

# Political Participation of Immigrants through Voting and Representation: The Case of Norway<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

As immigrants are often under-represented in the political arena, in recent years, political participation of immigrants has become one of the most significant issues in many immigrant receiving countries in Europe. Based on secondary data, this paper has examined the political participation of immigrants in Norway through discussions of immigrants' voting turnouts and representation in Norwegian local and national level elections. The analysis has showed that immigrants had a lower turnout and lower representation rate in both previous Norwegian local and national elections, when compared to native Norwegians. Indeed, voting turnout was significantly low in the case of non-naturalized immigrants with Asian, African, Latin American, and Eastern European backgrounds. For instance, whereas total voting turnouts were 59 percent and 61 percent respectively in the 2003 and

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2007 local elections, in the case of immigrants these rates were only 25 percent and 28 percent respectively. On the other hand, in the case of representation, the analysis revealed that though immigrants had some representation in municipalities, at the national level their representation was almost negligible. There have been only 3 immigrant origin representatives in Norwegian Parliamentary history who were directly elected. Therefore, this paper has concluded that immigrants are underrepresented in Norwegian politics, considering the total immigrant population, voters, and their proportionate participation rates.

**Keywords:** Norwegian Immigrants, Political Participation, Voting Turnout, Representation

## Introduction

Immigrants and their children comprise a growing group of society's members in many European countries. However, they are underrepresented in the political arena of many European countries. It was been shown that immigrants and their descendents were not considered as potential citizens for a long time in many European immigrant receiving countries, as such, they were not expected to be politically active in those host societies. In this regard, political and collective affairs were not of their concern as they were treated as guests, and were expected to work and to be active only in economic roles (Martiniello, 2005). However, since the 1970 the voting right of non-citizen has emerged as a political agenda in many European countries; especially in local level election for EU and non-EU national (Groenendijk, 2008).

In Norway, currently, migration and ethnic relations have emerged as an important topic of debate, especially the issue of immigrants' political inclusion into this host society. Indeed, it showed that whereas Norway had traditionally been a migrant sending country during the late nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century, it turned into a significant receiving country after the Second World War (Bergh and Bjørklund, 2010). Hence, there has been an increase in immigration in Norway in the recent decades and Norway has become an ethnically diversified country like other Scandinavian countries. However, it has been argued that this increased ethnic diversity is a challenge for Norway because this small country has always had a homogenous population and relatively low levels of social and political conflict when compared to other Scandinavian countries (Bengtsson et al 2010). Nevertheless, like many others European countries<sup>3</sup> Norway considered some category of third countries non-citizen immigrant's political participation, especially in the local level elections, e.g. in Municipality. However, it was not until 1983 when Norway offered voting rights to foreign nationals and since then, immigrants who had at least continuously three years legal residence, enjoyed voting rights as well as the right to compete as candidates in municipal election (Bergh and Bjørklund, 2010). Immigrants who have Norwegian citizenship are enjoying full political rights like other citizens. Thus, in national election, immigrants with Norwegian citizenship can participate like the native Norwegian (ibid).

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<sup>3</sup> Sixteen European countries such as Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, six cantons in Switzerland, and the United Kingdom offered to some category of third countries non-citizen immigrant's participation in local election (Groenendijk, 2008:3).

The main objective of the paper is to examine the political participation of immigrants in Norway. In order to explore political participation, the voting turn out and representation of immigrants in Norwegian previous local (municipality) and national (parliament) elections were examined. It is worth mentioning that this study used the term immigrants to mean people who were born outside Norway or whose parents were born outside Norway. Because in Norway the lexical definition of immigrants are used i.e., the place of birth is the main indicator of the definition of immigrant (Brunborg, 2009). In attempting to answer the research objective, the paper first discusses briefly meaning and dimensions of political participation, and the immigration history in Norwegian society focusing on the number of immigrant voters. It then examines the voting and representation patterns of immigrants in some previous Norwegian Elections. Finally, concluding remarks are drawn based on the findings.

## **Methodology**

This paper on the one hand, discusses the history of immigration in Norwegian society based on several authors' discussions in different books, journals and academic papers. On the other hand, the data used for examining voting and representation of immigrants in the Norwegian elections is collected from the secondary sources that include several available electoral statistical sources such as the Statistics Norway, International Migration Report (SOPEMI report for Norway), and some other academic documents about Norwegian Municipality and Parliamentary Elections. These electoral data mainly highlighted the political participations of immigrants with background of Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern European, Western Europe, North America, and Oceania living in Norway. Therefore, this paper mainly focuses on these groups of immigrants.

## **Political Participation: Meaning and Dimension**

It is shown that political participation is voluntary activities where people are involved directly or indirectly to influence the political outcome. In this regard, De Rooij (2011) formulated a definition of political participation by analyzing Brady (1999) and Verba et al (1995). According to her, “political participation is voluntary activities of ordinary people who are directed towards influencing directly or indirectly political outcomes at various levels of the political system”. She argued that these activities could be grouped into types, or modes, which are characterized by different dimensions that influence the choice of individuals between certain acts of participation. Therefore, De Rooij (2011) highlights that in present time two types of political dimensions are observed and those are shaping the pattern of political participation. The first dimension, which indicates pattern of political participation, that is associated with cost; some activities are costly and some others are less costly (De Rooij, 2011). For instance, political activities like voting in election, boycotting certain products or signing petition are identified as less costly activities, whereas contacting politicians, working in community groups, or demonstrating are identified as costly activities (ibid). The second dimension mainly indicates two types of political participation: conventional and unconventional. Here, conventional political activities are voting, campaigning, working in political party or association, conduct with politicians or governments etc. However, the activities like boycotting certain products, signing petitions, taking part in public demonstrations are examples of unconventional political participation (ibid).

On the other hand, Martiniello (2005) has addressed political participation as the active dimension of citizenship that introduces

individual in various ways to become part in the management of the collective affairs of a certain political community. Like the above-mentioned De Rooij's idea, Martiniello also classified political participation into conventional and unconventional. As he points out: "Unlike a lot of political science research, political participation cannot be restricted to conventional forms, such as voting or running for election. It also covers other and less conventional types of political activities, such as protests, demonstrations, hunger strikes, boycotts etc" (ibid).

Moreover, Richardson (1983, as cited in Thomas et al, 2012) recognized political participation as a foundation of democracy. She defines participation as "citizens taking part in the formulation and/or implementation of policy decisions". Richardson (ibid) argues that practically political participation is being expressed through indirect and direct participation. While direct participation happens with face-to-face interaction among the government official and their consumers, indirect participation involves with voting and pressure group membership, which is usually done by citizens with a view to affect the policy decision.

Therefore, the aforementioned discussion indicates that political participation is one kind of action by the people where they involved with different types of political activities, which can be divided into conventional, and unconventional, high cost activities and low cost activities, and direct and indirect participation. This paper attempts to highlight voting turnout and representation of immigrants that are included into conventional political participation. Indeed, among these two types of political participation, first one, i.e. voting turnout falls under low cost activities, in contrast, political representation is under high cost activities.

## History of Immigration in Norwegian Society

It is shown that Norway has traditionally been a country of emigration and has been considered as a late comer in immigration (Borchgrevink & Brochmann, 2003). For instance, until late nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century, it was mainly a migrant sending country. However, it turned into a significant receiving country after the Second World War since it emerged as an economically developed industrialized nation (Bergh and Bjørklund, 2010). And in recent time, it has experienced increased immigration and has become an ethnically diversified country like other Scandinavian countries. Norway experienced the same pattern of immigration wave like Sweden and Denmark- labour migration during the 60s and 70s, asylum seekers in the 80s and 90s, and a new wave of immigration started by the labour migration in the 2000s (Bengtsson et al, 2010).

During the 1960s, the first group of immigrants arrived in Norway as labourers from the third world countries. In this case, the largest group of migrants was from Pakistan followed by immigrants from Turkey (Bergh and Bjørklund, 2010). In 1970, the numbers of immigrant people reached about 3500 and that was roughly 0.1 percent of the Norwegian population. Later, in spite of restrictive immigration policies, statistics show that Norway received a large number of immigrants in the last decades. That was mainly caused by refugee immigration, asylum seekers and family reunification (ibid). In this connection, the changing situation of Europe in the 1990s was so vital. For instance, during this time the Cold War was over, Eastern Europe entered into democratic development due to the collapse of Soviet Union. Likewise, political and economic integration in the Western part happened and several tensions after Cold War happened like Balkan war (Brochman and

Kjeldstadil, 2008). Consequently, number of immigrants increased during this time in Norway.

In present time, statistics Norway (2011a) has estimated that a total of 420000 immigrants from the non-Nordic countries immigrated to Norway between 1990 and 2009. Among them 26 percent came as labour immigrants and another 26 percent were refugees whilst 11 percent arrived as students with residence for pursuing education. Besides, 23 percent came with family reunification with someone already in Norway and 16 percent accepted residence as they had established a family. The same source also indicates that in present time the total immigrant population is 600900 persons, that is, 12.2 percent of the total population of Norway. Among this total number of non-Western immigrant, Pakistani is the largest immigrant group who are just after Poles and Swedish. As illustrated in table 1 below, one can see that the Poland and Sweden comprise the largest migrant groups in Norway. However, among the foreign national with non-Western background, Pakistani is the largest immigrant group in Norway. There are further a large number of people from Iraq, Somalia, Vietnam, Iran, Turkey, Philippines, and Kosovo.

Table 1: Top ten foreign nationalities in Norway (2011)

| <b>Country Name</b> | <b>Number of Immigrants</b> |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| Poland              | 60610                       |
| Sweden              | 34108                       |
| Pakistan            | 31884                       |
| Iraq                | 27 827                      |
| Somalia             | 27 523                      |
| Vietnam             | 20 452                      |



|             |        |
|-------------|--------|
| Iran        | 16 957 |
| Turkey      | 16 430 |
| Philippines | 14 797 |
| Kosovo      | 13 303 |

Source: Østby (2013:18)

With the increase in the number of immigrants, there has also been an increased growth of immigrant's eligible voters in Norway. According to the SOPEMI report for Norway (2010), the main causes behind these increased numbers of immigrant voters are recent high immigration trends and age distribution of immigrants. Voters from immigrants with the background of Asia, Africa and South-America increased by 45 percent from 1999 to 2003 and 45 percent during 2003 to 2007 (SOPEMI report for Norway, 2010). In total, immigrant voters have increased by 50000 people between Local Election 2003 to 2007. Thus, in 2007 election, a total of 280000 immigrants were eligible to vote which constitute 7.7 percent of total Norwegian voters. Among the immigrant background voters, in this election 143000 were Norwegian citizens whilst foreign citizens were 137000 (Aalandslid, 2009). Besides, immigrants from Asia were the highest in number (100000) followed by Western European (60,000) and Eastern European background (40,000) (ibid). On the other hand, in recent local elections 2011, there were a total of 386700 immigrant persons entitled to vote that comprised 10.2 percent of total voters (SOPEMI report 2011). Compared to the elections in 2007, this is an increase of 106700 persons. Thus, immigrant voters are increasing, where the highest increasing rate have seen among the immigrant from Asia.

## Results and Discussion

### Immigrants' Political Participation in Norwegian Local Elections

#### Voting Turnout

Table 2 (below) presents election data about voting turnout of migrants in the last three different municipal elections of Norway. The general impression of this table is that migrants' electoral participation in local elections in Norway has been low. For instance, it shows that [Table 2] whereas overall electoral participation was 59 percent in the 2003 local election, 62 percent in 2007, and 65 percent in the election of 2011, in the case of immigrants with foreign citizenship, it was only 38 percent, 34 percent and 36 percent respectively. Besides, in the case of naturalized immigrants, i.e., Norwegian citizens with immigrant background, the turnout was 41 percent in 2003, 40 percent in 2007, and 43 percent in 2011. Thus, Norwegian citizens with immigrant background had a higher turnout than that of foreign citizens; however, while compared to the total turnout this electoral participation was low.

Table 2: Voting turnout in local elections among immigrants in Norway

| Electoral Turnout                  | Local Election |       |       |
|------------------------------------|----------------|-------|-------|
|                                    | 2003           | 2007  | 2011  |
| Total                              | 59             | 62    | 65    |
| Immigrant with Foreign Citizenship | 34             | 36    | 32    |
| Male/Female                        | 33/35          | 34/39 | 29/35 |
| Naturalized Immigrant              | 41             | 40    | 43    |
| Male/Female                        | 41/41          | 39/42 | 42/44 |

Source: Author's own elaboration based on SOPEMI report for Norway (2010, 2011) & Statistics Norway (2011b)

However, it is noteworthy that among the immigrant voters [Table 2], female electoral turnout rate was higher than that of male. For instance, among the immigrant voters with foreign citizenship, female had 35 per cent voting turnout in 2003, 39 per cent in 2007, and 35 per cent in 2011, whereas men had 33 per cent, 34 per cent, and 29 per cent respectively. Similarly, women turnout rate was also highest among the naturalized immigrant voters in 2007 and 2011; only in the case of 2003 election, there was no difference between men and women in electoral participation.

Nevertheless, there was also a variation in migrant electoral participation in terms of immigrants' country background. It is evident that [Table 3] Norwegian immigrants with Western background had higher electoral participation than that of non-Western. For instance, Norwegian citizens with immigrant background from Western Europe and North America and Oceania voted 64 per cent in 2003, 64 per cent in 2007, and 60 per cent in 2011 election. In the case of Norwegian citizens from Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe, this participation rate was 36 per cent, 37 per cent, and 40 per cent respectively. Likewise, immigrant voters with foreign citizenship from Western Europe, North America, and Oceania voted 39 per cent in 2003, 42 per cent in 2007, and 34 per cent in 2011. However, the turnout was 25 per cent, 28 per cent, and 30 per cent respectively in the case of Asia and others. If the voting turnout is analyzed according to the individual country, it has shown that immigrants from Sri Lanka had the highest turnout among the non-Western immigrants in 2003 (57 per cent), in 2007 (51 per cent), and in 2011 (57 per cent) election (Statistics Norway, 2011c). In the case of immigrants with Western background, the highest turnout was for Germans (51 per cent) in 2003 and for Germans and Danish (48 per cent) in 2007 and for Danish citizens (73 per cent) in 2011 election (ibid).

Table 3: Voting turnout in local elections based on immigrants' country background

| Immigrants' Background                                      | Local Election |      |      |
|---|----------------|------|------|
|   | 2003           | 2007 | 2011 |
| <b>Immigrants with Norwegian Citizenship</b>                |                |      |      |
| Western Europe, North America, and Oceania                  | 64             | 64   | 60   |
| Asia, Africa, Central- and Latin America and Eastern Europe | 36             | 37   | 40   |
| <b>Immigrant with Foreign Citizenship</b>                   |                |      |      |
| Western Europe, North America, and Oceania                  | 39             | 42   | 34   |
| Asia, Africa, Central- and Latin America and Eastern Europe | 25             | 28   | 30   |

Source: Author's own elaboration based on SOPEMI report for Norway (2010, 2011) & Statistics Norway (2011b).

Therefore, the aforementioned discussion reveals that immigrants have lower electoral participation in terms of voting turnout; especially immigrants with non-Western background that is immigrants from Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe have lower participation rate compared to immigrant from Western countries.

## Representation

In this study, migrant representation in politics is explained by identifying their representation among nominated candidates and elected candidates in the local elections of Norway. First, Table 4 reviews that representation of migrants in Norway. The table presents statistical information of the two recent elections of Norway. Elections under the review are local election of 2007 and local election of 2011.

Table 4: Nominated and elected immigrant representatives in municipal elections

| Year of Election | Number of Candidates | Number of Migrant Candidates |  | Total Elected | Elected Migrant Candidates |                           |
|------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|--|---------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
|                  |                      | Total                        | Asia & others non-Western <sup>4</sup> |               | Total                      | Asia & others non-Western |
| 2007             | 62500                | 1800<br>(2.9%)               | 1026                                   | 11000         | 223<br>(2%)                | 140                       |
| 2011             | 59500                | 2100<br>(3.5%)               | 1596                                   | 10952         | 268<br>(2.4%)              | 180                       |

Source: Author's own elaboration based on SOPEMI report for Norway 2010 and 2011, and Statistics Norway (2011b).

Above table shows that in the Norwegian election 2007, there were 1800 nominated candidates with a migrant background (2.9 percent of the total candidates) standing in the elections; out of which 223 were elected. It is worth mentioning that the majority of these immigrant candidates (1026) and elected immigrant representatives (140) were from Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe and South America. On the other hand, Norway had in total 2100 migrant candidates (3.5 percent of the total) in the 2011 election where majority had the non-Western background-Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe and South America. With regard to elected

<sup>4</sup> This category included immigrant with background of Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe and Latin America

candidate, in this election, among the total migrant elected candidate (268), majority (180) had the Asia and others non–Western background.

Even though the nominated and elected immigrant candidates had different countries of origin, some countries had the highest representation. For instance, in 2007 election [Table 5], nearly half of the candidates were from seven countries. These include Iran (100 candidates), Bosnia- Herzegovina (77 candidates), Pakistan (59 candidates), Iraq (56 candidates), Sri Lanka (50 candidates), Somalia (48 candidates), and Turkey (43 candidates). On the other hand, the largest nationalities [Table 5] that elected in the Norwegian local election 2007 were Iranian (20), Pakistani (18), Iraqi (8), Sri Lankan (8), Somali (8), and Turkish nationals (6). In terms of Gender dimension, based on a single country of origin, there was a huge gender gap recognized. For instance, in the case of 2007 election, a large number of the candidates with background of Asia and Africa were Male [Table 5]. This is also evident in the case of Muslim countries' migrant candidates and elected candidates. For example, in the 2007 election, most of the migrant candidates with Muslim country background- Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Turkey- were male.

Table: 5: Nominated and elected immigrants<sup>5</sup> by country and gender in local election 2007

| Country                | Nominated Migrants    |                |               | Elected Migrants     |               |               |
|------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|---------------|----------------------|---------------|---------------|
|                        | ( Number and Percent) |                |               | (Number and Percent) |               |               |
|                        | Male                  | Female         | Total         | Male                 | Female        | Total         |
| Iran                   | 64<br>(6.2%)          | 36<br>(3.5%)   | 100<br>(9.7%) | 14<br>(10%)          | 6 (4.3%)      | 20<br>(14.3%) |
| Bosnia-<br>Herzegovina | 43(4.2%)              | 34<br>(3.3%)   | 77<br>(7.5%)  | 3 (2.1%)             | 2 (1.4%)      | 5 (3.5%)      |
| Pakistan               | 44<br>(4.3%)          | 15<br>(1.5%)   | 59<br>(5.8%)  | 12<br>(8.6%)         | 6 (4.3%)      | 18<br>(12.9%) |
| Iraq                   | 39<br>(3.8%)          | 17<br>(1.6%)   | 56<br>(5.4%)  | 4(2.9%)              | 4 (2.9%)      | 8 (5.8%)      |
| Sri Lanka              | 36<br>(3.5%)          | 14<br>(1.4%)   | 50(4.9%)      | 5 (3.6%)             | 3 (2.1%)      | 8 (5.7%)      |
| Somalia                | 34<br>(3.3%)          | 14<br>(1.4%)   | 48<br>(4.7%)  | 5 (3.6)              | 3 (2.1%)      | 8 (5.7%)      |
| Turkey                 | 31<br>(3.0%)          | 12<br>(1.2%)   | 43(4.2%)      | 5(3.6)               | 1 (.75%)      | 6 (4.3%)      |
| Others                 | 263<br>(25.6%)        | 330<br>(32.2%) | 593<br>(57.8) | 28<br>(20%)          | 39<br>(27.9)  | 67<br>(47.8%) |
| Total                  | 554<br>(53.9%)        | 472<br>(46.1%) | 1026<br>(100) | 76<br>(54.4%)        | 64<br>(45.6%) | 140<br>(100)  |

Source: Author's own elaboration based on the data from Aalandslid (2009).

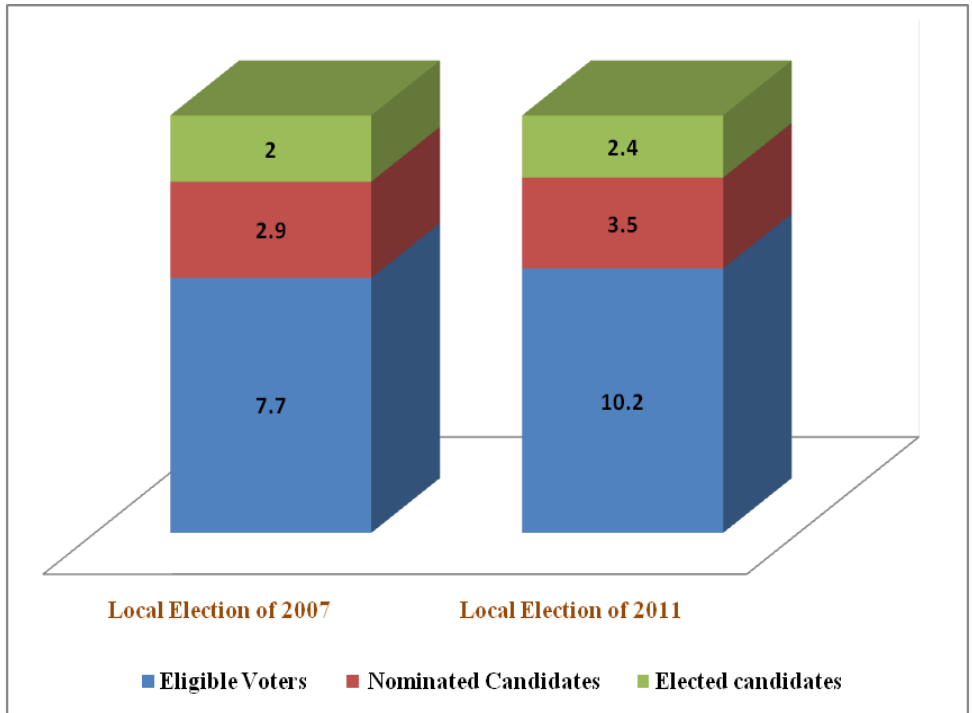
<sup>5</sup> Immigrant with background of Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe are presented in the Table 5.

Moreover, with regard to the political party, data on previous elections shows that the main two Norwegian political parties from where most of the migrants were nominated belonged to Labour Party and Socialist Left Party. However, the Norwegian Labour Party had nominated significantly more candidates than any other political party in the elections. For instance, in 2007 election, 78 migrants were nominated from the Labour party on their candidates list, followed by the Socialist Left Party (25); Conservative Party (10); Progress Party(7), and Liberal Party (6) (Aalandslid, 2009:131).

Taken as a whole, this section has delineated the fact that, migrants in Norwegian local elections have lower representation. This scenario is highlighted in the Figure 1. First the Figure 1 shows that in the 2007 election migrant voters that entitled to vote were 7.7 percent (SOPEMI Report for Norway, 2010:70) of the total eligible voters. However, migrant nominated candidates and elected candidates were 2.9 percent and 2 percent respectively [Table 4]. Second, Figure 1 also highlighted that in total 10.2 percent (SOPEMI Report for Norway, 2011:66) of the migrants in Norway had the right to vote in the local election 2011. However, their representation among the nominated candidates and elected candidates were 3.5 percent and 2.4 percent only [Table 4]. Thus, immigrants are underrepresented in the Norwegian Local politics.



Figure 1: Immigrants' political participation in Norwegian local elections (%)



Sources: Author's own elaboration based on the data of SOPEMI report for Norway (2010 & 2011).

Apart from the above examination, if we compare migrant representation with the number of immigrant population of Norway, we are also able to conclude that there is a significant under representation of immigrant in Norwegian Local politics. For example, it already showed that the total share of immigrant population was 12.2 percent in 2011. But as presented in Figure 1, the nominated candidate was 3.5 percent and elected representative was 2.5 percent only. Nevertheless, the situation of migrant under political representation in Norwegian society

is also evident in the investigation of Bergh and Bjørklund (2010:134). According to their calculation, in Norway, proportionately the immigrant elected representative should be 208 for the case of non-Western immigrants. Nevertheless, we find it [Table 4] 140 in the election 2007 and 180 in the election of 2011.

## **Immigrants' Political Participation in Norwegian National Elections**

Citizenship is a precondition to participate in the Norwegian national election, i.e., parliamentary elections. It should be noted that unlike most Western European countries, the Norwegian Parliament- the *Storting*- is elected for a four-year term. This section reviews the available electoral data in order to present the current situation of migrant political participation in the national elections of Norway through analyzing immigrants' voting turnout and representation.

### **Voting Turnout**

Table 6 (below) presents electoral data about voting turnout of Naturalized immigrants, i.e., Norwegian Citizens with an immigrant background, in the last two national elections (Parliamentary election) of Norway that held in September, 2009 and September, 2013 respectively. It shows lower voting turnout of immigrants like the previously discussed local elections. Whereas in the national election 2009 [Table 6], the total voting turnout was 76 percent, it was only 52 percent among Norwegian citizens with an immigrant background. Thus, the electoral turnout rate of immigrants is 24 percent lower than that of total electoral turnout in this election. On the other hand, 53 per cent of Norwegian citizens with an immigrant background voted in the national election of 2013. However, this turnout among those immigrant was

much lower, a difference of 25 percent, from that of total turnout (78 percent).

Table 6: Electoral turnout in percent among the naturalized immigrants

| <b>Electoral Turnout</b>                           |                                  | <b>National Election</b> |           |
|--|----------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|
|  |                                  | 2009                     | 2013      |
| <b>Total Turnout</b>                               |                                  | <b>76</b>                | <b>78</b> |
| Turnout of<br>Naturalized<br>Immigrants            | <b>Total</b>                     | <b>52</b>                | <b>53</b> |
|  | Male/Female                      | 52/52                    | 50/55     |
|  | <b>Western Europe</b>            | <b>76</b>                | <b>76</b> |
|  | Male/Female                      | 74/78                    | 76/76     |
|  | <b>Eastern Europe</b>            | <b>44</b>                | <b>47</b> |
|  | Male/Female                      | 43/45                    | 45/49     |
|  | <b>North-America and Oceania</b> | <b>74</b>                | <b>64</b> |
| Male/Female  | 76/72                            | 60/67                    |           |
| <b>Asia, Africa, South and<br/>Central America</b> | <b>51</b>                        | <b>51</b>                |           |
| Male/Female  | 51/50                            | 49/53                    |           |

Source: Author's own elaboration based on the data of Statistics Norway (2009, 2013).

However, the above table shows that voting turnout varies considerably by immigrants' country of background. In general, we find the highest participation rates among the immigrants with Western European backgrounds (76 percent in both elections) closely followed by North-America and Oceania (74 percent in 2009 and 64 percent in 2013). The turnout for those with an Asian, African, South and Central American background was much lower (51 percent both in 2009 and 2013). Nevertheless, there was also a variation in migrants' electoral participation in national elections in terms of their country of birth. For

instance, in the last national election of 2013, according to the Statistics Norway (2013) among the immigrants with European background, German, Danish, and Swedish had the highest participation of all immigrant groups (81, 81, and 75 percent respectively) which was close to the total electoral turnout. Besides, among the immigrant group, Croat, Macedonian, and Kosovan turnout was much lower than that of total migrants' turnout of the national election of 2013, with just below 40 percent. On the other hand, among the migrants with the background of Asia, Africa, South- and Central America, the highest electoral participation rates in the 2013 national election were from Sri Lanka, Somalia, Eritrea, and Philippines, each of which had almost a 60 per cent turnout (ibid). In this election, among this immigrant group, the lowest turnout was from Iran and China that was below 40 percent (ibid).

Moreover, with regard to gender dimension, it is evident from the table 6 that in most of the cases women had the higher participation than that of men. For instance, in the national election of 2009, the participation rate was the same for men and women, with 52 per cent. Likewise, female voters with a background from Western Europe, Eastern Europe had a higher participation than males from their same country background. Indeed, in the 2013 election, fifty-five per cent of women with an immigrant background voted compared to 50 per cent of men. In this election, except of the Western European migrants, among others- Eastern Europe, North, South and Central America, Oceania, Asia, and Africa- female had the highest participation than that of men voters of their regions; Western European men and women voters had equal participation. However, in both elections among all migrant groups, females with a background from Western Europe and North America and Oceania had the highest participation while females from Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe had the lowest. Nevertheless, some

countries women had a lower voting participation. For instance, female voters with a background of Kosovo, Iran, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ethiopia, India, and Afghanistan had lower participation than that of their male voters in 2013 election and female voters from Pakistan, India, Iran, Iraq, Morocco, Kosovo, and Bosnia-Herzegovina had a lower turnout than from their male voters (Statistics Norway, 2013).

Thus, immigrants have lower electoral participation in terms of voting turnout in the Norwegian National Elections; especially immigrants with Non Western background that is immigrants from Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe have lower participation rate compared to immigrant from Western countries. However, most of the cases, female migrants voters have the higher turnout than the male migrants do.

## Representation

The data regarding immigrant candidates in Norwegian national elections are not available in the existing electoral data source- SOPEMI Report for Norway and Statistics Norway. However, it has shown that in the Norwegian parliamentary election history only three immigrant candidates were directly elected<sup>6</sup>. Table 7 focuses on these three elected immigrant representative. Among them, *Afsan Rafiq*, with a background of Pakistan, was the first non-western representative who was elected as a candidate of the conservative party in the Norwegian parliament in 2001. The second immigrant background elected parliamentary member was *Saera Tithi Khan* of Bangladeshi origin who was elected in 2005 election as a Labour Party candidate. The third one is Pakistani origin Hadia Tajik who was elected in the election of 2009 as a candidate of the Labour party.

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<sup>6</sup> This calculation is up to 2009 election.

Table 7: Elected Member from Immigrant Community in Norwegian Parliament

| Name             | Gender | Political Party    | Year of Election | Background            |
|------------------|--------|--------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Afshan Rafiq     | Female | Conservative Party | 2001             | Pakistani Norwegian   |
| Saera Tithi Khan | Female | Labour Party       | 2005             | Bangladeshi Norwegian |
| Hadia Tajik      | Female | Labour Party       | 2009             | Pakistani Norwegian   |

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the data of Bergh and Bjørklund (2010) and Predelli (2011).

Apart from these three elected parliamentary members, a small number of immigrants also participated in Norwegian Parliament as deputies; who were not directly elected representative but recruited as second in command of elected members as their replacement (Bergh and Bjørklund, 2010:136). Among these immigrants politician, *Athar Ali* from Red Electoral Alliance, *Shabaz Tariq* and *Khalid Mahmood* from Labour Party, and *Aktar Chaudhry* from Socialist Left Party are mentionable, who served Norwegian Parliament for a definite period (ibid). Besides, a few immigrant political personalities served the national government through achieving political position in the executive branch (ibid). For instance, *Ramin-Osmundsen*, a Caribbean woman, was the first black minister who was appointed as minister for children and equality in October 2007 (Predelli, 2011:198).

With regard to immigrants' representation in the Norwegian Parliament, though the above discussion indicates there are a few successes, but in

terms of immigrant population, these examples are not significant to become a perfect representation. This lower political representation of immigrants is also evident in the study of Bergh and Bjørklund, (2010). They explored that the Norwegian immigrant people who have Asian, African and Latin American background constitute 5.2 percent of the total population. Therefore, according to their calculation immigrants' representation in Norwegian parliament should be 9 among the total 169 parliament representatives. But this is not shown in the Norwegian National election history as only 3 representatives achieved this position in the history and that never been exceed number one (ibid). Thus, these findings indicate that there is a significant under-representation of immigrant in Norwegian national politics.

## **Conclusion**

This paper aimed to explain the political participation of immigrants in Norway through analyzing migrants' voting turnout and representation in local and national elections of Norway. Accordingly, in conclusion, with regard to the research objective, the findings of this study indicate the following. First, concerning political participation in the local elections, based on the findings, we may conclude that their political participation is very low; they are politically less active and under-represented, in Norway. Our findings showed that immigrant had on average 20 to 30 percent lower electoral participation than that rest of the population in the previous local elections. In particular, their participation is significantly low in the case of non-naturalized immigrant with the background of Asia, Africa and Latin America and Eastern Europe. However, it is worth mentioning that in both cases, immigrants with Western and non-Western background, women had a higher turnout in the last Norwegian local elections. Besides, we are also able to conclude that there is a significant under-representation of immigrant

in Norwegian local politics when compared to native Norwegians. Indeed, the analysis have shown that though immigrants have some success in the local elections with regard to elected candidates, compare to the total immigrant population, immigrant voters, and immigrants proportionate participation rate, it is clear that immigrants are under-represented in Norwegian local politics. Second, with regard to the political participation in the national elections, our analysis showed that the electoral turnout rate of immigrants is 24 percent and 25 percent lower than that of total electoral turnout in the last two national elections respectively. Furthermore, in the national level, their representation is very negligible as we found only 3 immigrant's origin representatives in Norwegian Parliamentary history that ever directly elected in the Norwegian parliament. Thus, in light of Bergh and Bjørklund (2010) it has been arguable that though immigrants in Norway have some representation in the local political level, but at national level, i.e., in Norwegian parliament, their representation is very much negligible.

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