



Behind the ethnic–civic distinction: Public attitudes towards immigrants' political rights in the Netherlands



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ABSTRACT

Public opinion research has sought to distinguish between ethnic and civic conceptions of citizenship and examined the differential associations of these conceptions with policy preferences in the realm of immigration. What has not been examined empirically is why exactly these conceptions are related to people's preferences. In two survey studies conducted among national samples of native Dutch we tested the proposition that the endorsement of ethnic citizenship is related to lower acceptance of Muslim immigrant rights (Study 1) and their political participation (Study 2) because of a weaker normative sense of common national belonging and higher adherence to autochthony (primo-occupancy) beliefs. In contrast, the endorsement of civic citizenship was expected to be associated with higher acceptance of Muslim immigrant rights and their political participation because of a stronger sense of common belonging and lower belief in autochthony. The findings of the two studies are similar and in support of these expectations.

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1. Introduction

The distinction between ethnic and civic citizenship is widely used in the literature to differentiate between policies and legislation of nation-states (e.g., Brubaker, 1992; Koning, 2011; Smith, 1991). Survey research in different national contexts has shown that these alternative conceptions and criteria of national belonging also emerge side by side as contrasting normative images among the public (e.g., Hjerm, 1998; Jones and Smith, 2001; Levanon and Lewin-Epstein, 2010; Reeskens and Hooghe, 2010). Furthermore, there is quite some empirical evidence that an ethnic conception of nationhood has negative consequences for attitudes towards immigration and support for immigrant rights, whereas a civic conception often, but not always, tends to have more positive consequences (e.g., Hjerm, 1998; Reijerse et al., 2013; Wright et al., 2012). Yet, the precise underlying reasons explaining why the endorsement of ethnic and civic representations differently affect attitudes towards immigration issues remains rather general in current theoretical discussions and has, to our knowledge, not been examined empirically. Ethnic and civic representations define membership criteria that can stimulate the endorsement of specific normative beliefs that provide a justification for the acceptance or rejection of immigrants. The aim of the current research is to set a first step in the direction of finding out why exactly these association exist by considering two mediating constructs – common dual belonging and autochthony – in the relationship between the endorsement of ethnic and civic citizenship conceptions and the acceptance of immigrants' rights and their political participation.

In two survey studies conducted among national samples of native Dutch we tested the proposition that the endorsement of ethnic citizenship is related to lower acceptance of immigrant minority rights and their political participation because of a

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weaker sense of common dual belonging and higher adherence to autochthony beliefs. In contrast, the endorsement of civic citizenship was expected to be associated with higher acceptance of immigrant rights and political participation because of a stronger sense of common belonging and lower belief in autochthony.

2. Common dual belonging

A key question for understanding the public's subjective definition of nationhood is how the line is drawn between the national ingroup ('us') and outsiders ('them'). This boundary demarcates the limits to fellow-feeling and loyalty within a diverse society (Gaertner and Dovidio, 2000; Theiss-Morse, 2009; Transue, 2007). All citizenship criteria define 'outsiders' but there are large differences in how inclusive ethnic and civic citizenship criteria are.

Ethnic citizenship defines the national group as a community of people of shared descent. In terms of the 'common ingroup identity model' (Gaertner and Dovidio, 2000) this implies a one-group representation whereby there is a preference for cultural homogeneity and conformity to the native majority. The implication is that immigrants who do not have native majority ancestry cannot fulfill the ascribed, fixed citizenship criteria and therefore do not (fully) belong. In accordance with this, research has consistently found that an ethnic citizenship understanding is associated with negative attitudes towards immigrants, immigration policies, minority rights and multiculturalism (e.g., Kunovich, 2009; Pehrson et al., 2009; Reijerse et al., 2013; Wright, 2011; Wright et al., 2012).

In contrast, a civic representation emphasizes respect for the basic civic principles of society, which makes it relatively easy for immigrants to be included. In principle, anyone can belong provided that certain fundamental norms, rules and institutions are accepted. Within a civic representation there is the possibility of a normative sense of common dual belonging (Dovidio et al., 2007) whereby cultural differences are acknowledged and accepted in the context of a shared national identity. Although there are some exceptions (e.g., Kunovich, 2009; Schildkraut, 2007), research in the European and the US context has found that measures of civic understanding are associated with positive attitudes towards immigrants, minority rights and multiculturalism (e.g., Meeus et al., 2010; Reijerse et al., 2013; Wright et al., 2012).

Whereas ethnic citizenship is exclusionary towards immigrants, civic citizenship can be seen as more inclusive. In an ethnic perspective, cultural differences are believed to undermine a sense of national unity, whereas these differences are acceptable in a civic perspective. These different beliefs about unity and cultural diversity can be assumed to underlie the relations between citizenship conceptions and the acceptance of immigrant rights and their political participation. The endorsement of an ethnic conceptualization can be expected to be associated with a lower normative sense of common dual belonging and therefore with lower acceptance of immigrant rights and their political participation. In contrast, the endorsement of a civic representation can be expected to be associated with a higher sense of common dual belonging and via belonging with higher acceptance of rights and political participation.

3. Autochthony

In anthropology the term autochthony is used for the belief that a place belongs to those who 'are from the soil' and therefore are entitled to it (Ceuppens and Geschiere, 2005; Geschiere, 2009). This relates to ethnic nationhood in which the principle of territory is added to that of lineage which is central in ethnicity (Weber, 1968). Thus, while ethnicity and ethnic nationhood share an emphasis on common ancestry they differ in the fact that the latter implies territorial claims. For many people, nationhood is about homeland and being able to decide about homeland affairs. The term autochthony literally means being 'born from the soil', and 'the link with the land, central to the notion of autochthony, gives it a strong territorializing capacity, outlining – in a more or less symbolic way – a clearly defined "home"' (Geschiere, 2009, p. 29). Autochthony typically involves the claim of primo-occupancy with the related sense of ownership and entitlements, including the right to protection against newcomers: it has an 'implicit call for excluding strangers' ("allochthons"), whoever they may be' (Ceuppens and Geschiere, 2005, p. 386).

In political theory the term 'historical right' refers to the right to a piece of land because of first occupancy (Gans, 2001; Murphy, 1990), and autochthony is a strong justification for territorial and nationalist sovereignty claims and a core issue in violent conflicts and war (Toft, 2014). Autochthony claims are also used to exclude newcomers and to justify prejudice towards immigrant-origin groups in Western Europe. The past 20 years have witnessed an upsurge of autochthony in countries, such as the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, and Denmark (Ceuppens, 2011; Geschiere, 2009). Autochthony has become a key notion in discussions about immigration and minority rights among the far right and also for middle-of-the-road parties. In these countries arguments about primo-occupancy are increasingly evoked to exclude immigrants from full participation in the receiving society. Survey and experimental research has shown how autochthony is related to and causes opposition towards minority rights (Smeekes et al., 2014) and ethnic prejudice (Martinovic et al., 2015). The notion of autochthony is particularly salient in the Netherlands where it was introduced as a policy term in the 1980s.

Autochthony differs from ethnic conceptions of belonging that can be independent of territorial borders, as for example among the Roma or other nomadic people. Whereas ethnicity concerns belonging in terms of common origin and blood ties, autochthony and the related sense of ownership and entitlements define belonging as being historically rooted in place (Geschiere, 2009). Yet, we propose that an appeal to autochthony is particularly likely among people who endorse an ethnic conception of citizenship. Those who consider national belonging in terms of ancestry and blood are more likely to agree

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