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## Background, framework and focus of the special issue

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### ABSTRACT

This Special Issue seeks to explore the potentialities of strengthening a new field of research within migration and diversity studies: Immigrant incorporation in political parties. The point of departure of all contributions is that there is what we call a “diversity gap” between political parties as public representative organisations and diversity dynamics in democratic societies. This Special Issue seeks to explore the current strategies of political parties developing first conceptual frameworks, theoretical foundations and empirical hypothesis and approaches. The case studies come from four European countries, two from the North and two from the South of Europe: Germany, Ireland, Portugal and Spain.


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Democracy, particularly liberal democracy, is a great philosophy of inclusion [...] And yet, there is something in the dynamics of democracy which pushes to exclusion. (Taylor 1999)

### Background and framework of the different contributions

This Special Issue seeks to explore the potentialities of strengthening a new field of research within migration and diversity studies: *Immigrant incorporation in political parties*. The point of departure of all contributions is that there is what we call a “diversity gap” between political parties as public representative organisations and diversity dynamics in democratic societies. It is a fact that there is an underrepresentation of immigrants within mainstream European political parties. Europe is hardly alone in having a “diversity gap” in its representative political bodies. The underrepresentation of ethnic and

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religious minorities coming from immigrant background (IB) is common across all democratic political systems. It has centred also the attention of most researches in American politics (Ericson 2011).

Despite recent improvements, the party-political underrepresentation of immigrants and their descendants is still significant (Givens and Maxwell 2012). At the same time, the number of immigrants and of citizens with IB is growing in Europe (Eurostat 2016). Yet, the institutions of representative democracy and party organisations reflect rather poorly the increasing ethnic diversity of Western societies. Democratic societies face serious challenges concerning participation and representation (Merkel 2014). Worldwide migration supports the diversification of the constantly changing European societies and democracies are challenged to accommodate for increasingly diverse populations. Political parties play a key role in this process. In Western democracies, political parties largely control access to political power positions. Improving participation for immigrants in party politics is essential to support them as agents in the democratic system and in the long term to sustain social cohesion. Political organisations are thus facing new democratic challenges. Today, while the work of parties remains an essential “public good” and parties are understood as important public bodies providing exclusive venues for conventional participation and institutional political representation, in most Western democracies party organisations are struggling with the problems of declining memberships as well as and having members mainly from the national background of their respective country (Van Biezen, Mair, and Poguntke 2012).

Due to a lack of equality data, the numerical underrepresentation of non-EU citizens among the party membership cannot easily be quantified. As some contributions show, very few parties record data on the nationality or ethnic background of their members, although some published figures suggest a significant underrepresentation. We still lack knowledge of the internal and external factors that facilitate or hinder the active involvement of persons of immigrant origin in party organisations.

Given this reality, this Special Issue aims to bridge the gap between research on political parties and research on the political participation and representation of immigrants. Although we are aware that diversity studies have a broader scope (including gender studies and studies about disabilities, etc.), this Special Issue will seek to develop conceptual and empirical advance in migration research. On the one hand, diversity is considered as a new paradigm since it involves policies, programmes and routines (Faist 2009). On the other hand, political parties as public organisations are adjusting their practices to dynamics of diversity in order to “mainstream” their structures and policy objectives within the democratic system. At this level, we know that some organisations display diversity as a resource, offer training programmes to increase the intercultural competence of staff, implement criteria for

diversity personnel recruitment and offer special services to clients and customers for their own continuity (Zapata-Barrero and Van Ewijk 2011, 8). The fact that diversity is often subject of theoretical debates is illustrated by the multitude of academic publications on diversity in the area of political theory. For example, some theorists focus on cultural diversity (Kymlicka 1995; Jones 1998; Parekh 2000; Phillips 2008), while others discard culture as a useful concept, because it might not be specific enough to describe the dynamics of diversity (Phillips 2007). Other researchers assume that markers such as ethnicity and religion (Thompson 2008) or additional variables such as immigrant statuses, divergent labour market experiences, gender and age profiles, and/or spatial distribution might be more adequate to categorise diversity (Vertovec 2007). There are many scholars who believe that there are multiple relevant forms of diversity (Yuval-Davis 2006). Some of them doubt they should be treated in the same way, separating, for example, gender diversity versus ethnic diversity (Sinclair 2000), while other approaches focus on how identity markers intersect (Crenshaw 1989; Makkonen 2002; Davies 2005). Yet others believe that all of these social-collective forms of diversity should be replaced by more neutral forms such as life-style, thinking types, professional experience, personality types or functional background (Wise and Tschirhart 2000). Even if almost all approaches share that the diversity dynamics is one of the main factors of social change, the specific kinds of diversification are less clear, affecting ethnicities and identities, languages, gender balances, social statuses, skills and more (Vertovec 2014). Also, the fact that diversity is subject of policy debates is illustrated by the multitude of academic publications on diversity policies. Some authors focus on national or regional public policies, often linked to anti-discrimination or integration, distinguishing specific policy areas or citizenship regimes with regard to diversity (Castles and Davidson 2000; Isin and Turner 2002; Bauböck 2006; Zapata-Barrero 2009a, 2009b; Zapata-Barrero et al. 2013). Other authors focus on policies at the organisational level in public institutions or private organisations, distinguishing specific policy approaches with regard to diversity (Liff 1997; Wrench 2007). In migration-related diversity studies, there is already a trend of research on political parties, mainly related to discourses and their role in the decision-making process (Wodak and van Dijk 2000; Zapata-Barrero and Triandafyllidou 2012; Korkut et al. 2013). There is, however, a shortcoming in how immigrants are incorporated into political parties, their trajectories and experiences once they have been incorporated, and how the party organisation conceives incorporation, assignment of tasks and career promotion. This debate can be placed in an overall discussion about the incorporation of immigrants in public organisations (administrations, sectors such as education, police and health services).

## Focus and structure of the Special Issue

In migration studies, substantial research on the civic and political rights of migrants has been done since the seminal work of Leyton-Henry (1993), as well as some research on the participation of immigrants and people with an IB in civic and political life.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, a lot of comparative studies have been conducted on the position of political parties on immigration issues, as well as research on mobilisation strategies of political parties among immigrant communities,<sup>2</sup> but little research on how parties promote the inclusion of immigrants in their own organisation. This Special Issue focuses on this last point and looks at how parties open themselves up for people with an IB. The political participation of immigrants is a matter of growing interest for scholars. However, despite theoretical and practical advances in this field in Europe, immigrants' involvement in political parties remains under-researched. Further academic analysis is needed in the following particular areas: How do political parties attract immigrants as members and candidates? What are the main channels and obstacles to the incorporation of immigrants in political parties? If we assume that political parties know already why it is important to incorporate diversity in their structures and in society in general, they still challenge us to find out the surprising variety of reasons that they usually invoke both in the left and in the right wings, to justify the general gap between their narratives and their real practices.

In a nutshell, political parties are crucial actors when it comes to the incorporation of people with an IB into the different spheres of the society. They frame policy discussions on diversity accommodation and do not only reflect but also influence public perceptions and behaviours about these issues. They adopt positions and propose legislative and other measures within the political arena. The question is whether they – as societal entities – apply these measures to themselves and become open and inclusive organisations. Political parties in the democratic system have their own distinctive feature, as Zapata-Barrero highlights in his contribution of this Special Issue. Parties, as organisations holding legislative and governing powers, are central agents of societal developments that carry responsibility to incorporate diversity. They also have a key influence on this development in all areas of society and are a reference framework for legitimating social action. Furthermore, diversity is seen as a target of political discourse (*politicisation of diversity*), and the incorporation of diversity is embedded in these politics of discourse (see Zapata-Barrero and Triandafyllidou 2012).

Among the wide range of possibilities for immigrants to be politically active, we propose to examine more in-depth their involvement in political parties. Two directions, which we consider have been neglected so far, are put to the fore in this Special Issue:

- *Political parties' attitudes and measures to involve immigrants:* The low numbers of party members with an IB have raised questions within and outside parties on their representativeness. We seek to explore party strategies that address migrants' political inclusion, such as affiliation policies, welcoming procedures and the inclusion of diversity in selection procedures of party officials and candidates (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Bird, Saalfeld, and Wüst 2010). It also covers new perspectives on the linkages between political parties and civic associations (Odmalm 2005; Fennema and Tillie 2001). We want to explore the diversity of party attitudes on that matter, the channels for participation and obstacles that are at stake.
- *Immigrants' activity in political parties:* Several authors have stressed the necessity to widen our understanding of possibilities for immigrants to participate in the political systems of the receiving countries. They also stressed the existence of different patterns of inclusion depending on national institutional and legal opportunities (Hochschild and Mollenkopf 2009). The involvement in (non-ethnic) political parties may be considered as part of a pattern of assimilation and conformity of immigrants to receiving country politics. We think that this analysis needs to be challenged by empirical studies on immigrant activity in political parties. In this line, we analyse the political careers of immigrants and the opportunities and obstacles they face. We further study the transfers between political or civic engagements and party affiliation, and investigate immigrants' mobilisation in an aim to put diversification issues on the party agenda. The interplay between these mobilisations, party perceptions, ideology and norms referring to political representation is of special concern.

This Special Issue addresses this particular focus and topics with contributions covering different levels of analysis.

- (a) Theoretical analysis: for instance, Zapata-Barrero's contribution addresses seminal questions such as: How do political parties deal with the "diversity gap"? Why should immigrants be incorporated into political parties? How to identify the different political parties' strategies to incorporate immigrants and running them for office? Can the challenge of the underrepresentation of immigrants in political parties be understood in a similar way to the underrepresentation of women?
- (b) Descriptive: for instance, Szlovák's contributions: What are the main strategies of political parties to incorporate diversity? How are the trajectories of migrant involvement in political parties? What are the main profiles of immigrants as members, officials and politicians?
- (c) Explanatory: for instance, Buchianti/Zapata-Barrero's and Markard/Dähnke's and Reis Oliveira/Estrada Carvalhais' contributions: What are

the main factors explaining differences and similarities among political parties and countries? What role do institutional, legal and contextual systems of restrictions play? Which factors hinder and which factors support party-political participation of immigrants? How do party cultures and discourses on diversity influence the involvement of immigrants as members and office-holders in political parties?

## Sources and methodology

This Special Issue is the outcome of a project co-funded by the European Commission in the European Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals: DIVPOL – Diversity in Political Parties’ Programmes, Organisation and Representation (2013–14).<sup>3</sup> The main results were first discussed in a final conference in Brussels (12 June 2014) and an academic workshop was held at the 11th annual IMISCOE Conference on Immigration, Social Cohesion and Social Innovation (27–29 August 2014, Madrid). Due to the nature of the funding scheme, the special focus of the project was on people of immigrant origin of non-European countries. From the European countries participating in the project, contributions of this Special Issue include Germany, Ireland, Portugal and Spain.<sup>4</sup>

In order to quantify the descriptive underrepresentation of political representatives with non-European background in national parliaments in the frame of the DIVPOL project, the lists of Members of Parliaments in the respective countries were viewed, and publicly available biographies were scanned to identify IB of MPs. [Table 1](#) shows the underrepresentation of non-EU immigrants in national parliaments in 2014.

The empirical study sought to investigate reasons for this underrepresentation by exploring personal histories of political representatives and party members both with and without IB. In the five countries presented in this Special Issue, in total 162 politicians, political stakeholders, representatives of migrant organisations and experts were interviewed. The empirical phase

**Table 1.** Parliamentary representation of non-EU immigrants in national parliaments.

Country	Non-EU population in % <sup>a</sup>	MPs with non-EU immigrant background <sup>b</sup> /total number of MPs	MPs with non-EU immigrant background <sup>c</sup> in %
<b>Germany</b>	5.8	21/631	3.3
<b>Ireland</b>	3.6	2/226	0.9
<b>Portugal</b>	3.0	3/230 <sup>b</sup>	1.3
<b>Spain</b>	6.4	1/616	0.2

Source: DIVPOL June 2014.

<sup>a</sup> Source: Eurostat (2013a, 2013b). [migr\_pop1ctz], [demo\_grind].

<sup>b</sup> All holding national citizenship.

<sup>c</sup> The place of birth of the MPs is not formally recorded by the Portuguese Parliament, so the number could be higher than the publicly available sources show.

was conceptualised in the tradition of action research. The results of the interviews were discussed with participants during national seminars with the aims of progressing the opening political parties and the incorporation of people of IB. The interviews focused on the individuals' access to the party, the political topics the interviewees dealt with and how these changed over time, experiences on candidacy, perceptions of politicians of IB and diversity development within the parties. The semi-structured interviews lasted 30–90 minutes and started, in the case of politicians, with questions on their political career path, motivation for involvement in the party and how the interviewee was received when joining the party. Political office-holders were asked about the principal issues and topics they dealt with in their party and their experience of party structures, the role of networks, the nomination processes and (typical) career paths of political actors. In the second half of the interview partners were questioned about the opening process, diversity development and representation of immigrants within their parties. All interviewees were finally asked about the functions of political actors with an IB as office-holders and on their opinion on how (and by whom) immigrants were politically represented. The subsequent analysis of the interviews was carried out in accordance with qualitative techniques of analysis. The aim of the interviews was to identify the role of the interviewee's (non-) IB for their political career, obstacles and supporting factors experienced and how they related or did not relate to their (non-) IB. Experiences on candidacy, membership and diversity implementation were brought together and the on-going challenge to support diversity and opening processes practically and tangibly at all levels in political parties were explored.<sup>5</sup> The interviewees were members of twenty-three political parties, representing all major parties in the participating countries, and thirty-five migrant organisations. In all, forty per cent of the politicians interviewed were members of national parliaments (MPs) in 2013. [Table 2](#) provides an overview of the participants of different groups with and without IB.

In addition, party statutes, election programmes and campaigns were reviewed for inner-party immigrant or ethnic diversity-related networks and

**Table 2.** Participants of interviews and focus groups.

Country	Politicians (IB)	Politicians (without IB)	Party staff and gate-keepers (of them: with IB)	Representatives of migrant organisations	Other (academic experts, state representative)	Total
Germany	13	10	9 (3)	11	–	<b>43</b>
Ireland	16	12	5	8	2	<b>43</b>
Portugal	4	12	9 (6)	18	3	<b>46</b>
Spain	3	1	18 (10)	8	–	<b>30</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>41 (19)</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>162</b>

Source: DIVPOL 2013.



to understand how immigrants were addressed in current election programmes.

The country results are the basis for the case studies presented in different chapters of this Special Issue. The case studies come from four European countries, two from the North and two from the South: Germany, Ireland, Portugal and Spain. While Germany has a longer history of significant immigration since the late 1950s, Spain, Portugal and Ireland are new immigration countries. The countries presented in the case studies also differ in the legal and party-specific regulations, which lead to a variety of different opportunities for party-political participation of immigrants. In all countries discussed in this Special Issue, no legal obstacles exist for non-Europeans to join political parties. In Germany, Ireland and Spain non-EU nationals can join any political party, although some of the parties have minimum residency requirements. Most parties in Portugal allow non-EU nationals with access to political rights to join, while two parties do not define any specify the membership requirements concerning nationality. Political participation is, however, limited in a party, if the member is not allowed to run for office or to vote for candidates of that party: Throughout Europe in almost all countries only citizens hold active and passive voting rights at national levels (Migration Policy Group 2015). The exceptions to this in our sample are Brazilians in Portugal and Britons in Ireland, who can vote and be elected at national levels.<sup>6</sup> At the local level, however, non-Europeans who permanently reside in the country can in some countries not only vote in local elections, but also run for office in political parties. In Portugal and Spain, the principle of reciprocity means that some non-Europeans can participate in the decision-making process at the local level, while others cannot. The most favourable rights exist in Ireland where everyone resident in the state can vote and run in local elections after six months of residency. There, non-European residents have enjoyed passive voting rights since 1963 and active voting rights since 1974. More restrictive legislation exists in Germany, where third-country nationals are excluded from local voting rights. Political participation of immigrants is further influenced by naturalisation and double-citizenship legislation. While approaches to naturalisation and dual citizenship are very progressive, for example, in Ireland and Portugal, with a general acceptance of double-citizenship and short minimum residency requirements (in the Irish case), it is more restrictive in Germany and Spain. This diversity of regulations, legislations and specific exceptions for some non-nationals (e.g. by reciprocity agreement) results in opportunities for party-political participation for third-country nationals in Europe not only being fairly limited, but also very unevenly distributed. In many parties throughout Europe, there is a participation gap: non-Europeans can join a political party, but the law does not allow them to vote for or run as candidates. Ireland represents an interesting case as migrants enter political parties mostly as individuals and not as ethnic

association representatives. The positive aspect of this is that their ethnic identity gets less emphasis than in other countries but, on the other hand, they also often struggle to gain visibility, in particular in bigger parties.

In the DIVPOL project, we investigated some of the underlying reasons for the underrepresentation of politicians of IB and studied how in everyday political practice, IB was (re-)constructed as a relevant identity category. This was studied in the context of how parties as organisations function in established structures and (sometimes self-sustaining) power relations. The traditional practices relating to access, congregation and nomination can be deterrents to participation. Many aspects of inner-party work and welcoming culture (or lack of it) affect people of IB differently. Being different from the established majority of the party base in phenotype, culture or religion, insecurity with the language and lack of experience in the political culture exert an effect upon individuals' experience and their reception and perception within the party. Competition and effective networks were identified as two main aspects of internal party work. Traditional power structures and resistance to newcomers are not deterrents specific to immigrants, but exclusionary practices have even greater effects upon those differing from the majority of the party. Party-political practice can be even more intimidating for people who, for example, on grounds of their migration history do not have the necessary language skills, knowledge of the structures or habitus – a sense of “belonging to the same stable” – which are important in parties. Personal contacts were the major entry point into political parties, but politicians without IB were found to enter via different channels to those of immigrant origin. For many interviewees without IB political socialisation through the parties' youth organisations represents an important form of access to the political arena. In these early times of party-political commitment, personal connections are established that become important for any political career. When people enter at a later life stage, they not only lack many of these networks, the absence of early party-political socialisation can also be an obstacle as the person is lacking knowledge of party-political structures and habitus. It was suggested that the lack of strong inner-party network support by the party base makes politician of IB more vulnerable to internal politicking from competitors, as interviewees in Spain and Germany observed a high turnover among office-holders of IB; in Ireland, this was noticed for candidates. However, many of the politicians of IB from Germany and almost all politicians of IB from Spain had been active in migrant organisations or trade unions before their political career. Often, they were approached in this position by party members or officials and encouraged to join a party. This result supports Bloemraad's and Schönwälder's conclusion (2013) that citizens of immigrants are some of the few groups bringing with them forms of social capital relating to group identity, often manifest in ethnic associations.

Many respondents in the DIVPOL study experienced a relevance of their IB in the nomination process. In areas where voters of IB are to be reached, a general trend can be observed that parties put more candidates of IB on the lists. In party systems with proportional representation, party executives and leaders hold extensive power over the list-making process. Romain Garbaye's study of French city elections (2005) has shown that hierarchical structures, providing mayors or local elites with significant selection powers, are not per se beneficial nor detrimental to the inclusion of immigrant or minority groups. For strategic reasons, leader figures of ethnic organisations are courted by party functionaries, bringing both expertise and access to potential voters into the party. Several interviewees of IB in Germany and Spain were placed on the list directly by party leaders. Apart from the contextual asset to be nominated for political mandates because of the IB, the "benefits" of this, however, remain highly ambivalent, not only for the risk of being short-lived or leading to thematic relegation, but also because the person concerned is at risk of being ethnicized in a reductionist and stigmatising manner. Although politicians of IB or more specifically those "marked" as immigrants function as role models and exert a stimulating influence for political participation of immigrants, they carry the double burden of being representatives not only of their own and their party's or group's political positions, but also being in different contexts regarded as "ethnic representatives". This also has effects upon the contentious choice of immigration topics as working fields for politicians of IB. Migration and integration were, on the one hand, considered as political niche topics in which aspiring politicians could develop their political careers more easily than in more popular and competitive political fields such as economics or education. On the other hand, these niche positions were experienced to narrow migrants' career opportunities in the parties, as it was assumed that their thematic relegation would limit their appeal to a wider electorate. In Spain, where the vast majority of politicians of IB entered politics via involvement in "ethnic" associations, their party-political work was almost exclusively limited to the topic of immigration.

This Special Issue seeks to explore the current strategies of political parties as a new field of research within the current migration and diversity studies. The general aim is to develop first conceptual frameworks, theoretical foundations and empirical hypothesis and approaches to promote diversity research development both in migration-related diversity studies and in political parties. The main purpose is to explore this new field of research and open an empirical and theoretical debate within diversity and migration studies. The contributions in this Special Issue cover one of the three dimensions (theoretical, descriptive or explanatory) of the analysis of immigrant-incorporation in political parties and address topics related to the "diversity gap".

The first article in this Special Issue by *Ricard Zapata-Barrero* is a theoretically oriented contribution reviewing the literature directly or indirectly addressing the “diversity gap” and offering an interpretative framework with several channels of analysis on the political parties’ strategies. The author reminds us that the particular features of political parties and their role in the democratic system implies that they cannot be neutral when they identify the diversity gap as a problem and therefore have to follow some strategies to deal with it. He also argues that the utilitarian logic prevails over any argument based on democratic equality and power sharing. Each empirical analysis investigates the strategies, structures and ideologies within the national political party system and of mainstream political parties. In the following article, *Catarina Reis Oliveira* and *Isabel Estrada Carvalhais* describe the relationship between macro-level elements of the political opportunity structure (e.g. citizenship laws and party regulations) and micro-level interpretations of this and individuals’ experiences. They furthermore highlight the relevance of post-colonial and post-authoritarian legacies of the country as explanatory elements for shaping immigrants’ involvement in political parties in Portugal. Following the neo-institutional approach, *Lea Markard* and *Iris Dähnke* differentiate in their analytical article on diversity discourses in political parties in Germany between talk, decision and action. Using this approach, they outline discourses on (ethnic) diversity within parties (talk and decision level) and analyse experiences politicians made to reveal actual practices related to discourses on diversity in social reality (action level). In their following chapter on the Spanish case, *Flora Burchianti* and *Ricard Zapata-Barrero* look at the current underrepresentation of immigrants in political parties in Spain. Drawing on representatives’ individual trajectories in accessing and evolving in parties, they examine the modes of incorporation of immigrants in political parties and how this influences their possibilities for accessing elite positions in political parties. *Péter Szlovák* describes in his article how Ireland’s liberal and inclusive legislation for political involvement of immigrants is not enough to bring about equal representation of immigrants among party office-holders. He identifies unfavourable structural factors but also highlights that opportunity structure only provides partial explanation for current underrepresentation. Furthermore, he points out that the way how political actors interact as group(s) with the institutional context is also critical in the context of migrant participation in political parties.

## Notes

1. See, among others, Gerstle and Mollenkopf (2001), Messina (2006), Adamsom (2007), Vogel (2007), Martiniello (2005, 2009), Mollenkopf and Hochschild (2010), Koopmans and Statham (2000), Morales and Giugni (2010), Morales

- (2011), De Rooij (2012), Zapata-Barrero and Gropas (2012), Zapata-Barrero et al. (2013).
2. See, for instance, Bird, Saalfeld, and Wüst (2010), Sobolewska (2013), Bloemraad and Schönwälder (2013), and the bibliography of the different contributions in this Special Issue.
  3. See website: <http://www.cjd-nord.de/angebote/migration-forschung-und-beratung/abgeschlossene-projekte-forschung/divpol/>
  4. The empirical results, statistics and numbers presented only refer to those four countries. For detailed DIVPOL result and more country reports including Italy, Poland and Sweden, see above website.
  5. For the full questionnaire, see the DIVPOL project webpage [http://www.cjd-nord.de/angebote/migration-forschung-und-beratung/abgeschlossene-projekte-forschung/divpol/ch/704457e34ecdc392d0c909909f3d3d0/?tx\\_%5Bcontroller%5D=Standard](http://www.cjd-nord.de/angebote/migration-forschung-und-beratung/abgeschlossene-projekte-forschung/divpol/ch/704457e34ecdc392d0c909909f3d3d0/?tx_%5Bcontroller%5D=Standard)
  6. In Portugal, this applies only to Brazilians who hold a special status, under which equivalent political rights get suspended in Brazil. In the U.K., resident nationals of Commonwealth countries or Ireland are also entitled to vote at the national level.

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