



## Ethnic Minority Migrants in Britain and France: Integration Trade-offs

Jan Willem Duyvendak

To cite this article: Jan Willem Duyvendak (2015): Ethnic Minority Migrants in Britain and France: Integration Trade-offs, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, DOI: [10.1080/1369183X.2015.1123858](https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2015.1123858)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2015.1123858>



Published online: 30 Dec 2015.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 3



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

## BOOK REVIEW

Rahsaan Maxwell, **Ethnic Minority Migrants in Britain and France: Integration Trade-offs**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 274 pp., £60.00 hb. (ISBN 978-1-107-00481-8)

Rahsaan Maxwell has written an intriguing and elegant book regarding the often puzzling integration processes of migrants. Why do some groups make much progress in some fields (economics, politics) while not being socially integrated, while other groups seem socially far better integrated but less represented in politics and in the work force? By studying various groups in different contexts (as well as France and Germany he explores the situation in the Netherlands and the USA), Maxwell is able to develop a theory regarding the possible relationships between social integration on the one hand, and political and economic participation on the other. His claim is fairly straightforward: more social integration goes hand in hand with less political and economic participation, while ethnic minority groups which are not that well socially integrated will use group mobilisation to do better in the economic and political field.

I like this hypothesis for a couple of reasons. In the first place, it is a much better way of looking at immigrant integration than the 'national model' approach that was dominant in migration studies for far too long. National models could not explain differences among groups within one and the same country, whereas Maxwell's approach is more sensitive to group differences: not all groups are treated in the same way by mainstream society, and the various strategies these groups employ are proof of that (and show their agency!). Moreover, national models often suggested that immigrant groups did equally badly (or well) in all spheres, whereas Maxwell helps us understand the reasons for differences with regard to different kinds of integration within one and the same group. Secondly, Maxwell tries to identify mechanisms that may explain integration outcomes, instead of the far too structuralist approaches of the past that at best showed correlations between country indicators and the integration of newcomers (and often these indicators were rather inadequate; see Duyvendak et al. 2013).

Maxwell shows quite convincingly, I think, that trade-offs can be made. This is, perhaps, not a very surprising insight but it is an important one. The history of many marginalised groups can be understood along these lines: why were Jews so strongly represented in (certain) economic activities? (because of limitations in other fields); why are many African-Americans so good in sports? (because that was—and is—often the only possibility of being socially mobile); why were Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgenders quasi-absent in politics but (over)represented in certain cultural activities?, etc.

Whereas in an ideal, just world, à la Michael Walzer, spheres should be totally separated (one's position in one sphere should not affect one's position in another), Maxwell shows that often spheres are not separated but communicating vessels: minorities have the possibility of 'compensating' in the economic and political sphere for their weak results in social integration, just as a high level of social integration affects their integration in other spheres, albeit in a negative way. Maxwell even claims that social integration necessarily *hinders* political and economic integration.

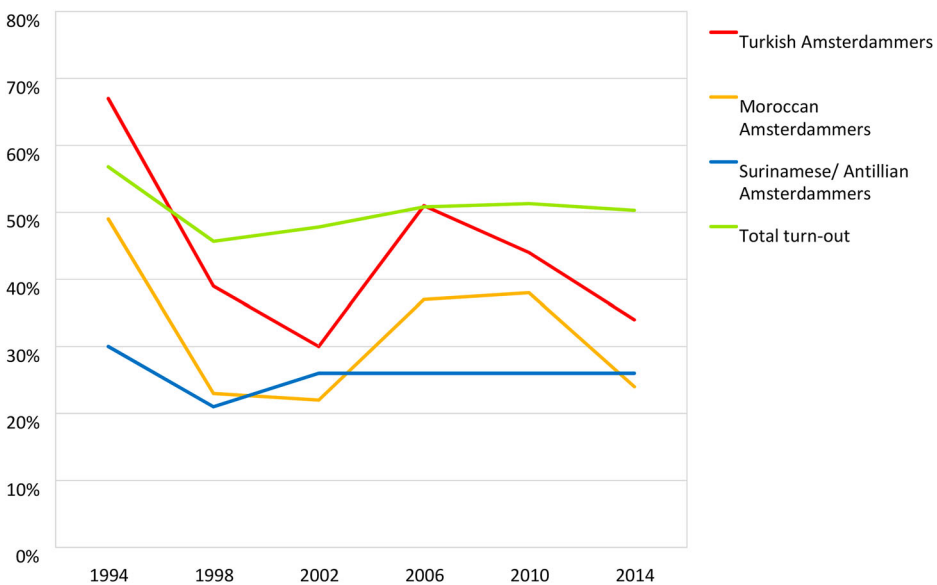
I do agree that these trade-offs can take place, but Maxwell overstates his point: why would relations between the social spheres on the one hand, and the political and economic sphere on the other, always and exclusively be zero-sum? Can social integration never correspond with high levels of political participation? And conversely: is not it often the case that low levels of

social integration co-occur with economic and political marginalisation? In other words, why not leave the option open that as well as *zero-sum*, spheres can relate as *win-win* and *lose-lose*?

Let us start with his claim that socially segregated groups have greater capacity for group mobilisation because they are more likely to depend on co-ethnic networks for survival. From the perspective of social movement studies, this is quite an unusual claim: in most recent collective action theorising (e.g. the political process approach) the capacity for group mobilisation is not that dependent on ‘internal’ networks in addition to external ones (opportunities and resources). Maxwell, however, does not consider social acceptance as a potential external resource for group mobilisation in politics but exclusively as an obstacle: ‘Social integration outcomes have reduced the capacity for group mobilization and hindered economic and political integration’ (10). For sure, he does acknowledge that dependence on migrants’ own networks will not be effective for migrants’ mobilisation in all cases, thereby introducing two intervening variables: independent financial resources and group size.

Can we understand the political integration of Dutch migrants, the case that I know best, along these lines? Based on the research of specialists in migrant political participation (Michon and Vermeulen 2013), my understanding is that the rather high level of political participation by Dutch Moroccans and Dutch Turks (see Figure 1) is not due to their own independent financial resources, but at least partly thanks to external support (political opportunities and subsidies for migrant ‘self-organizations’). In the Dutch case—and I would guess in many others as well—some societal acceptance and integration can go hand in hand with financial support enabling groups to organise and opportunities to effectively mobilise. Moreover, the decline in mobilisation of these two groups parallels decreases in subsidies and external support for ethnic mobilisation, rather than a decline in their own financial resources, let alone an increase in social acceptance. On the contrary, the decline in political mobilisation in the past 15 years has happened in a period of increased Islamophobia and decreasing social acceptance.

What then about the differences between post-colonial migrants (Surinamese and Antillean) on the one hand, and immigrants from Morocco and Turkey on the other, the former



**Figure 1.** Turnout municipal elections in Amsterdam 1994–2014.

Source: Kranendonk et al. (2014, p. 9).

having a lower level of political representation, the latter a higher one? Maxwell explains these differences with reference to the higher level of social integration of the Dutch Surinamese, which undermines their collective mobilisation. I tend to disagree with this explanation. First of all, even though there are differences among these groups, they are not stable at all, the Moroccans having an even lower turn-out in the last elections than the Surinamese! Secondly, a great deal has changed in the social acceptance of Dutch post-colonial migrants in the past 20 years (it has increased significantly), but this is not mirrored in their very low political activity from the start (whereas Maxwell's model would predict a decline in political mobilisation with the rise of social acceptance). This makes me, thirdly, conclude that more factors should be taken into account to explain political mobilisation than the degree of social integration and the size and strength of their own networks, including finances (see also Bloemraad 2013).

For instance, the political history of migrants seems to play an important role in relation to the political cleavages in the country of arrival. Guest workers, in particular Turks, identifying from the moment of their arrival as left-wing, often organised in all kind of political organisations. From their arrival on, Dutch left-wing political parties have been in close contact with these organisations, supporting them in all possible ways. This support has decreased in recent decades, as have government subsidies for Turkish and Moroccan organisations, leaving them on their own. In Maxwell's model, this would be the ideal situation for mobilisation: nothing better than relying on one's own networks and resources! The opposite has happened, however, since political activity has decreased, whereas the migrants' networks and independent financial resources have remained strong.

In other words: Maxwell's model is in some ways too *isolationist*: political integration is not (always) positively correlated with a lack of social integration and withdrawal into one's own group. The opposite happens as well: political integration may take place thanks to a supportive and welcoming broader society. It is not always zero-sum, it can sometimes be *win-win*.

Moreover, his model overlooks the possibility of a *lose-lose* situation, and in that sense it is slightly too *optimistic* since he assumes that a negative situation often leads to a positive outcome elsewhere. However, that is too good to be true. Even though Dutch Turks and Moroccans still have strong networks and independent financial resources, increased Islamophobia and decreasing social acceptance cause declining political participation and low levels of economic integration, particularly for young Moroccan men, the least socially accepted.

Paradoxically, his belief in trade-offs makes him overly *pessimistic* at the same time. He writes as a personal note that he finds it difficult to digest that increased social integration of African-Americans would impede their economic and political integration. But is this necessarily the case? Look at other minority Americans who made it into the mainstream: do they have a negative trade-off in terms of economic and political integration? Of course not; on the contrary. Minorities can become so well socially integrated, that a real *win-win-win* situation develops.

Hence, my claim is not that Maxwell's thesis cannot be true; it sometimes is. But I think it is an overstatement. There are cases where relationships are not zero-sum, but win-win or lose-lose. And there might even be situations in which social integration is not a very crucial variable to explain political and/or economic integration. Other factors may count far more.

The advantage of such a straightforward thesis as Maxwell's is that it can be tested empirically. But even though I think it can and should be rejected, that does not mean that it has no value. It has value, at some times, in some places, under certain circumstances. The world is far too complex to be summarised in just one model of trade-offs.

## References

- Bloemraad, I. 2013. "Accessing the Corridors of Power: Puzzles and Pathways to Understanding Minority Representation." *West European Politics* 36 (3): 652–670.
- Duyvendak, J. W., R. van Reekum, F. El-Hajjari, and C. Bertossi. 2013. "Mysterious Multiculturalism. The Risks of Using Model-Based Indices for Making Meaningful Comparisons." *Comparative European Politics* 11: 599–620.
- Kranendonk, M., L. Michon, H. Schwarz, and F. Vermeulen. 2014. *Opkomst en stemgedrag van Amsterdammers met een migratie-achtergrond tijdens de gemeenteraadsverkiezingen van 19 maart 2014*. Amsterdam: IMES Report.
- Michon, L., and F. Vermeulen. 2013. "Explaining Different Trajectories in Immigrant Political Integration: Moroccans and Turks in Amsterdam." *West European Politics* 36 (3): 597–614.

Jan Willem Duyvendak

University of Amsterdam

✉ w.g.j.duyvendak@uva.nl

© 2015 Jan Willem Duyvendak

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2015.1123858>