

# “Diversity in Political Parties’ Programmes, Organisation and Representation” (DivPol)<sup>1</sup>

## Theses Paper [Spain]

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

Entry processes of politicians and party members who have been interviewed for the DIVPOL project show in their majority similarities. The most common aspect is the **existence of a long experience of activism in associations or social organizations** before entering the party, either as active members of as leaders of the organisation. Activism in political parties represent as a second step of political activism taken by these persons, and a logical outcome of their previous social and political activism. This is mainly the case for social-democrat and left-wing parties in general. In addition, affiliation is often driven by **mentorship and personal contacts inside the party**. Persons with a foreign origin are spotted for their social or community activism to take part in the party activities on immigration, or are offered directly a position as candidate on a list. For party officers in charge of outreach activities, networking and talent spotting is a way to attract new skilled members who will be promoted in the party.

*During [a] meeting, I met directly people of the party [...]. At that time, they were just building their Immigration sector and they told me: “We have immigrants here and we want to know what they think”. [...] Before, I did not see [the party] from that close. We talked for a year and I started to work. [Interview 5, party officer w. foreign background]*

From the side of political parties, most of them have developed outreach campaigns and structures dedicated to the affiliation and political activity of members with immigrant background.

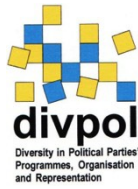
**Outreach campaigns:** Political parties are reluctant to target explicitly immigrants in their affiliation campaigns and claim that their “doors are open” to everybody on an equal footing. Nevertheless, party officers dealing with immigration and participation often attend activities and celebrations of immigrant organisations. They also organise meetings or invite associations' representatives to party activities. This is a way to generate immigrant's affiliation. However, there does not seem to exist a clear relation between pro-migrants' rights positions of a party and the level of immigrants' affiliation to the party.

**Training:** Very little specific training of members with foreign background has been organised by the parties. These members participate to ordinary training when it exists. Welcoming sessions about diversity or about the party orientations have been organised in two parties.

**Welcoming culture and party's incidence on the decision to affiliate:** Contrasted experiences related to welcoming culture in the party have been reported. It mainly depends on the way the person entered the party – by themselves or co-opted. Local branches of parties tend to be more difficult to integrate than immigration/diversity “safe” spaces. In general, people are required to adapt quickly to existing party structures and organisation, while this one is often not compatible with work of family life.

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**Party culture and their view on immigration** are important to take into account to bring immigrants closer to parties. Positions on immigrants' rights but also religion, language, economy or democratic values can be important criteria for both immigrants and the party in terms of affiliation.

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

There is no legal restriction to the affiliation of foreigners in political parties in Spain, nor in party statutes. Foreigners are not allowed to create parties but can be members whatever their nationality, legal situation or length of stay. Only the People's party restricts membership to authorized foreigners.

Other legal restrictions do affect the participation of third-country nationals in politics.

**Right to vote and passive suffrage:** Foreigners do not have the right to vote or passive suffrage at national and regional levels. At local level, only nationals of countries which signed a reciprocity agreement with Spain (n=12) have the right to vote.

**Acquisition of citizenship and dual citizenship:** Historical relations with some countries, especially Ibero-America, have led to establish a favourable regime for citizens of these countries who apply for Spanish citizenship (2-years residence instead of 10-years). However, the administrative complexity often add years to the process. Similarly, Spain forbids in theory dual-citizenship except for the citizens of these countries, but in practice many people manage to keep both citizenships.

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

Undoubtedly, the main obstacle for people with foreign background is on the road toward **representation** and representatives with foreign origin are still anecdotal. Only one senator and two members of Madrid regional assembly originate from third-countries (TC). Even at local level, we estimate that councillors from TC represent 0.1 to 0.3% of the total. Several characteristics can be highlighted from the trajectories of interviewed office-holders and candidates:

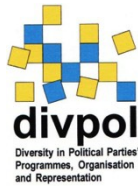
**The importance of leadership:** the “recruitment” on a list is often driven directly by the leader candidate whose views on immigrant participation seem to be determinant, especially when the presence of immigrant politicians in the assembly or position voted is unprecedented.

*I was only a base member; I wasn't participating in any space of decision of the party or anything. But [the leader candidate] looked at the most significant and representative associations and he called me to ask me to go on his list, because he wanted a communion between the party and the immigration (...). [Interview 6: politician w. foreign background]*

**The role of participation structures:** Participation structures of “diversity” members are sometimes entitled to propose names of candidates to the list makers to secure the presence of “diversity” candidates. However, the modalities of designation differ between parties and elections and the proposition is not binding for the list makers, nor guarantees the candidates to be in an eligible position.

**Control of party officers and leaders over list making:** Party officers still most frequently compose electoral lists, even if primaries or members' votes have sometimes been implemented. Overall, members with immigrant origin are not part and have little power over election committees. The lack of transparency of the process and the multiplicity of interests represented are obstacles to the promotion of new politicians with diverse backgrounds.

Politicians with immigrant background relate contrasted **experiences as office holders**. Most feel that their position was valuable and recognized. They picture their role as mediating for immigrants' interest and press this issue to the general agenda. Some felt that they also represented “powerless” or “ordinary” citizens and tried to speak for them. Others, however, stress that party politics was interfering with their action and felt powerless most of the time. Most politicians stayed elected only for a short time (one or two mandates).



## 4. Diversity inside Political Parties and Discourses on Diversity

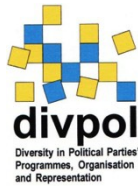
As regards to the internal organisation of the party related to diversity membership, we found that two tensions cross most of party - and immigrant associations - discourses.

**Normal vs. Specific:** There is a tension between the will that diversity members have a “normalised” participation and carrier inside the party, with no difference made with other native members on the one side, and the necessity for the party to adapt to diversity and to create specific structures of participation and recognition. Some parties have created spaces of participation for members with foreign background, which are diverse in their forms. One party created a foundation connected to the party, in which people and organizations participate according to their geographical area of origin. Another created spaces in the sector of participation which reflect members' diversity (for example in terms of ethnic, sexual and functional diversity). They coordinate their efforts to push for diversity issues. In other parties, immigrants invest primarily the branch dedicated to immigration/citizenship policies. In general, these parties advocate for the “normalization” of immigrants' participation and refuse to make a difference between their members in function of their origin. All parties underline that members with foreign background are encouraged to participate primarily to their closest local party structure as any other member, but many are often only involved in diversity sectors. Members also express a dilemma in participating to “diversity” spaces. While, they tend to be more welcoming, may accelerate promotions to positions or candidatures, and tackle topics which often interest members with foreign background; many perceive these structures as powerless spaces, and even segregated spaces. They also fear that their other talents or personal interests may not be recognized.

**Visibilisation vs. Internal recognition:** The promotion of diversity membership and representation also follows different paths and two dimensions have frequently been mentioned. On the one side that the staff, politicians as well as the membership of the party should reflect the diversity existing in society in quantitative terms and in all spheres of power. It is assumed that a “critical mass” of members and staff will help equalize the participation and give equal opportunities to diverse members to access offices. On the other side, it was stressed that politicians with foreign background should be in visible public positions. The assumption is that renowned diversity politicians make it possible for others to identify with them and arouse political participation. Parties address differently these issues. TCN and diversity members are clearly under-represented in spaces of power as well as in the membership. Even if participation spaces are a way to recognize the internal diversity, make it visible, and advocate for the diversification of the organization, they fail in influencing the main spaces of power. In addition, there is still no prominent politician with foreign background in Spanish politics. 2011 local elections, introduced novelty when the two main parties made visible their candidates with immigrant background and organized meetings to introduce them. Nevertheless, it is often underlined that the lack of public figure with diverse background remains an obstacle to immigrants' political participation. At the same time, strategies of visibilisation are suspected to be a way to gain immigrant voters' support without really diversifying the party. While associations recognize that the lack of public figures is a problem, they also feel that most immigrant candidates and politicians are being played by party executives.

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

Networking is often done through meetings, participation to celebrations, or participation to pro-immigrant social movements. For associations, relations with parties lead to tricky situations. Their identification with one party can lead to a deterioration of their resources when a new party enters in government (cut in budgets and subventions, exclusion from consultative bodies). They thus condemn clientele relations that political parties try to establish, but they recognize that associations often accept these arrangements because they fear being left out. Clientele relations in the politics of countries of origin make it also difficult to perceive some practices as abnormal, such as trading votes for services or subventions. Immigrant organizations mention other challenges, such as the fact that many immigrants are still more politically active toward their countries of origin.



## Recommendations for political parties and policy makers

### *Regarding the participation in political parties*

The study shows that there is an **increasing awareness of political parties** about the importance to promote the membership and participation of persons of foreign background. The creation of **“safe” spaces** is an interesting tool to encourage participation. However, a misuse of this tool leads to greater discrimination toward foreigners and diversity members. We then recommend that:

- The spaces of participation **must not be segregated** from other spaces of the political party. Their members have to be represented in the executive boards of the party. They should also be encouraged to participate to other spaces non related to immigration, according to their interests and talents.
- Political parties have to **improve the way new members are welcomed in the local constituencies**, adapt the organisation of tasks and meetings to allow workers and parents to participate, ensure the equal participation of underrepresented groups to the different tasks, meetings and decision-making, and grant new members appropriate training.

### *Regarding candidates selection processes*

Candidate selection is one of the key roles of political parties in democracy. Spanish political parties have to take a step forward to ensure that diversity members and immigrants are represented in eligible positions in the lists. **Diversifying selection committees** should be a priority. If this cannot be realised through existing processes, then quota system should be considered to ensure equity.

It is commonly admitted that political parties face a crisis of legitimacy and representation in current democracies. To ensure a better representation, including underrepresented groups such as immigrants and persons with foreign background, most stakeholders call for a **democratisation of parties** (such as open lists, primary elections, collegiality and transparency of decision processes). Even if these processes may have a positive impact on making the party closer to the citizenry -- and immigrants – they do not lead to a more diverse representation. Then, **the aim to represent ethnic diversity should not be forgotten in this process**.

In particular, counting on **strong inner networks** is the most important factor for a successful career inside the party. Immigrants and ethnically diverse members often lack those organised networks. Any initiative of political parties and civic organisations to strengthen their networks would benefit the representation of diversity.

### *Regarding legal obstacles to participation*

Independently from political parties, it is important that Spanish institutions encourage the political participation of foreigners by, in particular, allowing the **right to vote** to residents and by ensuring that persons with foreign background are **represented in political institutions**.