

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF MIGRANTS IN THE NETHERLANDS

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Summary

This paper examines three forms of political participation and the relationship between them and looks at the reasons why migrant organisations are important for political participation. We have investigated the turn out rates and voting behaviour of migrants. We have investigated active political participation that means we have interviewed councillors from ethnic minority groups and party officials in four cities. The third part of our research concerns organizations of ethnic minorities. We gathered data on Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese, Ghanaian and Chinese organizations and conducted network analyses to see if organizations have common board members. The combination of all this information supplies us with a picture of the civic community of the ethnic groups in the Netherlands. We theorize about explanations on differences between these groups and give more insight in the role of migrant organisations.

1. Introduction

The Netherlands has a population of about 16 million inhabitants, of which 5% is usually considered part of ethnic minority groups. *Ethnic minority* groups are immigrant groups with a consistent lower socio-economic status in terms of educational level and income. The main ethnic minority groups are 1) immigrants from former Dutch colonies with Dutch passports, like Surinamese and Antilleans, 2) immigrants that arrived as temporary labourers between 1960–1980, mainly from Turkey and Morocco and their offspring 3) immigrants that arrived more recently as refugees, from a variety of countries like Vietnam, Somalia, Iran, Iraq. National and local policies are formulated to improve the situation of these specific groups. In our study we focus mainly on the four largest ethnic minority groups, namely Surinamese, Antilleans, Turks and Moroccans. When I use the terms migrants and ethnic minorities, these groups are targeted.

Possibilities for political participation of members of ethnic minority groups vary for the three categories mentioned. Immigrants from the former colonies keep Dutch passports and have a right to vote in national, provincial and local elections and to become local or provincial councillor, parliamentarian or governor. The second category has a right for dual nationality since 1992: about two third of the Turks and half of the Moroccans¹ took Dutch nationality and kept the passport so have dual nationality. The Turks and Moroccans with a Dutch passport can actively or passively participate in all elections. Non-nationals have voting right has been granted on the municipal level, when they have lived more than five years in the Netherlands. That means the amount of Turks and Moroccans that can vote in local elections is considerably higher than on the national level. The concentration of ethnic minorities (in the larger cities in the Netherlands is 30 % in Amsterdam and 31 % in Rotterdam ² so a representation of these groups in the municipal council is urgent: social problems in city areas are often problems of ethnic minorities. A minister of Big Cities Policy was introduced in 1998, who deals with the issues of ethnic minorities.

¹ According to Kees Groenendijk, 2000

² This percentage concerns people that are born or have one parent that is born in a non- western country (see Berger et al, 2000).

The third target category of the ethnic minority policy is refugees, a diverse group with mainly four types of legal status: – 1 – asylum seeker, – 2 – all kinds of in-between status like permit for temporary stay (v-VTV), etceteras, – 3 – A- status: accepted refugees with a refugee passport (who are officially stateless) or C-status (VTV), and – 4 – refugees that have taken Dutch nationality. Asylum seekers do not have any voting rights and for all “accepted” refugees without Dutch nationality including the temporarily accepted ones, the five-year-rule applies for voting right on municipal level.

Becoming a councillor or parliamentarian is only possible with a Dutch passport; a second nationality is not a problem.

2. Turn out rates and voting behaviour

Aggregated data on voting behaviour of ethnic minorities in the Netherlands are not available from the bodies that organize the elections. The municipal registry supplies the election registry only with names and addresses and not with place of birth to protect the privacy of the voters. That means that we depend on exit polls and surveys to know more about the characteristics of the voters.

In 1994 and in 1998 we organized exit polls during the municipal elections in five Dutch cities. The cities with the highest percentage of ethnic minorities were chosen: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Den Haag, Utrecht and Arnhem.

In table 1 we present some results on turnout of migrants voters during the local elections of 1994 and 1998 in five cities in the Netherlands.

Background	Amsterdam		Rotterdam		Den Haag		Utrecht		Arnhem	
	1994	1998	1994	1998	1994	1998	1994	1998	1994	1998
Turks	67%	39	28	42	–*	36	55	39	56	50
Moroccans	49	23	23	33	–	23	44	26	51	18
Surinamese/ Antilleans	30	21	24	25	–	27	–	22	–	20
Capo Verdans	–	–	34	33	–	–	–	–	–	–
City turn out	56,8	45,7	56,9	48,4	57,6	57,6	59,8	56,5	57,2	52,0

* Den Haag 1994: no data

As shown in table 1 the turnout rates of Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese and Antilleans differ considerably.

The city turn out rate is in general higher than the turn out of ethnic minorities. Between 1994 and 1998 the general and migrant turn out went down in an alarming way. This was partly caused by diminishing clarity on the differences between the parties after the fall of the Berlin wall: former left wing parties moved to the centre, and left-right coalitions that had never been possible before took shape. A general loss of interest in politics was noticeable, that was more clear for marginal groups. Low turn out of minority groups in 1994 provoked the city of Rotterdam to start a campaign to stimulate the participation of ethnic minority groups in 1998.

Turks tend to turn up more at the polls than the other ethnic groups (for more information on our study on voting behaviour see Tillie, 1998; Fennema & Tillie, 1999; Tillie mmv Fennema & Heelsum, 2000).

Secondly, the actual voting behaviour has been studied. In table 2 voting patterns of migrants is compared to voting patterns of the total Dutch population.

Table 2 Voting behaviour of four ethnic groups in the local elections of 1998.									
	PvdA (Socialist party)	D66	Groen Links	SP	CDA (Christi an democr ats)	VVD (Liberal Democr ats)	SGP GPV RPF	Other (local) parties	N (100%)
Turks	30%	2	16	1	29	1	0	21	2209
Moroccans	42	1	45	1	4	1	0	6	1040
Surinamers	62	4	11	3	5	2	1	12	1354
Antilleans	51	5	13	6	8	5	2	10	174
Other migrants	41	6	19	6	10	6	1	11	1408
Total migrants	42	3	20	3	15	2	1	14	6185
Total Dutch	18	4	4	2	24	18	3	27	7.000.94 1

(Source: Tillie, et all 2000)

As shown in table 2 migrants tend to vote more on the left wing parties (PvdA and the Green Left Party) than the general population does. Migrants nearly don't vote for parties that are usually considered to the right side of continuum (VVD, SGP, GPV and RPF).

In our book on migrant voting (Tillie et al, 2000) we analyse the underlying reasons for party choice. We asked people what they could possibly vote and what they would never vote for. If voting behaviour were ideologically determined, a leftist person would never take voting on a right wing party into account. From that analysis we conclude that the voting behaviour of migrants was ideologically determined. We found few examples of voting that is determined by the ethnic background of a candidate, but usually this occurs within the limits of party preference. We find only a few exceptions in which a famous Turkish or Moroccan politician attracted a lot of votes for a certain party. We saw this effect more prominently the very first time non-nationals could participation in elections. The second time, the number of Turkish and Moroccan politicians had increased; they appeared in all parties and because of that, the effect of specific politicians diminished.

3. Active political participation in municipal councils

In paragraph 2 we have described passive political participation, and we will now turn to active political participation. With the introduction of voting rights for non-nationals, the number of councillors from ethnic minority groups in local councils increased also. We were interested in the way councillors from ethnic minority groups are selected, the way they function and the attitudes of the parties and policy

makers towards them. We interviewed the migrant councillors, other party members and officials in the civil service of four cities (see: Berger, Fennema, Heelsum, Tillie & Wolff, 2000).

The number of migrants in the councils of six cities from 1986 onwards is shown in table 3.

Table 3 Number of migrants in the council of six cities.

Year: City:	1986– 1990	1990– 1994	1994– 1998	1998– 2002
Amsterdam	3	4	8	11
Rotterdam	1	2	2	8
Den Haag	1	3	2	6
Utrecht	0	3	4	6
Eindhoven	2	1	2	1
Zaanstad	1	1	3	3

Table 3 shows a substantial difference between the two big cities (Amsterdam and Rotterdam) and the medium towns. In Amsterdam nearly a third of the councillors is of migrant origin in 1998. That means that migrants are nearly proportionally represented in the council of Amsterdam. In Rotterdam slightly more than a fifth of the councillors is of migrant origin, while the percentage of migrant inhabitants of Rotterdam is 30 percent. In Zaanstad, a smaller town, the percentage of migrant councillors is 7,5 percent, while the percentage of migrant in the population is 12,5 percent. In Den Haag and Utrecht the percentage of migrants in the council is 12,5 percent, while 3 percent of the population in both cities is of migrant origin.

Eindhoven is far behind and has only one migrant councillor, while with a proportional representation the amount of migrants should have been 4 in Eindhoven. Our general conclusion is positive: 13 years after the introduction of voting rights for non-nationals, migrants have become clearly visible in numbers in the councils of the big cities, even though they are not as often going to the polls as Dutch. The political institutions are accessible for migrants.

For smaller towns and villages in the countryside things are not the same. During the local elections of 1998 the total number of migrant councillors in the Netherlands has doubled from 74 (in 1994) to 150. That means, they constitute 1,5 percent of all chosen councillors, while migrants constitute 7 percent of the Dutch population. That means that migrants are underrepresented outside the big cities. The number of migrants has to increase up to 700 to become representative of the total migrant population.

Surinamese were the first to enter politics, because of their Dutch passports. In 1990 migrant politicians Surinamese and Turkish councillors dominated. When we look at the migrant politicians in 1998, Turks have become the largest group (Lakmaker, 2000). Lakmaker finds in a larger study 40% Turkish, 27% Surinamese, 14% Moroccan councillors and 19% with another background. The number of Moroccans did not increase to the expected level. In the four cities of our research we found eight Surinamese, eight Turkish, five Moroccan, one Antillean and one Ghanaian councillor.

Migrant councillors are relatively new to the Dutch political parties. In the last ten years all parties have put considerable effort into finding suitable Surinamese, Turkish and Moroccan candidates. According to some members of the selection commissions of the different parties this has led sometimes to premature choice of candidates, in the sense that some of them were inexperienced and unprepared for Dutch politics. Migrant candidates are supposed to attract voters from ethnic communities, to have contacts in ethnic communities, and to know more about issues that are important to these communities than their Dutch colleagues.

In general the councillors themselves report to be satisfied about the influence they have on the policy of their party and about the attention that is paid to their views. Half of the interviewed has been a member of the committee that determined the party program before the elections. Most of the interviewees report no clear discrimination in the party or in their political life, though some of them have more indirect examples. Strong party loyalty is reported among migrant councillors. We are somewhat suspicious about the amount of pressure put on these councillors to behave conform to the existing system. There seems to be a fear among their white counterparts that migrants could formulate their own "ethnic" program. Our interviews show that it is not always easy for the councillors to cope with contradictory demands like representing the views of the ethnic community and on the other hand not moving too much away from the requested line of thinking. An example is the position towards religious facilities of Muslims within a socialist perspective: most Turkish and Moroccan voters would find a mosque in their town a basic requirement, but a Dutch left wing party usually does not encourage that state subsidies are spent on religious facilities. In Van Heelsum & Penninx (1999) an example on the level of an Amsterdam borough is described. The three mosques in this borough divided their building into a religious and a social-cultural space, and asked subsidy for the social-cultural space and for the social-cultural activities from the mainly socialist borough-council. In this manner they tried to avoid the socialist policy not to support religious facilities.

The relationship between migrant councillors and ethnic organizations is an interesting one. Some councillors have ended on the list of election candidate because they were known in their community and in ethnic organizations. We asked the councillors about their membership of organizations. The majority (18 out of 27) is a member of one or more migrant organizations. It occurred rather frequently that they gave up their memberships after they were elected and took office. The reason they present is incompatibility of posts. Organizations ask councillors to look after their interests. The general view is that a councillor should not be subjected to too much pressure from organizations, so one has to be able to cope with this as a politician. They are aware of the problems it can cause when Dutch colleagues think that they are working for a specific (ethnic) rank and file. Expectations are contradictory: councillors are recruited because of their specific ethnic rank and file, but they are not supposed to pay too much attention to their ethnic community, cause that would easily lead to accusations of "clientalism". Clientalism is understood as an exchange of favours: a voter casts a preferential vote and in exchange the candidate settles the affairs of a voter. This kind of arrangements is supposed to be more common in the home countries of the migrants. Half of the councillors were chosen with preferential votes. A quarter of the councillors think that people from their own ethnic communities casted these preferential votes. It would be strange not to take care of the interests of your specific voters under these circumstances. Some councillors have

given attention during their campaign to needs of the ethnic community in their town. On the other hand we found that a considerable group of councillors has not been campaigning at all, or stressed the party's points of view during their campaign and not their own background.

We asked the councillors if it is possible as a councillor from an ethnic minority group not to deal with minority issues at all. In Amsterdam and Rotterdam some councillors dislike to be addressed as a representative of an ethnic minority group and stress that they represent everyone in the city. In these bigger cities, there is enough room for them to work on general issues like economic policy, healthcare, etceteras. In smaller cities, with only two or three councillors from an ethnic minority group, it looks less realistic that one can avoid minority issues. A councillor in stated: "There are simply not enough colleagues with the necessary knowledge and experience. And besides, I'm very involved with these issues."

Some feel pushed into minority issues. A councillor gave me an example, he stated: "I had liked to be send as a representative to the Exchange, since I'm a foreign exchange dealer. But they think: he does not know anything about that, because he is a Surinamer." Another example of wrong assumptions is shown in the following case: a non religious leftist Turkish representative was asked by other party members to visit the local mosque to talk about their request to expand the mosque, while this representative was considered anti-religious in Turkish circles.

4. Migrant organizations

The third part of our research concerns migrant organizations and the networks between these organizations. Migrant groups have build up many ethnic organizations to produce collective goods for their group. We find ethnic sport-organizations, mosques, cultural organizations, political organizations and interest groups (see also Lindo, van Heelsum and Penninx, 1997). Each of these organizations makes an appeal to its members to work towards a common goal. When they succeed better, the social trust of its members will increase. And when organizations have more contacts, social trust will spread to a greater part of the ethnic group. In this manner a community develops with more social capital. To measure civic community of ethnic groups we have focused on ethnic organizations and the contacts they have through joint board members.

As a first step of our study of the structure of ethnic communities in Amsterdam, table 4 reports the number of organizations in relation to the size of the various ethnic communities. Information on the organizations was collected from various sources: the Chamber of Commerce, experts on the specific ethnic groups, members of ethnic organizations, and the municipality of Amsterdam. Five databases were developed with names of organizations, addresses and telephone numbers, objectives and names of board members. We have gathered data on the amount of Turkish (Heelsum, 2001), Moroccan (Heelsum, in press), Surinamese (Heelsum & Voorthuysen, in press), Antillean and Ghanaian (Berger, Heelsum, Fennema & Tillie, 1998) organizations and their interlocking through board members in Amsterdam.

Table 3. Ethnic groups in Amsterdam (per 1-1-2000) and their organizational density

	a. population ¹	b. organisations ²	c. density (b/a x 1.000)
Nederlanders	400.027		
Surinamers	71.760	217	3,0
Marokkanen	55.043	170	3,1
Turken	33.931	189	5,6
Antillianen	11.623	43	3,7
Ghanezen	8.751	62	7,1

Source: ¹ <http://www.onstat.amsterdam.nl>; ² Our own research.

The interconnectedness of an ethnic community can be deduced from the amount and density of organizations, the percentage of members of an ethnic group that is a member of an ethnic organization, the interconnectedness of ethnic organizations and the use of specific newspapers and TV broadcasting networks. Surinamese in Amsterdam have the largest number of organizations, their number is also the largest. Ghanaian Amsterdammers have the highest density of organizations, followed by Turks. Though the Antillean Amsterdammers have 43 organizations, these organizations are not connected with each other, so we cannot really speak of an Antillean *community*. Turkish organizations are, despite political and religious cleavages, interconnected through a cohesive network of interlocking board members.

Since 1998, we have broadened the analysis of organizations to the national level. The networks of Turkish organizations in the Netherlands (Van Heelsum & Tillie, 1999) and Moroccan organizations in the Netherlands (Van Heelsum, 2000) and Surinamese organisations (Van Heelsum & Voorthuysen, in press) have been analysed. The number of Turkish organizations (1100) in the Netherlands is one and a half times as high as the amount of Moroccan organizations (720), the amount of Surinamese organisations is 881.

A simplified picture of the network of Turkish organizations in the Netherlands is shown in figure 1.

Figure 3 The network of Surinamese organizations in the Netherlands, based on common board members (Van Heelsum & Voorthuysen, 2002).

There are more contacts between the Turkish organizations and between Surinamese organisations through interlocking board members; Turks have more federations, and Turks have more representatives to advisory boards to the Dutch government than Moroccan s. The largest network of Turkish organizations consists of 150 organisations, the largest network of Surinamese organisations consists of 143 organisations. In the case of Moroccan organizations 53 were part of the largest cluster that we have shown in the above figure. The pictures of Turks and Surinamese are simplified, because drawings so many organisations would not become very clear. 48% of the Turkish organizations were not related through common board member, 53% of the Surinamese organisations and 64% if the Moroccan organizations are not related through common board members with other organizations.

Researchers often described the lack of cohesion of the Moroccan community in the Netherlands (Landman, 1992; Den Exter & Massaro, 1999; Van Gemert, 1998), and explanations have been formulated that usually pointed to cultural characteristics. The low level of education among Moroccans and the clan traditions in the isolated Berber villages in Morocco are seen as few of the causes of lack of cooperation between organizations. We will show in paragraph 5 that there is another explanation.

5. Combining the results on elections, local councillors and ethnic organizations.

Participating as a voter in elections, participating as a councillor in a municipal council and participation in ethnic organizations are not independent issues. My colleagues Fennema and Tillie have made plausible that that differences in political participation have a correlation with the civic communities of ethnic groups (Fennema & Tillie, 1999, 2000). The civic community perspective, that was reintroduced by Robert Putnam in his *Making Democracy Work* (Putnam, 1993) can explain the different levels of political participation of migrants. In his study of the regional councils in Italy, Putnam has shown that civic culture explains a large part of the different political performances among the Italian regions. Putnam has measured the 'civic ness' of regions by the density of the local cultural and recreational associations, by newspaper circulation, by the referendum turnout and by (lack of) preference voting. These different measurements have a high interrelation and thus form a robust 'civic community index'. "When two citizens meet on the street in a civic region, *both* of them are likely to have seen a newspaper at home that day; when two people in a less civic region meet, probably neither of them has. More than half of the citizens in the civic regions have never cast a preference ballot in their lives; more than half of the voters in the less civic regions say they always have. Membership in sports clubs, cultural and recreational groups, community and social action organizations, educational and youth groups, and so on is roughly twice as common in the most civic regions as in the least civic regions." (Putnam, 1993: 97-98). What is true for the Italian regions may

also be true for a multicultural society. The civic culture of ethnic groups, that is their degree of civic community, will most likely contribute to the working of democracy in a multicultural democracy.

When we rank order voter turn out, amount of councillors per ethnic group and amount of organizations per ethnic minority group, we find striking similarities. Voting turn out rates of Turks are highest, number of Turkish councillors is highest, the amount of organizations is highest and the network between organizations in the Turkish community is strongest. We conclude that there is a rank correlation between the degree of civic community of the various ethnic groups and the levels of political participation. The common held belief that a strong interrelated ethnic community is a danger to the functioning of a multi cultural democracy because it leads to separate independent communities of migrants has met an argument here. As the case of the Turkish community in the Netherlands shows, the opposite can be true. A strong interconnected ethnic civic community and a high level of active and passive political participation go hand in hand. The perspective of Putnam has helped to see that a strong civic community can also have the opposite effect, namely it improves the functioning of a democracy. A prerequisite for political participation and better functioning of the democracy is of course that the receiving society has to give opportunities to the participation of ethnic minority groups. The interrelation between the political opportunity structure and the possibilities for migrant organizations to develop has to be stressed. Rath, Penninx, Groenendijk & Meyer (1999) describe the institutionalisation of Islam in the Netherlands and clearly show the interaction between the immigrants and the receiving society. Creating a positive political opportunity structure means for instance that political parties are open to migrant-councillors: not only to the voters that the new councillors attract, but also to changes in their policies because of new views and new input. Another example of an improved political opportunity structure is the installation of an advisory board of migrant organizations by the local councils of the borough of East Amsterdam (Van Heelsum & Penninx, 1999). Organisations can also play an important role in mediating between authorities and their backlash; the example of the city district of Amsterdam Oost shows this clearly. In that district representatives of mosques and social cultural organisations are actively involved when important decisions are taken. In Amsterdam Oost the three mosques played the more active role in communicating and working together with the administration of all the organisations in that district. The religious organisations are the largest category of migrant organisations and are often among the more active ones.

Organisations can stimulate their members to vote. Organisations can provide political parties with candidates that have managerial experience and that are known in their communities. The quality of the functioning of a democracy improves with the combination of these factors. Migrant organisation can play an important role in a) stimulating political participation of migrants and b) are good for the integration of migrants in society and the adjustments of societies procedures to migrants.

Vermeulen & Penninx (2000)!

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