

12. You belong with me: Explaining ethnic minority citizens' experiences of political inclusion

Aim: To improve understandings of ethnic minority citizens' *experiences* of political inclusion by centering diverse experiences *among* ethnic minority citizens and explaining these by focusing on cross-national and individual differences among various groups of ethnic minority citizens.

Theoretical background:

Although the number of politicians with migration backgrounds has been increasing and particular minority groups are overrepresented in parliaments, ethnic minority citizens still experience political exclusions. Consequently, the growing literature on whose political interests are numerically or even substantively represented tells us little about which ethnic minority citizens also *feel* included, and why or why not. Insights into these experiences of political inclusion, such as feelings of political representation and trust, are crucial to ensure sustainable democracies including minority engagement, especially given the current prominence of populist narratives ethnicizing who belongs to the polity.

Existing studies on experiences of political inclusion tend to focus on differences in political trust between ethnic minorities and majorities, which overlooks the diversity of experiences *among* ethnic minority citizens – and what cross-national and individual factors can explain that. Therefore, the current project adopts an intracategorical approach to understand and explain the diversity among ethnic minority citizens in their experiences of political inclusion.

The project iteratively builds and tests a new theoretical framework by synthesizing diverse literatures, including sociological explanations of political belonging in general populations, political science studies on representation and populism, and anthropological work on ethnic boundary drawing and belonging. An example of a focus is to further develop and test insights from literatures on ethnic boundary drawing, which argue that specific ethnic groups are ranked from most to least "valued". These constructed hierarchies depend on what boundaries (e.g., race versus religion) are salient in what contexts. This would raise questions like: Do people with their roots in sub-Saharan Africa feel better represented in the Netherlands than in the U.S.? And, vice versa, do people with their roots in North Africa feel better represented in the U.S. than in the Netherlands?

Another possible approach is to address insights from sociological and political science studies on majorities' hostility and populism from a minority-perspective, raising questions as: Do countries with stronger anti-migrant sentiments and populist right parties squelch ethnic minority citizens' political trust? And does that hold for all groups equally, or mostly for men, children of migrants, or people with their roots in Muslim-majority countries? Thus, although the general question of this project is which ethnic minority citizens experience greater political inclusion in what contexts and why, the project allows freedom for the candidate to emphasize and zoom in on their particular interests.

Research design:

This project a) applies advanced statistical techniques to existing survey data based on general and migrant-specific populations (e.g., data from EURISLAM, EU-MIDIS, EVS, and/or ESS) and b) collects and analyzes qualitative data to situate experiences of political inclusion and further develop a theoretical understanding of these experiences among ethnic minority citizens.

Literature

- Röder, A., & Mühlau, P. (2012). Low expectations or different evaluations: What Explains Immigrants' High Levels of Trust in Host-Country Institutions? *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 38(5), 777-792.
- Sanders, D., Fisher, S. D., Heath, A., & Sobolewska, M. (2014). The democratic engagement of Britain's ethnic minorities. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 37(1), 120-139.

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