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The potential of immigrant parties: insights from the Dutch case

Floris Vermeulen¹ · Eelco Harteveld¹ · Anja van Heelsum¹ · Aad van der Veen²

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Abstract A new party led by politicians of immigrant background entered Dutch parliament with three seats after the March 2017 national elections. This article investigates the success of DENK—an immigrant party promoting a clear pro-diversity agenda—and shows how this success is largely thanks to Dutch voters of Turkish and Moroccan background, using polling data by Ipsos and SCORE. It also illustrates how these votes disproportionately increased with the number of residents of Turkish and Moroccan background in a neighborhood, using aggregate voting data from the statistical bureaus of Amsterdam and Rotterdam and the Dutch press agency ANP. That said, immigrant background does not fully explain the party's success; DENK voters' distinct ideological profile melds progressive and conservative attitudes in a combination thus far underrepresented among other parties' followers, which is illustrated by additional analyses of the polling data. Similar immigrant electorates exist elsewhere in Western Europe. Meanwhile, mainstream parties have turned sharply to the right on immigration, integration, and Islam, alienating substantial segments of this electorate. Whether these circumstances lead to the rise of more successful immigrant parties depends on how open political institutions are and how mainstream parties behave.

Keywords Immigrant voters · DENK · The Netherlands · 2017 Dutch national elections

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Introduction

In the last decades, European democracies have placed immigration and integration issues center stage, and this movement has accordingly shaped voter and party behavior (Azmanova 2011; Kriesi et al. 2008; De Vries et al. 2013). Many issues divide mainstream parties and create electoral potential for mobilizing at both national and local levels. Non-immigrant citizens who are critical of immigration have found their political voice in populist radical right parties, now well established in most European democracies (Mudde 2013). But what role do immigrants and their descendants, comprising substantial groups in many of these countries, play in the political articulation of the other side of this cleavage (Dancygier and Saunders 2006)? Should we be expecting a party family of immigrant parties to emerge?

Studying immigrants' political integration is nothing new (Tillie 2000; Bloemraad and Vermeulen 2014; Fennema and Tillie 1999). Research consistently emphasizes the importance of immigrant group representation as something determining in how far communities can influence policies affecting their lives, whether in terms of social welfare, education, housing, the labor market, or security. Political appointments permit a direct voice to sound off in political decisions that affect immigrant constituencies (Heath et al. 2013). Alba and Foner (2009) regard the election of politicians of immigrant backgrounds as the "gold standard" of immigrant groups' political integration. Political representation for immigrants has usually taken place within mainstream parties. However, signs suggest this path is being hampered across European countries, making it more difficult for immigrant politicians to gain access to mainstream parties or an influential position within them (Michon and Vermeulen 2009, 2013; Vermeulen 2018). Organizing via pro-diversity immigrant parties can provide an alternative route in such contexts. Yet, we lack knowledge about which factors account for these parties' success and failure. To assess their potential, we need more information about their constituencies. How are these parties embedded in the immigrant communities? What are this electorate segment's ideological features? In this study, we describe such a party in the Netherlands and analyze the immigrant context, ideologically and spatially speaking, that supports it.

The Netherlands witnessed something unique in the March 2017 general elections. For the first time in history, a party headed by three politicians of immigrant background promoting a clear diversity agenda entered the Dutch parliament with three seats (2.06% of the votes): *DENK*. The Netherlands has one of the world's most open political systems; it consists of a single constituency and has no preset electoral threshold. For that reason, a relatively large number of parties are present in parliament; 13 parties obtained at least one seat in the 2017 elections. Even more dramatically than in other Western European countries, voters in the Netherlands have been in flux since the late 1990s due to weakening party allegiances (Pelikaan et al. 2016). Dutch elections are among the most volatile in Europe (Mainwaring et al. 2017). Weaker links between voters and parties, combined with a lack of thresholds that could disincentive voting for smaller or less established parties, facilitate new parties, such as *DENK*, in obtaining electoral representation (Otjes and Krouwel 2018; Krouwel and Lucardie 2008).



Still, the Netherlands' electoral system cannot fully explain the success of DENK. The system has not recently been altered, and other countries with relatively open systems, such as Belgium, have not yet seen such an electorally successful party of this type. Multicultural and pro-immigrant parties have previously been somewhat successful at the local level, though something has since clearly changed at the national level. The goal of this article is to better understand the success of DENK by mapping the geographical and attitudinal basis of its support. This, in turn, can provide insights into the conditions under which similar parties might arise in other contexts.

What is DENK?

DENK was established in February 2015. Its name means “think” in Dutch and “equal” in Turkish. The party leaders are two MPs of Turkish background, Tunahan Kuzu and Selçuk Öztürk, who left the social-democratic *Partij van de Arbeid* (PvdA) in that same year. The third DENK parliamentarian is Farid Azarkan, a politician of Moroccan background who was once director of the Moroccan national advisory organization (Samenwerkingsverband Marokkaanse Nederlanders, SMN). According to its manifesto, DENK was established to combat rising intolerance, right-wing thinking, and xenophobia in the Netherlands. The party program has a primarily social-democratic profile. On its website, DENK states its ten major political positions.¹ The first is to build a more inclusive society in which divisions between groups diminish. To accomplish that, the party suggests not only monitoring immigrant integration, but also mainstream society's “acceptance behavior.” Demonstrated lack of acceptance should have consequences; for instance, discriminatory behavior should lead to perpetrators being barred from working for government institutions. Most of the others are left-leaning socioeconomic positions, for instance, on a fair and sustainable society with equal wealth distribution. The party also has a number of more conservative positions, such as being against euthanasia; promoting very strong punishment for child molesters; and opposing the change in national law for a yes-unless organ donation system. In addition to that the party does not recognize the events in Armenia between 1915 and 1923 as genocide.

Though DENK's target electorate includes everyone who supports cultivation of a multicultural society, it particularly targets the country's two largest immigrant communities, Turks and Moroccans.² The article will mostly refer to these groups as “Dutch-Turks” or “residents of Turkish background” and “Dutch-Moroccans” or “residents of Moroccan background.” As a whole, this group of voters shows

¹ <https://www.bewegingDENK.nl/standpunten>.

² The Netherlands' first Turkish and Moroccan immigrants arrived in the 1970s under the “guest labor” program, but immigration continued, initially often through marriage and nowadays for myriad reasons. The Netherlands' population comprises 391,088 people of Moroccan background and 400,367 of Turkish background, including both first and second generations, with and without Dutch passports (CBS figures for 2017).



aversion to the anti-immigrant *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV), led by parliamentarian Geert Wilders, and concern about what they observe as increased Islamophobia and racism in the Netherlands (Van der Valk 2017). In hopes of engaging the third-largest immigrant community in the Netherlands, the Surinamese, DENK incorporated into its party well-known Dutch-Surinamese anti-racism activist Sylvana Simons. However, three months before the elections, disagreement between party leaders and Simons caused her to leave. She started her own party, called *Artikel 1* after the clause on equality in the Dutch constitution. Artikel 1 did not gain enough votes to enter parliament. We restrict our analyses to DENK, but briefly describe some empirical findings regarding Artikel 1 in note 6.

Factors explaining support for DENK: embeddedness in immigrant communities and ideological profile

Embeddedness in immigrant communities

One of the main questions concerning the political participation of immigrant voters is the extent to which background affects behavior (Bloemraad and Vermeulen 2014). This question might be even more salient for those who support an immigrant party than just voting for a particular party. We are interested in the possible engagement for such a party has with people of immigrant background—in other words, the embeddedness of the immigrant party in the immigrant community—because it may be a major factor in explaining a party's success or failure.

In general, pro-diversity immigrant parties or politicians of immigrant background may primarily attract voters of the same background, or if not quite the same, then sharing comparable migratory histories. This may be because voters of immigrant background feel their interests and those of their communities are more effectively addressed by parties and politicians who know their problems firsthand, look like them, and speak their language (Leighley 2001). Immigrant voters may thus use the perceived interest of their group as a proxy for their own individual interests, and immigrant background may function for some voters as a shortcut to electoral decision-making (Otjes and Krouwel 2018). In addition, strong in-group solidarity within immigrant communities and/or out-group hostility towards another community may further increase the support for pro-immigrant parties or candidates of immigrant background (Fisher et al. 2015; Martin 2016; Kranendonk et al. 2017).

Voting for candidates of the same background seems to occur frequently in the Netherlands for a large segment of the immigrant electorate. Tillie (2000) found such patterns in five Dutch cities' local elections in 1998: 83% of Dutch-Turks, 47% of Dutch-Moroccans, and 47% of Dutch-Surinamese voted for a candidate of the same background. This phenomenon has persisted in other Dutch elections as well (Michon and Tillie 2002; Van Heelsum 2005; Van Heelsum and Tillie 2006; Van der Heijden and Van Heelsum 2010; Kranendonk et al. 2014). Van Heelsum et al. (2016, p. 39) show that voting for candidates of the same background has always been higher among Dutch-Turks than Dutch-Moroccans and



Dutch-Surinamese. Since DENK is led by Turkish and Moroccan politicians and features almost exclusively candidates with these backgrounds (Kranendonk et al. 2018; Santing and Vermeulen 2018), we expect the party, at both national and local levels, to be especially popular among voters of such backgrounds.

H1 DENK will be popular among voters of Turkish and Moroccan background.

Immigrant voters, just as non-immigrant voters, often acquire political knowledge through interacting and communicating with people of the same background who are present in their immediate environment (Cho et al. 2006). These ongoing political socialization processes regularly occur where immigrants reside. Neighborhoods therefore play an especially important role in the political behavior of immigrant voters (Leighley 2001). The assumption, on one hand, is that voters get influenced by discussions held with those in their surroundings as well as through the ethnic minority social networks present within the immigrant neighborhoods and that this mechanism is stronger for this group of voters than among voters without an immigrant background (Sonenshein and Drayse 2006; Martin 2016). On the other hand, pro-immigrant parties and candidates of immigrant background campaign in areas with concentrations of voters of the same background in order to heighten the effect of their campaigning (Cho et al. 2006).

Beyond mere composition, the characteristics of a neighborhood are thus worth analyzing as we try to explain levels of voting for an immigrant party. Based on what we have seen, social interaction among neighbors and party mobilization in immigrant-concentrated geographical areas should be significantly stronger in neighborhoods with more residents of immigrant background, particularly where there are large groups sharing a common background, than in neighborhoods with smaller concentrations. These concentration effects are not necessarily linear though most likely have threshold effects (Cho et al. 2006). In other words, the immigrant group's size or concentration must reach a certain level for the mechanisms to take effect. For instance, Vermeulen (2006) observes how an immigrant civic infrastructure starts to form when a certain number of immigrants from a particular group exist in a city. DeSante and Perry (2016) argue that the size of an immigrant population conditions both costs and desire to seek and acquire political knowledge. High rates of immigrant concentration thus facilitate access to resources and social groups; that, in turn, aids in the development of civic skills, knowledge, and political interest. These correlations are not found at low rates of immigrant concentration. Bhatti and Hansen (2016) observe effects of ethnic residential concentration on voter turnout once the concentration becomes a critical mass. Finally, Dancygier (2017) only finds a similar effect on preferential voting for candidates of the same immigrant background in areas of high Muslim immigrant concentration in Belgian municipalities.

Such network and mobilization effects are thus expected to be stronger with high, rather than low, levels of immigrant concentration. Neighborhoods with high concentration of particular immigrant groups provide a favorable context for the presence of immigrant organizational and informal social infrastructure, which helps



sustain the network and mobilization mechanisms so far described. Following Vermeulen et al. (2017), we therefore expect the effect of an immigrant group's relative size to be larger and non-linear on voting for immigrant parties and candidates of immigrant background in neighborhoods where the immigrant group is already relatively large.

H2 DENK support is positively but non-linearly correlated to the share of Dutch-Turkish and Dutch-Moroccan residents in the neighborhood.

Ideological supply and demand

A shared ethnicity is not necessarily enough for attracting votes. We expect a certain level of ideological congruence between party and voter to be relevant when tracing the support for DENK. Applicable here is Pitkin's (1967) concept of substantial representation, which occurs when the representative "stands for" the same issues, ideologies, or policies as the represented. Given DENK's focus on discrimination and diversity, we expect the party to draw support from voters, especially those of immigrant background, who assign high saliency to these topics.

At the same time, support for DENK must be seen in the context of the supply side—the other options available on the ballot. In the past, three parties attracted most of the immigrant votes: the Christian-democratic *CDA*, the green *Groen-Links*, and the social-democratic *PvdA*. Therefore, in order to understand the rise of DENK, we also need to account for a shift of voters of immigrant background away from mainstream parties, especially the *PvdA* (Vermeulen et al. 2014; Otjes and Krouwel 2018). We expect this shift to be the result of an ideological mismatch between the supply of parties and the demand of voters of immigrant background for several reasons.

First, most mainstream parties have, over the last decade, shifted towards a less—or at least more ambiguous—multiculturalist platform. This likely reflects endeavors to prevent loss of white lower-educated constituencies to right-wing populist anti-immigrant parties (Van Heerden et al. 2014; Bale et al. 2010; Abou-Chadi 2016). Until 2000, the *CDA* had an electoral potential—meaning it was seriously considered as a party to vote for—of around 50% of Dutch-Turkish voters (Tillie 2000, p. 49). However, after 2000, the *CDA* moved to the right on matters concerning immigration, integration, and Islam (Van Heerden et al. 2014). In 2010, it formed a government with support from the anti-immigrant *PVV*. Afterwards, electoral support among immigrants became even more concentrated in the *PvdA*. However, this support, too, experienced a rapid decline (Vermeulen et al. 2014; Van Heelsum et al. 2016).

Second, the positions promulgated by the *PvdA* and other mainstream secular parties have been incongruent with a substantive share of religious voters of Turkish and Moroccan backgrounds (Vermeulen 2018). This created the potential for a new party to fill the gap.

It is common to describe the political space in economic and cultural dimensions. In Western Europe, the issues tend to revolve around questions of globalization and



the boundaries of the community (see Kriesi et al. 2008). However, older cultural themes, especially those concerning morality (individual freedom vs authority and tradition), are also still relevant in politics. In a three-dimensional space, it is thus possible to identify an economic dimension, one “old” cultural dimension concerning morality, and one “new” cultural dimension concerning globalization (Kitschelt and Rehm 2014). In most contexts, including in the Netherlands, the two cultural dimensions overlap at the level of parties; mainstream pro-immigration parties generally also favor furthering gender emancipation, LGBT rights, etc. This may create a mismatch; the PvdA is progressive on moral values, whereas many voters of Turkish or Moroccan background are predominantly religious and therefore less progressive (Otjes and Krouwel 2018). At the same time, morally conservative parties are no natural ally for many immigrant voters either because of their increasing critique of Islam and immigration.

The 2017 Chapel Hill expert survey (CHES)³ confirms that DENK is uniquely placed, espousing contrasting positions along two cultural dimensions. CHES experts coded DENK as the most immigration-positive of all Dutch parties, giving it the extremely low score of 0.3 on a scale from 0 (“Fully opposed to a restrictive policy on immigration”) to 10 (“Fully in favor of a restrictive policy on immigration”). As a comparison, the average across all parties is 5.9; the PvdA’s score is 4.8. At the same time, on the GAL/TAN⁴ scale, which ranges from 0 (libertarian) to 10 (traditional), DENK gets a relatively traditional 6.4, compared to the national average of 5.2 and the PvdA’s 3.2. Economically, the party is considered relatively left-wing, scoring 3.3, compared to the national average of 5.0 and the PvdA’s 3.8.

We investigate this dynamic by looking at the ideological profile of those who switched to voting for DENK and those who remained loyal to the PvdA or other parties. Following Otjes and Krouwel (2018), we expect many DENK supporters to have the same ideological position as the party.

H3 DENK supporters are relatively progressive on globalization issues but relatively conservative in their moral values.

Relatedly, given the strong mobilization of DENK along the cultural dimensions, we expect DENK supporters not to have remarkable positions on economic issues.

Method and data

We use two types of data sources: *individual* and *aggregated*. The latter provides externally valid estimations of the existence and extent of voting for DENK and voting patterns in neighborhoods (H1 and H2). The former—although less

³ www.chesdata.eu.

⁴ Standing for green/alternative/libertarian versus traditional/authoritarian/nationalist.



representative of the population at large—offers further insights into the characteristics and motivations of DENK supporters (H1 and H3).

The individual-level data come from two surveys with questions explicitly about DENK. While we acknowledge that the scarcity of surveys involving sufficient numbers of voters of immigrant background makes it difficult to reliably identify ethnic voting at the individual level, we still think we can shed light on the origins of the DENK vote. We do endeavor to do this with help from two particular surveys.

The first was conducted by polling institute Ipsos among Dutch citizens of immigrant background around the 2017 national elections. Commissioned by the Dutch broadcaster NOS, it surveyed 401 respondents of Turkish background and 435 respondents of Moroccan background—almost 50% of whom were born in the Netherlands.⁵ To reach all target migrant groups via their preferred channels, the survey applied mixed-mode data collection (online, telephone, and in-person) and quota sampling. Respondents who did not speak the Dutch language were interviewed in their native language. The results were weighted to population figures (age, gender, education, and region) of both groups, and this approach resulted in a satisfactory representation of them. Because it contains items on electoral choice and perceived societal problems, the survey offers relevant information on the factors that explain voting for DENK among Dutch-Turks and Dutch-Moroccans.

The second source of individual-level data was the SCoRE survey conducted by the University of Amsterdam in April 2017.⁶ This survey was carried out online as part of an ongoing panel of the company GfK. This panel which was originally recruited using probability sampling among Dutch residents. Nevertheless, residents of non-Western immigrant background are underrepresented (19% were born outside the country or have a parent who was; 22% is the national average). However, the large sample still permits observation of a sizeable group of residents who were born outside the Netherlands or have one or two parents who were.

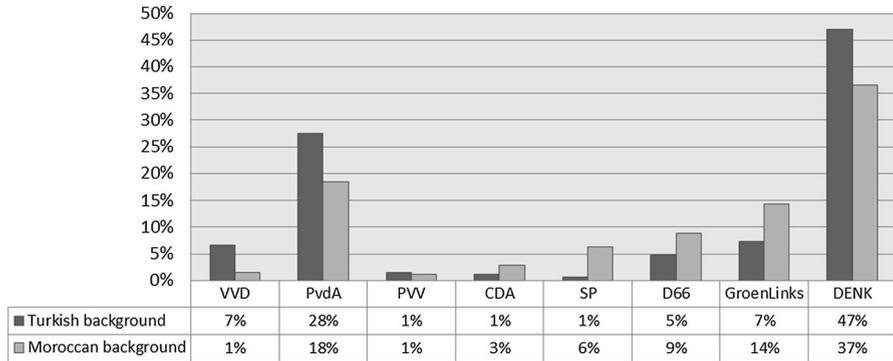
Our analysis on the aggregate level consists of a comparison of support for DENK (and Artikel 1)⁷ at the neighborhood level with the share of residents of Turkish (or Moroccan, Surinamese, or other immigrant) background in the same neighborhood. Obviously, if residents of Turkish background are relatively more likely to vote for DENK, more support for this party should be observable in neighborhoods with a larger share of residents of Turkish background, *ceteris paribus*. However, this research strategy runs the risk of ecological fallacies (Robinson 1950): correlations at the aggregate level might not validly reflect mechanisms at the individual level. We aimed to minimize this problem in two ways. First, we used a thorough control strategy, controlling for an elaborate set of macro-level (notably socioeconomic) characteristics of neighborhoods, thus aiming to rule out as many

⁵ Report in Dutch: http://download.omroep.nl/nos/docs/080317_turken-marokkanen.pdf.

⁶ Data collection for the SCoRE survey was made possible by an NWO ORA grant (project number OND1363737). For more information, see <https://www.score.uni-mainz.de>.

⁷ We do not discuss Artikel 1 votes. Theoretically, Artikel 1 does not present itself to be as much as an immigrant party as DENK. Empirically, our individual-level data would not allow us to make reliable statements about Artikel 1 voters. The aggregated analysis shows that Artikel 1 was electorally successful in a couple areas where a large number of residents of Surinamese background live. At the same time, the support base was generally more geographically scattered, meaning that we find support for Artikel 1 in a large number of neighborhoods in which the percentage of residents of immigrant background is low.





Graph 1 Weighted support for parties in the 2017 national elections. *Source* IPSOS, *N*=756 (351 of whom are of Turkish background; 405 of whom are of Moroccan background)

confounding factors as possible. Second, we evaluated the correlations at multiple levels of aggregation: neighborhoods as well as municipalities. To the extent that correlations remain similar across these levels of aggregation, it becomes more plausible that they reflect the same individual-level mechanism.

Data at the aggregate level were gathered from a range of official sources. Election results at the *neighborhood level* were obtained from the statistical bureaus of the two largest cities (Amsterdam and Rotterdam). At the *municipal level*, they were obtained from the Dutch press agency ANP. The *percentage of citizens of Turkish (or Moroccan, Surinamese, or non-immigrant) background* at various geographical levels is available through the organization Statistics Netherlands (CBS). CBS also provided the control variables we employ (available for Rotterdam and municipal levels only): *total population, population density, average house value, percentage of homes on a social minimum, mean income per recipient (in 1000 euros), and average household size.*

Results

We first consider the embeddedness in specific immigrant communities and then the DENK voters’ concerns, ideological and otherwise.

Embeddedness in Dutch-Turkish and Dutch-Moroccan communities

To what extent does a Turkish or Moroccan background increase the probability of voting for DENK? To what extent is support for the party embedded in Dutch-Turkish and Dutch-Moroccan communities and neighborhoods? We first look at the general level of support for DENK among citizens of Turkish and Moroccan background and then study the correlation between concentrations of voters with these backgrounds at the neighborhood level and support for DENK in that neighborhood.



Graph 1 shows how people reported voting in 2017, according to the Ipsos survey among Dutch-Turks and Dutch-Moroccans.

Clearly, DENK is the most popular party among voters of both Turkish and Moroccan backgrounds. Given that the party obtained 2.06% of the votes overall, the level of support is very high. The party has stronger support among Dutch-Turks (47%) than Dutch-Moroccans (37%), and this difference is significant ($p < 5\%$). Interestingly, among the Turkish respondents, women (53%) were significantly more likely to vote for DENK than men (42%). Among DENK voters, 31% of Dutch-Turks and 23% of Dutch-Moroccans indicated that their own immigrant background plays an “important role” in deciding to vote for a party; 64.7% and 49.7%, respectively, indicated it plays “some role.”

Even higher levels of support among Dutch-Turkish and Dutch-Moroccan voters were observed in the 2018 local elections in Amsterdam: 74% of the Dutch-Turks and 49% of the Dutch-Moroccans voted for DENK during this election—the first in which DENK participated. No significant difference between men and women appeared for either group. Support for DENK outside the Turkish and Moroccan communities was very small; it was no more than 6% among groups of an immigrant background other than Turkish or Moroccan and just 2% among voters of non-immigrant background (Kranendonk et al. 2018).

In sum, survey respondents of Turkish or Moroccan background expressed a strong preference for DENK and candidates of the same immigrant backgrounds as themselves, thus supporting H1. A recent study of Amsterdam’s municipal elections found similar voting patterns with even higher levels of support among these two groups and low levels of support outside these immigrant groups (Kranendonk et al. 2018).

Immigrant concentration effects on voting patterns at the neighborhood level

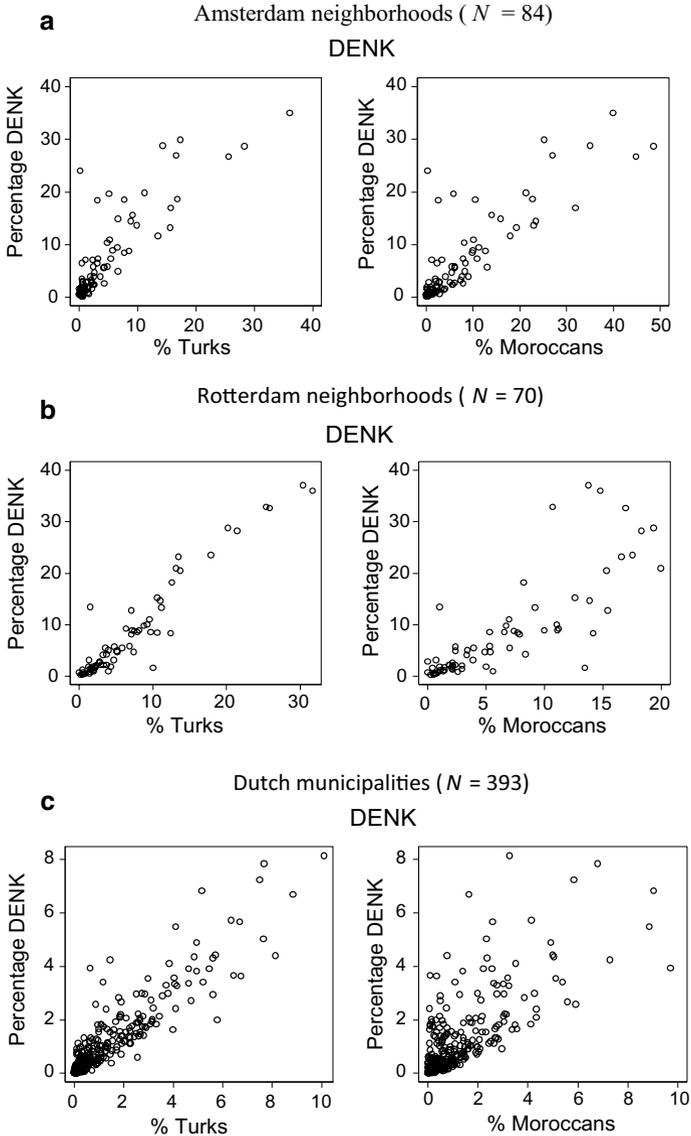
For the second research question and hypothesis on the correlation between immigrant concentration and voting, we first show the results of a bivariate analysis in which percentage of immigrants of Turkish or Moroccan background, neighborhoods, and DENK voting are combined.

Here, we analyze whether neighborhoods and municipalities with a stronger presence of residents of Turkish, Moroccan, or Suriname backgrounds are more likely to show high electoral support for DENK. Graph 2 visualizes the associations, while Table 1 presents the correlation coefficients.

These findings, summarized in Table 1, replicate our earlier findings because they provide strong support for the Hypothesis 1 that DENK support is stronger among voters of immigrant background. At the level of Amsterdam and Rotterdam neighborhoods and municipalities, a strong correlation appears between the share of residents of Turkish background and the vote for DENK ($r > 0.90$). Albeit slightly lower, a positive correlation is also visible for the share of residents of Moroccan background.

At the same time, these bivariate correlations are likely to be confounded by the fact that residents of immigrant background (particularly Turkish and Moroccan) are relatively likely to live in the same neighborhoods. We therefore continue with a





Graph 2 Support for DENK by size of ethnic group. *Source* Amsterdam municipality; Rotterdam municipality; Kiesraad (electoral council)

multivariate analysis, allowing us to control for the presence of other groups, as well as to consider alternative explanations, socioeconomic and otherwise, that might lead to an overrepresentation of DENK supporters in neighborhoods with higher shares of residents of immigrant background.

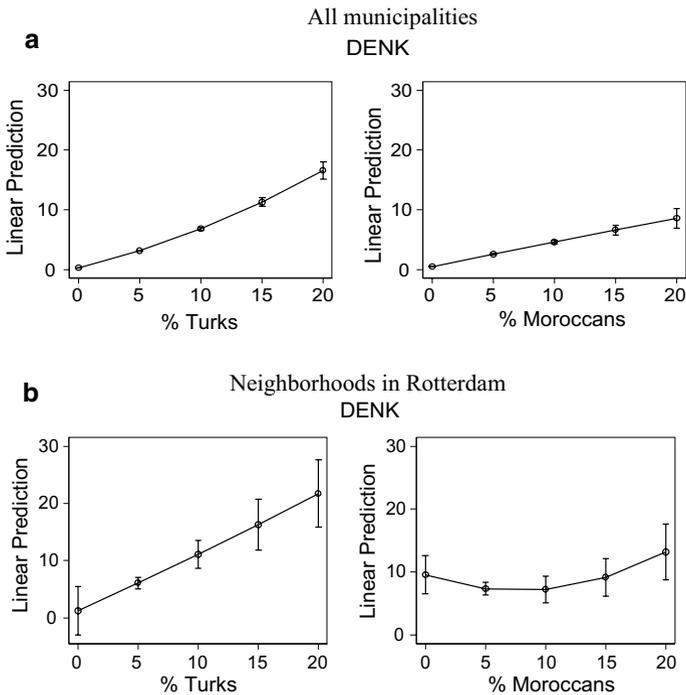
Crucially, to uncover possible roles played by the neighborhoods, we model DENK support as a non-linear function (using a squared term) of Turkish and



Table 1 Correlations between % immigrants in area and support for DENK

	Municipality	Amsterdam	Rotterdam
% Turkish	0.91*	0.93*	0.95*
% Moroccan	0.76*	0.91*	0.81*
% non-immigrant background	- 0.71*	- 0.69	- 0.79*
<i>N</i>	384	84	68
Median (min; max) % Turkish background	0.38 (0.00; 7.67)	2.13 (0.03; 36.02)	4.49 (0.00; 31.70)
Median (min; max) % Moroccan background	0.36 (0.00; 9.69)	3.88 (0.02; 48.59)	4.44 (0.00; 19.96)
Correlation (Turkish, Moroccan)	0.47	0.95	0.82

Source Amsterdam municipality; Rotterdam municipality; Kiesraad (electoral council). Significance at * $p < 0.05$



Graph 3 Predicted support for DENK based on multivariate regression. Source Amsterdam municipality; Rotterdam municipality; Kiesraad (electoral council); Statistics Netherlands (CBS). “Appendix 2” shows details of the regression analysis, including strengths of all the control variables

Moroccan presence. As our theoretical outline noted, voting for immigrant parties or candidates of immigrant background might be amplified by demographic concentration and the existence of immigrant community life and interactions. This would result in a non-linear pattern. All models control for several alternative explanations: total population, population density, average house value, percentage of homes on a



social minimum, mean income per recipient (in 1000 euros), and average household size. These controls were not available for Amsterdam. While the full models are available in “Appendix 2” (including the effects of the control variables), Graph 3 provides a plot with the predicted probabilities of DENK support, based on the share of Turkish and Moroccan presence, controlling for all other indicators.

First of all, the graphs confirm that even when taking into account a wide range of alternative socioeconomic and demographic explanations, DENK support is systematically larger in neighborhoods and municipalities with higher shares of residents of Turkish background, but to a much lesser extent in neighborhoods with more residents of Moroccan background. However, while the correlation with DENK support is generally less strongly related to the share of Moroccan residents than it is to Turkish residents, its relation to Moroccan presence appears to be *more non-linear*. For neighborhoods with fewer than 10% Moroccans, the predicted support is that of the full sample (around 8%); after that, there is an increase. In other words, while Moroccan presence is generally a worse predictor of DENK support, this level of support *is* still large in neighborhoods with a very substantive presence of Moroccans. This is indicative of the neighborhood effect discussed above, in which communication among people of the same ethnicity plays an important role. In neighborhoods with a large presence of voters of Moroccan background, we find significantly more voters of Moroccan background voting for DENK. All in all, some evidence shows that, as expected in H2, neighborhoods play a role, but more so among residents of Moroccan background than Turkish background. An increasing percentage of Dutch-Turks in a neighborhood simply leads to significantly higher support for DENK. For neighborhoods with a large percentage of Dutch-Moroccans, we see a strong effect for those neighborhoods in which the presence of this group is the highest. Both results indicate a contextual effect in which the presence of people of the same ethnicity, possibly through stronger ethnic social networks—such as immigrant organizations, businesses, and mosques—increases electoral success for DENK. A segment of DENK supporters seems embedded in the different immigrant ethnic communities, which affects their political behavior.

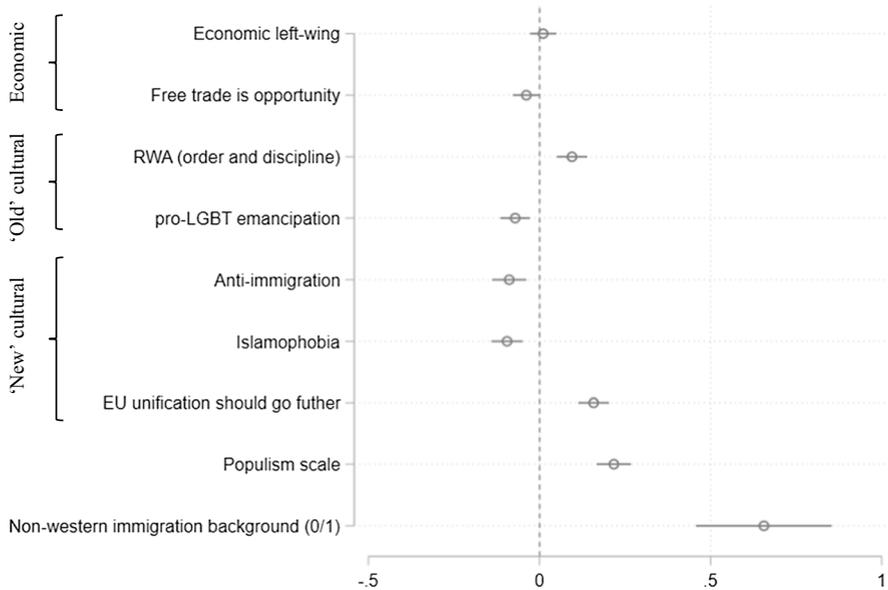
DENK supporters’ concerns and attitudes

To determine the ideological profile of DENK supporters, we use individual-level data.

The SCoRE survey, tallying 8000 respondents, contains a question asking “how likely you would be to ever vote for DENK” on a scale from 0 (“never”) to 10 (“very likely”). Called the propensity to vote (PTV), this item is often used to measure the electoral utility of parties (Van der Eijk 2002), and is especially useful for smaller parties with a low number of actual voters in a sample. It allows some inferences to be made about the factors that increase the likelihood that respondents would consider voting for DENK, without relying on the unreliably small number of respondents who actually did (only 28).

Graph 4 shows the effect sizes of various potential predictors of respondents’ self-reported PTV for DENK. This includes non-Western immigration status as well as a range of attitudes reflecting the economic dimension (domestic government policies;





Graph 4 Predictors of the propensity to vote (PTV) FOR DENK. *Source* SCoRE; $N=6552$

international trade⁸); the old cultural dimensions (law and order; LGBT rights); and the new cultural dimension (immigration; Islam; the EU). To investigate the role of Denk's opposition to established politics (see also Otjes and Krouwel 2018), we include the populism scale as developed by Akkerman et al. (2014). "Appendix 1" provides more details about the indicators. We refrain from including a general measure of left–right position, because this might correlate strongly with any of the other dimensions depending on respondents' interpretation of its meaning. However, including this variable—which we did as a robustness check—does not alter the findings. The model controls for socioeconomic status, education, gender, and age (not shown in the graph but included in the full regression table).

The figure shows the coefficients of standardized variables (except for non-Western immigrant background, which is a dummy variable) in a linear regression with PTV for DENK as the dependent variable and robust standard errors, with 95% confidence intervals. Positive effects mean that respondents scoring high on the variable are *more* likely to consider voting DENK, compared to all other parties; negative effects mean that respondents scoring low on the variable are more likely to consider voting DENK, *ceteris paribus*. Because the variables were standardized, the effect sizes are comparable across variables. We reconducted all models excluding self-reported non-voters, but this did not affect the results.

Graph 4 confirms that DENK support is hardly predicted by indicators of the economic dimension, including our composite scale of questions about government

⁸ We distinguish domestic economic items from international trade, because the latter possibly relates to the globalization dimension as well.



intervention and redistribution, or support for free trade: the effect sizes are close to (or even overlap with) zero. Items representing the new cultural dimension (globalization) and the old (morality) are better predictors. DENK support is predicted by toughness on law and order and reluctance about LGBT rights—both conservative positions on the old cultural dimension. By contrast, DENK support is also predicted by pro-immigration, pro-Islam, and pro-European stances—all progressive positions on the new cultural dimension. Additionally, anti-establishment sentiment (as measured by the populism indicator) is a very good predictor of DENK support.

This pattern is in line with [H3](#): DENK supporters combine progressive views on the globalization component of the cultural dimension with conservative views on its morality component. This is especially interesting given that most DENK voters previously supported the PvdA. According to the first results of the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study 2017, almost 20% of PvdA voters in 2012 voted for DENK in 2017 (Van Holsteyn 2018). The rise of DENK therefore poses a considerable electoral threat to the PvdA. While that party's ideology resonated with the group's integration and immigration stance, the social democrats were more progressive about other issues. By contrast, conservative parties mirror many DENK voters' traditional values, while being Islamophobic and anti-immigration. The aforementioned mismatch between supply and demand is possibly causing greater discontent with political elites, as reflected in the populism indicator.⁹

Conclusions

This article sought to understand the success of DENK, the first pro-diversity immigrant party in the Dutch parliament. We argued that embeddedness in specific immigrant communities plays an important role in understanding why certain immigrant voters support DENK. These immigrant voters might see their group's interests as a proxy for their own individual interests. We observed that among Dutch-Turks and, to a lesser extent, Dutch-Moroccans, DENK was—by far—the most popular party in the last national and local elections. Having Turkish or Moroccan background is an important explanatory factor in support for DENK ([H1](#)). Furthermore, we found immigrant concentration effects at the neighborhood level. Neighborhoods having a large percentage of voters of Turkish or Moroccan background correlate strongly with support for DENK. We assume that in these neighborhoods informal and formal immigrant networks play a role in mobilizing voters. Not only does information spread more quickly when such networks exist (Tillie 2004), but there is also an ongoing political socialization process in local environments with large immigrant communities; these areas might attract immigrant parties and ethnic candidates to

⁹ We also explored whether some attitudes were better predictors among respondents with an immigrant background than among respondents without such background. In “[Appendix 4](#)” we show the interactions between immigrant background status and three variables, one for each dimension (economic, old cultural, and new cultural). This shows that immigration attitudes are a better predictor among respondents with an immigration background. This suggests that this topic was especially salient among this group in driving support for DENK. We conclude that the same set of variables explains DENK support regardless of immigrant background status, albeit with somewhat different relative weights.



campaign and secure votes from potential immigrant voters. Neighborhoods and municipalities with more residents of Turkish background have a much larger share of DENK voters than those with residents of Moroccan background. However, when the share of Moroccans is relatively large, DENK support increases non-linearly, which suggests a concentration effect (H2). These results remain significant after controlling for several important other neighborhood characteristics.

At the same time, we find that support for DENK is not all about ethnicity or immigrant status; it also has a clear ideological element. In relation to H3 concerning ideological profile, we note that DENK supporters in previous elections often voted for the Christian-democratic *CDA* or, more commonly, the social-democratic *PvdA*. Across the board, DENK voters are relatively progressive on globalization issues (immigration; the EU) and relatively conservative on morality issues (law and order; LGBT rights). This combination of attitudes does not resonate with the positions of the *PvdA* (see also Otjes and Krouwel 2018). In other words, in a context where Islam became politicized, DENK benefitted to some extent from a vacuum left by the mainstream parties. It also functioned as a political entrepreneur successfully managing to mobilize voters with its never-before-combined portfolio of concerns and attitudes.

What do these results say about the reasons an immigrant party like DENK succeeds and about its possible limits? And can we expect similar parties to appear in other contexts? For starters, we should keep in mind that just 2% of the Dutch electorate voted for DENK. The number of immigrant voters at the national level is relatively small, around 7% is of non-Western background,¹⁰ and their turnout tends to be significantly lower than average turnout (Vermeulen et al. 2014; Kranendonk et al. 2018). However, an open political system, like that of the Netherlands, permits relatively easy representation of smaller interest groups. This is not the case in electoral systems with higher thresholds or smaller district, such as Germany and the UK, although there the spatial distribution of such groups matters. Furthermore, even in the open Dutch system, it took more than a decade of consistent anti-immigrant and anti-Islam mobilization by a populist radical right party, as well as the adoption of some of this discourse by mainstream parties, before a successful immigrant party emerged.

On the other hand, there is ample reason to believe that in other countries, such as France and Germany, a similar immigrant electorate exists especially at the local level. Throughout Europe, mainstream parties have taken a turn to the right in matters concerning immigration, integration, and Islam. The parties have consequently estranged and excluded segments of their electorate (Vermeulen 2018) who unequivocally share features that value ethnicity and religion. Many of these voters identify with, and are embedded in, their immigrant community. As we have illustrated, sometimes they combine progressive views on globalization with conservative morality. These voters are increasingly frustrated and disappointed with mainstream parties. They feel stigmatized by some of the discourses these parties produce. If the political systems of European democracies continue to obstruct this electoral segment's political representation with particular thresholds, we expect further frustration for immigrant groups. That, in turn, will lead to decreasing levels of political participation, further isolation, and political apathy.

¹⁰ <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/achtergrond/2017/08/het-profiel-van-het-electoraat-in-2012>.



Appendix 1: Indicators

Appendix 1.1: Overview of variables

Economic dimension

Economic left-wing ($\alpha=0.50$)¹¹

- The less that government intervenes in the economy, the better it is for [country].
- The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels.
- Employees need strong trade unions to protect their working conditions and wages.

Free trade

- International free trade is an opportunity for economic growth in the Netherlands.

‘Old’ cultural dimension (morality)

RWA (right-wing authoritarianism): order and discipline ($\alpha=0.55$)

- What our country really needs instead of more “civil rights” is a good stiff dose of law and order.
- What our country needs most is disciplined citizens, following national leaders in unity.

LGBT emancipation ($\alpha=0.67$).

- Homosexuals and feminists should be praised for being brave enough to defy “traditional family values.”
- Everyone should have their own lifestyle, religious beliefs, and sexual preferences, even if it makes them different from everyone else.
- It’s a good thing that same-sex marriage is equal to opposite-sex marriage in the eyes of the law.

‘New’ cultural dimension (globalization)

Anti-immigration ($\alpha=0.742$)

- Would you say that [country]’s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?
- “It is better for a country if almost everyone shares the same customs and traditions.”
- Would you say it is generally bad or good for [country]’s economy that people come to live here from other countries?

¹¹ The reliability of the economic scale and order and discipline scale is low. However, we decided to keep these items because they are theoretically related and common in other studies.



Islamophobia ($\alpha=0.80$)

- Islam is an archaic religion, unable to adjust to the present.
- Islam is compatible with our democracy.
- There are violent aspects to Islam which predispose it towards terrorism.

European Unification

- Now thinking about the EU, some say European unification should go further. Others say it has already gone too far. What number on the scale best describes your position?

Anti-establishment attitudes

Populism scale ($\alpha=0.86$)

- “The politicians in Parliament need to follow the will of the people.”
- “The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions.”
- “The political differences between the elite and the people are larger than the differences among the people.”
- “I would rather be represented by a citizen than by a specialized politician.”
- “Elected officials talk too much and take too little action.”
- “What people call “compromise” in politics is really just selling out on one’s principles.”

Appendix 1.2: Descriptives of variables used in regression (before standardization)

Variable	Obs	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Propensity to vote DENK	8013	0.678273	1.530624	0	10
Non-Western immigrant status	8013	0.0842381	0.2777619	0	1
Left-wing on economy	7884	2.938134	1.316746	– 6	7
Pro-free trade	7397	5.575098	1.335415	1	8
Pro-law and order	7740	4.573385	1.413451	1	7
Pro-LGBT emancipation	7845	5.601593	1.477609	1	7
Nativism	7897	5.765565	1.554191	0	14
Islamophobia	7675	2.123974	1.969375	– 7	7
Pro-EU integration	7380	3.70813	1.730811	1	7
Populism	7846	3.60712	0.9165728	1	5

Source SCoRE (www.score.uni-mainz.de/)



Appendix 2: Macro-level models

	Municipalities coefficient (SE)	Rotterdam n'hoods coefficient (SE)
% Turkish	0.491*** (0.021)	0.950* (0.412)
% Turkish ²	0.016*** (0.003)	0.004 (0.009)
% Moroccans	0.420*** (0.023)	- 0.657 (0.388)
% Moroccans ²	- 0.001 (0.003)	0.042* (0.016)
% Surinamese	0.032 (0.028)	0.022 (0.518)
% Surinamese ²	0.001 (0.003)	- 0.005 (0.024)
% non-migrant	- 0.019 (0.025)	- 0.099 (0.213)
% non-migrant ²	0.000 (0.000)	0.001 (0.002)
Population size	0.000 (0.000)	- 0.013 (0.009)
Density of population	- 0.000** (0.000)	- 0.000 (0.000)
Value of houses	- 0.000 (0.000)	0.024 (0.017)
Share of household on social minimum	0.001 (0.002)	0.000 (0.008)
Income	0.003 (0.008)	- 0.203 (0.208)
Household size	0.020 (0.094)	- 2.079 (2.528)
Intercept	0.401 (1.005)	13.059 (9.508)
R ²	0.977	0.915
N	382	68

Source Kiesraad; Rotterdam municipality

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001

Appendix 3: Regression on propensity to vote (PTV) DENK

	b (SE)
Economic left-wing	0.011 (0.019)
Pro-free trade	- 0.038 (0.020)
Pro-law and order	0.094*** (0.023)
Pro-LGBT emancipation	- 0.071** (0.022)
Anti-immigration	- 0.089*** (0.026)
Islamophobia	- 0.095*** (0.023)
Pro-EU unification	0.158*** (0.023)
Populism scale	0.217*** (0.025)
Non-Western immigrant background	0.655*** (0.101)
Main activity (ref.: <i>in education</i>)	
Having a job	- 0.144 (0.197)
Unemployed	- 0.124 (0.215)
Cannot work	- 0.254 (0.211)
Pensioner	- 0.236 (0.216)



	<i>b</i> (SE)
Housekeeper	– 0.089 (0.221)
Education (years)	– 0.012** (0.004)
Religiosity	0.049*** (0.011)
Sex (female)	0.043 (0.040)
Year of birth	0.012*** (0.002)
Intercept	– 22.278*** (4.234)
R^2	0.079
N	6552

Source SCORe data (www.score.uni-mainz.de/), University of Amsterdam

Appendix 4: Regression on propensity to vote Denk, including interactions

	<i>b</i> (SE)
Economic left-wing	0.019 (0.019)
Non-western immigrant background	0.431*** (0.094)
Economic left-wing × immigrant background	– 0.119 (0.104)
Pro-free trade	– 0.038 (0.020)
Pro-law and order	0.071*** (0.021)
Pro-law and order × immigrant background	0.220 (0.121)
pro-LGBT emancipation	– 0.069** (0.022)
Anti-immigration	– 0.043 (0.024)
Anti-immigration × immigrant background	– 0.501*** (0.122)
Islamophobia	– 0.091*** (0.023)
Pro-European unification	0.161*** (0.023)
Populism scale	0.211*** (0.025)
Main activity (ref.: in education)	
Having a job	– 0.049 (0.095)
Unemployed	0.112 (0.221)
Cannot work	– 0.032 (0.126)
Pensioner	– 0.165 (0.109)
Housekeeper	– 0.139 (0.097)
Education (years)	– 0.012** (0.004)
Religiosity	0.047*** (0.011)
Sex (female)	0.045 (0.040)
Year of birth	0.011*** (0.002)
Intercept	– 21.779*** (4.113)
R^2	0.086
N	6552



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