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Uneven Pathways to Local Power: The Political Incorporation of Immigrants' Descendants

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Abstract

Research focusing on the political incorporation of immigrants' descendants is rather scarce, in contrast to the high level of scholarly attention paid to the case of foreign-born immigrants. This exploratory study addresses this gap by adopting a sociological and neo-institutionalist approach to investigate the trajectories leading to political involvement of children of immigrants elected to local parliaments across a selection of Swiss cantons. The analysis of the factors shaping their mobilization in relation to the features of local policies for immigrants' integration and cantonal conceptions of citizenship sheds light on the variability of their political incorporation. The article thus makes a twofold contribution to the existing literature. First, it highlights the distinctive role played by local schools in the political socialization of immigrants' descendants, compared to that of their Swiss-origin counterparts. Second, it shows the decisive impact of cantonal institutional and discursive contexts in shaping the categories that are relevant for political action, influencing collective identities, claim-making, and political mobilization.

Keywords

political incorporation; political mobilization; second generation; subnational contexts; Switzerland

1. Introduction

Long considered merely as objects of economic policies, immigrants and their descendants have increasingly been recognized as active political agents since the 1990s in a European context marked by the acknowledgment of immigration as a lasting phenomenon, of the resulting cultural diversification of host societies, and of the rising politicization of ethnicity. The growing comparative literature on these issues (Alba & Foner, 2009; Bird, 2005; Bird et al., 2011; Bloemraad & Schönwälder, 2013; Dancygier, 2017; Garbaye, 2005; Givens & Maxwell, 2012; Ruedin, 2009, 2013a, 2013b) identifies representation in national

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and local parliaments as a crucial aspect of their political incorporation. Moreover, it highlights the role of individual characteristics, group-specific features, and the institutional settings of host societies to explain variation in political incorporation across different contexts and immigrant groups.

While research on this topic commonly examines "immigrant minorities" without differentiating between generations, this article seeks to empirically assess the specific extent of generational status in this matter. Our exploratory study addresses this issue from a sociological perspective to analyze the factors shaping the political incorporation of descendants of immigrants who sit in local parliaments. We do so by investigating their political socialization and political agenda as members of parliament (MPs; Martiniello, 2005) within the context of Switzerland, which offers an ideal research setting due to two characteristics particularly relevant to our analysis.

First, Switzerland is a major immigration country: 32% of the permanent resident population was born abroad while 8% of residents are classified as "second generation" (Federal Statistical Office, 2023); and some 53% of children of immigrants acquired Swiss citizenship by way of naturalization (Federal Statistical Office, 2024b). In this study, we focus on the "new second generation" (Fibbi et al., 2015), who are now young adults who have recently started their working life and are making their way into mainstream society. They are the children of the second relevant immigration inflow after the Second World War, from Turkey and the Western Balkans, who arrived in Switzerland under labor, family reunification, and asylum provisions in the late 1980s and 1990s. In comparison to descendants of groups that immigrated in the 1950s and 1960s (Bolzman et al., 2003), they experience, on average, harder socioeconomic trajectories (Fibbi et al., 2015) and face significant discrimination in the labor market (Fibbi et al., 2022) and unfavorable public discourse. While much scholarly attention has focused on the difficult economic integration of these groups, little is known about their political incorporation.

Switzerland offers a second highly relevant feature for our analysis: its extreme federalism (Ireland, 2000; Lijphart, 1999) produces considerable variations in cantonal citizenship and integration policies. Systematic efforts to measure and compare their relative inclusiveness reveal a polarization that is especially salient regarding electoral rights granted to non-citizen residents. German-speaking cantons exhibit more restrictive policies than their French-speaking counterparts (Arrighi & Piccoli, 2018; Manatschal, 2011; Probst et al., 2019; Wichmann et al., 2011). A correlation has been observed between the inclusiveness of these policies and the degree, nature, and direction of foreign-born immigrants' political claims (Eggert & Murigande, 2004; Giugni & Passy, 2003; Ireland, 1994) as well as the strategic behaviors of political parties regarding minority representation (Nadler, 2022). It remains unclear, however, to what extent this institutional context affects the patterns of political incorporation of immigrants' descendants.

Focusing on the four largest urban areas situated in the two main Swiss linguistic regions (Geneva, Lausanne, Basel, and Zurich), the study uses a within-case comparative approach to investigate the factors shaping the political incorporation of descendants of immigrants. In-depth interviews were conducted with politicians of immigrant origin (PIOs) elected to local parliaments and a smaller number of Swiss-origin representatives to investigate their trajectories leading to political involvement and activity. The results reveal the distinctive features of the pathways to active local political engagement of descendants of immigrants compared with those of their Swiss-origin peers and document the impact of local institutional settings on the political mobilization of immigrants' descendants.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Our exploratory study builds on the concept of the political incorporation of immigrants, defined as "the process of becoming part of the political debates, practices and decision making, thus achieving full citizenship" (Bloemraad, 2006, p. 6). Political incorporation features three dimensions, namely the acquisition of formal citizenship status through naturalization, participation in the political system of the new country, and being elected to political office. Dealing by design with descendants of immigrants holding Swiss citizenship by way of naturalization and elected in local parliaments, the study examines the dimension of political participation, which Bloemraad defines as "community advocacy" (Bloemraad, 2006, p. 5). We concentrate on how descendants of immigrants engage in politics and which notion of "community" is pertinent for their political involvement. We investigate two crucial moments: how they first developed an interest in politics, and the issues they advocate for in their political activity as MPs.

We adopt a new institutionalist approach, which "emphasizes the interaction of actors, both individual and collective, with the institutional and the cultural context" (Bloemraad & Schönwälder, 2013, p. 567). This theoretical approach is particularly suitable for comparing the impact of institutional systems on political involvement, process, and outcomes in different political settings. This framework articulates three broad categories of factors: micro-level individual candidate characteristics, meso-level immigrant-group dynamics, and macro-level institutional and cultural contexts.

Political socialization, an essential precondition for political participation, is the micro-level process through which individuals internalize and develop their political values and ideas, build their social identity, and develop their political opinions and attitudes. These habits are often established in the formative years of early adulthood (Mannheim, 1928) and are exceptionally stable over the life cycle (Prior, 2010). The literature about immigrants' political incorporation tends to compound foreign-born immigrants with their descendants, as if they were indistinguishable within a homogeneous "origin" group. However, a considerable body of research highlights significant generational differences within immigrant families, pointing to a disrupted transmission of political orientations across various forms of formal political participation, including civic and political engagement (Bloemraad & Trost, 2008; Callahan & Muller, 2013; Kasinitz et al., 2008; Okamoto et al., 2013; Wong & Tseng, 2008) and voting behavior (Borkowska & Luthra, 2024). We therefore expect that the political socialization of children of immigrants may not primarily be driven by their parents or their origin community but from other sources, such as school education.

Another crucial site of socialization that leads to political participation is engagement at the meso level in civil society associations and social networks. There are different mechanisms linking associational involvement and political participation (Giugni & Grasso, 2020), but we concentrate on the two sociological ones, namely the social capital model and the group consciousness model. Being embedded in a social network through associational life fosters the accumulation of social capital and stimulates political participation. Building on Putnam's concept of social capital (1993, 2000), one influential approach argues that the strength and density of the "ethnic civic community" may explain differences in political participation and incorporation across immigrant groups and different cities (e.g., Fennema & Tillie, 1999, 2001; Giugni et al., 2014; Tillie, 2004; Vermeulen et al., 2014). Yet this literature refers mainly to foreign-born immigrants socialized in their home country; whether this applies to their descendants is still to be assessed. Other types of voluntary associations also bring together people with similar experiences and values along dimensions of their identity other than

origin. They foster group consciousness and solidarity among members and collectivize groups' interests, for instance to counter marginalization (McClain et al., 2009; Miller et al., 1981). We believe that these associative experiences of the descendants of immigrants may favor rearrangements of their various personal identities, encourage the emergence of collective actors, and eventually also have an impact on their political activity. Parental ethnic communities are expected to play quite a limited role in the case of immigrants' descendants compared to other local civil society communities. Furthermore, the collective claims articulated by the young MPs are expected to mirror which presentation of the self they want to stage and whose "community" interests they want to champion in the political arena.

The process of political learning and mobilization is embedded in the social organization of ethnic and mainstream communities; institutions and government policies provide the environment within which individuals organize themselves for activities relating to political participation (Bloemraad, 2006). At the macro level, the political opportunity structure—a set of institutional and discursive features specific to each context (Koopmans, 1999; Tarrow, 1998)—influences the extent and forms of minority organization, their access to the political arena, and the degree of responsiveness to claims made by minority groups (Martiniello, 2005). Bloemraad's structured mobilization model identifies significant features of immigrants' collective action: concepts of citizenship, naturalization laws and policies, political culture—in terms of acceptance of immigrants—and the presence of anti-immigrant parties and government policies (Bloemraad, 2006). The concept of citizenship we refer to is a comprehensive one, including naturalization as well as the interaction of rights and obligations toward the state (Manatschal, 2011). In Switzerland, cantons have significant autonomy to shape citizenship and integration policies. An emphasis can be put on equal accessibility to citizenship for individual immigrants or on group rights for immigrant-origin communities (Koopmans & Statham, 2000). We expect that the claims of second-generation MPs will vary according to the citizenship and integration policies characterizing the cantonal state they live in. We figure that cantons open to group rights are more likely to experience the emergence of minority claims than cantons focusing on individual rights. Our exploratory investigation aims to test the extent to which this relation can be transposed to the understudied case of second-generation political activation.

3. Research Design and Fieldwork

A small-N qualitative approach with three key steps was designed to address our research question. First, four urban areas with comparable characteristics, except for the variable under investigation, were carefully selected following a most similar research design to account for the greatest variation in citizenship and integration policies. In the second step, data were meticulously collected from municipal parliaments, media sources, and interviews to provide an estimation of the descriptive representation of immigrants and their descendants in the local parliaments under investigation. This data collection allowed us to identify members of municipal parliaments of immigrant descent and a small number of MPs of Swiss descent; they participated in in-depth interviews as the third and final step. The following sections provide a more detailed account of these steps.

3.1. Context Selection

We selected the four largest Swiss urban areas (Geneva, Lausanne, Basel, and Zurich), which offer the best approximation to a most similar cases setting. In the contexts of all four urban areas, the size of the "new

second generation” is significant, with communities from Turkey and the Western Balkans slightly more prevalent in Basel (especially Turks) and Zurich. Moreover, the institutional “rules of the game” shaping access to local parliaments in those urban areas are similar: a proportional electoral system, a party list system, and the possibility of casting preferential votes or removing names from the list. Municipal parliaments tend to lean left, and this tendency is more pronounced in the Lausanne urban area than in Zurich, with Basel and Geneva occupying intermediate positions.

The major difference—indeed our variable of interest—among these areas lies in their diverse conceptions of citizenship at cantonal level that crystallize in different integration policies for immigrants. Cantons enjoy considerable legislative leeway to craft their own citizenship and integration policies: They can modulate federal criteria for ordinary naturalization, give non-citizen residents the right to vote or even stand as a candidate in local and cantonal elections, or grant group rights to immigrant minorities. These variations are best captured by systematic efforts to conceptualize and measure the access of immigrants to civic, political, socio-structural, and cultural and religious rights (Arrighi & Piccoli, 2018; Manatschal, 2011, 2012).

The Index on Citizenship Law in Switzerland (Arrighi & Piccoli, 2018) reveals that there is relatively more inclusive legislation on ordinary naturalization in the cantons of Vaud (VD, capital city Lausanne) and Geneva (GE) than in Zurich (ZH), Basel-City (BS), and Basel-Country (BL). Crucially for our purposes, it shows major differences regarding access to electoral rights for foreign nationals. The canton of Vaud grants both active and passive suffrage at municipal level to foreigners holding a long-term permit and a 10-year residence record in Switzerland, whereas the canton of Geneva entitles foreigners with eight years’ residence in Switzerland to vote at the municipal level but denies them passive suffrage rights. In contrast, foreign residents in Zurich and Basel have no local voting rights.

The picture is more nuanced as regards the second dimension of citizenship, the granting of group rights to immigrants. Weakly developed in the Swiss case, it can be captured by indicators such as cultural requirements set for naturalization, cultural rights granted in or outside public institutions, or legal recognition of religious minorities (Manatschal, 2011). The city-canton of Basel (BS) stands out in this regard for its openness to diversity (Wichmann & D’Amato, 2010); it has minimal cultural requirements for naturalization and today officially recognizes the Alevi religion. Basel’s authorities endorsed the *Leitbild zur Integration* 25 years ago (Ehret, 1999), advocating a “careful approach to culture” (Ehret, 2009, p. 1), actively supporting the formation of immigrant associations (Cattacin & Kaya, 2005) and thereby promoting the collective expression of migrants’ interests. In contrast, Zurich is the most assimilationist canton among those under investigation, as exemplified by its stringent cultural requirements for naturalization, minimal granting of cultural rights, and no legal recognition of religious minorities.

Identifying the factors shaping these distinct citizenship and integration models falls beyond the scope of this study, yet it is worth noting the relation between these models and the results of votes on citizenship and immigration issues (frequent and easily measured in Swiss direct democracy) and the relative electoral strength of the populist radical-right party (Schweizerische Volkspartei, SVP, Swiss People’s Party). Unlike Zurich, Basel-City often aligns with the liberal voting tendencies of the two French-speaking cantons on immigration issues, as demonstrated by the 2015 results of the initiative against mass immigration, which was accepted by 47% of voters in Zurich but only 39% in Geneva, Vaud, and Basel-City. Likewise, the SVP has dominated the political scene in Zurich since the 1990s, but its electoral weight is significantly lower and similar across the three other cantons.

3.2. Descriptive Representation of Immigrants and Their Descendants

In each selected urban area, we gathered descriptive data on immigrant-origin MPs in local parliaments of two municipalities, the main city and a nearby medium-sized town with a high proportion of foreigners (around 40% or more), to maximize the likelihood of finding MPs with an immigrant background. In this second step we took into account all Swiss MPs of immigrant origin regardless of their generational position to provide the largest overview of immigrants' representation.

Our data collection relied on a triangulation of three main sources of information. First, we accessed publicly available data, such as information found on parliamentary and party websites and in newspaper articles, to gather names and biographical details that could help identify individuals with a visible and/or explicitly stated immigrant background. Second, where information was incomplete or unclear, we contacted parliamentary bodies and political parties to elucidate origin, which helped verify and expand our initial findings. Third, we directly approached party and parliament members, who were often willing to provide precise information about their colleagues' origin. Overall, we consider the dataset robust due to this triangulated methodology and the reinforcement effect across these three sources, with one notable limitation: We may have missed elected representatives from neighboring countries (France, Germany, and Austria), as indicated by their surprisingly low representation (see Table 2).

The mapping of the various local parliaments provided an insight into the country of origin, gender, and political affiliation of Swiss-origin and immigrant-origin MPs. Our data reveal a significant underrepresentation of immigrant-origin minorities in municipal parliaments as of April 2016 (Table 1). In major cities, the percentage of minority MPs ranges from 4% in Zurich to 12.5% in Geneva, both substantially below the proportion of foreign residents. Medium-sized towns exhibit more variability, with minority representation ranging from 2.5% in Pratteln (BL) to 32.5% in Renens (VD). The latter, with nearly a third of its MPs having immigrant origins, is a notable exception, contrasting sharply with the German-speaking towns of Schlieren (ZH) and Pratteln (BL).

Table 1. Population and parliament composition in selected municipalities (April 2016).

Municipalities (Canton)	Inhabitants (in 1,000s)	Resident aliens (%)	MPs (Total)	Immigrant-origin MPs* (N)	(%)
Zurich (ZH)	391.4	31.9	125	5	4.0
Schlieren (ZH)	18.4	45.9	36	2	5.5
Basel (BS)	168.6	36.2	100	6	6.0
Pratteln (BL)	15.6	39.7	40	1	2.5
Lausanne (VD)	133.9	42.3	100	5	5.0
Renens (VD)	18.9	51.3	80	26	32.5
Geneva (GE)	197.4	48.7	80	10	12.5
Vernier (GE)	35.3	45.8	40	6	16.6

Note: * The category immigrant-origin MPs includes both foreign-born immigrants and descendants of immigrants.

A closer look at the composition of the immigrant minority representation (Table 2) reveals some important variations among the different cities. In Basel-City, all minority MP seats are held by Turkish-origin representatives, while in other cities representation is more diverse, sometimes including MPs from smaller

immigrant groups. Second-generation MPs constitute less than half (44%) of immigrant-origin MPs in the selected municipalities, and their proportion is generally higher in medium-sized towns than in cities, except in Renens.

Table 2. Features of immigrant-origin MPs in 2016*.

Municipalities (Canton)	Generation		Political parties**	Countries of origin***
	First	Second		
Zurich (ZH)	1	4	PS/SP (3), VL (2)	BO, ES, GR, IN, TR
Schlieren (ZH)	0	2	PS/SP (2)	MK, TN
Basel (BS)	5	1	PS/SP (4), PES, PLR	TR (6)
Pratteln (BL)	0	1	PS/SP	TR
Lausanne (VD)	3	2	PS/SP (4), PES	VN (2), IT, KO, LK
Renens (VD)	17	9	PS/SP (13), POP (8), PLR (3), UDC/SVP (2)	IT (6), TR (5), CO (2), KO (2), ES (2), AF, BA, CD, HR, EC, UK, PT, SN, ZA
Geneva (GE)	7	3	PS/SP (4), PDC (3), PES, MCG, POP	KO (2), TN (2), DZ, GR, ES, IR, LB, SO
Vernier (GE)	1	5	PS/SP (4), PLR, MCG	KO (3), DZ (2), ES

Notes: * Immigrant-origin MPs includes both foreign-born immigrants and descendants of immigrants; ** Political parties: MCG: Mouvement citoyen genevois; PES: Parti écologiste suisse; PLR: Parti libéral radical; POP: Parti ouvrier populaire; PS/SP: Parti socialiste/Sozialdemokratische Partei; UDC/SVP: Union démocratique du centre/Schweizerische Volkspartei; VL: Vert'libéraux; parties with no number have one representative; *** Countries of origin: AF: Afghanistan; BA: Bosnia; BO: Bolivia; CD: Democratic Republic of Congo; CO: Colombia; DZ: Algeria; EC: Ecuador; ES: Spain; GR: Greece; HR: Croatia; IT: Italy; IR: Iran; IN: India; KO: Kosovo; LB: Lebanon; LK: Sri Lanka; MK: Macedonia; PT: Portugal; SN: Senegal; SO: Somalia; TN: Tunisia; TR: Turkey; UK: United Kingdom; VN: Vietnam; ZA: South Africa; countries with no number have one representative.

3.3. Overview of Our Interviewees

The collection of the descriptive representation data was used to identify potential interviewees and was extended to other municipalities in the same urban areas to compensate for the limited number of MPs in certain city parliaments who are immigrants' descendants. The notion of immigrants' descendants adopted for the fieldwork includes persons of immigrant origin who grew up and attended most of their compulsory school (five years) in Switzerland, regardless of their place of birth. This is the general understanding of "second generation" in Switzerland, where, in the absence of *jus soli*, place of birth has no bearing on citizenship. We specifically targeted the "new second generation" of individuals with Western Balkan and Turkish origins (Fibbi et al., 2015), as they reside in all cantons (albeit in varying proportions) and occupy similar positions in the social stratification. Moreover, we incorporated a small number of Swiss-origin peers of similar age, gender, and party affiliation. The information gathered from this sort of control group helped us better assess the specificities of immigrant-origin youth in relation to the factors influencing their political socialization. Table 3 provides an overview of the interviewed MPs and their main characteristics.

Between September and December 2016, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 34 MPs, 25 of whom were PIOs, and 9 PCHs. The interviews were conducted using a guide with three main series of questions on the following topics: the role of family and school in early political socialization, the influence of networks and associations on political mobilization, and the main issues they intended to promote as MPs.

Table 3. Overview and features of interviewed MPs.

Urban areas	Politicians of Swiss origin (PCHs)	PCHs: Gender* and party affiliation**	PIOs	PIOs: Gender*, party affiliation**, and parental country of origin
Zurich	2	F, PS/SP; M, PS/SP	8	F, PS, Kosovo; F, PS, Kosovo; F, PS, Macedonia; M, PS, Turkey; M, PS, Bolivia; M, VL, India; M, PLR, Macedonia; M, PS, Uganda
Basel	2	F, PS/SP; M, PS/SP	5	F, PS, Turkey; F, PS, Turkey; M, PS, Turkey; M, PS, Kosovo; M, PS, Ghana
Lausanne	3	F, PS/SP; F, PS/SP; M, PLR	6	F, PS, Vietnam; M, PES, Vietnam; F, PS, Kosovo; M, PS, Kosovo; M, PLR, Nigeria; F, PS, Somalia
Geneva	2	F, PS/SP; M, PS/SP	6	F, PS, Greece; F, PS, Turkey; M, PS, Algeria; M, PS, Kosovo; F, PS, Kosovo; M, PS, Spain
Total	9		25	

Notes: * F stands for female; M stands for male; ** Political parties: PES: Parti écologiste suisse; PLR: Parti libéral radical; PS/SP: Parti socialiste/Sozialdemokratische Partei; VL: Vert'libéraux.

To comply with ethical standards, we asked for and obtained consent to publish anonymized data; therefore, pseudonyms are used when attributing an excerpt from an interview, alongside the name of the canton the person resided in. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using MAXQDA, which is designed for theoretical coding. This method allowed us to deconstruct, conceptualize, and reassemble the data to relate it to our theoretical framework (Flick, 2014).

All PIOs are Swiss citizens by way of naturalization; their demographic, socioeconomic, and political characteristics offer enlightening insights. Almost 50% of PIOs are women. Such a high percentage mirrors our mapping of MPs in the selected cities yet exceeds by far the 35% average in Swiss local legislative bodies (Federal Statistical Office, 2024a). All respondents were aged between 20 and 30 at the time of the interviews. Twenty-two out of 25 PIOs and 8 out of 9 PCHs held or were pursuing tertiary education qualifications in 2016. Intergenerational upward social mobility has been experienced by 15 out of 22 tertiary-educated PIOs; they are the first in their families to reach this level of education, whereas the educational attainment of PCHs mirrors systematically their parents' level. PIOs are predominantly affiliated with left-wing parties (84%), which is consistent with our mapping of MPs in the selected cities (Table 2). Yet, as young politicians, PIOs and PCHs had similar difficulties accessing an MP position: They all entered the city parliament by replacing senior officials as "next-in-line" candidates from the same party list.

4. Results: The Political Incorporation of Second-Generation MPs From a Comparative Perspective

4.1. Political Socialization

PIO respondents trace their political socialization back to their late teens but do not attribute it to their family environment. Many do mention their families, especially parents who were active in homeland politics in countries experiencing political unrest such as Turkey or Kosovo during the 1990s. However, few PIOs received family support regarding getting acquainted with Swiss political culture because often their parents

lacked knowledge of and interest in Swiss politics. Poor language skills, demanding work schedules, and a perception that foreign residents should avoid public affairs often hindered their immigrant parents from being politically involved in Switzerland. This situation is exemplified by the case of Fatmire, an MP living in the Zurich area:

> My parents did not speak German well, so they could not deal with politics here. They were of course interested in Macedonian politics: They watched TV, read the newspaper, and discussed events there. In Switzerland, they heard about politics, but they were cautious, thinking, "If I behave correctly, then nothing happens to me, so I keep a low profile as much as I can." Because of this anxiety, they never talked about politics or meant: "I want to do something here." Moreover, they simply lacked time. My father worked 120%, had two jobs, and my mother, who spoke little German, was busy with four children. So, politics was almost never discussed in the family. (Fatmire_ZH)

Most respondents emphasize instead that at the time of the interview the practice of politics in their parents' home country differed sharply from that in Switzerland. They thus unanimously mention the crucial impact that their school education had not only on their social mobility but also specifically on their political socialization. Most of them identify an influential school or college teacher—usually teaching civic education, history, or law—who actively contributed to the development of their political knowledge and values. For instance, Bona, an MP living in the Lausanne region, reflects a common narrative of our PIO respondents in the following excerpt:

> I learned about the Swiss political system in school. I was lucky enough to have a high school history teacher who taught the Swiss political system in a rather ludic and interesting way. She is the one who showed how the federal, cantonal, or communal systems operate and encouraged us to talk about elections and votes. She opened our eyes to several realities and stimulated my curiosity. (Bona_VD)

Thanks to political knowledge and interest gained at school, many PIOs felt empowered to inform their parents about local politics and felt confident to discuss new issues within the family. Bottom-up processes of political socialization, referred to as "trickle-up" processes in the literature (Spierings, 2016; Terriquez & Kwon, 2015), often occur in immigrant families because of the first generation's poor knowledge of the Swiss political system and their children's acquisition of political skills at school. Although such trickle-up processes are most common among minimally politicized parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (McDevitt & Chaffee, 2002), our findings indicate that they also occur in families already politically engaged in their home country. Indeed, most PIO respondents use the political competencies acquired in school within their social networks or civic organizations to inform their parents about (local) political issues and encourage their participation. Thirteen respondents in our sample reported regularly supporting their enfranchised parents regarding how to vote, and some even gave them advice about what to vote for, which is useful in the Swiss direct democracy system, where voters are called to cast ballots three to four times a year on all kinds of issues. In these cases, the political skills acquired by young PIOs at school can introduce new topics, deeply transforming family relationships. Bekim, an MP in the Basel region, recalls:

> My political interest, developed at school, was the trigger for change within our family. Suddenly social issues were addressed at home that were never discussed before. Liberalism in marriage, tolerance for gays, no matter what skin color…are topics that were first addressed at home because of my political interests, and that changed family relations. (Bekim_BS)

In this regard, PIOs' experiences are sharply distinct from those of our Swiss-origin respondents, whose political knowledge and orientation were shaped through exposure to politically informed and politically active families. An iconic example of this form of political socialization is provided by Lucas, an MP in the Lausanne region whose family has a long-standing history of political involvement. Lucas emphasized that his family was the firm locus of his political socialization, notably by using the term "family virus." He rejects other potential influences, such as school, on his political trajectory:

> I have always been in an environment where we talk about politics, or we do politics. I had a grandfather who sat in the federal parliament, my two parents were successively on the communal executive....I have been interested in politics since I was a kid....I would dare to say that I learned as an autodidact or listening to family discussions. All I know is that citizenship classes did not help me. I was rather correcting the teacher when he was talking nonsense. (Lucas_VD)

The vertical transmission observed among PCHs often leads to the formation of political "dynasties" within local political institutions, as regularly reported in the media. The contrast with PIOs could not be sharper. PIOs differ from both their parents and their Swiss-origin peers because the "disruption" of family transmission dynamics makes them rely instead on local agents of socialization and other sources of political socialization and activation.

4.2. Social Networks

PIOs engage in civil society associations and social networks before investing in the political arena. The literature emphasizes the role of a rich ethnic associational life in fostering political participation of first-generation immigrants. Our findings suggest that, on the contrary, immigrants' descendants refrain from engaging in their parents' ethnic networks. Apart from one notable exception in Basel (see Section 4.3.2), most respondents are not involved in organizations representing their parents' countries of origin and did not accumulate social capital through an "ethnic civic community."

Although many interviewees participated as children in cultural or religious events organized by their parents' associations, most of them had abandoned these practices and contacts by adolescence and in 2016 only had sporadic involvement. They often mention feeling uncomfortable regarding being identified with their parents' national community because they are worried about being confined to the perceived cultural traits and political interests of that community. PIOs may instead engage in movements related to general immigration and/or integration issues that go far beyond the ethnic dimension alone. Shpresa illustrates this point:

> I always wanted to act in favor of the refugee cause, seeing the refugee as a human being, not differentiating by ethnicity. It does not matter if they are Albanian, Turk, or Syrian. I never wanted to represent and defend only one group....I have always been interested in the topic "foreigners," as a general topic, not just Albanians. (Shpresa_ZH)

However, the trickle-up processes described above can push some PIOs to instrumentally reactivate their parents' ethnic network during their political campaign. This pattern was observed among some MPs from the sizeable Albanian and Turkish communities in Swiss German municipalities, who sometimes successfully directed transnational political communications toward associations and media used by their parents' ethnic

communities. In other cases, such attempts were disappointing precisely because of the weakened connections with parents' ethnic networks, as illustrated by the experience of Alessandra, a politician of Vietnamese origin living in Lausanne:

> We [my party and I] thought we had to activate these networks and approached them. We took advantage of the Vietnamese New Year in January. I prepared a little speech that I read in Vietnamese, but it went very badly, because I don't know the language well. The feedback was mixed. Some people were happy, and others really looked away like "I don't want to talk about this." I don't know if I would do it again. (Alexandra_VD)

These findings suggest that it is necessary to distinguish between immigrants and their descendants when studying their political incorporation as they may have different relations to their "origin" communities.

4.3. Actors' Mobilization and Institutional Context

Next, we investigate the impact of different local opportunity structures on actors' political action by analyzing the discursive dimensions of their mobilization, such as their identity and political claims. In each canton being studied, PIOs put forward a peculiar declination of their identity and mobilize around partially different issues. The fieldwork revealed three different presentations of self among PIOs and related ways of political mobilization. In Zurich, PIOs built their political identity around their minority status as second-generation citizens and mobilized against the political exclusion of all non-citizens regardless of their ethnic background. In Basel, on the contrary, PIOs' identity is solidly rooted in their ethnic minority homeland experience but at the same time firmly engaged in local politics. In the French-speaking cities, PIOs emphasized their local identity as residents while broadly combating the social and political exclusion of migrants and underprivileged groups. We argue that these various identity constructs emerge from the interplay between, on the one hand, minority bonding and bridging social capital, and, on the other, the constraints and opportunities set by majority society.

4.3.1. Zurich: Pan-Ethnic Second-Generation Mobilization

In a political system closed to foreign residents, Zurich provides the clearest example of associational engagement that mobilizes an explicitly second-generation identity rather than ethnic community-based networks. The Second@s Plus association is a case in point. It was set up in the 2000s in response to a dominant discourse stigmatizing immigrants' descendants in general rather than a specific community. The term "Secondos," blending Italian and Spanish, denotes an emerging new group of mixed ethnic origin now established in the country of residence. It became a disparaging term used to label second-generation youth as troublemakers—particularly following incidents that occurred during Labor Day protests in the early 2000s. But the association turned this into a claimed identity, a positive marker. Daniel, a founding member, reports:

> At that time, this concept [Secondos] was quite unknown, yet it had a negative connotation. Suddenly [in public discourse after the troubles] second-generation youth were all supposed to be criminal people! I thought: "I am also a second-generation citizen, but I am not a criminal!" So, we set up a group and said, "If you introduce a term, Secondos, then you have to give it a positive connotation." (Daniel_ZH)

This normative inversion strategy (Lamont & Bail, 2005; Wimmer, 2008) was a necessary step toward affirming a collective identity as foreign residents and rejecting assigned identities that referred to parents' countries of origin. Political mobilization around this collective identity allowed immigrants' descendants to reclaim agency over discourse and decisions directly affecting them, as explained by Lindita:

> They cannot discuss topics of integration and immigration policy without us. We want to talk about these issues ourselves. It was such an empowerment, such a self-confident attitude. With Second@s Plus it was a matter of saying, "We are also here, these issues of naturalization and equal opportunities directly affect us, not all migrants, but very specifically the second generation." (Lindita_ZH)

The movement was explicitly formed to encourage political expression among immigrants' descendants, promoting local-level political engagement and challenging restrictive naturalization policies at both cantonal and national levels. The local dynamic became nationally relevant publicly in 2004 when the movement made its mark as a visible social actor via its punchy and colorful—yet unsuccessful—campaign supporting the introduction at federal level of birthright citizenship for the grandchildren of immigrants.

Zurich's institutional and discursive framework, based on restrictive integration policies and a stigmatizing discourse on second-generation citizens, has thus fostered a reactive form of political identification around the Secondos identity and mobilization for a political voice. The local party system responded strategically to these demands. Initially, the SP capitalized on them by establishing electoral lists under the "Second@s Plus" label and forming close interpersonal relationships with its members, who became a key "reservoir" for young PIOs. Since the 2010s, the association has extended its relations beyond the SP to include all political parties—except for the SVP. It advocates fair naturalization processes and voting rights at local and regional levels. Today, the movement remains a vital reference for immigrants' descendants in Zurich and many PIO respondents engage with it. However, it has not expanded in many other cantons.

4.3.2. Basel: Ethnic Intergenerational Mobilization

In Basel, the PIOs are strikingly homogeneous (Table 2); all have a Turkish background and are predominantly from the numerically important Alevi community. Alevis developed many different types of association (sports, culture, religion, integration-related issues) that bonded both first- and second-generation people. This is the only case among those studied where such close intergenerational connections have been maintained over time. These associations also have a bridging function, catering to transnational and institutional relationships between members of the Alevi community and the Turkish embassy in Switzerland as well as local authorities and left-wing political parties. This case aligns with the ethnic civic community argument, which suggests that the size of the community and the density of ethnic associational networks promote political participation.

The extensive literature on Turkish political participation in Germany and the Netherlands has somewhat overlooked the specificity of the Alevis' struggle for minority recognition in Europe (Massicard, 2012; Sökefeld, 2008) and the interdependent development of "identity politics" in both their homeland and their host country. Alevis, including the Basel PIO respondents, emphasize the differences between the cultural values and practices of the Sunni majority in Turkey and those of their community, which they consider a progressive and tolerant form of Islam more readily accepted in Europe. In the Swiss context, the Alevis'

successful identity claim follows the path previously taken by other religious minorities striving for public recognition.

Yet the political achievement of the Alevis' strategic emphasis on cultural distinctiveness was enabled by a combination of factors specific to the Basel region. Immigrant-group dynamics such as the concentration of the Turkish-origin population, a strong Alevi community, and a dense associative network coincided with a favorable local structure for political opportunity characterized by the responsiveness of left-wing parties and Basel's multicultural citizenship model facilitating collective migrant expression. Emre, president of the Alevitische Kulturzentrum founded by his father and MP in the Basel region, relates how left-wing parties began recruiting candidates from his organization in the early 2000s, leading to his election to the Basel-City parliament in 2004 alongside four other Alevi politicians:

> By the 2000s, the SP [Sozialdemokratische Partei] and the Greens noticed that the Alevi community had sympathy for them and today it is so, before elections to the legislative or the executive seats, we go on a tour with candidates in the migrant associations, mostly on Sundays. One of these associations is the Alevi cultural community. That is how I, together with four Alevi friends, became involved in the SP....All of us were successful, all from the Alevi community. (Emre_BS)

So, both first and second generations make use of the same channels to engage in politics and successfully run for office: The two generations converge in their pursuit of the same goal, contributing to the "Alevi revival" observed in Western Europe since the 1990s (Massicard, 2012). This political integration, combined with an institutional context favoring the collective expression of migrants' interests, led to the Alevi community's official recognition by the Basel-City parliament in 2012, granting them the same status as Christians and Jews. Such recognition has both a symbolic value (acknowledgment of the social value of the community) and a practical value (access to the rights and resources guaranteed by the cantonal Constitution to religious groups) that have yielded resources for a transnational politics of identity aimed at formal recognition of the Alevi in Turkey.

4.3.3. Geneva and Lausanne: Local Youth Mobilization

The French-speaking urban areas under investigation present a different picture. The Secondos movement developed in the German-speaking cantons never managed to take root in Western Switzerland, where ethnic associations with strong ties between first and second generations are largely absent. In the two French-speaking cantons, the granting of local voting rights to long-term foreign residents in the early 2000s set the dominant frame for integration, emphasizing individual and territorial entitlement over group membership.

PIO respondents in Geneva and Lausanne report that they established their social network within local, often self-organized associations, typically at the neighborhood level. The experience of Bilal, a PIO in the Geneva canton, is iconic:

> With a group of eight friends, we created the [neighborhood] Association, a non-profit organization, to foster better living through various activities....We were open to everyone, from 1 to 99 years old, and...wanted to destigmatize the youth of my neighborhood. (Bilal_GE)

As Bilal says, the aim of this group action was destigmatizing what he calls the "youth of my neighborhood." Whereas PIOs in Zurich were labeled "Secondos" and mobilized politically around this identity, most respondents in Geneva and Lausanne built their political engagement on an identification with their—usually deprived—neighborhood.

Besides neighborhood associations, youth parliaments are important sites of social capital acquisition and political recruitment. They promote political education, the participation of young adults, and the culture of democratic discussion that is essential in a direct democracy. In Geneva, municipal youth parliaments (accessible to people aged 15–25 regardless of their citizenship status) staged voting rights claims for non-citizen residents in the mid-1990s (Wegschaider, 2023). Guxim provides a telling example of this process:

> The first civic engagement was through the Geneva Youth Parliament which we co-founded with a large group of young people. The idea arose during a voting campaign. A law teacher explained the latest revision of unemployment insurance and we realized that young people were the most affected by the reform, yet nobody was addressing it. We decided to create a structure to clarify electoral and voting issues. We also noticed that young people lacked a partner to approach the state, particularly when navigating administrative procedures for various activities. We envisioned the Parliament as a catalyst: a place where ideas could be proposed, resources pooled, and collaborations formed. I chaired the Culture Committee for a year and then served as vice-president of the Parliament. (Guxim_GE)

PIOs in urban areas in Geneva and Lausanne mobilize around youth-related issues and engage in local community structures in a political environment that tends to see them not as immigrants or foreigners (because of their formal status or their origin) but as "citizens," i.e., as legitimate, active actors in the place where they reside. Their discourse does not feature ethnic references but instead defends socially disadvantaged groups in deprived neighborhoods. They address a constituency that comprises and yet goes beyond their parents' ethnic community and the foreign population. In their quest for social justice, PIO respondents often address social integration and discrimination issues. While they may understand that political parties show an interest in them because of their migrant background, they refrain from and sometimes even resent being considered community representatives.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Our contribution adds to existing literature on the political incorporation of immigrants' descendants by highlighting the specific socialization processes they experienced and the structuring influence of contextual dimensions on their mobilization.

The decisive drive of PIOs to engage in political action is provided, as expected, not mainly by their families—as is the case for PCHs—but by Swiss teachers and local, civic experiences. Even in politically active families, international migration appears to disrupt the intergenerational transmission of political engagement. When political incorporation is being studied, the cases of the first and second generation should not be systematically lumped together: The second generation undergoes a specific socialization process that enables them to master the codes and knowledge of their country of residence's political system. The vertical model conceiving young people's political commitment (or lack thereof) as a

unidirectional transmission of political skills and orientations from parents to their children is thus challenged, at least regarding the specific case of a politically active second generation. Effective political socialization at school creates a difference between the descendants of immigrants who actively engage in politics and those, the most numerous, who are reluctant to participate in local political life (Bevelander & Hutcheson, 2022; Fibbi et al., 2023).

Political socialization is a lifelong horizontal process characterized by peer-to-peer transmission of knowledge and political skills (Terriquez et al., 2020). Many studies identify ethnic networks, both for immigrants and for their descendants, as the crucial actor in this secondary socialization, as documented in the case of the Turkish Alevi community in Basel. The importance of bonding social capital appears to be context-dependent, particularly where the minority group can capitalize on ethnic concentration and organizational density and encounters a favorable structure for local political opportunities. Yet, in all other cases under scrutiny, peer-to-peer socialization develops through other politicizing agents, as expected. Such agents are for instance young people from different backgrounds and civic organizations with peers from non-immigrant families, leading to the acquisition of bridging social capital. Hence, the impact of ethnic horizontal socialization on political mobilization varies among ethnic groups and according to contextual determinants, shaping different types of reference "communities": ethnic, pan-ethnic, and territorial ones.

The significant contextual dissimilarities highlighted by our subnational comparative study are the result of the interplay between the internal dynamics of immigrant minority groups and the features of local policies toward immigrants. As postulated in the theoretical framework, the identities and communities around which the PIOs express their political claims are those that are discursively legitimized by the cultural frame of citizenship and integration policies specific to each institutional context. In an extreme federalist system, the establishment of representative and accountable government at cantonal level "provides new institutional resources for political leaders to adapt, blur, and re-define the meaning of citizenship for vulnerable [minority] subjects" (Piccoli, 2020, p. 21).

Our article grapples with the vast subject matter of political incorporation by entering through the "side door" of individual protagonists of immigrant descent, so our data were not suited to tackling the political parties' attitudes toward immigrant-origin candidates (Nadler, 2022). Indeed, in-depth research is needed on the role of gatekeepers, such as political parties, trade unions, and religious and humanitarian nonprofit associations, in fostering and controlling the access of immigrants and their descendants to political participation. Further research should test our exploratory findings and sharpen the analysis of local institutional and discursive citizenship constructs.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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