A Multilevel Puzzle
Migrants’ voting rights in National and Local Elections

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How DOES and how SHOULD the composition of the DEMOS change in response to INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION?

PUZZLE, CONCEPTS AND METHODS

Universal suffrage for all resident citizens has become a nearly universal democratic norm. International migration simultaneously creates groups of expatriates (non-resident citizens) and foreigners (non-citizen residents). The ensuing disjuncture between citizen and resident populations has produced various types of ‘discrepant electorates’.

Do and should migrants have the right to vote and if so, in what elections?

APPROACH

Realist normative theory: Focuses on real-world problems and conditions for desirable change

Mixed methods: Combines large N comparative analysis with small n descriptive analysis of deviant cases

DATA

Based on a collection of electoral laws and narrative reports published by the EUDO CITIZENSHIP Observatory

Covers 53 democracies (31 in Europe and 22 in the Americas)

Pays symmetric attention to immigrants/emigrants and national/local elections

EXISTING THEORIES

Constitutional doctrines and normative theories have defended three (conflicting) adaptations:

- The INSULAR view: includes only resident citizens
- The DETERRITORIALISED view: includes all citizens
- The POSTNATIONAL view: includes all residents

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: Transnational voting rights in 53 democracies

PATTERN OF EXPANSION

Voting rights today no longer depend on residence at the national level and on citizenship of the respective state at the local level

PATTERN OF CONTAINMENT

Voting rights do, however, generally depend on citizenship of the respective state at the national level and on residence at the local level

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

EMPIRICAL findings

- Insular demos are remarkably rare: compelling evidence of ‘expansive citizenship’;
- While strong, the postnational trend is in fact largely confined to local elections;
- Conversely, the deterritorialised view only applies to the national demos.

NORMATIVE justifications

- Migrants have a stakeholder claim to citizenship in polities of origin and residence;
- External conditions for self-government are different for independent states and dependent municipalities;
- Citizenship-based national franchise and residence-based local franchise take into account migrants’ membership claims while respecting different conditions for local and national self-government.

Towards a ‘level specific expansion’

The dominant pattern in real world democracies consists in a level specific expansion, to include non citizens in the local demos and non residents in the national one.