Voting Participation of Natives and Immigrants in Sweden – a Cohort Analysis of the 2002, 2006 and 2010 Elections

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Motivation

• Sweden extended local and provincial voting rights to immigrants with resident status in the 1970s.

• Policy rationale:
  – increase political influence, interest and self-esteem among foreign citizens.

• Citizenship acquisition:
  – Nordics – after 2 years
  – Refugees – after 4 years
  – All other immigrants – after 5 years
Idea

To what extent do differences in voting participation across immigrant (foreign citizens and naturalised) categories exist?

– are they explained by
  – Personal characteristics:
    – Demographic
    – socio-economic
    – human capital attributes and
  – immigration related factors

Is citizenship an important factor in determining voter participation?

Is voting participation increasing over time? Integration (political)
Previous research

- Human capital attributes are key drivers of voting behaviour
  - Age, education and labour market characteristics are powerful determinants in explaining voting behaviour (DeSipio 1996; Bass & Casper 2001)

- Less research done on voter turnout and minority status.
  - Minorities have lower voting participation rates. Not always reduced over generations (Ramakrishnan & Espenshade 2001)
  - Asians are less likely to vote than native-born (Bass & Casper 2001; Lien 2004)
  - Immigrants vote less. Canadian-born minorities display similar voting rates to majority Canadian-born (CES) (Chiu, et al 1994) Using ESCS 2002, social capital important for voting outcomes of immigrants and ethnic minorities in Canada (Bevelander & Pendakur 2009)
  - Sweden – Immigrants vote less, naturalised have higher participation (Bevelander & Pendakur 2011)
Data and Method

• Swedish 2002, 2006 & 2010 electoral survey
  – contains information on individual electoral participation for all those eligible to vote in national, provincial and municipal elections.

• Matched to:
  – Registry data from Statistics Sweden, which contains information for every Swedish resident.
  – Municipal level data from census

• Sample:
  – $2 \times 70,000 \& 1 \times 110,000$ residents in Sweden = 250,000
    – About a third are immigrants (75,000).
    – More than half of the immigrants (50,000) are not citizens but have the right to vote in municipal and provincial elections.

• Synthetic Cohort analysis
Voting participation of foreign born (foreign citizens and naturalised)
Voting participation by group
Voting participation by group
Voting participation by cohort

- Election 2002
- Election 2006
- Election 2010
Voting Participation by Cohort
Regression analysis

As in earlier studies:

• Women vote more
• married vote more
• Older vote more
• Higher income vote more
• Higher education vote more
• More years in the country vote more
• Naturalised vote more
• Differences by country of birth

• Stable over time
Cohort analysis

• Pooling 2002 and 2010 data in order to analyse if cohort of immigrants arriving 1991-1998 have increasing voting participation?

• Foreign citizens no integration effect

• Naturalised have integration effect – vote more in subsequent election
Conclusion

• After controlling for demographic and socio-economic characteristics, both demographic and socioeconomic factors make a difference to the probability of voting.

• Place of birth is important, Non-Eu Europeans, Asians and Europeans are not likely to vote.

• Citizenship makes a real difference to the probability of voting

• Years of residency is also really important. Confirmed by the cohort analysis:
  – Participation takes time – long term immigrants are more likely to participate as compared to short term immigrants who may not have the same stake in Sweden.

• If we want to encourage inclusion/integration policies for immigrants we should be really careful about changes to citizenship policy and inform not citizens that they are allowed to vote in local/regional elections