



“Diversity in Political Parties’ Programmes, Organisation and Representation” (DivPol)¹

Theses Paper PORTUGAL

1. Access/ Entry to Political Parties and Political Life in Parties

In Portugal the political actors that were interviewed were consensual in presenting their parties with no constraint about nationality in regard to the admission rules of new militants, and some considered that the lists of candidates are guided by criteria of competence and merit only. However it became also quite obvious along the interviews that: **(a)** most of them do not actually master the statuses of their own parties and/or do not know the legal limitations that might exist to access/entry; **(b)** respondents tend to made a kind of *mea culpa* in recognising that there are not many immigrant politicians (IP) or politicians with an immigrant background (PIB) in the party’s structures and/or do not have information on that issue. Respondents attributed their lack of information to the fact that parties do not make any sort of differentiation between militants on the basis of nationality or ethnic background, therefore there are no ways to see statistically their presence; **(c)** some respondents denounced the existence of too complex balances of power that do not enable the access, not only to immigrants but also to other groups in society.

The underrepresentation of immigrants in the internal structures of parties, in political leading roles, as well as in lists of candidates, especially in eligible places, was explained by respondents as reflecting: **(1)** the existence of **strongly rooted power relations** and prevailing *status quo* inside the parties that cannot be easily challenged - “*established internal codes not always easy to understand*”; **(2)** the **lack of lobbying of immigrants** - some participants argued on the need of communities to join, identify the best political actors among them and lobby collectively on their behalf to the various political parties; finally, **(3)** the **lack of parties’ awareness about the electoral relevance of immigrants**. Some participants argued that once parties begin to realise that immigrant communities are demographically expressive and have their own specificities, they will be more careful about calling out candidates who may be closer to these communities’ reality.

On the other hand, when trying to explore possible explanations for the lack of immigrants’ political engagement, participants in Portugal underlined a set of common reasons, among which: **(1) political culture**: Portuguese society, in general, distrusts politicians at present, so immigrants are just part of a wider sentiment of frustration about politics. Respondents were also unanimous in portraying the Portuguese political class as quite conservative and closed as far as the functioning of their internal structures are concerned; **(2) language** was also signalled as a problem not only when immigrants don’t dom-

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inate it, but also when they do. Speaking Portuguese was in some respondents' views one reason underneath the lack of political concern about a better social and political integration of lusophone immigrants; **(3) lack of political interest** of immigrant communities; **(4) economic reasons**: most respondents from left to the right, with and without migrant background, were rather consensual in liking immigrants lack of political engagement to their economic vulnerability or labour motivations to be in Portugal; **(5) legal reasons**: most interviewees consider the persistence of the *reciprocity principle* as a paramount obstacle to immigrants' political participation; **(6) immigrants' political representation**: regardless of how much immigrants participate politically, another different matter is to reflect on who is responsible for representing them.

2. Dealing with Legislative Restrictions for Third-Country Nationals in Political Parties

Political rights in Portugal to foreigners are dependent on the **principle of reciprocity** (RP) – only immigrants that came from countries where Portuguese can vote, can vote in Portugal. Several respondents stated that the reciprocity principle is an obstacle to immigrants' political participation in Portugal. Still this is a controversial theme: some considered it should be abolished, while others stressed it should be abolished at the local level but kept at the national one, and others held to a more conservative position, considering that the RP has a legal frame provided by international law that cannot be simply overstepped. In general terms, most respondents (within the entire political spectrum) agreed that the RP is relevant in the diplomatic relations between states, but that for the practical purpose of fostering the integration of immigrant communities at local level, it has become too constraining.

Furthermore, although closely linked, in Portugal electoral participation and the freedom to join and act within a political party are not exactly coincident. The Political Parties legal Act considers that *“political parties are constituted by citizens who hold political rights”*; in other words that includes all TCNs that have political rights recognised by the Portuguese law and international bilateral agreements. This Law also establishes that *“no person shall be denied membership in any particular political party or expulsion on grounds of...place of origin”*. Therefore, in general terms, TCNs who hold political rights and are legally residents in Portugal have the right to join a political party if they want to do so. However, over the past decade, depending on particular parties statutes it is possible identify some variety in the criteria of admittance of TCNs and/or their roles in the political party, being some parties more open than others.

3. Career Paths and Roles of Politicians with “immigrant background”

So far, all members of parliament (MPs) in the National Parliament have been Portuguese citizens, even if holding dual citizenship. The respondents provided few examples of MPs that they perceived as having immigrant background. Two of those examples arrived to the Parliament in the 1990s in a special programme promoted by one MP to bring immigrant leaders to support the discussion of immigration policies and extraordinary regularization processes that were being defined and discussed at that time in the Parliament. These examples were reported as being positive to the conception approval of important Legal Acts for the life of immigrants in Portugal, such as the law for the financial support of immigrants associations, the reform of the citizenship law and the creation of the public institution devoted to the integration of immigrants (the High Commission for Immigration).



Still is interesting to underline that those same politicians with immigrant background when asked if they represented the immigrants interests, stated that as soon as elected they represented the all electorate (and not only the immigrants electorate) and the parties interests.

At the local level non-national politicians (IP) and national politicians with immigrant background (PIB) are easier to identify. However, the numbers have not been impressive over the years. The interviewees and focus groups participants referred, however, that in the last local elections (2013) there were an increase of citizens with immigrant background in the lists of candidates, especially in metropolitan areas with higher concentration of immigrant residents to capture new voters and/or immigrants voters.

4. Diversity inside Political Parties and Discourses on Diversity

During the last ten years in Portugal, there has been a significant convergence of the political positions of the major political parties on immigration and integration policies. Political arguments made by the extreme right, propagating racist attitudes and xenophobia, have not led, at this point, to electoral gains. Consequently all respondents conveyed both personally and institutionally, very positive views on the presence of immigrants in Portugal and on the need to keep fostering their social *and* political integration of immigrants. Several politicians from the different political spectrum defended that *immigration is not a fracturing issue in Portugal*, contrary to what seems to happen in other European countries according to our respondents' views. Although there is a political consensus around immigration issues and integration policy, there are also divergences among political parties related to the concession of political rights to immigrants. Still, parties do not have specific concessions for foreigners or immigrants. Programmes or party manifestos on this are also absent. Although most respondents mentioned a certain preoccupation about including immigration on the parties' agendas, this seems to follow very random strategies.

5. Networks between Political Parties and Immigrant Communities and their associations

There was a wide consent among the respondents on the relevance that PIB and IP have or may have in the parties' relationships with communities. As for why they are relevant, the most signalled reasons were: **(1) Know-how:** IP and PIB may bring great added value to parties' approach to immigration, integration, social cohesion, because they have a powerful know-how that parties should recognize. By the same token, their presence is very important for communities, which see them as privileged interlocutors, as individuals more capable of implementing projects according to immigrant communities' interests; **(2) Communication facilitators:** several respondents state the idea that *"immigrant politicians are definitely the best positioned to dialogue with parties and with their own communities"*, because *"they facilitate communication, they understand better the communities' needs and demands"*. More trust is also achieved in parties' proposals and promises if immigrants see party members that are closer to the communities.

Several immigrant associations' leaders argued that associations may turn into fundamental spaces of immigrants' political empowerment. However, they must want to become that. Indeed, while recognized and cherished by most participants for their roles and potentials, associations were also perceived as spaces of limited efficacy. Lack of multiple resources (money, boards, expertise, time), lack of dia-



logue and cooperative strategies among associative leaders, and lack of empowering agendas, were among the internal explanations for such limited efficacy.

6. Recommendations

The following list summarises participants' contributions to recommendations to enhance immigrants' participation in political parties in Portugal:

- Parties need to track their militants. This is important not only in what regards a better knowledge of the immigrants' presence inside the party, but also of other sectors and groups in society and if the party have a representation of such diversity inside its structures.
- Parties must study deeper, along with entities such as COCAI, ACIDI and academics, the immigrant reality, its various communities, their demands, their specificities. In practical terms this means parties must invest on working groups dedicated to immigration issues.
- It is very important to preserve the positive legislative legacy so far existent, which includes integration policies, the nationality law, legal instruments to foster integration of migrants (in the health and education systems, in the labour market), the constitutional prohibition of any fascist or xenophobic acts and organizations. Still more is needed in respect to political rights: revising the Reciprocity Principle, in order to widen the access to electoral rights to immigrants.
- Automatic registration in the electoral books of legal residents entitled with political rights (as happen with Portuguese above 18 years old) could increase political participation.
- Immigrant associations and other relevant NGOs should invest more in disseminating citizenship rights, with special emphasis among immigrant communities already entitled with electoral rights. Associations should perform regular and consistent activities next to the communities, including training sessions to inform individuals on their rights, to explain how people may register to vote.
- Immigrant associations should work out more as platforms of lobby next to the political parties and decision making structures.