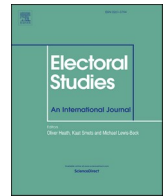




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What are we missing? Explaining immigrant-origin voter turnout with standard and immigrant-specific theories

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1. Introduction

Large-scale immigration is one of the most prominent challenges facing developed countries around the world. As a direct consequence of these demographic changes, the number of voters with an immigrant background is steadily increasing. As these ‘immigrant-origin voters’ – who we define as first- or second-generation immigrants¹ now holding the citizenship of their country of destination – often cluster in bigger cities or regions, they can easily become decisive for electoral majorities. However, immigrant-origin voters will only be able to translate demographic influence into political power if they decide to participate in elections. For political scientists, the crucial question is thus how to explain immigrant-origin voter turnout.

In theoretical terms, we can summarise existing findings by differentiating between two perspectives: (1) The electoral turnout of immigrant-origin voters can be explained by the same theories that we use for native citizens. In short, the well-established *standard approaches of electoral research* are also applicable to immigrant-origin voters. (2) In contrast, standard models of electoral research might not be sufficient to explain the electoral turnout of immigrant-origin voters. Rather, *immigrant-specific approaches* might be more relevant or might decisively moderate the impact of standard explanatory variables. Most prominently, the roles of ethnic networks (e.g. Fennema and Tillie, 1999; Jacobs and Tillie, 2004), ethnic identity (e.g. Schildkraut, 2005; Valdez, 2011), and discrimination experiences (e.g. Schildkraut, 2005; Oskooi, 2018) have been discussed.

What motivates this research note is not establishing a new approach to explain immigrant-origin voter turnout but to rigorously test the theoretical perspectives against each other. For this, we take up a standard electoral research perspective and ask what immigrant-specific

approaches have to offer in terms of additional explanatory power. We focus on Germany, where approximately 10 percent of the electorate is now made up of immigrant-origin voters, coming especially from Turkey (1.2 percent) and the former Soviet Union (3.2 percent) (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2017). Using a recent high-quality survey of immigrant voters carried out after the German federal election of 2017 - where the reported turnout rates of immigrant-origin voters were found to be 15 to 20 percentage points (67–74%) lower than for the native population (88%) - we (1) compare the drivers of immigrant-origin and native voter turnout; (2) add immigrant-specific variables to the standard model; (3) test for possible interaction effects of standard and immigrant-specific variables, and (4) address potential differences between immigrant-origin groups. After standard electoral research approaches are fully controlled for, our findings give very little support for the relevance of immigrant-specific variables. By and large, inter-individual differences of turnout between immigrant voters and between native voters follow the same logic and can adequately – but not fully – explained by standard electoral research approaches.

2. A standard model of turnout

Notwithstanding the prominence of research interested in the determinants of individual turnout, defining a standard model is anything but straightforward. A recent meta-review by Smets and van Ham of 90 empirical articles published in leading journals between 2000 and 2010 concludes: ‘the embarrassment of riches [is] a rather accurate depiction of the current state of voter turnout research’ (Smets and van Ham, 2013, p. 356). The authors identify no less than 170 independent variables used to explain voter turnout, and only eight of them are included in at least 25 percent of all reviewed studies. Smets and van Ham thus

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¹ We focus on first- and second-generation immigrant-origin voters for comparability reasons with recent results from Europe (e.g. Heath et al., 2013), thereby also applying the dominant approach in political integration research. Furthermore, due to their recent immigration history, only a low share (~8 percent) of post-Soviet German voters belong to the second generation.

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conclude that there is no agreed-on core model for explaining voter turnout, leaving us with the task of defining a convincing version of such a model on our own. We do this by (1) starting with the list of the eight most widely used independent variables identified by Smets and van Ham (2013), and (2) adding those concepts already successfully applied in previous studies on turnout in Germany (for a recent review see Schäfer et al., 2016). As a result, our standard model of voter turnout includes: gender, age (and age²), education, income, marital status, organizational membership, satisfaction with democracy, party identification, political interest, political efficacy and social trust, as well as a dummy variable for regional origin (West or East Germany). With socio-economic as well as civic (Verba et al., 1995), social psychological (Campbell et al., 1960), mobilization (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993) and group-based resources (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948), our standard model covers all major theories of turnout.² At the same time, it is restricted to variables that should be available from recent election surveys. Importantly, this standard model does not include any immigrant-specific variables.

3. Immigrant-specific approaches to voter turnout

After having formulated a standard model of voter turnout applicable for immigrant-origin as well as native voters, we now turn to the immigrant-specific approaches. As we will confine our analysis to those with German citizenship, we restrict ourselves to concepts that are potentially relevant for this group, excluding, for instance, legal status beyond German citizenship. Also, generational effects, length of stay in the host country, and language proficiency³ are surely relevant and important variables for immigrant-origin voters' political participation, especially in studies where information on political attitudes is not available (e.g. Ramakrishnan and Espenshade, 2001). However, we will treat them here only as controls as from a theoretical point of view, they are causally distant from turnout and their effects are mainly mediated by other, causally more close concepts. Here, we focus on three of the most prominent immigrant-specific ones: *ethnic networks*, *(ethnic) identity*, and *discrimination experiences*. We present our line of reasoning for focusing on those three concepts and pay special attention to their linkages to the standard approaches described above.

3.1. Ethnic networks

The first immigrant-specific approach points to the mobilising capacity of social capital provided by ethnic networks. In their initial study of Turks and Moroccans in Amsterdam (Fennema and Tillie, 1999), identify a macro-link between the political participation of ethnic minorities and their network of ethnic associations (e.g. religious

² In the US context, partisan mobilization i.e. if and how often parties and candidates reach out to/contact voters, was shown to be an important predictor of turnout in general and of immigrant turnout specifically in studies by Wong et al. (2005); Fraga et al. (2012); Valenzuela and Michelson (2016). Closely related, immigrant group size was found by Fraga (2018) to be positively related to turnout, as immigrant groups become more attractive for politicians' mobilization strategies with increasing size. However, partisan mobilization is far less common in Germany (and other Western democracies), e.g. almost 50 percent of US but only 13 percent of German voters report mobilization attempts in the campaign as it was shown by Karp and Banducci (2007). We found neither an effect of group size on the local level nor of partisan mobilization, and thus do not include these variables in the German standard model in order to keep this more parsimonious.

³ Furthermore, as our sample only includes German citizens, language proficiency is high: 96% of respondents were judged by interviewers as proficient enough to participate in German, thus including proficiency as an explanatory variable does not add much information. In addition, while repeating all analyses including a self-rated and an interviewer-rated variable for German-language proficiency, no significant effects were found.

associations, clubs, immigrant organisations, etc.). They argue that ethnic networks create civic virtues among their members, which then spread to a wider circle of immigrants which is only loosely connected to the inner network. In the same way, Jacobs and Tillie (2004, p. 421) maintain that 'voluntary associations create social trust, which spills over into political trust and higher political participation'. Ethnic network effects have been tested extensively at the local level, e.g. for Amsterdam (Tillie, 2004), Berlin (Berger et al., 2004), and Brussels (Jacobs et al., 2004) but the results about voter turnout are mixed. Two particular points of critique lead to a reformulation of the initial argument. First, the focus on co-ethnic social capital should be accompanied by forms of cross-cultural social capital embedded in mainstream organisations, such as trade unions. The second critique calls for a more nuanced picture of ethnic organisations and the social capital they might provide. This leads to the introduction of the concepts of 'bridging' and 'bonding' social capital. While bridging capital connects immigrants with autochthonous networks, bonding capital links them to their co-ethnic network. Bridging capital is expected to increase political participation, but bonding capital might actually prevent immigrants from engaging in the politics of their host society (e.g. Tillie, 2004).

Looking at the ethnic network approach from an electoral studies perspective, it should be noted that such network arguments have a long tradition in political participation research. As early as 1963, Almond and Verba observed a positive correlation between active engagement in voluntary associations and subjective political competence. Also, the effect of organizational membership – be it in ethnic or social organisations such as unions and sports clubs – played a central role in the works of the Columbia school (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948). In summary, embeddedness in social networks seems to foster political participation among immigrants and non-migrants alike, and the core moderating variables of the ethnic network approach – social trust and political interest – are already incorporated in our standard model.

3.2. Ethnic identity

Scholars concerned with the political participation of immigrant-origin groups also point to social psychological factors, specifically ethnic identity – the second immigrant-specific approach. According to the social identity approach (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), social categorisations are cognitive instruments that are used to systematically order the social environment into in-groups and out-groups. Whatever informal or formal group individuals associate with, constitutes their in-group; an out-group includes individuals who do not share the same salient social traits. For immigrant-origin voters, the most relevant self-assigned category can be expected to be 'ethnic identity' ('race' in the US context), in contrast with 'national identity' which relates to their host society, as we also deal with naturalised immigrants. Conceptualising possible combinations, we build on the work of Berry (1984) who distinguishes between four types of cultural adaptation, depending on the degree of identification with the cultures of the country of origin and the country of destination. The possible resulting forms of cultural adaptation are *assimilation* (sole identification with the culture of the country of destination); *separation* (sole identification with the culture of the country of origin); *marginalisation* (identification with neither culture), and *integration* (identification with both cultures). Taking Germany as an example, assimilated immigrants (i.e. those feeling strongly 'German') might be expected to show the greatest level of political participation, while strong ethnic identifiers (those feeling 'Turkish' or 'Russian') might not have developed the emotional linkages to Germany to be interested in German politics at all. However, while some degree of identification with the host society is seen as necessary to mobilise for political action, more recent studies provide evidence that 'dual identification' ('integration' in Berry's words) provides immigrants with more satisfaction about their situation than do the other forms of cultural adaptation, thereby stimulating participation (Simon and Grabow, 2010; Fischer-Neumann, 2014).

Looking at the ethnic identity approach from a standard electoral studies perspective, assimilation, separation or mixed forms of identification obviously are concepts that are less relevant for native voters. However, and as with the ethnic network approach, the central moderating variables of the identity approach – political interest and satisfaction with the political system – are already incorporated in our standard model. We will thus see what remains to be explained for identity variables once the standard variables are controlled for.

3.3. Discrimination

Finally, the third immigrant-specific approach highlights the role of discrimination experiences in the country of destination. Broadly defined, discrimination entails drawing a distinction through judgements or actions in favour of, or against, a person or a group, based on any characteristic. For immigrants, discrimination based on ethnicity, race, or immigrant history can surely be expected to play a prominent role (Schildkraut, 2005). Discrimination might come in several sub-forms, depending on whether it is perceived personally or as discrimination against the in-group (Sanders et al., 2014), and also depending on the person or institution doing the discriminating, who might be a random person on the street, a political party, or even the government (Oskooii, 2018). Because of these different nuances, the potential effects of discrimination on voter turnout are not easily summarised.

On the one hand, a substantial body of public health research on discrimination and psychological well-being shows that exposure to discrimination is associated with feelings of inferiority, insecurity, powerlessness, and depression (see Oskooii, 2018 for an encompassing review) – all variables that are known to reduce the likelihood of voting (Ojeda and Pacheco, 2017). Most importantly for our research interest, Brehm and Rahn (1997) demonstrated that victims of discrimination from racial and ethnic minority groups tend to have lower levels of general trust and confidence in political institutions – psychological resources which themselves are known to correlate with turnout. On the other hand, there is also convincing empirical evidence that discrimination might increase political participation, especially the participation of ethnic minorities. If victims of discrimination do not trace back discrimination experiences to themselves as individuals but to their membership of a group, their feelings of shared identity, group attachment, linked fate or group consciousness can be strengthened (Sanchez, 2006). As discussed in the ethnic identity section, such a sense of connectedness might well encourage group members to become politically cohesive and active, as, for instance, the mobilization of Latino immigrants in the US has shown (Stokes, 2003).

Whatever the effects of discrimination are, it should be noted that many of the moderating variables discussed in discrimination studies are also prominent variables of standard electoral research. Specifically, social trust, political efficacy, social networks, and trust in the political system are psychological and social attachments also commonly used in standard electoral studies. Only by controlling for them, we will be able to see what the additional effects of perceived discrimination are when we now turn to our empirical investigation into the context of Germany.

4. Data and methods

To test the explanatory power of standard and immigrant-specific approaches against each other, we use data from the *Immigrant German Election Study* (IMGES), a survey done after the German federal election of 2017. IMGES targets the two biggest groups of immigrants in Germany, people from Turkey and from the former Soviet Union and its successor states, and includes only German citizens. For our analyses, we restrict the sample to all respondents aged 18 and older, resulting in a total sample of 750 immigrant-origin voters. While the IMGES data will be the basis for our analysis of immigrant voters, we use the *German Longitudinal Election Study* (GLES) for our baseline models for native

voters (Roßteutscher et al., 2018). We can use GLES with confidence because IMGES imitated the set-up of GLES regarding sampling framework, survey mode, field time, and questionnaire design. We excluded the 301 respondents with a first- and second-generation migration background from the GLES data, resulting in a sample of 1430 native voters.

Turnout was measured with a dichotomous question to indicate whether respondents voted in the federal election 2017. The operationalisation of the standard electoral survey items (gender, age, age,² education, income, marital status, organizational membership, satisfaction with democracy, party identification, political interest, political efficacy and social trust) resembles the operationalisation of other studies using GLES data (Schäfer et al., 2016). Refer to the [Online Appendix \(Table OA1\)](#) for the precise coding of the data.

The immigrant-specific items were only measured in IMGES. For potential ethnic network effects, we asked whether respondents had participated in any activity organised by any of nine listed organisations during the previous 12 months. Additionally, we asked whether more than half of the members of each organisation that the respondent identified as being a member of originated from the same country as the respondent. For *bridging capital*, we counted all organisations in which the majority of members were not from the same country of origin. For *bonding capital*, we counted all organisations in which the majority of members were from the same country of origin. Both variables ranged from 0 to 9. *Identification* was measured on a five-point scale as the sense of feeling like a group member (1 ‘does not apply at all’ to 5 ‘totally applies’). We asked all respondents whether they felt ‘German’, and additionally we asked Germans of Turkish descent whether they felt ‘Turkish’ or ‘Kurdish’, and Russian-Germans whether they felt ‘Russian’ or ‘Russian-German’. Finally, we constructed a classification of identity, that separated individuals into those who felt strongly (a value > 3) ‘German’, or strongly as members of an immigrant group, strongly as being part of both groups (dual identifiers), and those not reporting any strong identity. For *discrimination*, we first employed a filter question that asked respondents whether they would describe themselves as being members of a group that is discriminated against in Germany (yes/no). We then asked why the group is discriminated against, e.g. because of its ethnic origin, language, gender, disability, or religion. Those that named ethnic origin, language, and/or religion as reasons were then asked how often they experienced discrimination in five domains within the last five years, such as at the work place or by the police, on a three-point rating scale: often, sometimes, rarely. We calculated the mean frequency of discrimination over all five domains, resulting in a variable with values from 1 (seldom discrimination) to 3 (very frequent discrimination). All respondents who did not describe themselves as being part of a discriminated group were coded as 0. Furthermore, we controlled for *immigrant group* (Turkish/Russian) and included a variable for *time spent in Germany*. For this, we divide the time that has elapsed since respondents migrated to Germany in years by their age (similar see Bergh and Bjørklund, 2010). The ratio ranges from 0.02 to 1 (1 for second generation immigrants that lived all their life in Germany). The bivariate correlations for all variables are reported in the [Online Appendix Tables OA2 \(GLES\) and OA3 \(IMGES\)](#).

5. Results

[Table 1](#) shows the results of seven weighted⁴ logistic regression models (labelled M1 to M7 in the table) with turnout as the dependent variable showing average marginal effects. Model 1 shows the standard electoral research model for the group of native voters and is based on the GLES data. Model 2 resembles Model 1 for the group of immigrant voters using IMGES data. While a direct comparison of both models is naturally affected by the different sample sizes, the general picture is

⁴ Post-hoc weights that adjust for unit nonresponse.

Table 1
Logistic regressions on turnout for native and immigrant voters; average marginal effects.

	GLÉS	IMGES	IMGES	IMGES	IMGES	IMGES	IMGES
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6 (Turkish)	M7 (Russian)
Gender: female	0.01 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.04)		-0.06 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.04)	0.03 (0.06)	-0.05 (0.06)
Age in years	0.33 (0.21)	0.54 (0.74)		1.27 (0.77)	0.65 (0.75)	-1.66 (1.26)	2.10* (0.95)
Age ²	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)		-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)
Education (base: low)							
Education: middle	0.03 (0.03)	0.14* (0.06)		0.16** (0.06)	0.16** (0.06)	0.21** (0.08)	0.09 (0.07)
Education: high	0.08** (0.03)	0.17* (0.07)		0.20** (0.07)	0.17* (0.07)	0.26*** (0.07)	0.09 (0.08)
Income log	0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)		0.00 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.02)
Origin: West Germany	0.04* (0.02)	-0.07 (0.07)		-0.09 (0.07)	-0.07 (0.07)	-0.05 (0.09)	-0.09 (0.09)
Partnership	0.06** (0.02)	0.05 (0.05)		0.05 (0.05)	0.05 (0.05)	0.04 (0.06)	0.06 (0.07)
Organisation member	0.09 (0.07)	0.02 (0.12)			-0.06 (0.20)	0.19 (0.24)	-0.31 (0.32)
Satisfaction: Democracy	0.07 (0.04)	0.01 (0.10)			0.02 (0.10)	0.00 (0.15)	-0.06 (0.12)
Party identification	0.04* (0.02)	0.16*** (0.04)			0.15*** (0.04)	0.22*** (0.05)	0.13* (0.06)
Political interest	0.21*** (0.04)	0.40*** (0.10)			0.38*** (0.09)	0.24* (0.11)	0.39** (0.13)
Internal political efficacy	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.08)			-0.02 (0.08)	-0.14 (0.10)	0.12 (0.11)
Social trust	-0.01 (0.04)	0.15 (0.09)			0.14 (0.09)	0.19 (0.10)	0.15 (0.11)
Identification (base: more foreign)							
no identification			0.09 (0.09)	0.09 (0.08)	0.08 (0.07)	-0.00 (0.08)	0.15 (0.10)
more German			0.17** (0.06)	0.13* (0.06)	0.07 (0.06)	0.01 (0.07)	0.07 (0.07)
dual identity			0.11 (0.07)	0.09 (0.06)	0.06 (0.06)	-0.02 (0.07)	0.11 (0.07)
Discrimination index			0.00 (0.10)	0.00 (0.09)	0.03 (0.08)	-0.02 (0.09)	0.13 (0.15)
Bridging capital			0.21 (0.18)	0.13 (0.16)	0.13 (0.24)	-0.04 (0.31)	0.29 (0.31)
Bonding capital			0.13 (0.18)	0.07 (0.18)	-0.01 (0.23)	0.24 (0.33)	-0.34 (0.35)
Time spent in Germany			0.06 (0.12)	0.13 (0.15)	0.06 (0.13)	0.10 (0.22)	0.17 (0.20)
Group (base: Turkish)			-0.01 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.06)		
N	1430	750	750	750	750	365	385
McFadden's R ²	0.19	0.14	0.03	0.07	0.15	0.25	0.18
McFadden's Adj R ²	0.16	0.11	0.01	0.03	0.10	0.14	0.10
AIC	754	807	896	873	815	352	444
BIC	833	876	938	947	921	438	531

***: $p < 0.001$, **: $p < 0.01$, *: $p < 0.05$; Standard error in parentheses; all AME are rounded to two numbers after the decimal point.

that the same standard model explains voter turnout in both groups, with political interest, education, and party identification being the most important independent variables. The more educated, politically interested, and party-affiliated individuals show a higher turnout. In contrast, the two variables living in a partnership and being of West German origin are not significant in the full immigrant sample, which leads to a closer model fit for the native population, as expressed by McFadden's R^2 (0.19 for M1 vs. 0.14 for M2). Also, note that none of the nonsignificant effects in the native sample (M1) are significant in the immigrant sample (M2). In summary, the standard model quite convincingly explains voter turnout for both native and immigrant voters.

Model 3 is based on the IMGES data and includes only immigrant-specific approaches: ethnic network, identity, discrimination effects, a dummy for group differences, and time spent in Germany. With the exception of one variable, none of these effects is significant. Only strong German identifiers show a significantly higher turnout compared with the reference category of strong immigrant group identifiers. This gives some support for traditional assimilation theories, while dual identity does not lead to effects passing standard thresholds of significance – without any control variables included. With regard to network effects, bridging capital is positively related to turnout – but this estimated effect is far from conventional levels of statistical significance. The same applies to the effect of bonding capital, which direction further varies between models. As discrimination experiences also show no significant effect on turnout, the model fit of the immigrant-specific model M3 is poor (adj. McFadden $R^2 = 0.01$). The next two models (M4 and M5) add standard electoral research variables in two steps: Model 4 adds basic socio-demographic variables, and Model 5 adds all standard model variables. This makes the only significant immigrant-specific effect of feeling German nonsignificant, while controlling for the immigrant-specific factors does not change the effect of the standard electoral research variables: political interest, party identification and education still explain immigrant voter turnout (M5). While not even one

immigrant-specific variable is significantly related to turnout in the fully-specified Model 5, the model fit is not increased when compared to the standard Model 1 (0.19 for M5 vs. 0.15 for M1), and a Wald test shows that adding immigrant-specific factors does not significantly enhance the model fit (for a graphical display of results see also [Figure OA1 in the Online-Appendix](#)). In summary, immigrant-specific approaches add no extra explanatory power to the standard model, nor are immigrant-specific variables strongly correlated with turnout in a bi-variate way.

6. Robustness tests

In order to validate these general findings, we estimated several additional models. We started by running separate models for the group of Turkish (M6) and Russian origin voters (M7), splitting up the IMGES sample. While there are differences between the two groups – education is a much stronger predictor in the former, age in the latter group – our general finding remains uncontested: in their total, standard approaches can explain immigrant-origin voter turnout quite well, with political interest and party identification being the most important variables. At the same time, most immigrant-specific variables do not have any effects on turnout – identity patterns being the only exception – and no immigrant-specific effect survives the inclusion of even modest effect controls. We also ran all models shown in [Table 1](#) without income and political interest, thereby increasing the number of cases and dropping possibly the most theoretically controversial independent variable (see [Table OA4](#)). Only one immigrant-specific variable turns out to be significant and it is again the one tapping into a strong host-country identity: strong German identifiers show a higher turnout than strong immigrant group identifiers by 13–17 percentage points. However, this effect is the weakest of any significant variable; party identification, education, and political efficacy are stronger drivers of turnout. We also tested for potential interaction effects between the immigrant-specific variables, especially for the quite prominently discussed interaction

between identity and discrimination (see e.g. Schildkraut, 2005), but without any significant results.

Next, we changed the reference category of the identity variable to ‘no identification’ and combined the bridging and bonding variables to an overall index of ethnic networks, although none of these changes lead to any meaningful results. To test whether our findings were affected by the chosen operationalisation for the immigrant-specific factors, we ran additional models using different ways of operationalisation for bridging and bonding capital (additive index as well as a ratio indicator, see Table OA5, M5b and M5c). Furthermore, we estimated additional models (Table OA6), one using only group-based discrimination (M5d), and one splitting up individual-level discrimination into societal and political discrimination (M5e). However, we obtained similar results, for both the baseline models and the full models.

In order to further investigate potential differences due to political socialisation, we split up the entire IMGES sample into first- and second-generation immigrant voters (Table OA7). This shows that the second generation is better described by the standard model than the first, but also that none of the immigrant-specific variables is significantly related to turnout in any of the sub-samples. Last, we estimate the main models M3, M4 and M5 without post-hoc weights, to show that our results do not rely on the used weights – we still find that immigrant-specific factors do not add to the explanation once the standard approaches are taken into account (Table OA8).

While all of these analyses confirm our general message that immigrant-specific approaches add little to our understanding of immigrant turnout, we have also carried out a final test for the explanatory power of the standard approaches (see Table OA9). For this, we have combined the full IMGES with the GLES sample for native voters and indicate immigrant voters with by two dummies representing a Turkish- and Post-Soviet immigration background. These models show that education, income, partnership, party identification, and political efficacy are relevant predictors for turnout in the combined sample. However, this analysis also reveals that both ethnic group dummies are still strong predictors for lower turnout even when all standard variables are controlled for. Thus, and notwithstanding the empirical irrelevance of the three main immigrant-specific approaches as presented above, we are also not able to fully explain turnout differences between immigrant and native voters by standard approaches alone.

7. Conclusion

In summary, we find that standard approaches can be used fruitfully to explain immigrant voter turnout in the 2017 German federal election, and immigrant-specific variables can add very little to them. Theoretically, this was what we expected, as most of the main moderating variables of ethnic network-, identity- and discrimination-approaches are already included in the standard model, leaving little else to be explained. However, most immigrant-specific variables are not even significantly related to turnout without controlling for standard electoral research approaches, host-country identity being the only exception. As these findings are unaffected by different model specifications, the inclusion of interaction effects, and as immigrant-specific variables also add little to our understanding if we analyse immigrant-groups separately, we have to conclude that scholars miss little by ignoring these approaches when analysing immigrant-origin voter turnout in Germany.

At the same time, we want to stress that the standard approaches cannot perfectly explain turnout differences between immigrant-origin and native voters. We would also like to remind the reader that we were here dealing only with immigrants with German citizenship – as only these are able to vote in national elections – and that immigrant-specific theories might be of more relevance to non-German residents and activities of non-formal political participation – both in Germany and in other countries for which we do not wish to generalize our findings. However, our results should remind scholars to control for

standard electoral research variables when analysing immigrants’ political behaviour in Germany or elsewhere.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2019.102103>.

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