



UCD SCHOOL OF APPLIED SOCIAL SCIENCE

*WORKING PAPER SERIES
2009*

Immigrant political participation in the Republic of Ireland:

Socio-political capital and motivational stakes

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WP09/12

November 2009

**UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN
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This article examines immigrant political participation in the 2009 Irish local government elections drawing mainly on interviews with African and East European candidates. Almost half the immigrant candidates who stood in the 2009 elections participated in the study. All were comparatively recent migrants; just one was an Irish citizen. A limited body of international research examines the role of social capital in political participation using a narrow operationalisation of this concept limited to trust and reciprocity scores. Our research is distinctive in that it operationalises a broader definition of social capital. Drawing on the work of Robert Putnam and Pierre Bourdieu, the research considered the role of individual human, social and cultural capital, defined in terms of socio-economic status, pre-migratory political socialisation, membership of immigrant and Irish groups and organisations, religiosity, motivational stakes and residency/citizenship status factors, to examine differences between both cohorts.

Keywords: Cultural capital; social capital; socio-political capital; motivational stakes; politics; Ireland; immigrant political participation; local government elections.

Introduction

Transformations to the Republic of Ireland (hereafter Ireland) brought about by mass immigration since the 1990s are the focus of a growing body of social science literature yet research from a political science perspective has been limited. Much of the research focus to date has been on the politics of the 2004 Citizenship Referendum and on top-down responses to immigrants (Fanning and Mutwarasibo, 2007; Garner, 2007; Lentin, 2007a, 2007b). A handful of empirical studies have examined the responses of Irish political parties to immigrants. *Positive Politics* (Fanning *et al.*, 2004) was undertaken on behalf of an African NGO in advance of the 2004 local government elections in which most residents were entitled to vote. It found that Irish

political parties made minimal efforts to attract the support of immigrant voters and did little or nothing to encourage these to become party members. A second study (Fanning *et al.*, 2007), undertaken in advance of a general election in 2007 in which few immigrants were entitled to vote, found openness-in-principle to immigrants amongst Irish political parties but identified few concrete measures to reach out to immigrant communities. In Northern Ireland, only one study has specifically investigated the responses of political parties to immigrants, in this case via an analysis of party manifestos (McGarry *et al.*, 2008).

Our research is distinctive in its focus on immigrant political participants; it draws on interviews with eighteen immigrant candidates (almost half of those) who contested the 2009 Irish local government elections as well as on interviews with a number of immigrants strongly active within Irish political parties.¹ The aim of the research was to identify factors that influenced immigrant political participation with a view to testing a series of hypotheses generated in the absence of previous research. The study examined the role of socio-political capital, motivations for participating in politics and (residency/citizenship) status-related factors, distinguishing between African respondents (the predominant immigrant participants in the 2004 local government elections) and candidates from EU countries. It was anticipated correctly that most of the latter would be Polish. The research was undertaken in a context where Ireland's large (12.5 percent) immigrant population is predominantly non-citizen recent arrivals who are nevertheless entitled to stand and vote in local government elections. All ten of the African candidate respondents first came to Ireland between 1999 and 2003. The eight Polish and two other East European respondents arrived between 2000 and 2006.

¹ The study was funded by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS).

Six African candidates stood as independents in the 2004 local government elections; of these two were elected as councillors. Both of these were well-educated former asylum seekers with broadly similar experiences in Ireland. Rotimi Adebari (who was subsequently appointed as Ireland's first black mayor) had found it very difficult to secure employment once entitled to work and became involved in community groups in Portlaoise before entering politics. Taiwo Matthews had qualified as a doctor but, unable to work, established himself as a religious minister in Ennis, Co. Clare. No equivalent role models could be identified for other immigrant groups. Whilst the 2006 Census of Population identified the Polish community as the largest of all immigrant communities, most of these had arrived in Ireland following EU enlargement and the previous local government elections in 2004.

Research on African integration in Ireland has to date focused considerably on the role of religious social capital, African elite formation and immigrant civic participation (see Mutwarasibo and Smith, 2000; Ugba, 2007). Several African community organisations have been founded since the late 1990s but two have emerged as particularly important community networks: *Akina Dada wa Africa* (AkiDwa), a women's organisation, and the African Centre (see De Tona and Lentin, 2007; Akinjobi, 2006). Both have memberships that include Africans of different nationalities and religious backgrounds (including Muslims). A cohort of established African community activists, centring on such organisations, is identifiable, within which members are typically active in capacity building roles in immigrant community groups and churches and community development organisations (Africa Centre, *Strategic Plan 2005-2008*: 5).

For example, the Africa Centre's Strategic Plan for 2005-2008 emphasised the need to strengthen the capacity of African communities to participate in Irish society,

to promote the ‘genuine representation of minority communities’ and to promote civic integration amongst African communities (ibid. 7). After the 2004 election the Centre undertook action research aimed at fostering civic and political participation. The resultant *Inclusive Citizenship in 21st Century Ireland: What Prospects for the African Community?* depicted African respondents, from Dublin, Dundalk and Waterford, to be strongly engaged in community activities (63 percent) and very strongly interested in becoming politically active (98 percent) but found that actual political participation rates were much lower. For example, just 2 percent of those surveyed described themselves as members of political organisations and just 27 percent had voted in the 2004 local government elections. Respondents identified a range of specific barriers to civic participation including racism, language barriers and a sense of insecurity (Ejorh, 2006). *Inclusive Citizenship* emphasised how ‘civil society provides the space for the marginalised to assert themselves and to contribute to the public sphere – activities that embody the ‘stuff’ of citizenship, often in the absence of its formal acquisition’ (Feldman *et al.*, 2005: 10). Such civic activism emerged in a context (or even because) Africans have found it more difficult to integrate within the economy (Fanning, 2009: 153). As a relatively established (pre-2004) immigrant cohort, Africans have been at the forefront of bottom-up immigrant political participation.

By comparison, considerably less was known about how EU Accession State migrants might engage in civic or political participation. Crucially, most had lived in Ireland for a shorter period. Poles became the largest ethnic minority group (63,276) as identified in the 2006 census. Of these some 33,400 had arrived in Ireland in the twelve months before the census (CSO, 2007a: 37). Poles were found in 2006 to have the most one-sided male/female ratio of all immigrant communities with 64 percent male and 36 percent female. Seven out of 10 were in the 30-34 age group and over 60

percent were single. Most Poles were living in Polish-only households, with non-family households dominating (ibid. 73). A very significant 59 percent of married males and 18 percent of married females were not living with their spouse at the time of the census suggesting that many had families in their country of origin. By contrast, the percentage of married Nigerians not living with their spouse was relatively low at 8 percent. This census profile suggests that many Polish migrants perceive themselves as temporary residents in Ireland and do not have the kinds of communal social ties likely to foster civic and political participation.

However, since 2004 Polish has quickly become the second most commonly spoken language in Ireland. The commercial significance of this is exemplified by the publication of a Polish language weekly supplement of a major daily newspaper (*Evening Herald*) and by fairly widespread advertising of private sector services in Polish. Poles were far less likely than Africans to be economically marginalised but likely to experience an employment penalty compared to Irish people with similar education and skills (Barrett *et al.*, 2006). Some 95 percent of Polish adults (the highest percentage of all immigrant groups) were identified as being in paid employment in 2006 (CSO, 2007b: 47). We considered that Polish political activism was less likely to be motivated by personal experiences of racism. Yet, labour market discrimination of migrants (especially in the construction sector) had become politicised. The number of immigrant (non-citizen) trade union members rose by over 50 percent from 24,800 to 37,100 between 2005 and 2007.

To a considerable extent Polish civic and political activism in Ireland seemed preoccupied with Polonia (the Polish Diaspora) rather than focused on Irish institutions. For example, campaigns to develop Polish language schools have been directed at the Polish consulate and 22,000 persons living in Ireland voted in the 2007

Polish elections (over one third of the Polish population as identified by the 2006 census) (RTE, 2007).

The context of immigrant political activism

In the absence of previous studies of immigrant political participation this research was inevitably exploratory. It examined three sets of factors understood from the international literature and from available Irish data to potentially influence the participation of immigrant candidates in the 2009 local government elections. In summary these were:

- *Socio-Political Capital*: defined to include any human, social and cultural capital that positively contributes to the capacity of a person to engage in political activism and participation.
- *Motivational Stakes*: any perceived identifiable interests in political outcomes either in terms of individual gain or as a member of an immigrant community.
- *Status factors*: refer to the ways in which citizenship and legal status directly or indirectly influence immigrant participation. Status factors are seen to influence the identification of motivational stakes.

Social capital is generally defined as the social benefits resulting from social connections, shared values, trust and reciprocity. The term “socio-political capital” is coined here to refer to the ways in which cultural, social and human capital might contribute to the capacity of individuals to participate in political processes. As examined here, it includes prior political socialisation and elite status within

communities of origin. Cultural capital as defined by Pierre Bourdieu includes the knowledge, experiences and connections which confer advantages upon individuals in distinct social settings (see Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Bourdieu's concept of social capital is relational and centres on the resources (and obligations) which accrue to members of groups or networks. He defines social capital as: 'The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu, 1986: 249). For Bourdieu, social capital "lubricates" civil society; 'the outcome is a voluntary provision of collective goods, such as common norms, predictability in human exchanges, and trust' (Svendsen and Svendsen, 2004: 247). Bourdieu uses the concept of 'field' to denote the specific context of interaction (such as a political setting) and the concept of 'habitus' to denote the internalised attributes of individual actors that confer advantage in specific fields of social interaction; each field has its specific capital and its dominant habitus (Grenfell and James, 1998; Kauppi, 2004). By participating in particular fields, individuals accumulate forms of social capital and this in turn shapes habitus as an internalised disposition. Bourdieu presents individual behaviour as a kind of social game where habitus may or may not confer advantages in particular fields of social relations; 'individuals may be in, or out, of the game, and may or may not have the necessary capital to play it to their advantage' (Grenfell and James, 1998: 25).

James Coleman, like Bourdieu, adopts a relational view of social capital, seeing it as a collective good and as a resource for action that is instrumental in the creation of human capital (Coleman, 1988). However, the conceptual popularity of social capital in recent years is largely attributable to the work of Robert Putnam (see Putnam, 2000). Putnam influentially distinguishes between "bonding" social capital,

whereby membership of delimited groups or organisations confers advantages upon members, and “bridging” social capital, which is outwardly focused and extends across social divides. Like human capital and cultural capital, social capital is understood to confer resources upon individuals.

Our concept of socio-political capital draws more on Bourdieu than on Putnam because our interest is chiefly in individual political actors. As observed by Siisiäinen: ‘Putnam’s idea of social capital deals with collective values and societal integration, whereas Bourdieu’s approach is made from the point of view of actors engaged in struggle in pursuit of their interests’ (Siisiäinen, 2000: 10). Siisiäinen argues that ‘Putnam does not deal with politics [...] his theory can be seen as a kind of wish to escape politics in the de Tocquevillean tradition’ (ibid. 7). The following comparison of Bourdieu (and Coleman) and Putnam by Svendsen and Svendsen illustrates our preference for Bourdieu’s approach:

[...] Putnam’s definition of social capital tends to be substantivist – amounts and numbers – compared to Coleman’s and especially Bourdieu’s, where social capital tends to be defined relationally, as an exchange that – embedded in dynamic and complex social processes – produces individual and social identities. Where Putnam sees social capital primarily as quantifiable relations, Bourdieu and Coleman are interested in these relations’ emotional, cultural, and social quality (2004: 252).

A limited body of international research examines the role of social capital in political participation. Bäck and Kestilä (2008), for example, examine empirically the relation between social capital and political trust in Finland. The ‘individual-level’ data used

derive from the Finnish data in the European Social Survey (first round, 2002/2003), where the focus is on informal sociality rather than formal membership of voluntary associations. The study employs a narrow operationalisation of social capital (i.e. trust and reciprocity scores – the main indices of social capital used by Putnam) in reference to subjective political competence or attitudes towards politics across three levels; trust in politicians (actors); trust in parliament (institutions) and satisfaction with democracy (political system or regime). Similarly, Van Londen *et al.* (2007) examine civic engagement (i.e. membership of associations), trust and voter participation by Turkish and Moroccan minorities in Rotterdam.

A US study suggests that social connectedness (what Putnam measured in his studies of social capital) is a strong predictor of political participation across different ethnic groups (though the study measured this simply in terms of years of residency in the same community) (Leighley and Vedlitz, 1999). One study of Latino political participation in the United States found that English language proficiency had ‘an enormous effect upon Latino political participation’ but that once English proficiency was taken into consideration, the Latino variable ceased to be significant. To a lesser extent the same held in the case of English-speaking Asian-Americans (Cho, 1999: 1147).

Church membership has been identified as explaining why African-Americans have greater participation rates than would be expected given their socio-economic status. Not so in the case of Latino’s in the United States (their high affiliation with religious institutions notwithstanding) (Jones-Correa and Leal, 2001). The underlying explanation offered here relates to differences in political socialisation between Protestant African American churches and Latino Catholic congregations. As concluded by Verba *et al.*:

Latinos, a mostly Catholic group, in spite of recent defections to evangelical Protestant churches, are relatively unlikely to have the chance to develop civic skills in the context of church activity. African Americans, in contrast, are affiliated with Protestant churches that are especially rich in opportunities for the development of civic skills (1995: 523).

Religiosity emerged as a potential influence on immigrant social capital in the Irish case. For example, the percentage of non-religious Nigerians (the largest African community) identified by the 2006 Census was just 0.7 percent (CSO, 2007c: 109). Studies of recent Catholic Polish immigrants in Britain have depicted these as considerably more religiously active than the host Catholic population (See Davis *et al.*, 2007). The 2006 census found that 93 percent of Polish immigrants in Ireland are Roman Catholic (with 5 per cent ticking the 'no religion' box) (CSO, 2008: 30).

In considering the significance of cultural capital on immigrant political participation our research placed emphasis on pre-migratory political socialisation, levels of education and employment status. Some of the research challenges here are summarised in the following terms by Jones-Correa and Andalon:

The immigration experience provides a unique opportunity to test hypotheses about political socialization. The immigration experience itself serves as a distinct break in socialization contexts for an identifiable, delimited adult population. Immigrant populations allow researchers to gauge the effects of both recent and prior socialization for adults operating in new social and

political contexts. Are there breaks or continuities with previous patterns of socialization and participation? (2008: 3).

Several studies of immigrants to Australia and Canada suggest that there may well be an absence of continuity between pre-migratory and post-migratory political socialisation (Jones-Correa and Andalon, 2008; Finifter and Finifter, 1989; Black, 1987). Here the literature suggests that different pre-migratory experiences translate into different degrees of continuity in respect of political participation and that culture, understood as an admixture of social capital and political socialisation, needs to be examined as a factor on a case-by-case basis.

Some US research has linked naturalisation to temporal delays in political participation. In the Irish case, expectations amongst immigrants that they will or will not naturalise are posited as influencing the nature and extent of political participation. Research on political mobilisation amongst naturalised Latinos in the United States suggests that perceptions of threat by migrants can be an impetus to both naturalisation and political participation: ‘Latino permanent residents, sensing growing hostility to their political and economic interests, chose to naturalise and enter the political system in large numbers’ (Pantoja *et al.*, 2001: 747). This suggests that equivalent motivational stakes might pertain in respect of African migrants in the Irish case.

The overwhelming majority of immigrants in Ireland have not naturalised. Many, if not most, are not resident in the country long enough to be eligible. The experience of other EU Member States suggests that most immigrants from these are unlikely to seek Irish citizenship because they do not need to do so to obtain employment and social entitlements. Proximity to other European countries, low cost

travel and rights to free movement may serve to undermine civil and political participation in Irish society. This suggests a potentially low impetus for some forms of political and civic participation amongst EU migrants compared to non-EU migrants. However, Polish migrants are not prevented from acquiring dual nationality; naturalisation as Irish citizens would not require them to forfeit Polish citizenship.

Other potentially relevant factors emphasised in the international literature included host-country language fluency and naturalisation, factors both correlated with time of residence in the host country (Jones-Correa and Andalon, 2008; Pantoja *et al.*, 2001). Several studies undertaken in the United States identified acquisition of English language, US citizenship and duration of residence as factors that accounted for greater participation amongst migrants in electoral and non-electoral politics (Junn, 1997; Cho, 1999; Ramakirshnan and Espenshade, 2001). The right of non-citizen migrants to vote in Irish local elections allows for immediate political participation unimpeded by the time delays associated with the naturalisation process. Nevertheless, the hypothesis that levels of political activism may be influenced by duration of residence warranted consideration.

Findings

Human Capital

All but one of the African respondents was educated to degree level. The sole exception had a management diploma. Two had masters degrees and one was completing a masters degree. Of the ten respondents, two were graduates in English and literature, one in economics, one in marketing, one in information technology,

one in communications, one in industrial chemistry and mineral processing, one was completing a masters degree in international relations, and one held three masters degrees in adult and community education, business administration and healthcare management.

Comparisons between their pre-migratory and post-migratory occupational status (using CSO socio-economic group categories) reveal that four African respondents retained their pre-migratory status, two moved to a higher socio-economic category, two moved to lower categories (one being unemployed) and three fell under category H (own account workers), which can indicate *either* upward or downward shifts in employment status. In summary, their pre-migratory status = 2 x A (employers and managers), 2 x B (higher professional), 3 x C (lower professional), 1 x E (manual skilled), 1 x H (own account worker), 1 x Z (other employed). By comparison their post-migratory status = 2 x A, 3 x B, 1 x C, 3 x H and 1 unemployed. On the basis of occupational status African candidates were somewhat atypical of the wider African migrant population as identified in the 2006 census and in 2008 ESRI research which identified extremely disproportionate unemployment amongst Black people – nine times that of Irish nationals (O’Connell and McGinnity, 2008).

By comparison six of the East European respondents in our sample were educated to degree level (though three of these held masters degrees). All had completed secondary education. Of the four non-graduates one had dropped out of third level and one was in the process of applying to study accountancy. The six graduates held qualifications in law, pharmacy, accountancy, business administration and politics, and international relations. When the occupational status of East European respondents was compared to their pre-migratory occupational status, it was

found that four are in the same socio-economic group pre and post migration, four are in lower groups and two are in higher groups. In summary, their pre-migratory status = 1 x A (employers and managers), 3 x B (higher professional), 4 x C (lower professional), 1 x E (manual skilled), 1 x Z (other employed). By comparison their post-migratory status = 2 x A, 1 x B, 3 x C, 2 x D (non-manual), 1 x E and 1 x F (semi-skilled).

Compared to African respondents, East Europeans in our sample experienced a greater degree of downward occupational mobility, which appears to support findings that immigrants from the New Member States (NMS) of the EU suffer the largest relative “occupational gap” (Barrett and Duffy, 2007: 14). Yet respondents typically appeared to fare better than the wider NMS population as identified by the 2006 Census; six of the ten are in socio-economic groups A, B or C, compared to only 9 per cent of the total Polish working population in Ireland (CSO, 2008: 30).

Prior Political Socialisation as Cultural Capital

Seven of the ten African respondents had distinct pre-migratory political socialisation. One stated that two of his brothers were local councillors in Nigeria, one had been a party secretary for the SDP at the local level in Nigeria, one had been a member of the NRC in Nigeria and one had been a member of the ANC in South Africa. Three had been active in student politics of which one came from “a family of politicians”, whose father, uncles and grandfather were active in politics in Nigeria (AF4). One with no pre-migratory involvement in politics stated that two of his siblings were councillors in Nigeria (AM2). Another African candidate with no such family history

depicted experiences of being a leader at school as a form of pre-migratory political socialisation:

The first time I think I really had contact with politics was when I was in secondary school. I was elected class prefect [...] From then I was really noticeable wherever I went. I was the class prefect until my final year and then I was elected the general prefect of the school. During that time too I happened to lead seven organisations in school. So people felt there was something I could do [...] And right within me I am revolutionary, you know, I have to stand on my own and then mobilise people, be critical if there is a need about what is happening (AM5).

Another similarly commented: “Politics really has always been a part of me. When I was a student I was a student’s union leader, I stood in the elections [...] so it was not something that I stumbled into” (AF2). A number of African respondents depicted themselves as putative community leaders in making statements such as; “I think that part of leadership is you shouldn’t be afraid to take up responsibility” (AM2) and “as a leader I feel I can engender change from within” (AF2).

Six of the ten East European respondents stated that they had no pre-migratory involvement in politics. Three of these stated that whilst they had not been involved in formal politics they had been active in social or voluntary organisations as an alternative to engagement with the formal political system. As put by a Polish respondent:

I worked as a volunteer in a few organisations. It was communist times. I was president for two years of a film discussion club. We presented films not available in official places. After that I was connected for six years with a Catholic organisation. It was about religious exhibitions, art [...] I met some very interesting young people. It was not *sensu stricto* political activity but it was political. I was never connected with any party (EEM2).

Pre-migratory political socialisation amongst East European respondents was characterised by antipathy towards the political systems of their countries of origin – an issue that also emerged in discussions about voter registration. A number of Polish respondents argued that distrust of authority, grounded in pre-migratory experiences, impeded voter registration in Ireland. Poles in particular were depicted as unwilling to fill official forms or to enter Garda stations to enrol on the supplementary electoral register (Fanning, O’Boyle and Shaw, 2009). Negative perceptions of home country politics explained why some respondents were inclined to discursively distance themselves from formal politics and express misgivings about careerist understandings of politics. Typically these understood the term politician as a pejorative term, whilst emphasising their interest in working on behalf of their local community.

Notwithstanding such antipathy all but one of the East European candidates interviewed had become members of Irish political parties. The sole exception had sought unsuccessfully a nomination from a political party. Five of these candidates stated that their decision to stand for election was directly influenced (and in some cases directly encouraged) by Irish members of political parties. In effect, some of these were invited to join political parties or to stand. One respondent described being asked to stand for Fine Gael by an Irish friend who was a member of the party and

who he had first come into contact with at a town council meeting. He described attending several town council meetings and encountering “a few people that I consider good people that I didn’t know were Fine Gael” (EEM3). A Fianna Fáil candidate similarly described being directly approached by a local councillor whom she had come to know in her area. Her decision to stand was primarily an outcome of her participation in social networks outside of her community of origin, which was equally important in the cases of two other East European candidates.

Membership of Groups and Networks (Bridging and Bonding Social Capital)

Fifteen of the twenty respondents were affiliated to a political party. For some, party membership was experienced as a form of bridging social capital. One respondent described how being a member of an Irish political party offered immigrants a means of overcoming feelings of alienation within Irish society and also provided a way to “show the Irish people that we can do something together”. For this respondent, membership of a political party was seen to provide a sense of belonging: “I think for me it is important to be in a party because that way I feel a part of Irish society” (EEM1).

All of the African respondents stated that they were members of community organisations and voluntary groups (Fig. 1). These include AkiDwa and the Africa Centre. With one exception (an Ebo support group), each of these organisations represented Africans from divergent religious and ethnic groups. In each case respondents identified themselves as members of Irish community groups and

networks as well as immigrant ones (although almost half of the male respondents did not elaborate on the nature of their involvement in ‘immigrant groups’, suggesting predominantly informal ties with other immigrants). The four female African respondents stated that they were members of immigrant groups, but were also members of Irish organisations, including community and voluntary organisations and intercultural networks. On this basis African female respondents appeared to possess both more bridging *and* bonding social capital than males.

Fig. 1: Bridging and bonding social capital of African respondents²

Respondent	Membership of immigrant organisations	Membership of Irish organisations	Church affiliation	Membership of political party
AF1	N=2	N=4	Active member of Protestant congregation	Green Party
AM1		N=2	Active member of Protestant congregation	Fine Gael
AM2		N=1	Practicing Muslim	Fianna Fáil
AM3		N=4	Practicing Catholic	Independent
AF2	N=3	N=1	Practicing Catholic	Fine Gael
AM4		N=1	Active member of Protestant congregation	Independent
AM5	N=1	N=1	Active member of Protestant congregation	Green Party
AM6	N=1	N=2	Not religious	Independent
AF3	N=2	N=4.	Practicing Catholic	Independent
AF4	N=2	N=3	Active member of Protestant congregation and ordained pastor	Green Party

Compared to African respondents, the level of participation of East European respondents in both Irish and immigrant organisations and networks was low (Fig. 2).

² The names of specific organisations are not included to protect the anonymity of respondents. In summary, these included organisations with a national membership (e.g. Cairde, AIDS Alliance, Integrating Ireland, Community Workers Co-op, trade unions) and local groups (e.g. chambers of commerce, policing fora, community integration groups, neighbourhood watch groups, residents associations, women’s groups, sports clubs and branches of citizen information centres and homeless charities).

Just three East European respondents were members of Irish organisations; of these two were female. Of the ten East European respondents, five (all Polish) stated that they were members of Polish organisations but were not members of Irish community organisations or groups other than a political party. Seven in all were members of Forum Polonia and two were members of the Polish Toastmaster’s Club in Ireland. Just two of the seven Polish respondents in our sample claimed to be members of Irish organisations.

Fig. 2: Bridging and bonding social capital of East European respondents³

Respondent	Membership of immigrant organisations	Membership of Irish organisations	Church affiliation	Membership of political party
EEM1	N=1		Practicing Catholic	Fine Gael
EEF1	N=1		Not religious	Labour Party
EEM2	N=2		Not religious	N/A
EEM3	N=1		Practicing Catholic	Fine Gael
EEM4	N=1	N=1	Practicing Catholic	Fianna Fáil
EEM5	N=1	N=1	Non-practicing Russian Orthodox	Green Party
EEF2		N=5	Semi-practicing Catholic	Fianna Fáil
EEF3			Practicing Catholic	Fine Gael
EEF4	N=1		Practicing Catholic	Fianna Fáil
EEM6	N=2		No response	Fine Gael

³ The names of specific Irish organisations are not included to protect the anonymity of respondents. In summary, one respondent did occasional voluntary work for a local charity, one participated in a spring cleaning initiative, and just one was member of multiple organisations (county development partnership, a sports organisation, a Chernobyl children’s project, an Irish charity, and an intercultural organisation).

In the run up to the 2009 local elections Forum Polonia emerged as the leading representative voice of the Polish community; all Polish respondents were members. Forum Polonia has two stated goals; promoting the integration and enhancing the image of the Polish community in Ireland.

Forum Polonia is a cooperative platform that brings together representatives of various Polish community organisations, the media, and individuals involved in projects relating to the Polish minority and its links to Irish society as a whole. The Forum operates through information exchanges, mutual supports, social integration, and promoting and developing the interests of the Polish community in the Republic of Ireland (www.forumpolonia.org/en/o-nas/).

A key stated aim of the Forum is to ‘reach a common policy stance on issues relevant to the Polish community’. Forum Polonia (FP) works as a ‘network of links and contacts which facilitate information exchanges as well as mutual supports and assistance; establishing of working groups to initiate, develop and implement projects coordinated by a project leader; cooperating with other bodies in Poland’ (www.forumpolonia.org/en/o-nas/). As a national-level organisation representing a trans-national Diaspora, FP was arguably ill-equipped to support Polish candidates at a local level. As put by one Polish respondent (who was not a member of any Irish organisations or networks) prior to election:

I think Forum Polonia is a great idea, they do big work, big money invested in posters and leaflets, people are very engaged to make popular the idea of

taking part in an election. But everything is focused on voting, not as standing as a candidate. So I'm a bit disappointed (EEM2).

This suggests that FP worked more effectively at generating bonding rather than bridging social capital. But it was also the case that FP played an influential role in fostering relationships between the Polish community and the two largest political parties. Both had recruited Polish integration officers who were active FP members and extensive outreach by Fianna Fáil to immigrant communities was almost entirely directed at the Polish community; this included meetings attended by government ministers and party leaders, social events aimed at bringing senior party members and members of the Polish community together as well recruitment activities via the *Polski* section on the party website homepage (Fanning, O'Boyle and Shaw, 2009: Appendix 3). Fine Gael similarly focused most of its efforts on engaging with immigrants from the Polish community; there were some indications that mutual perceptions of common values influenced these. One respondent described being attracted to Fine Gael because it was a Christian Democrat party like Civic Forum (both were allied in the EU parliament). A few Polish respondents described how their involvement in Fine Gael came about through social contacts with Irish fellow Catholics, suggesting that religious social capital had helped get them selected as candidates.

Religious Social Capital: Bonding or Bridging?

All but one of the African respondents described themselves as religious. Of the eight Christians, three were Catholic and the remainder were from various Protestant

denominations. Seven in total, including one Muslim, described themselves as actively practicing their religion. Six described themselves as active Christian churchgoers. Of these three were members of Pentecostal congregations with one being an ordained pastor. A further two described themselves as semi-regular churchgoers.

Many African respondents emphasised the role of their Church as a ‘social place’ that gave them a sense of belonging. A number discussed how their religious beliefs influenced their participation in politics. For example, one said that although his entry into politics was not in any way religiously or spiritually motivated, his religious beliefs nevertheless inform his politics; religion acts as a moral guide when faced with difficult decisions: “So if you look at politics you have to make tough decisions going forward but when those decisions are made you have to ask your conscience and ask what would Jesus do” (AM1). Another asserted that it was “time that Godly people get into politics” (AM4). Overall, African respondents perceived their political and spiritual lives as intertwined. As put by one: “I can’t divide myself” (AF4) and by another: “We are all political, we are all religious [...] I’m not a fanatic but my Christian values feed into everything I do” (AF1).

African respondents tended to emphasise their involvement in community life through their membership of religious congregations, voluntary organisations and other associations. Whilst they did not always describe such involvement as the motivational impetus to enter politics (see below), it is suggested that religious and other forms of social capital fostered an ethos of participation (see O’Boyle, 2009).

Of the ten East European respondents, six described themselves as actively religious Catholics. One identified himself as Catholic but claimed that he does not go to church; one claimed that she is not religious and one did not answer this question.

The sole identified non-Catholic (Russian Orthodox) did not attend church. Of the actively religious Catholics, one described being pleasantly surprised to discover that a town council meeting he attended “started with a prayer” (EEM3). When he asked about this a local councillor explained that Fine Gael is a Christian Democratic party. For some Polish respondents membership of the Catholic Church was experienced as a form of bridging social capital which helped them to integrate into Irish society. Several Polish respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the Polish Catholic Church and described being more attracted to the Irish Catholic Church. As put by one: “Polish priests are not friendly” (EEF1). Another similarly commented:

What I love about Irish priests is that they come down to the bar for a pint. But you know why they do it? They want to meet the people in a place outside of the church. They want to integrate; they want to be one of the people. They are not driving fancy cars like they do in Poland (EEM4).

Whilst Poles were far less likely to exhibit bridging social capital, defined in terms of membership of non-Polish organisations, for some religion functioned as a form of bridging social capital. For African respondents, on the other hand, religion was more likely to function as bonding social capital. The limited capacity of this to secure integration into wider Irish society arguably accounts for the proactive involvement of many African respondents in ‘Irish’ organisations and networks.

Motivational Stakes

Motivational states refer to perceived identifiable interests in political outcomes either in terms of individual gain or as a member of an immigrant community. Motivational stakes refer to rationale for participation. Our interviews with immigrant candidates suggest that they get involved in Irish politics for many of the same complex reasons as other persons but that there are specific reasons for immigrants also. The reasons as articulated by respondents (Fig. 3) need to be interpreted with caution.⁴ It can be assumed, for example, that anyone standing for political office will be motivated to some degree by what we term “personal instrumentality”. Bourdieu, in fact, is highly sceptical of altruistic action that is putatively free of any specific interest on the part of an actor (Siisiäinen, 2000: 18). Five candidates – four African and one East European candidate (none of whom were ‘independents’) – revealed a high degree of *personal instrumentality*, understood as expressions of self-interest pertaining to personal goals (career, business etc.) in explaining their political motivations. Two African respondents claimed that “business interests” played a significant part in their entry into politics (AM1, AM2). In contrast, the other three candidates viewed politics as a potential career in itself or as a vehicle for their careers in more general terms. This careerist orientation seems to have influenced their choice of political party; all five were standing on behalf of one of the two parties *in government* i.e. Fianna Fáil or the Green Party.

⁴ Unlike other sections of this article, which refer to all twenty respondents, this table only includes *candidates* in the local government elections (i.e. a total of 18).

Fig. 3: Motivational stakes as expressed by respondents

Candidates	Expressed motivations in standing for election						
	Attracted to distinctive values or ideology of party *	Personal instrumentality	Wish to promote distinct needs of own community of origin	Wish to promote needs of local area *	Wish to foster integration	Have concerns about alienation	Have concerns about racism, discrimination, and lesser rights
AF1		X		X (c)	X		X
AM1		X		X (c)	X		
AM2		X		X (c)	X		
AM3	(i)			X (c)	X		
AF2				X (c)	X		X
AM4	(i)			X (c)	X		
AM5				X (c)	X		
AM6	(i)		X	X (c)	X		X
AF3				X (c)	X		X
AF4	X (i)	X		X (c)	X		X
EEM1	X			X	X		
EEF1				X (c)	X	X	
EEM2				X (c)	X	X	
EEM3				X (c)	X	X	
EEM4		X		X	X	X	
EEM5	X			X (c)	X		
EEF2				X (c)	X	X	
EEF3				X (c)			
Total	3	5	1	18	17	5	5

* (i) = parties are interchangeable in view of respondent; (c) = respondents with children

African respondents overwhelmingly did not identify with any political ideology *per se*. When discussing their political views or problems (such as racism) they tended to extol Christian humanist values. Only one African candidate claimed to be attracted to the distinctive values of her party (the Green Party), however, she also considered that political parties in Ireland are largely interchangeable (AF4). Only one respondent (a Polish candidate) used the word “ideology” in explaining his attraction to Fine Gael (EEM1). Another East European candidate (a Russian) claimed that his long term

interests in Green Peace and environmentalism were important factors in his joining the Green Party. All other candidates described their attraction to parties in terms of their personal experiences, emphasising such things as their party's openness to immigrants or its organisational culture.

Four of the five 'independent' candidates in our sample regarded Irish political parties as largely interchangeable and tended to be cynical about political parties. One African independent stated that Irish political parties "have a blueprint, they don't like to change" (AM4) while another insisted that all parties are now merely "window shopping for immigrant faces" (AM6). The only East European independent candidate in our sample (a Pole) similarly insisted that no party "is fighting for the votes of the Polish community" and that none was especially interested in immigrants (EEM2).

Only one respondent in our entire sample – an African independent candidate – claimed that a desire *to promote the distinct needs of his own community of origin* was an important motivation for entering politics. In this case, his desire to promote the needs of Africans in Ireland stemmed from his first-hand experience of racism and prejudice.

All eighteen candidates claimed an interest in *promoting the needs of their immediate local area* when explaining their motivation for entering politics. Crucially, sixteen of the eighteen candidates interviewed had children living with them in Ireland; in this respect Polish candidates were markedly atypical of the wider Polish population as found by the 2006 census. Some repeatedly drew on the experiences of their children and other family members to illustrate the changes they hoped to effect and therefore their motivations must be viewed as both personally and publicly orientated. As put by one African respondent: "My motivation is basically

[...] my community has no facilities. When I came here my daughter wasn't able to meet friends or even play with neighbours" (AM3). Respondents in both groups also emphasised the need for improved facilities and amenities and drew attention to a host of local problems (such as poor infrastructure, limited public transport and anti-social behaviour etc.) which they felt were compounding the social isolation experienced by immigrants in particular. One African respondent described this impetus for participation in the following terms:

Yes I'm a migrant, but I'm also a woman. I'm also a mum who has got children who are in school like everybody else so participation would have been a very big issue. There are a lot of things that impede participation of people at different levels, like access to education and access to healthcare services. And then access to employment as well. But also issues such as the environment and issues such as transport are big, big issues (AF1).

Another African candidate stated that he became politically active because anti-social behaviour, vandalism and intimidation of his staff were affecting his business (AM1). A number of respondents depicted their engagement with Irish politics as community activism, frequently self-identifying as "community activists" rather than politicians (e.g. AM3). As put by one: "If you view politics as going to Dublin and being very loud then no. I prefer to work with small communities, just to be a voice for a few people" (EEF1). As similarly put by another (a candidate for a different political party): "To be honest I am not that interested in politics – about parties and things like that. But to do something in the community here you need to have some power" (EEM3).

Unsurprisingly, all but one candidate (seventeen) spoke of a desire to *foster integration* when explaining their political motivation. As with the desire to promote the needs of their immediate local area, the desire to foster integration was expressed by an approximately equal number of African and East European candidates. Respondents in both groups described wanting to become a “voice” for their wider (i.e. Irish and migrant) communities and to encourage the integration of migrants in general. Directly linking to their interest in promoting the needs of their immediate local area, respondents frequently argued that integration must take root at the local level. As put by one respondent: “I believe so much in grassroots [...] we have to cultivate good neighbourliness. If you live in a place you need to be friends with your neighbours. They will get to know you [...] Let us on the local level organise things and bring people together” (AM5).

A *concern about alienation* was described by five of the eight East European candidates (four of whom are Polish) as a specific motivation for entering politics. (Only one Polish candidate did not specify this as a motivation). Although integration into mainstream Irish society remains a problem for African and East European immigrants alike, the latter explain that in coming to Ireland as migrant workers (i.e. for economic reasons), East Europeans generally have poorly developed social networks in comparison to Africans and other groups. For Polish respondents in particular their concerns tended to be articulated as an anti-politics communitarianism, influenced by experiences of alienation from party politics in their country of origin. Amongst Polish respondents the need to address the social isolation of immigrants emerged as a distinct motivating factor. In essence, civic and political participation were envisaged as a response (or antidote) to alienation and isolation brought about by economic circumstances. As put by a Polish respondent:

Most Polish people came here for work, for economic reasons, so they try to save as much as they can and don't go out. That's why integration here is a bit worse. That's why I would like to have meetings with Polish and Irish people so they will work together and maybe socialise more [...] it doesn't need to cost money. Maybe we could clean a part of the town, plant flowers somewhere, then after we could meet and maybe have a barbeque or something. That's one thing because in Poland there are usually meeting places in every town with a canopy over it. I think if I get into the council I will try to create a place like that (EEM3).

Half of the African respondents in our sample cited *experiences of racism and discrimination* as a core motivation for becoming involved in politics. One candidate described her entry into politics as “the only available path left to try” (AF1). For another the decision was explained experientially: “Coming to Ireland and experiencing racism and discrimination [...] once you've experienced it you know how it feels, you know where it hurts” (AF2). While an approximately equal number of African and East European respondents expressed concerns about integration, the former were more prone to argue that integration demands certain preconditions, such as adequate representation, access channels and basic rights. As put by one African respondent (an independent): “We need immigrants at the higher level to speak for immigrants [...] you can't have integration without representation” (AM6).

Status Factors

Status factors refer to the ways in which citizenship and legal status directly or indirectly influence immigrant participation activism and participation. Such factors were exemplified by an African respondent who described how insecurities about residency status impeded her involvement in social issues:

Often immigrants start out with immigrant-specific concerns (residency status, immigration issues, English language) but gradually move on to more mainstream concerns (childcare, housing, public transport etc). One of our Nigerian members described it as “if you are thirsty you only care about getting water”. That’s how it is with what is your immediate concern. If I need residency, I only care about that, not about public transport. But once I am settled and maybe get a job, I want to sort out how to get to work by public transport and I no longer care about residency but public transport (AF1).

However, all ten African respondents had secure residency status and, having arrived in Ireland between 1999 and 2003, were comparatively longstanding immigrant members of Irish society. While Eastern European respondents typically emphasised economic security as a prerequisite for civic and political participation, some African respondents described a hierarchy of needs which placed residency status as a priority need:

Yes I’ve just gained Irish citizenship. It took two and a half years to process. But then it’s great because everything, even in Ireland, revolves around citizenship. There is so much dichotomy and the Irish system has created a hierarchy of Irish citizens really because under the rights of the child the Irish

child is supposed to enjoy being raised among all family members but among immigrants there is a category of Irish children who are not allowed to enjoy that same privilege of their family members around them. So the Irish state effectively creates categories of Irish citizens which I think is bad (AF2).

The above respondent was the only one of the ten Africans interviewed to have Irish citizenship, however, eight stated that they intended to naturalise. One was a citizen of another EU state and cited this as a reason for not becoming an Irish citizen and one did not answer this question. Nevertheless, the desire to naturalise should not be interpreted as a disavowal of native nationality. For example, one respondent stated that if forced to choose between being Irish or Nigerian she would choose to keep her Nigerian passport:

Because home is home. Nigeria is the only place, as bad as it, that I really feel I am home. Yes Ireland is home now but Irish people keep reminding me that my home is somewhere else. It's there in my consciousness that this is not home because every time they ask "do you like it here?", "will you go back home?!" So I don't feel that I'm really a part of this society even though I see it as home. So those are some of the challenges our children will have. This is their home (AF2).

Half of the East European respondents in our sample stated that they intended to naturalise even though being citizens of another EU state conferred residence status upon them. One respondent whose country of origin did not permit dual citizenship described her reluctance to change nationality (EEF3). Even though Poles are entitled

to dual citizenship one Polish respondent described his unwillingness to become an Irish citizen. In essence, he viewed this as compromising his Polish identity (EEM3). However, collectively considered the responses provided by Eastern European respondents to questions of legal status disproved the original hypothesis that EU migrants would be less likely to naturalise. All but two Eastern European candidates had children living in Ireland. As put by one Polish respondent: “My baby is Irish so I want to be too. I think citizenship is good if people want to stay here” (EEF1). Another stated: “If I stay in Ireland and if I get the chance I will apply for Irish citizenship because I will never be an Irish person but I am part of Irish society and when you are a citizen you have full rights” (EEM1). Nevertheless, East European respondents also frequently discussed the limitations of naturalisation as a means of integration, pointing out that if they acquired Irish citizenship they would not ‘become Irish’. As put by one: “It makes a difference applying for jobs but [...] it doesn’t feel like home – you are still a foreigner” (EEF1).

Analysis and conclusion

Our initial hypothesis was that barriers to economic integration encountered by many Africans (due to racism, non-recognition of qualifications and being unable to work whilst asylum applications were being considered) shunted putative leaders towards civic and voluntary sector roles whilst Poles, a more recent immigrant cohort, were archetypically in paid employment but were more atomised, less engaged in civic participation but less preoccupied with residency status issues (always an issue for non EU-migrants). With respect to African candidates our hypothesis was partly borne out. All of these were members of a number of voluntary organisations but just

two were employed in the voluntary sector. A further two were not in paid employment but were members of a number of voluntary organisations. However, six of the ten African respondents were employed in the private sector or were self-employed but some of these were unemployed or in jobs that did not reflect their pre-migratory socio-economic status. Even so, the socio-economic profile of African respondents found them considerably better off than most Africans.

Our hypothesis concerning Polish political participation was considerably borne out; concerns about alienation experienced by members of their communities of origin emerged as the main distinctive motive for participation by Polish and other East European candidates. East European respondents were far less engaged in community organisations than were Africans. Residency status emerged as less of a predictor of immigrant political participation than suggested by the international literature; non-citizen immigrants are entitled to vote in and contest Irish local government elections. Yet, interviews with African candidates suggested that these would not have been willing to stand if their residency status had not been resolved.

Our initial hypothesis that Polish and other EU-migrants would be comparatively disinterested in naturalisation was not borne out. Arguably this was the case partly because the profile of East European candidates – mostly parents interested in community issues – differed considerably from the general status of such migrants found in the 2006 Census of Population. A striking finding was that all but two of the candidates we interviewed had children living in Ireland. In effect, such candidates were self-selecting persons particularly interested in integrating within Irish society; many referred to the experiences of their children in discussing their motivations to stand for election.

The sole reason for standing cited by all candidates was the wish to promote the needs of their local area. The second most commonly cited reason was a wish to foster integration. Few candidates identified or were attracted by ideologies particular to any political party. The main difference in motivational stakes expressed by African and East European respondents was that the former emphasised concerns about racism, discrimination and lesser rights whilst the latter emphasised concerns about alienation experienced by members of their community of origin.

Both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael presumed a Eurocentric cultural affinity with the (Catholic) Polish community in advance of the election; both recruited Poles as integration officers and targeted much of their centralised efforts at recruiting immigrant party members at the Polish community. To some extent this was the result of successful engagement with these political parties by Forum Polonia. African organisations have not successfully engaged with political parties and are instead preoccupied with bottom-up civic participation. Some parallels emerge between our findings of lower levels of involvement by Poles than Africans in immigrant-led organisations and those of Verba *et al.* (1995: 523) which identified differences in civic skills between Protestant African Americans and Latino Catholics attributable to church activity. We did not find that African religiosity directly translated into entrepreneurial political mobilisation, although one of the candidates we interviewed was a pastor (as was one African candidate in 2004). However, some African respondents had founded or were leaders of immigrant groups.

Our research highlights the importance of social capital in fostering political participation amongst immigrants. Our analysis supports the essentially Bourdieuan notion of capital attracting capital and the interconvertibility of different kinds of capital. This article placed considerable emphasis on “socio-political capital”,

examined using socio-economic status (pre and post migration), prior political socialisation, membership of groups and networks, and religious social capital. In respect of socio-economic status, all twenty respondents were found to be atypical of their nationality profiles in the 2006 census. Respondents possessed high levels of human capital (markedly so in the case of African respondents) even if these were under employed. Unable to maximise the use of their human capital Africans were typically active in Irish and immigrant organisations where they developed considerable social capital. Some respondents, both African and East European, described being approached by more than one political party to contest the election. In essence they were perceived as having politically valuable social capital attributes. Examples amongst African respondents included being successful in business, being prominent members of trade unions, having a media profile or being viewed as immigrant leaders or otherwise able to deliver immigrant votes.

Prior political socialisation emerged as a significant form of cultural capital amongst African respondents; of these a distinctive political habitus was evident whereby individuals had been acculturated into leadership roles, had pre-migratory experience of politics as party members or within political families, pointing to a cultural capital explanation for their involvement in Irish politics. Pre-migratory political socialisation did not emerge as a significant factor for East European candidates. The main identifiable form of accrued cultural capital seems to have been Catholicism which translated, in a predominantly Catholic host society, into a form of bridging social capital.

African religiosity, which was predominantly Protestant, did not translate into bridging social capital. Arguably the considerable efforts made by African candidates to integrate by joining Irish organisations sought to compensate for this. Africans

were considerably more “networked” than East European respondents. Africans were not merely involved in a greater number of associations, groups and networks but, more importantly, were involved in *both* immigrant and Irish organisations. East European respondents were far less likely to be members of Irish organisations other than political parties. Here some benefited from religious social capital; three of the four Polish respondents who were members of Fine Gael were active Catholics and two of these referred to social contacts with local members of that party as instrumental in their joining political parties or being selected as candidates. All three Eastern European respondents who were members of Fianna Fáil described themselves as practicing Catholics again suggesting that having the same religion as the host community worked for them as a form of bridging social capital. For some Polish respondents religious social capital fulfilled the same bridging role as being active in Irish organisations did for some African respondents.

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