast, community organisations have been less cohesive and, as a result, less successful in shaping local immigrant integration policies and practices.

In summary, our inductive framework emphasises the relevance of three local factors that together underscore the capacity of the local policy-making elite, voters, and civil society organisations to adopt and implement group-based immigrant integration policies. One, cities with a majority of left-leaning politicians are more likely to enact and implement integration policies that emphasise group-based characteristics. Two, cities with a sizeable immigrant-origin electorate and a sizeable number of immigrants (or their direct descendants) on city council and in city administrative positions are also more likely to adopt and implement group-based immigrant integration policies. Finally, cities that have a well-developed infrastructure of community-based organisations that actively represent immigrants’ collective interests in local politics and policy-making are also more likely enact and implement integration policies that are attentive to immigrants’ group interests and concerns.

Methods and data

With a focus on the period starting in the 1970s, we compare the integration policies of four large European and U.S. cities: Berlin, Amsterdam, New York City, and San Francisco. They all have experienced large-scale immigration at least since WWII, and they have on the books integration policies, although they target different immigrant groups and seek to accomplish different goals. Each city, however, operates in a different national (and regional) policy context. Germany long denied it was a country of immigration, but now cautiously recognises its immigrant (and refugee) residents and the imperative to address their integration. Once a model of religious and cultural tolerance, the Netherlands has since retreated from multiculturalism and group-based approaches to immigrant integration. The USA, a classic country of immigration, has no formal integration programme and today takes a hard line on immigration enforcement. Additionally, San Francisco operates in a state that led the anti-immigration movement in the USA in the 1980s and 1990s, while New York City is situated in a state that has been more welcoming of immigrants during this period.

These similarities and differences make Berlin, Amsterdam, New York City, and San Francisco good initial cases to develop a basic framework for understanding when and why urban context shapes city immigrant integration policies. These four transatlantic cities are not necessarily representative of all European and U.S. cities. Additional research
on the integration experiences of other cities will be necessary to refine, extend, and test our inductive framework developed out of the integration experiences of these four cities.

For Berlin and Amsterdam, we draw on several comparative research projects conducted in the last 10 years (Michon and Vermeulen 2013; Vermeulen 2006, 2008, 2013, 2014; Vermeulen and Doğan 2015). These projects examined the development of local integration policies, the emergence and functioning of local immigrant organisations, and the civic and political participation of immigrants in these two European cities. Data include over 80 interviews with local and national politicians, policy-makers, and practitioners, as well as members, staff, and board members of local immigrant organisations. We also consulted national and local policy reports, annual data on local subsidies to immigrant organisations, and archived registration data on immigrant organisations in Berlin and Amsterdam.

For New York City and San Francisco, we draw on two research projects conducted between 2006 and 2013 (de Graauw 2012, 2014, forthcoming; de Graauw, Gleeson, and Bloemraad 2013; de Graauw, Gordon, and Mollenkopf forthcoming). These projects examined the local politics of immigrant rights in each city, with a focus on the role of community-based immigrant organisations in advocating for local integration policies. Data include over 145 interviews with the staff of immigrant organisations, elected and appointed officials and other local government employees, and leaders from a variety of community-based organisations with an interest in immigrant integration, such as local labour unions, churches, and grant-making institutions. We also draw from Census statistics, newspaper reports in the local press, documentary evidence from immigrant organisations, two dozen recorded and televised hearings on integration policies enacted in these two U.S. cities, and an assortment of government reports.

**Berlin**

Modern-day immigration to Berlin is closely tied to the city’s positioning in the political geography of the Cold War. Thousands of refugees from Communist countries entered Western Europe through West Berlin, where many found work and settled, until the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 closed this migration route overnight. Faced with labour shortages in the late 1960s, local authorities—in collaboration with national authorities—started recruiting guest workers from Turkey, Yugoslavia, Italy, and Greece, leading to a strong presence of these migrant groups in West Berlin. The fall of the wall in 1989 and the reunification of Germany in 1990 caused a serious economic crisis, lasting over 20 years and ultimately almost bankrupting the city. While the Berlin crisis resulted in population loss, large numbers of immigrants—mainly from Eastern and Southeastern Europe—continued to migrate to the city. Some were of German heritage; others were political refugees fleeing violent conflicts in former Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union (Ohliger and Raiser 2005) and recently from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

Today, Berlin is Germany’s largest city with 3.4 million residents, about 14% of whom are ‘foreigners’ without German citizenship (CIMSB 2011). In 2010, Berlin counted 583,000 foreign-born residents and 280,000 second-generation immigrants. Together, these individuals of ‘immigrant background’ make up a quarter of Berlin’s population (IntMK 2011). Turks form the largest immigrant-origin group, comprising approximately
200,000 foreign-born individuals and second-generation immigrants. Other large immigrant communities include individuals with origins in the former Soviet Union (about 100,000), former Yugoslavia (about 60,000), and Poland (about 45,000) (RIM 2014).

National political leaders did not officially recognise immigration and integration as vital features of the country’s history until 2000, even though Germany had been admitting large numbers of immigrants for several decades. The surge in immigration, however, forced Berlin to formulate a cautious integration policy in the 1980s. This early policy sought to address the segregation, racial violence, unemployment, and housing problems experienced by guest workers and later family reunification migrants and asylum seekers (Schwarz 1992).

Berlin’s early integration policy developed to include a mix of restrictive and inclusive elements, reflecting the partisan composition of its government at the time. The centre-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU) triumphed in the 1981 Berlin elections with campaign promises of restrictive and even xenophobic measures to deal with the city’s growing immigrant population. Following the elections, the CDU formed a coalition government with the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP) and introduced a new integration policy under the slogan ‘integration or departure’ (Schwarz 2001, 131). This policy sought to reduce the number of immigrants in the city by finding and expelling illegal immigrants and opposing dual nationality. Yet, in stark contrast to national policy, it also sought to integrate immigrant-origin individuals already living in Berlin by promoting the naturalisation of especially second- and third-generation Turkish immigrants. The integrative aspect of the policy would be implemented with the assistance of a newly established administrative office focused on immigrant integration, the Ausländerbeauftragte (Commissioner of Foreigners’ Affairs), which also allocated and administered funding to immigrant organisations in the city (Vermeulen 2006).

The enactment of more liberal national immigration and citizenship laws at the turn of the millennium gave German municipalities more opportunities to develop formal integration policies. After 2000, Berlin officials strategically used this changed national context to stake out a bolder position on integration. The Berlin Senate then published its first official integration policy, which promotes immigrants’ participation in local government bodies such as the State Advisory Board for Integration and Migration Issues as well as in educational, social services, and neighbourhood institutions. The new policy envisions integration as a bilateral process in which immigrant organisations play a key bridging function between immigrant minorities and the host society (Vermeulen 2008). Finally, the Senate appointed the first Senator for Integration Affairs and changed the name of Ausländerbeauftragte to Integrations- und Migrationsbeauftragte (Commissioner for Integration and Migration).

Berlin is home to numerous community-based organisations that help immigrants and their descendants adjust to life in the city. Given their large numbers, Turks stand out from other immigrant groups for their associational activities, and many organisations provide interest representation as well as religious, socio-economic, and cultural services to Berlin’s Turkish community. Their organisational density notwithstanding, Turkish organisations suffer from a high degree of polarisation and rivalry because of the ongoing influence of transnational ideological movements from Turkey. As a result, Turkish organisations do not have a strong tradition of working together, and their
internal fragmentation has undermined their ability to promote the collective interests of Turkish immigrants in local politics and policy-making (Vermeulen 2013).

Today, many of Berlin’s immigrants still confront poverty and struggle in school and in the labour market. Many also lack the right to vote in local elections, and only about 9% of the Berlin electorate is of immigrant background (i.e. first- and second-generation immigrants) (IntMK 2011). While non-citizen voting is common in some European cities, including Amsterdam, the German constitution mandates that only German citizens have municipal voting rights. Strict national immigration laws from before 2000, however, have made it difficult for immigrants to acquire German citizenship (Koopmans et al. 2005). Immigrant organisations nationwide, but particularly those in Berlin, have pushed for reform, arguing that political participation increases integration. Many local and regional authorities also favour extending local voting rights to non-citizens, but national-level politicians have been reluctant to realise electoral reform.

Despite low levels of electoral participation by immigrant-origin Berliners, a growing number of local politicians with immigrant backgrounds hold office in city government. In 2005, politicians with immigrant roots held 9 of 141 seats (6%) in the Senate, the executive body that governs the city-state of Berlin. In 2011, this number had increased to 17 of 149 seats (11%). Most of these immigrant-origin politicians have a Turkish background. About 11% of Berlin civil servants are of immigrant background. Of this group, 90% is foreign-born and about 10% are second-generation immigrants (IntMK 2011).

Berlin’s current integration policy does not valorise immigrant group identities or grant new collective rights to immigrants. Instead, it is a careful pragmatic and overall top-down approach that emphasises mutual understanding and relationship building between immigrants, their organisations, and city officials. The Islam Forum, an initiative created by the Commissioner for Integration and Migration in 2005, is a telling example. The Forum serves as a key medium for exchange, communication, and discussion between Muslim and non-Muslim public and private sector actors in Berlin. It holds closed meetings four times a year, with participation from representatives from organised and more informal Islamic groups, Berlin officials (including the Minister of the Interior, district mayors, and city police), three neighbourhood management agencies, and representatives from Jewish, Christian, and other civil society organisations. On the basis of equal membership, representatives of Muslim groups can freely—though not publicly—discuss with other Forum participants controversial issues including security, cooperation, the position of Muslims in Berlin, and Muslims’ participation in Berlin society. Besides institutionalizing dialogue, the Forum endeavours to strengthen mutual trust to facilitate possible future collaborations around local integration issues (Vermeulen 2014).

In summary, Berlin formulated integration policies long before the national government did, mostly in efforts to remedy local problems resulting from the large influx of immigrants after WWII. In the early 1980s, Berlin officials developed an integration policy that had both inclusive and restrictive elements, reflecting the centre-right CDU–FDP coalition in power at the time. An important part of the early integration policy was the creation of the Ausländerbeauftragte, a local bureaucratic agency responsible for supporting immigrant groups. This early policy and the Ausländerbeauftragte, however, did not espouse a clear group-based approach to immigrant integration. This changed, but only slowly, when left-leaning politicians would dominate Berlin
government in ensuing years, and they changed the *Ausländerbeauftragte* to the *Integrationsbeauftragte* and formulated a bolder local integration policy framework.

Berlin’s current approach to integration is best characterised as top-down and pragmatic, and it still does not openly recognise or target specific immigrant groups as distinct policy beneficiaries. Compared to national German integration policies, Berlin’s policies have been more responsive to the demands and problems from immigrant-origin residents. Compared to the other cities we examine, however, Berlin’s responses are relatively weak. The weakness of community-based organisations, also in the large Turkish community, provides one explanation for this; the fact that immigrant-origin individuals make up small percentages of the city’s electorate and public officials provides another.

### Amsterdam

Seventeenth century Amsterdam attracted many economic migrants and religious refugees from across Europe, but few immigrants settled in the city in the centuries following the Dutch Golden Age. Starting in the early 1960s, Amsterdam once again attracted large numbers of immigrants, including newcomers from former Dutch colonies, most notably Surinam, and guest workers from countries ringing the Mediterranean Sea, mainly Turkey and Morocco. These immigrant waves significantly altered the city’s demography so that 50 years later over half of Amsterdam’s population was of immigrant origin (i.e. individuals who are foreign-born or who are born in the Netherlands with at least one foreign-born parent). Today, Amsterdam is the largest city in the Netherlands with almost 800,000 residents, including 230,000 foreign-born individuals and 180,000 second-generation immigrants. The three largest immigrant-origin groups are Moroccans (69,439, or 9% of the total city population; 47% are foreign-born), Surinamese (68,881, or 9% of city population; 55% are foreign-born), and Turks (40,370, or 5% of the city population; 52% are foreign-born) (Vermeulen, Michon, and Tillie 2014).

Today, immigrant Amsterdammers tend to have low socio-economic status, and—compared to native-born city residents—they are at a disadvantage in the labour market, income, housing, and education (Entzinger and Scheffer 2012). The highly stratified Dutch school system provides a telling example of the socio-economic disadvantage faced by students of immigrant origin. Primary schools have a heavy hand in determining the type of high school that students attend, a decision with tremendous impact on their educational trajectories and labour market prospects. While only 30% of Amsterdam students of Surinamese, Turkish, or Moroccan background are steered towards an academic (HAVO/VWO) rather than a vocational track, this is the case for 70% of Amsterdam students with no immigrant background (Entzinger and Scheffer 2012, 87). The resultant segregation in Amsterdam schools, where poor performing schools have high percentages of students with an immigrant background, has become an important and controversial issue in local politics.

Initially, Amsterdam authorities sought to improve immigrants’ socio-economic situation and increase other city residents’ tolerance and respect for different immigrant cultures with a multicultural or group-based approach that dovetailed a national multicultural approach to immigrant integration. Dating from the 1970s, Amsterdam’s multicultural integration policy classified Surinamese, Moroccans, and Turks as ‘minority target groups’ and made them eligible for subsidies to develop their own organisations to
promote group interests. During the 1990s, however, city and national officials became critical of this approach, in large part because it had failed to realise the desired economic improvements for minority target groups within a short period of time. City officials also grew uneasy with the presence of large and religiously active Muslim communities in Amsterdam, which they thought of as a secular city. They believed that the city’s policy of recognizing immigrants’ collective cultural and religious identities actually was deepening segregation and increasing polarisation (Vermeulen 2008).

By 1999, Amsterdam officials had distanced themselves from multiculturalism, instead embracing a diversity policy that targets the social problems of all city residents, not just those of specific minority groups. This new diversity policy effectively is an ‘anti-minority target group policy’ (antidoelgroepenbeleid) and seeks to ensure that everyone has equal opportunity to participate in society (Vermeulen 2008). Practically, this means that ethnicity, religion, or other group-specific cultural identities no longer play a role in the development, enactment, and implementation of local social policies, which now strive to be universal in character. This policy change, which was driven by local developments, has coincided with growing national support for populist anti-immigrant parties that view cultural and religious diversity as undermining social cohesion in Dutch society.

Over the years, Moroccan, Surinamese, and Turkish immigrants in Amsterdam have formed many organisations that support their communities. There are, however, notable differences between and within these groups’ organisations. In 2007, the Surinamese (14 organisations per 1000 immigrants) and Turkish (13.3 organisations per 1000 immigrants) communities had almost double the organisational density of the Moroccan community (7.5 organisations per 1000 immigrants). In that same year, a significantly higher percentage of Turkish community members (44%) participated in immigrant organisations compared to Moroccan (25%) and Surinamese (17%) community members (Vermeulen, Michon, and Tillie 2014). With a well-developed infrastructure of organisations, an active and politically connected organisational elite, and an engaged rank-and-file membership, the Turkish community has the highest level of group-based resources among the three largest immigrant groups in Amsterdam. Local immigrant organisations have been critical of the group-neutral diversity policy that Amsterdam officials imposed after 1999, but even those in the highly organised Turkish community have appeared too weak to counter it (Nicholls and Uitermark 2013).

Immigrants in Amsterdam experience a more opportune electoral context compared to immigrants in the other three cities we discuss, and Dutch national legislation has enabled this. Amsterdam’s voting system, defined by the national policy context, facilitates minority representation since elections occur through party-list proportionality, with pure proportionality, very low thresholds, and the ability to cast preferential votes. Voter registration is automatic and non-citizens with at least five years of legal residency in the Netherlands have had the right to vote in local elections since 1985. As a result, immigrants have enjoyed higher levels of electoral participation than elsewhere in Europe. However, turnout among immigrant-origin groups varies and has decreased since the mid-1990s (see Table 1). In the 2014 elections, 34% of Turkish-origin individuals in Amsterdam turned out to vote, compared to 26% of Surinamese and 24% of Moroccans.

Immigrants have also enjoyed considerable levels of political representation in Amsterdam, capturing between 16% and 20% of all 45 City Council seats since the late 1990s (see Table 2). Here also, we see differences across immigrant groups. Since 1994, a relatively
large number of immigrant-origin city councillors have been of Turkish descent, contributing to Turks’ overrepresentation on City Council. This can be explained by Turks’ more abundant group-based resources (Michon and Vermeulen 2013). Individuals of immigrant origin also are found in the city bureaucracy, and in 2010 about 22% of Amsterdam’s civil servants were of non-Western immigrant background (Gemeente Amsterdam 2013). In contrast, immigrants—and Turks in particular—have had a harder time breaking into high-level appointed executive posts in city government. Between 2002 and 2010, individuals of Moroccan and Surinamese background held the positions of deputy mayor, district mayor, and district deputy mayor 11 and 10 times respectively, but individuals of Turkish background did so only 3 times (Vermeulen, Michon, and Tillie 2014).

The difficulty of immigrant-origin individuals to capture high-level city administrative positions is explained partly by the relative weak positions of immigrant organisations in Amsterdam politics and policy-making as well as city officials’ reluctance since the late 1990s to recognise and support immigrant, ethnic, or religious identities (Michon and Vermeulen 2013). A concomitant development has been the evolution of Amsterdam’s multicultural policies, iconic examples during the 1970s and 1980s of a local integration approach in which immigrants’ group-based characteristics played a defining role, to a new group-neutral diversity framework where immigrants’ collective ethnic or religious identities are discounted.

Amsterdam is an example of a city in which the political context provides clear opportunities for the development of local, group-based immigrant integration policies. Between 1945 and 2014, the city experienced a long period of continuous left-wing city governments. Additionally, progressive national electoral rules helped create a large immigrant electorate in the city from the 1980s onward. These local contextual factors help explain why during the 1980s and 1990s Amsterdam authorities developed and implemented local immigrant integration policies that officially recognised specific immigrant groups and allowed them to receive financial support to improve their socio-economic position in the city. These group-specific integration policies, however,

Table 1. Percentage turnout of immigrant-origin voters in Amsterdam, 1994–2014.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surinam</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall turnout</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Michon and Vermeulen (2013) and Kranendonk et al. (2014).

Table 2. Immigrant-origin city councillors in Amsterdam, 1990–2014.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Surinam</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of City Council (N = 45)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Michon and Vermeulen (2013) and authors’ own calculations.
came to an end in the late 1990s as both city and national politicians became dissatisfied with their results. The weak power of community-based immigrant organisations in the city partly explains this important policy shift away from a multicultural approach to immigrant integration even as two other explanatory factors (i.e. left-leaning governments and large immigrant electorate) were still present.

**New York City**

New York City has long been—and continues to be—the traditional point of entry for immigrants coming to the USA. In 1850, more than a third of the city’s inhabitants were foreign-born. The percentage of immigrants in the city declined in subsequent decades as a result of federal restrictive immigration laws enacted at the turn of the twentieth century, but increased again after federal immigration laws were liberalised in 1965. In 2012, New York was the largest city in the USA and 37% of its 8,199,221 residents were born abroad (ACS 2012).

New York City’s immigrant population is very diverse, and no one single immigrant nationality group constitutes more than 12% of the city’s total foreign-born population. The majority (52%) of immigrants hail from Latin America, with Dominicans (12%), Jamaicans (6%), and Mexicans (6%) constituting the largest groups. The second largest group (26%) comes from Asia, and mostly China (10%) and India (3%). The third largest group (17%) comes from Europe, with Russians (3%) making up most numerous group. New York City counts an estimated 499,000 undocumented immigrants, and Latino immigrants in particular have high rates of poverty and are disproportionately represented in low-wage service jobs (DCP 2013). About 52% of New York City’s immigrants have acquired U.S. citizenship, compared to 44% of immigrants nationwide. Immigrants also form a growing proportion of the city’s electorate (Minnite and Mollenkopf 2008), and they made up 30% (892,000) of all New York City voters in the 2012 presidential election (Roberts 2013). New York City has long been a Democratic-majority city, but it had Republican mayors between 1994 and 2007 (when Mayor Bloomberg changed his affiliation to Independent).

New York City’s integration initiatives are mostly locally developed without the direction or support of the national government or New York State. The U.S. government has increasingly emphasised immigration enforcement and does not actively promote or support immigrant integration. New York State, in contrast, does welcome immigrants, but its integration initiatives developed notably later than the city’s, at times by copying and scaling up city initiatives. Since 2002, New York State has allowed qualified undocumented students to pay the reduced, in-state tuition rate at public colleges and universities. It also has, since 2011, a state-wide language access policy for limited English proficient immigrants. New York State, furthermore, created several agencies dedicated to helping immigrants. They include the Department of Labor’s Division of Immigrant Policies and Affairs (dating from 2007), which monitors and protects the labour rights of immigrants, and the Office for New Americans (created in 2012), which promotes immigrants’ participation in the state’s civic and economic life.

In New York City, policy discussions about immigrant integration have often focused on harnessing the economic power of immigrants, without targeting specific immigrant nationality groups. Public officials are well aware that the constant stream of new
immigrants has saved New York City from population loss and economic stagnation characteristic of other large cities in the Northeast and Midwest. They often emphasise that immigrants, who make up 48% of all small business owners in the city, play an important role in the city’s economy, with the potential to create new jobs, contribute to city and state coffers, and revitalise city neighbourhoods (AS/COA 2014; FPI 2011). Mayors Bloomberg (2001–2013) and de Blasio (2014–present)—both powerful figures in city government—have made immigrant economic opportunity a key plank in their immigration agendas, each promoting new initiatives to serve immigrant entrepreneurs.

Since 2003, the New York City Council and the mayor have taken big strides to make city government and certain businesses (i.e. chain pharmacies) more accessible to limited English proficient immigrants. Today, all city agencies with public service functions are required to provide direct services to city residents in the top six languages spoken in the city (i.e. Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Korean, Italian, and French Creole). In recent years, City Council also has debated legislation to reinstitute local voting rights for non-citizens, and in 2014 it enacted a municipal ID card programme to promote the civic integration of the city’s undocumented population.

The city was one of the first U.S. cities to institutionalise its commitment to immigrant integration. Dating from 1986, the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs is charged with recommending to the mayor and City Council policies and programmes that facilitate the successful integration of immigrant New Yorkers into the civic, economic, and cultural life of the city. In 2002, shortly after the 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, City Council also created an Immigration Committee, which reviews and vets all policy proposals that affect immigration and immigrants in New York City.

New York City, however, has also a long history of working together with federal immigration officials—especially in its main jail complex on Rikers Island—to apprehend and deport undocumented immigrants. Between 2008 and 2010, federal officials with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detained over 7000 immigrant New Yorkers each year, 91% of whom have been deported (NYU School of Law, Immigrant Defense Project, and Families for Freedom 2012). Community advocates have criticised these collaborations for breaking apart families and immigrant neighbourhoods. Their mounting pressure for change has prompted City Council to enact several policies between 2011 and 2014 that restrict the situations in which the city honours ICE detainers, thus making it less likely that undocumented immigrants without serious criminal records are deported from the USA.

Community-based immigrant rights organisations have played critical roles in promoting pro-immigrant and opposing anti-immigrant policies and practices in New York City. Given its long history of mass migration and exceptionally diverse immigrant population, the city counts many active immigrant rights organisations, estimated at over 240 (MOIA 2014). Most of these are neighbourhood based, cater to particular immigrant nationality or language groups, and focus on specific service areas or policy issues. Yet they have been able to find common ground and articulate common agendas focused on issues affecting many disadvantaged immigrants, such as discrimination in accessing government information and services, housing, and employment. Organisations actively engage in coalition building to pool their staff skills, membership bases, and other organisational resources so they can exert influence in a city that has a highly centralised and partisan political system where the mayor sets the agenda on many issues.
Some organisational collaborations have been institutionalised and formalised. The best known is the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC), a citywide advocacy coalition with a staff of 23 and nearly 200 member organisations. It ‘promotes immigrants’ full civic participation, fosters their leadership, and provides a unified voice and a vehicle for collective action for New York’s diverse immigrant communities’ (NYIC 2015). Founded in 1987, the NYIC today often has a seat at the table when policy-makers address issues affecting the city’s immigrants, and city officials readily identify NYIC as a major advocacy force in the city. Other collaborations have occurred in a more ad hoc fashion, when organisations mobilised around particular advocacy campaigns. Issues such as language access, immigrant labour rights, housing, health care, state driver licenses, and federal immigration enforcement routinely bring together immigrant rights organisations from across the city and also involve local powerbrokers like the New York Civil Liberties Union or various labour unions.

The substantive representation of immigrants’ group interests in local policy-making has occurred at a time when immigrants and their direct descendants have gained a stronger foothold in New York City’s decision-making structures. Compared to San Francisco, though, their political incorporation has been less complete. A growing number of immigrants and ethno-racial minorities with immigrant backgrounds have been elected to City Council since it was enlarged and redistricted to promote better minority representation in 1991 (see Figure 1). While the 31-member City Council in 1962 included 29 whites and 2 blacks, the 51-member City Council in 2014 included 25 whites, 13 blacks, 11 Latinos (including three who identified also black), and 2 Asians. Currently, Asians are the most underrepresented group on City Council: they constitute 13% of the city population, but they hold only 4% of the Council seats. New York City has had one black mayor (David Dinkins, 1989–1993). No Asian or Latino has yet succeeded in capturing the city’s top elective post, but they have been candidates in recent polarised mayoral elections.

![Figure 1. Ethno-racial composition of City Council, New York City, 1962–2014.](image)

*Note:* Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

*Sources:* Mollenkopf and Sonenshein (2013) and authors’ 2014 updates.
Immigrants and their descendants have made inroads also into the city’s municipal workforce, both in high-level appointive positions and lower-level civil service positions (see Figure 2). The advances, however, are more muted than in San Francisco. In 2005, about 153,000 individuals were employed in mayoral agencies in New York City. Among them, whites and blacks were overrepresented vis-à-vis their proportions in the overall city population, while Latinos and Asians were underrepresented.

Altogether, New York City has adopted and implemented several immigrant integration policies without direction or support from the state or federal government. New York City officials have been more active on integration issues than officials in Berlin and Amsterdam, but less so than those in San Francisco. Compared to the two European cities, immigrant-origin individuals in New York City have been more successful in breaking into local public office, and community-based immigrant rights organisations have been more active in local policy-making.

**San Francisco**

San Francisco has also long been an immigrant gateway. In 1860, half of its population was foreign-born. As in New York City, San Francisco’s immigrant population declined as a result of restrictive federal immigration laws until the 1960s, but it has grown since. In 2012, San Francisco was the 14th largest city in the USA and 36% of its 807,755 residents were foreign-born (ACS 2012). Asians (62%) comprise the largest immigrant group, with origins mostly in China (34%), the Philippines (10%), and Vietnam (6%). Latin Americans

![Figure 2](image-url).

**Figure 2.** Ethno-racial composition of the municipal workforce and city population, New York City, 2005.

*Notes: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native; NYC population = 7,956,113; NYC municipal workforce = 153,973.*

*Sources:* City population data are from the 2005 American Community Survey (1-year estimates). New York City workforce data are from the Equal Employment Practices Commission and cover mayoral agencies only.
(20%) are the second largest immigrant group, coming mostly from Mexico (9%) and El Salvador (4%). San Francisco counts an estimated 30,000–45,000 undocumented immigrants (Hill and Johnson 2011; MPI 2014), and immigrants are overrepresented among low-skilled and low-wage workers in the city’s expanding service economy. San Francisco has a relatively high naturalisation rate: 61% of its immigrants have acquired U.S. citizenship, compared to 44% of immigrants nationwide. Immigrants also form a growing proportion of the electorate, and in August 2015 they made up 23% of the city’s 433,000 registered voters (“Online Counts Reports” 2015).

With a constant replenishment of new immigrants, the issue of immigrant integration has long had political salience in San Francisco. A Democratic stronghold and one of the nation’s most liberal big cities, San Francisco is also part of a state that for many years led the modern anti-immigration movement in the USA. During the 1980s and 1990s, California voters approved measures to make English the state’s official language (Prop. 63, 1986), deny social services, health care, and public education to undocumented immigrants (Prop. 187, 1994), prohibit affirmative action in public settings (Prop. 209, 1996), and ban bilingual education in public schools (Prop. 227, 1998). More recently, however, California has seen a huge political shift with the enactment of laws aimed at expanding immigrants’ access to education (AB 540, 2001; AB 130 & 131, 2011), work (AB 263 & 524, 2013; SB 666, 2013), transportation (SB 60, 2013), and legal protections from deportation (AB 4, 2013). San Francisco also operates in the context of a national government focused on immigration enforcement, with few federal laws and resources dedicated to immigrant integration. The shifting state context and the anti-immigrant federal context notwithstanding, San Francisco has become one of the most immigrant-friendly cities in the nation.

In San Francisco, public discussions about immigrant integration have focused on the concerns and problems that are shared by a wide range of newcomers who struggle to survive in this high cost city, rather than those of just particular immigrant nationality, ethno-racial, or religious groups. With the goal of helping disadvantaged immigrants to achieve greater socio-economic and civic and political parity with the native-born population, local policy-makers have sought to reduce the integration barriers faced by immigrants who are non-citizens or undocumented, as well as immigrants who are limited English proficient, uneducated, or poor. The city’s policy-makers have considered a range of immigrant integration issues, putting San Francisco in the vanguard of developing a local integration programme that fills the void of a non-existent national integration programme and a minimalist welfare state.

Notably since the late 1990s, as the immigrant electorate was expanding and community groups became vocal supporters of immigrant rights, San Francisco policy-makers have adopted various policies that bring substantive benefits to disadvantaged immigrants in the city. In 2001, they enacted a language access policy that makes it easier for limited English proficient immigrants to interact and communicate with front-line city officials in their native language. Since 2000, local officials have taken steps to raise the minimum level of pay for immigrants and other low-wage workers in the city and to make it harder for unscrupulous employers to cheat immigrants out of their wages. In 2009, San Francisco started issuing municipal ID cards that enable undocumented immigrants to open a bank account, access city services, and identify themselves to police and other local government officials. And in 2014, city officials allocated $2.1 million for lawyers...
to represent undocumented children facing deportation after crossing the U.S. border to escape violence in Central America. However, two ballot measures (in 2004 and 2011) to allow non-citizens to vote in local school board elections failed.

San Francisco’s well-developed infrastructure of over 200 community-based immigrant rights organisations has played a key role in the enactment and implementation of these integration policies (de Graauw forthcoming). The organisations tend to be secular and run by college-educated first- and second-generation immigrants, and they are essential bridging institutions that connect city hall with the city’s growing and evolving newcomer communities. Since public services in the USA have increasingly been privatised and devolved since the late 1970s, these organisations today receive substantial amounts of city funding to provide services to immigrants and other needy populations (de Graauw 2012). These service provision activities have allowed them to develop a unique and unrivalled expertise on immigrant communities that they can leverage with San Francisco officials, who would struggle to learn about the needs and interests of a large portion of city residents without these organisational allies in immigrant communities.

The enactment and implementation of immigrant integration policies in San Francisco also has happened at a time when more immigrants have broken into local corridors of legislative and administrative power. A growing number of immigrants and ethno-racial minorities with immigrant backgrounds have been elected to the Board of Supervisors, especially since the city switched from at-large back to district elections in 2000 (see Figure 3). While the 11-member Board of Supervisors included 3 Asians and Latinos (and 1 African American) in 2001, it has steadily increased since then, to reach 7 Asians and Latinos (and 2 African Americans) in early 2014. One current Board member, David Campos, previously was an undocumented immigrant from Guatemala. He represents the heavily Latino Mission district and has been a strong advocate for immigrant rights. The current mayor is Ed Lee, the first Asian American to capture the city’s top elective post.

Figure 3. Ethno-racial composition of the Board of Supervisors, San Francisco, 1997–2013.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
Source: Authors’ compilation.
It is noteworthy that many of San Francisco’s Asian and Latino elected and appointed officials from the late 1990s onward started their careers in local community-based organisations. Mayor Lee was an attorney with the Asian Law Caucus for 10 years before entering public service in 1989. Eric Mar, a member of the Board of Supervisors of Asian descent, was the past director of the Northern California Coalition for Immigrant Rights and a long-time activist with the Chinese Progressive Association. There are many other examples, also among Latino public officials. This suggests that immigrant-serving community organisations have served as valuable training grounds for ethnic city leaders, who have subsequently used their seats in government to strengthen immigrant integration in San Francisco.

San Francisco policy-makers with immigrant backgrounds have also spearheaded the creation of new government bodies that further strengthen the city’s ability to make informed decisions about a range of immigrant issues. In 1997, the efforts of Supervisor Mabel Teng—an immigrant from Hong Kong—led to the creation of the nation’s first Immigrant Rights Commission, which functions as a consultative body charged with providing advice and making policy recommendations to the Board of Supervisors and the mayor on issues affecting the city’s immigrants. In 2008, furthermore, then City Administrator Ed Lee helped establish the Office of Civic Engagement and Immigrant Affairs, an executive-level office that seeks to foster immigrant integration in San Francisco, with a focus on language assistance, community outreach, citizenship, and immigrant civic participation.

Figure 4. Ethno-racial composition of the municipal workforce and city population, San Francisco, 2005.

Notes: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native; SF population = 719,077; SF municipal workforce = 29,079.

Sources: City population data are from the 2005 American Community Survey (1-year estimates). San Francisco workforce data are from the SF Department of Human Resources.
Immigrants and their descendants have made inroads also into the city’s municipal workforce, both in high-level appointive positions and lower-level civil service positions. In 2005, when San Francisco had a municipal workforce of about 29,000, whites were underrepresented and blacks were overrepresented among municipal workers (see Figure 4). The percentages of Asian and Latino municipal workers were about proportional to their percentages in the city population. Asians were even slightly overrepresented among San Francisco’s municipal workers. These notable numbers of immigrants and their descendants among municipal workers have made city administrative officials more sensitive to the unique needs and circumstances of immigrant San Franciscans.

To reiterate, San Francisco has a left-leaning, progressive government, immigrants constitute a sizeable share of the city’s electorate, immigrant-origin individuals are well represented among local government officials, and the city has a well-developed and active infrastructure of immigrant advocacy organisations. Together, these factors help explain why San Francisco stands apart from the other cities we examined for its policy commitment to immigrant integration. The city’s activism on immigrant integration stands in clear contrast to the federal government’s focus on immigration enforcement and California’s anti-immigrant orientation during the 1980s and 1990s.

Discussion and conclusion

Our rich qualitative data on integration dynamics in these four large European and U.S. cities underscore the need for scholars to rethink what immigrant integration policies can look like. Much of the literature examines whether or not countries embrace multicultural integration policies that grant group-differentiated rights and benefits to immigrants and ethno-racial minorities (e.g. Koopmans, Michalowski, and Waibel 2012; Wright and Bloemraad 2012). City integration policies are much more diverse, with only few instances of outright multicultural approaches. Among our cases, only Amsterdam’s integration policy during the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s—with its designation of Surinamese, Moroccans, and Turks as ‘minority target groups’ eligible for special government assistance—is a clear example of a multicultural approach. Perhaps New York City’s and San Francisco’s approaches—which recognise the unique needs of undocumented and limited English proficient immigrants and which have provided for the creation of specific government offices to promote their interests—can also be thought of as multicultural approaches. However, their policies were not designed with the interests of specific nationality or ethno-racial groups in mind. Berlin’s policy—with its top-down emphasis on mutual understanding and relationship building between immigrant communities (especially Muslims), their organisations, and city officials—is at best only a symbolic multicultural policy.

In enacting and implementing integration policies, officials in the four cities have focused on different groups of beneficiaries. In New York City and San Francisco, officials have targeted their policies at disadvantaged foreign-born individuals (regardless of national origin, ethnicity, or religious background), with a focus on non-citizens, undocumented immigrants, and immigrants who are limited English proficient, uneducated, and poor. This makes sense in the context of the USA, a country with a relatively weak welfare state and few federal safety net provisions for struggling immigrants in particular. In Amsterdam, policies initially targeted specific ethno-nationality groups, with a focus on
Surinamese, Moroccans, and Turks, and included foreign-born individuals as well as later-generation immigrants. In more recent years, with multiculturalism under attack locally and nationally, city officials instead have emphasised a more individualist approach to integration, one that seeks to promote the well-being of individuals rather than that of designated groups. Berlin officials, in turn, have focused their integration policy more narrowly on opening up local institutions to immigrant communities, with particular attention to first- and later-generation Muslims. These different constructions of target populations can be explained by differences in the size and composition of each city's immigrant population, as well as by how public officials across cities understand obstacles to immigrant integration, as primarily socio-economic, socio-cultural, or ethno-religious in nature.

Our data also inform a basic framework for explaining when and why city officials enact and implement immigrant integration policies that considers also the role of urban contextual (and not only national) factors. Much of the literature examines how national-level factors shape integration policies, both at the national and local levels (e.g. Koopmans 2004; Koopmans, Michalowski, and Waibel 2012; Koopmans et al. 2005). For the four cities we examined, however, national context does not always provide a good guide for understanding the integration approaches that city officials adopted. In Amsterdam, local integration policy did indeed move away from a multicultural approach at the same time that multiculturalism lost favour at the national level. In Berlin, however, local policy towards immigrants and their direct descendants has long been more inclusive than we would expect based on the overall anti-immigrant mood and exclusionary immigration and citizenship policies that prevailed at the national level. Finally, immigrant integration policies in New York City and San Francisco developed in the absence of a formal national integration programme and at a time when federal policies and practices emphasised immigration enforcement and the restriction of immigrant rights and benefits, especially for the undocumented. In addition, both U.S. cities adopted integration policies even while embedded in state contexts long characterised by differing orientations towards immigrant rights. Thus, national (and regional) context alone cannot explain integration policies adopted by large European and U.S. cities.

Local contextual variables help us better understand when and why city officials enact and implement integration policies, especially those that recognise immigrants as a distinct target population and that bring substantive benefits to immigrants and their direct descendants. The partisanship of local government is one variable, and cities appear more likely to support immigrant integration policies when they have left-leaning governments. Admittedly, we do not see much variation in the partisanship of government across the four cities we examined, since most large cities today have overall liberal governments. However, when Berlin was ruled in the early 1980s by a coalition government that included the centre-right CDU, city officials adopted an integration policy that also had clear exclusionary elements. Other research on local policy responses to immigration in the context of the USA (e.g. Ramakrishnan and Wong 2010) similarly shows that cities with liberal, left-leaning governments are more likely to enact policies that expand immigrant rights and benefits, while cities with conservative, right-leaning governments are more likely to enact policies that restrict them.
The degree to which immigrants are a part of the city electorate and use their vote to signal their policy preferences to local policy-makers sheds additional light on when and why city officials enact and implement policies that promote immigrant integration. In Berlin, immigrants and their descendants form a relatively small percentage of the city’s electorate, and we see a relatively cautious and symbolic integration programme. In New York City and San Francisco, immigrants and their direct descendants form large and growing proportions of the electorate, and both cities have adopted several policies that address the substantive needs and interests of immigrants. The link between immigrant voters and local integration policies in these cities might be further strengthened if non-citizens are allowed to vote in local elections, and officials in both New York City and San Francisco have debated non-citizen voting rights in recent years. Amsterdam is perhaps an anomaly here: immigrants are allowed to vote in local elections and many of them do, but city officials have nonetheless retreated from a multicultural integration approach that offers material resources to designated immigrant-origin communities. This suggests that immigrants’ electoral participation might not be sufficient to trigger the adoption and implementation of local integration policies.

Perhaps more important than their electoral participation is that immigrant-origin individuals need to break into local corridors of legislative and administrative power. Such demographic representation makes it more likely that city government adopts and implements policies and practices that reflect immigrants’ substantive interests. Among our city cases, San Francisco provides the best example of this. As immigrants and their descendants in recent years have increased their share of local legislative and administrative positions, the city has deepened its commitment to immigrant integration with the enactment and implementation of various policies that specifically benefit its immigrant residents who struggle with language access, labour exploitation, and the stigma of undocumented status. Important to note is that many of these immigrant-origin city officials previously worked in local immigrant rights organisations. Their commitment to immigrant issues thus predated their public service, but they have subsequently used their seats in San Francisco government to advance immigrant rights and immigrant integration from inside city hall.

More generally, an infrastructure of community-based immigrant organisations is crucial for understanding local immigrant integration policies. In New York City and San Francisco, where immigrant organisations are well organised and regularly collaborate with each other to realise shared goals, we see a stronger policy commitment to immigrant integration. In Berlin, where organisations in the Turkish community are notably weaker as a result of internal fragmentation and polarisation, we do not see the same kind of bottom-up pressure for policies that respond to immigrants’ group interests. Finally, Amsterdam has many immigrant organisations, though there are notable differences in organisational density and advocacy capacity between the Surinamese, Moroccan, and Turkish communities.

Our inductive framework for understanding when and why cities adopt and implement immigrant integration policies thus suggests that we need to consider urban contextual factors that together underscore the capacity of (1) the city policy-making elite, (2) voters, and (3) civil society organisations to effect inclusive policy change. Our framework builds on the experiences of only four cities in three countries. To refine, build out, and test this framework, we need more comparative research on local integration policies that
considers the experiences of more cities also in other national contexts. Future research should examine the specificities of the urban context—with a focus on local institutions and immigrant group-based resources on a local level—to study processes of immigrant integration. Not only do cities continue to be an important locus for immigrant integration, but local factors also shape integration dynamics in crucial ways.

Notes

1. Integration policies can help immigrants, especially those with disadvantaged political and socio-demographic profiles, to achieve greater parity with native-born residents in education, employment, housing, health, and civic and political participation. These policies do not necessarily target immigrants specifically, and immigrants benefit from general social welfare and civil rights policies that seek to increase the life chances of all disadvantaged residents in a particular country, state/province, or municipality. We, however, focus on integration policies, sometimes referred to as ‘multicultural policies,’ where immigrants’ group-based characteristics such as national origin, documentation status, ethnicity, religion, and/or socio-economic status figure prominently in the development, enactment, and implementation of policies designed to promote immigrant advancement.

2. German statistics on ‘immigrants’ typically count individuals who lack German citizenship, not individuals who are foreign-born. As such, foreign-born individuals who have acquired German citizenship technically are not considered immigrants. Also, individuals without German citizenship can include the foreign-born and their descendants, making it difficult to distinguish between first- and later-generation immigrants.

3. New York City allowed for non-citizen voting in school board elections between 1969 and 2003, when school boards were abolished. During this period, non-citizen parents of children in the city’s public school system—regardless of citizenship and immigration status—had the right to vote in school board elections (Hayduk 2006). Since 2003, a large coalition of immigrant and other community organisations has been advocating for legislation that would restore local voting rights for non-citizens. In the USA, non-citizens are not allowed to vote in federal elections, but states have discretion over non-citizen voting rights at the state and local levels. No state currently allows for non-citizen voting, but a handful of municipalities do.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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