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The Seniority Ceiling: Why Some Immigrants Struggle to Rise in Political Office

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Abstract

First-generation immigrants face a seniority ceiling that limits their political incorporation as candidates and officeholders. Career ladders that require qualification time in lower positions create structural barriers for this group. We use linked data from Swedish electoral ballots and administrative records to examine this idea. A novel identification strategy isolates the effect of seniority-based promotion structures from immigrant-specific disadvantages by comparing immigrants' incorporation patterns to those of internal movers—native-born Swedes who relocate between municipalities. The seniority ceiling explains about half of the immigrant-native gap in holding political positions and almost the entire gradient of worsening incorporation at higher levels. We find strong selection effects at both the individual and group level. The seniority ceiling restricts incorporation at higher career steps for those with fewer opportunities to accumulate qualification time: those who arrived more recently or at older ages.

JEL classification

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Keywords

immigration, political representation, political candidacy, political careers

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1. Introduction

Foreign-born individuals rarely become political candidates and officeholders. This group typically accounts for 15–20% of the population in OECD countries, but just 5% of these countries' parliamentarians (Hänni and Saalfeld 2020; see also Bird et al. 2011; Bloemraad and Schönwälder 2013; Geese and Saalfeld 2018). Many researchers and practitioners see threats to democracy in this absence. Key concerns include political decisions that fail to adequately reflect immigrants' collective interests, and lower legitimacy of the democratic system (Dahl 1971; Verba 2003; Bloemraad 2006; Bird et al. 2011; Wüst 2014).

Improving immigrants' political incorporation requires understanding which factors drive their absence. We theorize and test a novel explanation for first-generation immigrants' under-representation among political candidates and officeholders. Our explanation centers on political career ladders characterized by *seniority-based advancement*. Such ladders make upward promotion conditional on tenure length in lower positions. This creates a structural barrier—a *seniority ceiling*—for first-generation immigrants via two mechanisms. First and foremost, immigrants who have arrived more recently have had fewer years to accumulate qualification time for higher office. Second, and perhaps less obviously, people who immigrate at an older age have shorter time windows for doing so before "aging out" of the political career ladder.

We leverage detailed Swedish microdata to study whether foreign-born individuals (henceforth, immigrants) have worse political incorporation at higher political positions. We then analyze whether the seniority ceiling can account for the patterns that we observe. Digitized data from electoral ballots provides information about four rungs on Sweden's main political career ladder over a 50-year period (1973–2018). We perfectly match the data on political positions with administrative records for all residents of the country (1968–2022). This enables us to compare participation rates between immigrants and native-born in each position,

from the lowest level of local political candidacy to the highest level of being elected to parliament. Immigrants' relative probability to participate measures the concept of political incorporation. As described by Bloemraad (2006: 6), the group's political incorporation "is generally achieved when patterns of immigrant participation are comparable to those among the native-born" (see also Rogers 2006; and for a conceptual review, see Minnite 2009).

We develop an identification strategy that isolates the impact of seniority-based career advancement from other drivers of immigrants' political incorporation. This strategy relies on a comparison group of Sweden-born individuals who relocate between municipalities and are new to politics. *Native-born movers* face the same participation constraints from seniority-based career advancement as immigrants do, but are immune to immigrant-specific constraints such as language barriers or negative treatment by voters or parties based on immigrant status. Using them as a comparison group lets us determine how much of immigrants' deficit in political incorporation derives from general disadvantages imposed by seniority-based career advancement on any political newcomer. In other words, the strategy isolates the impact of the seniority ceiling from many other potential drivers of immigrants' absence from politics (e.g., Sen and Wasow 2016).

Our results document a pattern of worse incorporation at higher career steps. Immigrants are 50–70% as likely as natives to occupy lower positions (e.g., candidates or elected councilors in local politics), but only 35% as likely to be local party leaders or parliamentarians. Implementing our identification strategy ascribes about half of immigrants' deficit in incorporation at each career step to the seniority ceiling, and almost the entire gradient of worse incorporation at higher positions. Results from two placebo tests strengthen this interpretation. The ceiling has no impact on voting in elections (a participation behavior outside the political career ladder) or for second-generation immigrants (who are not more constrained by the seniority ceiling than other native-born of the same age).

We leverage our theory to analyze selection effects from the seniority ceiling across individuals and groups. The results show strong suppressive effects for individuals who arrived more recently, or at an older age. We also document larger group-level suppression for the incorporation of *non-Western* immigrants, who generally arrived in Sweden more recently than those from *Western* countries. This group dichotomization captures the main cleavage between ethnically differentiated immigrant minorities in Sweden (Bäck and Soininen 1998; Strömblad and Borevi 2004; Blomqvist 2005).

We find some evidence that the seniority ceiling varies by traits of political parties and neighborhoods. The results suggest that it suppresses immigrants' incorporation more in established compared to new political parties, and among people who settle in neighborhoods with fewer elected politicians. The latter suggests that the seniority ceiling is can be partly cracked by access to beneficial social networks.

Our paper contributes to a large research literature documenting that immigrant-origin individuals are under-represented among political candidates and officeholders (reviewed by Bloemraad and Schönwälder 2013; Hänni and Saalfeld 2020; Ghaem-Maghami and Kuuere 2022). We provide the first comparison of immigrants' incorporation at various rungs on a country's main political career ladder, documenting worse incorporation at higher steps for first-generation immigrants. Our comparative analysis of second-generation immigrants provides equally novel results for that group (contributing to earlier research by, e.g., Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001; Alba and Foner 2015).

Research on country-level determinants of immigrants' political incorporation highlights factors related to electoral and party systems, integration policies, citizenship regimes, and immigrants' population shares and geographic residence patterns (Bird 2005; Bird et al. 2011; Alba and Foner 2015; Bergh and Bjørklund 2011; Ruedin 2013; Bloemraad and Schönwälder 2013; recently reviewed by Hänni and Saalfeld 2020). Our paper makes theoretical and

empirical contributions to this literature. We draw on qualitative research (e.g., Soininen and Etzler 2006) to extend the theoretical understanding of immigrant candidates' political opportunity structure (Bird 2005). Our theory emphasizes how party-level traits such as the height of the career ladder and principles of promotion, interact with immigrant traits to form a crucial part of this opportunity structure.

Our empirical analysis provides the first causal evidence that seniority-based career advancement strongly determines patterns of immigrants' political incorporation. This result holds high external relevance, because career ladders with seniority-based advancement are common in political parties all over the world (Fenno 1973; Norris 1997, reviewed for different countries by Folke and Rickne 2025). This makes the career-ladder traits studied in this paper a major factor for understanding variation in immigrants' incorporation across countries and parties.

Our paper enhances the theoretical understanding of incorporation patterns across immigrant groups. A country's contemporary immigrant population is a function of its history of immigrant cohorts arriving from different places at different times. This creates a mechanical correlation between group-based traits and length of residence. Our paper demonstrates the fundamental importance of these histories for understanding present-day variation in incorporation of immigrant groups across the political career ladder.

The analysis of selection effects highlights novel traits with potential relevance for immigrants' substantive representation. Work in this area has shown, for example, that MPs with a visible immigration background ask more parliamentary questions about migration, ethnic diversity and equality (Saalfeld 2014; Wüst 2014; Bhatiya et al. 2025). Our paper offers a novel theoretical lens for analyzing these types of patterns. Prior research demonstrates that immigrants' political attitudes converge to those of the native-born population over time

(Krejcova et al. 2025). This makes the seniority ceiling directly relevant as a raster that selects immigrants with the most similar attitudes to higher positions.

The closest research to our uses Swedish microdata to examine drivers of immigrants' political participation. This work has rejected explanations rooted in immigrants' ambitions to run for local office (Dancygier et al. 2021) and found mixed evidence regarding residential concentration based on ethnicity (Lindgren et al. 2022; Andersson et al. 2022). Dancygier et al. (2015) compare probabilities to hold local elected office conditional on observable traits, and interpret a larger residual disadvantage for immigrants from non-OECD countries as discriminatory treatment by political parties. Our paper highlights likely omitted variable bias in their approach, which does not control for shorter lengths of residence among non-OECD immigrants.

Our findings advance research and practice for improving immigrants' political incorporation. They suggest that effective interventions should target parties' career structures and promotion principles, and cautions against policy design that do not take them into account. A large research literature demonstrates that discrimination from parties and voters makes immigrants less likely to enter and advance in politics (see, for example Portmann and Stojanović 2019, and Auer et al. 2025). Our paper lays the foundation for developing sharper tools to identify when discrimination occurs and designing prevention policies with a lower risk of backlash.

The paper makes two additional contributions to research in political science and economics. First, our identification strategy reveals that native-born individuals who relocate within a country are under-represented in local and national politics. These gaps are larger than previously identified in the case of voting (see, e.g., Hansen 2016 and Pardelli and Kustov 2025). Second, our findings contribute to broader research on immigrants' incorporation into the labor market. Examining political party data sidesteps common challenges of observability

and statistical power associated with analyzing career ladders using employer–employee data. Our analysis of career ladder traits in the political sector suggests a previously unexplored determinant of immigrants' economic integration across firms, occupations, or sectors in this large literature (recently reviewed by Brell et al. 2020; Fasani et al. 2022).

Sweden may present a "most likely case" for finding evidence of a seniority ceiling. It has a relatively large and increasing fraction of foreign-born residents (10% in 1990 and 20% in 2022, Statistics Sweden, www.scb.se). Several institutional features constitute a relatively favorable environment for this group to enter politics, including a list-based proportional representation system, a liberal citizenship regime, and generous integration policies (Soininen 2011; Geddes and Scholten 2016). These features likely provide more statistical power for analyzing impacts of seniority-based career advancement compared to countries with more restrictive institutional contexts and smaller foreign-born populations. And while seniority-based advancement is common, Swedish political parties have particularly strong seniority principles (e.g., Folke and Rickne 2025; Grahn and Håkansson 2025). Our results likely represent an upper bound relative to candidate-centered electoral systems where voters have greater relative influence over the selection of politicians.

2. The seniority ceiling in politics

Research shows that political parties often have predictable and comparable promotion ladders that politicians climb over the course of their careers (Fenno 1973; Hagevi 2010; Norris 1997). These ladders tend to start with low-paid positions in local politics and progress to more influential positions in national politics over time (reviewed by Folke and Rickne 2025). Promotion upward on political career ladders may depend on qualification time in lower positions. We label this institution *seniority-based career advancement*.

Several factors can give rise to seniority-based career advancement. Political parties' nomination and selection procedures may follow formal or informal seniority principles. Length of membership or party service are commonly used as formal criteria in parties' selection procedures (Gallagher and Marsh 1988). Other cases such as Sweden have strong seniority principles that operate as norms rather than formalized rules (Soininen and Etzler 2006, Brothén 1996, Grahn and Håkansson 2025).

A norm of seniority-based promotion may arise from the commonplace structure of local-to-national political careers. When political career ladders have fewer higher than lower positions, and politicians tend to occupy those higher positions for some time, this creates a queue of lower-level officeholders waiting to advance. This may increase the importance of lower-level tenures as a selection criterion for promotion (Soininen and Etzler 2006). Voters' candidate choices may introduce seniority-based career advancement if they positively value candidates' experiences in lower offices when voting for higher ones.

Two main mechanisms put first-generation immigrants at a disadvantage in contexts with seniority-based career advancement. One mechanism operates via *length of residence*. New immigrants arriving in a country need time to become party members, integrate into local party organizations, and climb the political career ladder. Newcomers start from the bottom of the career ladder and work their way up—sometimes for decades before accumulating the expected qualification time for higher office. Seniority-based career advancement imposes these time durations on all newcomers to a local party system. Relocations within a country imply that some fraction of the native-born population are newcomers, but all foreign-born individuals belong to that group. This makes the institution of seniority-based career advancement particularly relevant for the immigrant-native gap in political candidacy and officeholding.

A second mechanism operates via immigrants' *age at arrival*. Countries' immigrant populations typically consist of a mix of people arriving as adults and people arriving as

children in these families. Persons who are older at arrival face a structural disadvantage in climbing career ladders with seniority-based advancement. This creates a mismatch with the ages at which native-born individuals typically appear on different steps and risk "aging out" of the ladder before reaching the top. The higher the age at arrival, the larger this mismatch becomes since the immigrant will need to enter the political system at a higher age compared to the typical native-born person.

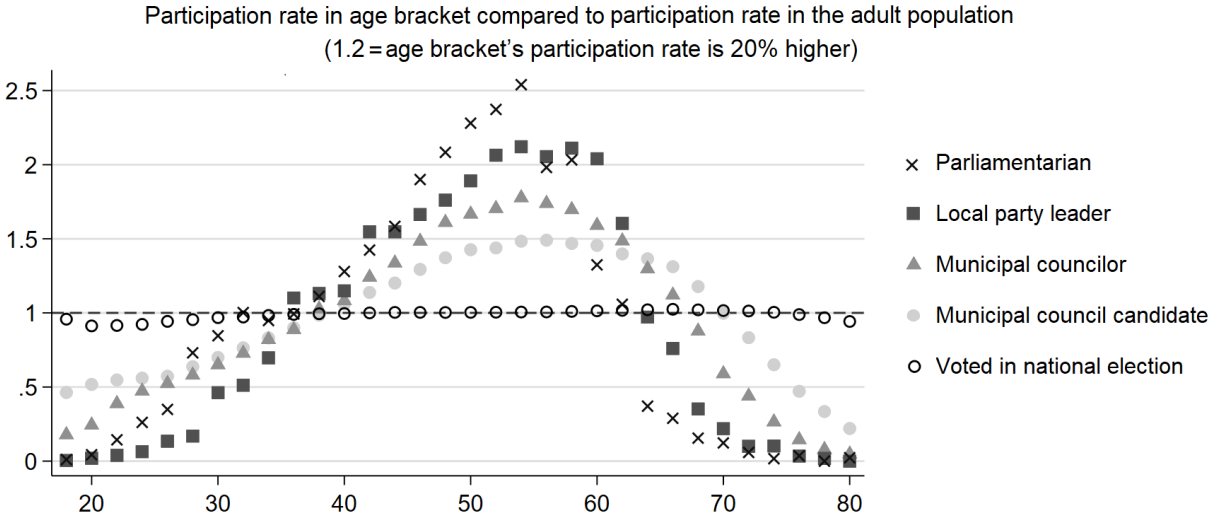

Figure 1. Swedish life-cycle in political participation.

Notes: Relative probabilities to vote and hold political positions in 2-year age brackets compared with the adult population. Probabilities are calculated in pooled cross-sections of eight election years between 1991 and 2018. Data on all Swedish residents come from population records and data on voting and political position-holding come from digitized voter rolls and electoral ballots (details in Section 3). Sample sizes in Table 1.

We illustrate the aging-out mechanism with descriptive statistics from our dataset for Swedish politicians (details in Section 3). Figure 1 shows relative rates of political participation across 2-year age brackets in pooled cross-sectional data for eight election years (1991 to 2018). Probabilities of political participation start growing at younger ages for lower positions (local candidates and officeholders), followed by increasing likelihoods later in life for holding higher positions (party leader and parliamentarian). Participation in higher positions drops sharply around Sweden's official retirement age. This retirement norm from politics might be particularly detrimental for immigrants who were older at the time of immigration as it shrinks the available time window for climbing the career ladder before expected retirement. This

differs from child or teenage arrivals who can join political parties and climb career ladders alongside their native-born peers.

Our framework suggests a testable hypothesis for how the seniority ceiling affects immigrants' political incorporation. We predict that *immigrants have lower political incorporation on higher career steps* (*Hypothesis 1a), because of seniority-based career advancement (Hypothesis 1b).*

Selection effects across individuals and groups. The seniority ceiling might affect *which* immigrants are less likely to occupy higher political positions. Our framework suggests disadvantages for those with shorter lengths of residence or higher age at immigration. These selection mechanisms might operate across individuals as well as across groups.

Most countries' immigrant populations consist of different groups with common traits like the same region of birth or the same immigration reason. These groups may have arrived at different time points because of variation in countries' immigration policies or economic conditions, or the occurrence of events pushing migrants to leave their homes (wars and conflicts, political oppression, etc.). Even without these determinants, declining costs of international travel have brought immigrants from more distant global regions to most countries in recent decades. These macro-developments may create variation in general lengths of residence across immigrant groups with shared trait(s) of research interest. In some cases, groups may differ systematically by age at arrival, for example when armed conflicts push families to send primarily young men to other countries.

Our prediction about selection effects at the individual or group-level expects that *seniority-based career advancement leads to lower political incorporation on higher career steps for immigrant individuals or groups with (i) shorter lengths of residence, or (ii) higher age at immigration (Hypothesis 2).*

Figure 2 illustrates a case of systematically different lengths of residence across theoretically relevant groups of immigrants. It demonstrates the more recent arrival to Sweden of immigrants from *non-Western* compared to *Western* birth regions (definition in the figure note). Immigration to Sweden began in earnest after World War 2 and brought mostly labor immigrants from European countries. Later cohorts became gradually more dominated by immigrants from Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa, with most arriving as refugees fleeing war or persecution. These inflows tripled the share of foreign-born individuals in the population from 7% to 22% of the adult population, with *Western* immigrants more likely to arrive in earlier decades than their *non-Western* counterparts.

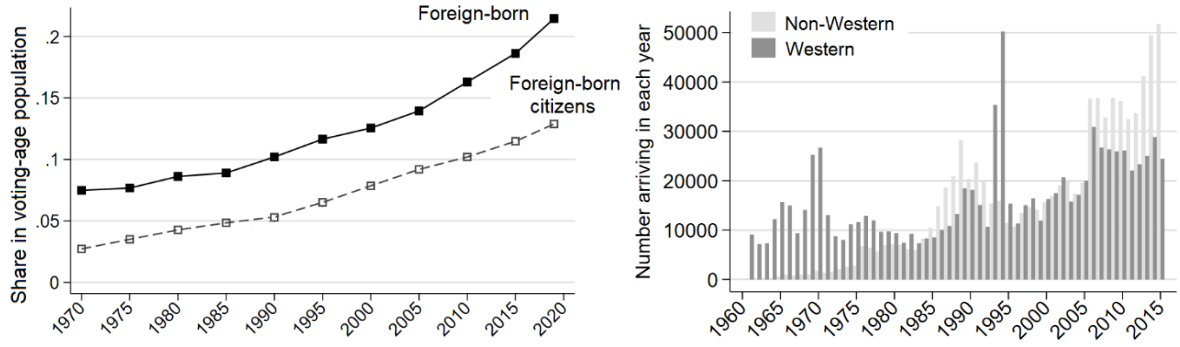

Figure 2. Share of immigrants (left) and new immigrants by region of origin (right).

Notes: The left graph shows the share of foreign-born individuals in the Swedish adult (18+) population. Western immigrants are those with birth countries in Europe, North America, or Oceania, and non-Western immigrants are those with birth countries in Asia, Central America and the Caribbean, South America, and Africa. Source: the authors' data described in Section 3.

Heterogeneity by party and pre-existing social networks. We highlight two sources of potential variation in the strength of the seniority ceiling. First, seniority-based career advancement likely develops in political parties over time. As new parties grow older and more established, they develop organizational strength and put in place more routinized and transparent procedures for recruitment and promotion (e.g., Mainwaring 1999; 2018). Predictable career ladders provide stronger incentives for politicians to enter and advance within a party rather than switch between parties. This lengthens the queue of lower-level activists and politicians waiting to advance to higher positions. More politicians may also join this queue as new parties gradually

take more mainstream ideological and political positions over time, or gain access to government (Art 2011).

Place-based traits represent a second source of variation. Newcomers to an area may enter political career ladders more quickly if it offers easier access to social networks underpinning candidate recruitment. Relevant networks in the labor market may connect newcomers with people in the local political system, for example among their workplace colleagues (Aggeborn and Andersson 2025) or neighbors (Cho et al. 2006; Bratsberg et al. 2021). Such networks may also help newcomers advance by forming geography- or ethnicity-based civic and political structures that facilitate collective mobilization and group consciousness (e.g., Bloemraad 2005, 2006; De Graauw and Vermeulen 2016).

3. Data and variables

We draw annual demographic data from 1968 to 2018 from the Swedish population registration (*Folkbokföringen*). Anyone who plans to live in Sweden for more than one year must obtain a personal identification number and register in this system. It includes each person's current postal address, and people who relocate must update their records. Other variables include country of birth, citizenship, sex at birth, civil status, and information on international adoption. Like all other data in this paper, the population registration contains highly reliable information with few missing values. For example, fewer than 0.1% of residents lack data on their country of birth. Additional annual data on socioeconomic traits from 1991 to 2018 come from the Longitudinal Integrated Database for Health Insurance and Labour Market Studies. Variables include education level, employment status, annual disposable household income. Most importantly, they include the person's most recent year of immigration, which we clean slightly before using it in the analysis[1].

[1] Karl-Oskar Lindgren and Sven Oskarsson kindly allowed our access to the 2010 voting data.

We define an *immigrant* as a person born outside Sweden and exclude adopted children from this group. We define *Western* immigrants as individuals born in Europe, North America, or Oceania, and *non-Western* immigrants as those born in Africa, South America, or Asia (including the Middle East). We measure *age at immigration* using data on birth year and immigration year, and calculate *length of residence* as the number of years since immigration. The placebo analysis of *second-generation immigrants* defines this group as persons born in Sweden with at least one foreign-born parent.

Our identification strategy makes use of *native-born movers*—native-born persons who move residence from one Swedish municipality to another. It tests whether immigrants' lower levels of participation as candidates and officeholders stems from fewer available years to accumulate qualification time for these positions—either due to shorter lengths of residence or due to arriving at a higher age. We expect these disadvantages to apply primarily to immigrants arriving as adults rather than children or teenagers, and design our strategy accordingly.

We construct a comparison group of *native-born movers* by identifying all address changes in the population register between 1969 and 2018. We exclude individuals if they (i) moved before turning 18 years old, (ii) returned to a municipality where they lived before, or (iii) held on any of our four political positions before the move (observable since 1973 in our electoral ballot data).

We measure the *length of residence in the municipality* and *age at municipal arrival* for native-born movers and for immigrants who arrived as adults. To compare adult native-born movers to adult immigrants, we set them to 0 for immigrants arriving before age 18. Municipality length of residence is the number of years as a resident according to the population register. We truncate this variable at 22 years; the longest length of residence we can observe in all election years in our analysis sample, which starts in 1991 (subject to sensitivity checks in

the empirical analysis). *Second-generation immigrants* are defined as those with at least one foreign born parent.

Analysis sample and descriptive statistics We compare the likelihood that immigrants and natives hold political positions in data for eight election years (1991 to 2018). Removing observations based on the eligibility criterion requiring three years of residence for local participation yields a sample size of 57,239,519 person-year observations, of which 7,689,060 are from immigrants. Table 1 presents summary statistics for our demographic and socioeconomic variables in this sample. Further removing non-citizens leaves 52,367,052 observations, of which 4,998,967 are from immigrants.

Table 1 shows similar gender and age distributions among immigrants and native-born, but also that immigrants are younger and have lower levels of employment and income (columns 1 and 2). Non-Western immigrants are younger than Western immigrants but similar in all other traits (columns 3 and 4).

Table 1. Summary statistics.

	Immigrant (foreign-born)	Native-born	Subsamples of immigrants		Subsamples of native-born	
			Non-Western	Western	Movers	Non-Movers
Demographic traits	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Woman	0.52	0.51	0.49	0.53	0.52	0.50
Age						
18-29	0.16	0.18	0.22	0.12	0.15	0.22
30-39	0.21	0.15	0.28	0.17	0.2	0.14
40-49	0.21	0.17	0.24	0.19	0.24	0.13
50-59	0.18	0.16	0.15	0.19	0.16	0.15
60+	0.24	0.34	0.11	0.32	0.25	0.35
Married	0.51	0.45	0.54	0.50	0.47	0.42
Divorced	0.17	0.1	0.18	0.17	0.11	0.1
Socioeconomic traits						
Education						
Primary	0.29	0.27	0.31	0.28	0.22	0.29
Secondary	0.40	0.45	0.37	0.42	0.40	0.49
Tertiary	0.31	0.27	0.32	0.30	0.39	0.22
Employed	0.51	0.6	0.51	0.50	0.67	0.58
Family income (1,000 SEK), SD: 92	260	317	255	263	301	310
Observations	7,834,246	49,405273	4,693,604	2,861,215	35,628,733	13,776,540

Notes: Pooled cross sections of individual-level data in eight election years between 1991 and 2018. Sample restricted to adults eligible to hold local office.

Our identification strategy leverages participation rates among native-born movers with different lengths of residence in the municipality to approximate typical qualification times for career advancement on the political career ladder. This method assumes that movers' career speed approximately captures the general career speed of all native-born. Comparing the traits of movers and non-movers helps us assess this assumption (columns 5 and 6). Movers are more likely to be married, employed, and have tertiary education—traits known to facilitate political officeholding—which demonstrates the importance of controlling for demographic and socioeconomic traits in our regression analysis.

4. Career ladder and seniority-based advancement in Swedish politics

Figure 3 shows the main political career ladder in Swedish politics. Most careers begin in a municipal party branch. The country's 290 municipalities are microcosms of the national party structure. Parties with representation in parliament have branches in nearly all municipalities

and account for more than 95% of the elected municipal councilors. Municipal party branches are organizationally independent from each other and vis-à-vis the national party organization. They make autonomous personnel decisions and receive independent financing through Sweden's system of public funding for political parties.

Ordinary residents (L5 in Figure 3) begin their political career by becoming one of approximately 50,000 nominated candidates on a municipal party ballot (L4). Eligibility for local candidacy generally requires three years of residence in the municipality (details in Appendix B1). Among these candidates, about 13,000 take the next career step of entering the municipal council (L3). These positions are counted from the top of the party's rank-ordered ballot. Sweden introduced optional preference voting (flexible lists) in 1998, but these votes have little importance in determining who wins a council seat, and vote gaps are small between immigrant and native-born politicians.[2]

The third career step is to ascend into the leadership of the local party branch. This leader typically appears first on the rank-ordered ballot (L2). They almost always receive the most influential political appointment granted to their party in the local election, such as chairing the municipal executive board (the equivalent of a mayor) in cases where their party leads the local governing coalition. The fourth and final career step on our stylized ladder is advancing to one of the 349 seats in parliament (L1). Becoming a parliamentarian requires citizenship, and

[2] About one third of Swedish voters choose to cast their optional preference vote, and most vote for candidates whose list rank would anyway have resulted in a seat. Parties use vote counts to guide future rankings, however (Folke et al. 2016). We estimate immigrant-native gaps with the approach of Folke and Rickne (2025). We obtain a measurement of preference votes that isolates voter preferences from parties' list-rank decisions and the mechanical effect of high list rank on votes. We regress votes on dummy variables for each list rank, predict the residuals at the individual level, and transform these to a z-score. We regress this z-score on the immigrant indicator and fixed effects for party, year, and municipality. Results show gaps favoring immigrants of 0.05 SD among local candidates, 0.13 SD among elected councilors, and 0.23 SD (not significant at conventional levels) for local party leaders. These positive gaps increase marginally when adding the controls in Table 1 (see Table A1). We acknowledge that voter discrimination expressed in preference voting severely restrict immigrants' incorporation in other contexts, as shown by, e.g., Thrasher et al. (2017), Portmann and Stojanović (2019), but cf. Togeby (2008).

obtaining citizenship generally requires permanent resident status and 2–5 years of residency in the country. Dual citizenship has been legal since 2001 (see details in Appendix B).

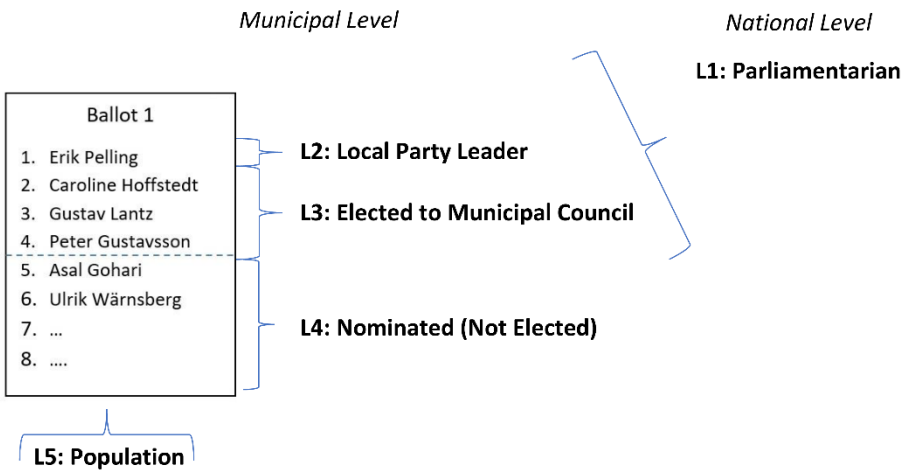

Figure 3. Stylized career ladder from local to national Swedish politics.

Candidate nomination and selection procedures vary little across Swedish political parties or across national and local politics (for more details, see Soininen and Etzler 2006, Buisseret et al. 2022, Widenstjerna 2020). Local party organizations have election committees populated by current and former party members, and these committees largely decide who appears on the ballot, and in which rank, using internal primaries among party members as a guidance (Soininen and Etzler 2006). A large recent survey experiment among party members and selection committees found larger probabilities of assigning higher ballot ranks to fictional candidates with longer membership and more extensive experience in appointed and elected positions (Grahn and Håkansson 2025).

We create binary indicators for each of the four positions from local candidate to parliamentarian. The indicator for local party leadership is assigned a value of 1 for persons who appear in the top ballot rank, and zero otherwise. To ensure that we capture a meaningful

hierarchical difference between councilors and party leaders, we restrict the analysis of local party leadership to local party branches with at least five elected politicians.[3]

Descriptive statistics demonstrate the practical relevance of our career ladder. About two thirds of the persons who appear on each career step arrive there from the step below. Those elected to a municipal assembly have a median of 4 years (1 term) of prior experience as nominated candidates. Local party leaders have a median of 12 years of prior experience as local candidates or councilors, and parliamentarians have a median of 12 years of experience across the three local positions. Relatively small portions of local party leaders (8%) and parliamentarians (17%) start directly on these positions (see also Figure A1).

5. Immigrants political incorporation across career steps

We use graphical evidence and regression analysis to test Hypothesis 1a about immigrants' political incorporation across career steps. Figure 4 compares the share of immigrants on each position to the share among eligible residents. We observe a clear pattern of smaller shares at higher positions between 1991 and 2018. Taking averages over these elections, immigrants made up 14% of the average municipal population eligible to run for local office, but only 10% of local candidates, 8% of elected municipal councilors, and 3% of local party leaders. At the national level, they made up 9% of citizens and 5% of parliamentarians.

[3] About half (54%) of the local party branches and one fifth of the elected councilors (22%) belong to the excluded observations, for which the concept of a party leader is less meaningful. The composition of political parties is similar for this position and the ones below and above it on our stylized career ladder (Appendix Table A2).

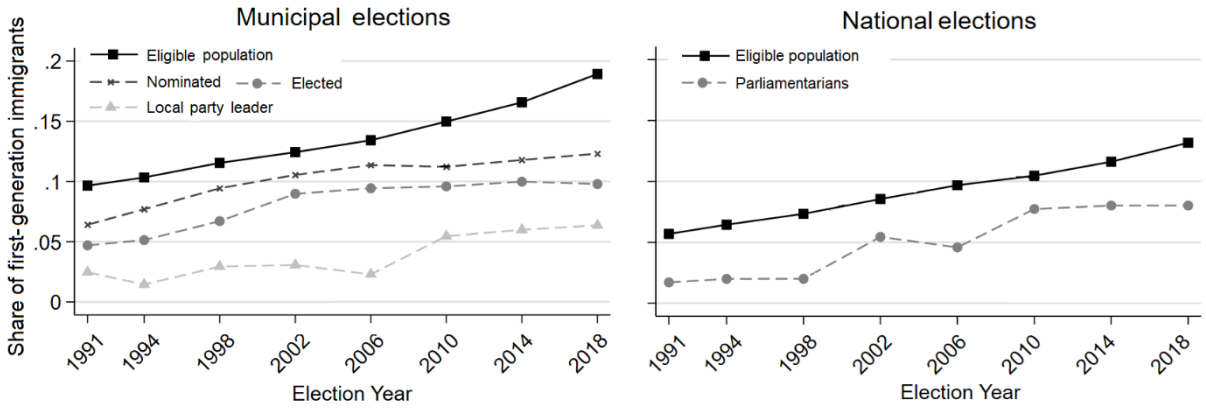

Figure 4. Immigrant shares among eligible and actual political position-holders.

Notes: Section 4 describes the eligibility requirements for local and national participation. N(population, left graph)=57,239,192; N(nominated councilors)=324,133; N(elected councilors) =97,346; N(local party leaders) =6,794; N(citizens, right graph)=54,230,031; N(Parliamentarians)=2,794. To make the data nationally representative, we weigh the municipal positions by the number of individuals eligible for positions in the municipality.

Our regressions estimate an aggregate number for immigrants' incorporation at each position, i.e., a single statistic for immigrants' probability to hold each position relative to native-born. Later sections examine impacts of the seniority ceiling on this statistic by adding control variables, which motivates estimation by OLS rather than conditional logit or a similar maximum likelihood model.[4]

Immigrant-native gaps in percentage-points estimated using OLS are difficult to compare across positions with widely different baseline probabilities in the population. For example, 0.75% of the adult Swedish population are nominated for a local council position in each election, only 0.005% are elected to parliament. We sidestep this problem by adjusting the binary outcome variables for position-holding as follows. At the national level, we divide the binary indicator for being a parliamentarian by the proportion of parliamentarians in the native-born adult population in each election year. For the local positions, we divide each indicator by

[4] OLS estimates change across specifications only when an added variable is correlated with the previously included regressors. Logit estimates are more difficult to interpret, and can change across specifications even in the absence of such correlation, provided the added variable explains variation in the dependent variable (Mood 2010).

the proportion of native-born residents in the same municipality and election year who hold the position.

We use OLS to estimate

$$Y_{it} = \alpha + \beta Immigrant_i + e_{it} \quad (1)$$

where Y_{it} is each adjusted outcome variable, and the point estimate β on the immigrant indicator captures the difference in means between immigrants and native-born. Importantly, the mean of the adjusted outcome is always 1 among native-born, because it captures the average probability of native-born individuals to hold office relative to native-born individuals. The mean among immigrants equals our quantity of interest, namely the probability of position-holding for immigrants relative to natives. This mean is 1 when the two probabilities are the same (i.e., perfect political incorporation) and below 1 when immigrants' probability is lower (i.e., an incorporation deficit). For example, a value of 0.5 implies that immigrants' probability is 50% as large as natives'. The point estimate subtracts 1 from this number (the average among natives), and we therefore add back 1 before reporting the results. Standard errors are clustered at the individual level.

Note that fixed effects for election year or municipality are not required to control for variation in the outcomes across these dimensions in Equation (1). The reason is that the adjusted outcome variables are constructed to have a mean of 1 among native-born individuals within each election year for national politics, and within each election-year–municipality combination for municipal politics. In other words, the adjustment removes cross-time and cross-municipality variation in baseline position-holding rates. The adjustment also ensures that

our estimates of local incorporation are not driven by municipality characteristics such as population size, council size, or the local share of immigrants[5].

Figure 5 shows results from estimating Equation (1) for each political position. The black markers in the left side of the figure show these estimates, with lines showing 95% confidence intervals (regression output in Appendix Table A3). We observe that immigrants are 67% as likely as the native-born to be nominated councilors, 54% as likely to be local councilors, 37% as likely to be local party leaders, and 34% as likely to be parliamentarians. This pattern of worse incorporation at higher levels of the political career ladder provides support for Hypothesis 1a.

5. Impact of the seniority ceiling

Identification strategy. We study the impacts of the seniority ceiling by adding control variables to Equation (1) and examining potential changes in estimated levels of political incorporation ($\beta + 1$). We choose these controls to match the two mechanisms theorized to constrain the probability to hold political positions for all political newcomers in a geographic area. We specify

$$Y_{it} = \alpha + \beta Immigrant_i + YrsMun_{it} + AgeMun_{it} + \boldsymbol{Demography_{it}} + \boldsymbol{Socioeconomics_{it}} + e_{it} \quad (2)$$

which expands Equation (1) with fixed effects for two-year brackets of municipal residence duration ($YrsMun_{it}$) and fixed effects for three brackets of arrival age (18—29, 30—39, and 40 or older; $AgeMun_{it}$). These variables are measured for both immigrants and native-born movers, conditional on having moved to the municipality as an adult. We test Hypothesis 1b by

[5] Adjusting for population and council size is central because the number of seats per capita differs widely across large and small municipalities. Since immigrants are concentrated in large municipalities with few seats per capita, a failure to adjust the outcome variable would overstate the deficit in incorporation.

analyzing whether estimated levels of incorporation ($\beta + 1$) change when immigrants are compared to native-born movers with similar lengths of residence and age at arrival.

We briefly demonstrate the approach of using native-born movers as a benchmark. Estimating Equation (1) for native-born movers with ten or fewer years of residence yields lower probabilities to hold each political position relative to other native-born. These native-born movers are 60% as likely as other native-born to be nominated as local councilors, 40% as likely to be elected local councilors, 15% as likely to become local party leader, and 20% as likely to be elected to parliament. Further regression analysis shows that their political incorporation grows as a function of years of municipal residence (see Appendix C for a detailed description). Incorporation starts at zero at very short lengths of residence and catches up with other native-born residents after approximately 20 years (Figure C1). This description demonstrates the usefulness of native-born movers as a comparison group.

After including all controls, the point estimate on the immigrant indicator in Equation (2) captures two sources of variation. First, it captures differences in position-holding between adult immigrants and adult native-born movers matched on residence duration and age at arrival (the vertical distances between immigrants' and natives' position-holding probabilities in Appendix Figure C1). Second, it captures the difference between immigrant and native-born individuals who either arrived before adulthood or have resided in the municipality for more than 22 years, the upper limit of our residence duration controls, beyond which immigrants and non-moving natives are treated symmetrically.

It is not clear a priori whether the regression equation should include controls for demographic or socioeconomic traits. In theory, seniority-based career advancement imposes qualification times for higher office regardless of politicians' background traits. In practice, approximating these constraints by shorter lengths of residence and higher age at arrival risks

introducing omitted variable bias. Individuals more constrained by seniority-based advancement likely have lower levels of resources that facilitate political participation (i.e., the traits listed in Table 1, motivated in Appendix D). By leaving these traits out, we risk overestimating the impact of the seniority ceiling. Adding them to the regression creates an opposite concern of including "bad controls" that capture some of the relationship of interest. We take the second, more conservative approach and include all variables in Table 1 (denoted $Demography_{it}$ and $Socioeconomics_{it}$) as an intermediary regression specification between the bivariate regression and the full set of controls.

Results. The dark gray triangles in Figure 5 show estimated incorporation levels from the regressions with controls for demography and socioeconomic traits. The dark gray area in the right-side plot shows how the baseline (bivariate) incorporation levels change when these controls are added. The light gray markers on the left display estimates from the specification with controls for residency length and arrival age, and the light gray area on the right shows any further changes when adding these controls. The size of this area directly reflects the explanatory power of the seniority ceiling: a larger area indicates that matching immigrants and native-born movers on residence duration and age at arrival accounts for a greater share of immigrants' deficit in political incorporation across career steps.

Inspecting the placement of the gray triangles in Figure 5 shows that adding controls for demographic and socioeconomic traits to the bivariate regression models accounts for approximately 10 to 20% of each estimated deficit in immigrants' political incorporation (vertical lines are 95% confidence intervals; regression output in Appendix Table A3). The controls for family income and employment produce most of these shifts.[6] Because each

[6] Including one control at a time shows these variables to matter more than demographic traits and education (results not reported). This reflects the summary statistics in Table 1 showing small differences in demography and education, but lower employment and family income among immigrants. Bratsberg et al. (2017) reviews studies on immigrants' structural disadvantages in Nordic labor markets.

estimate shifts by a similar proportion, the gradient of worse incorporation at higher compared to the lower positions remains.

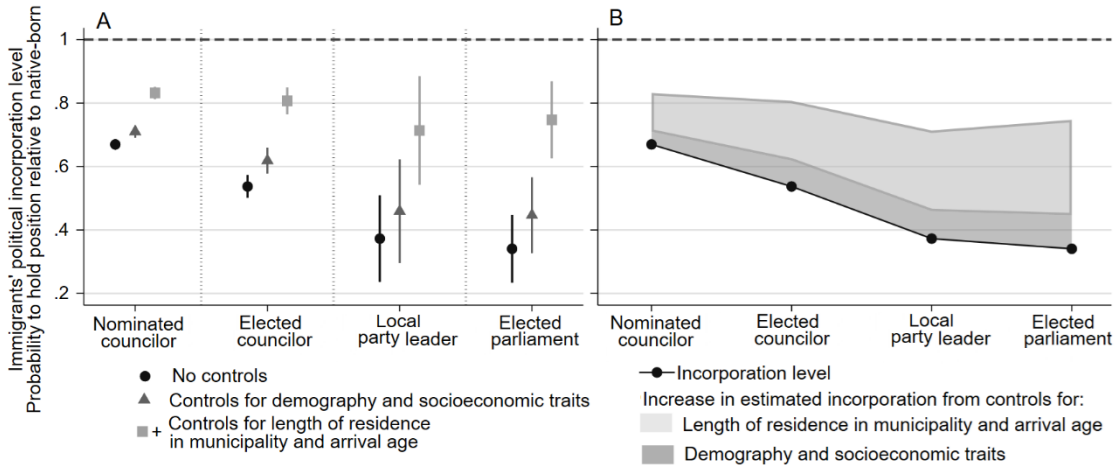

Figure 5. Explanations for immigrants' political incorporation.

Notes: The left side shows point estimates of the coefficient on the binary indicator for being a first-generation immigrant from Equations (1) and (2), capturing immigrants' probability to hold the position relative to native born. Control variables in three regression specifications listed in the legend. Controls for demography are binary indicators for (binary) sex at birth, 5-year intervals of age, and for being married or divorced. Controls for socioeconomic traits are binary indicators for secondary and tertiary education, the log of annual disposable family income, and a dummy for being employed. Controls for length of residence and arrival age are binary indicators for 2-year brackets of length of residence in the municipality and three categorical variables for the age at arrival (18 to 29, 30—39 and 40 or older). Vertical lines are 95% confidence intervals based on standard errors clustered at the individual level. Black markers on the right side repeat the estimates from the bivariate regression. Gray shaded areas show reductions in the estimates from adding the two sets of controls listed in the legend. Data are pooled cross-sections of election years between 1991 and 2018 restricted to adults eligible for local candidacy and officeholding. N=54,240,107—57,239,519; regression output and exact sample sizes in Appendix Table A3.

Additional analyses in Appendix D finds the same results when we add two sets of controls: fixed effects for 353 occupations (Figure D1), and fixed effects for industrial sector and employment type and stability (Figure D2). These capture additional personal circumstances that facilitate political entry and advancement via work conditions, job security, or opportunities for wealth accumulation, and which stem from individuals' social class and occupation (Carnes 2018; Folke and Rickne 2025).

Seniority-based career advancement explains a substantial fraction of immigrants' deficits in political incorporation. The estimated incorporation rate increases to 80% for the two lower positions and 70% for the two higher ones. These changes largely eliminate the gradient of

worse incorporation at higher positions (right side of Figure 5), which provides support for Hypothesis 1b. While seniority-based career advancement does not fully explain why immigrants experience worse incorporation at higher political positions, it explains most of that relationship. Specifically, accounting for this institutional factor reduces the difference in incorporation between the lowest (local candidacy) and two highest positions from approximately 30 percentage points to about 10 percentage points.

Placebo tests. Political parties do not impose qualification times on the political behavior of voting in elections. The seniority ceiling should therefore not account for any fraction of immigrants' lower participation. We re-estimate the analysis in Figure 5 using binary indicators for voting as dependent variables (Appendix Figure E1). Eligible immigrants are about 70% as likely as natives to vote in local elections, and 80% in national elections. Adding the controls for seniority-based advancement does not produce any shift in the estimated incorporation deficits for these participation behaviors.

Second-generation immigrants may share immigrant-specific traits with the first-generation, such as foreign-sounding names, phenotypical differences, or perceived "otherness". At the same time, this group has the same residence length as native-born individuals with native-born parents born in the same year. The seniority ceiling should therefore not explain deficits in incorporation among this group. We re-estimate equation (2) after adding a binary indicator for second-generation immigrants (Appendix Table E1). For all four positions, the estimates for second-generation immigrants are unaffected by the controls for seniority-based advancement. Much smaller and statistically imprecise estimates for this group may stem from evading the major hurdle imposed by the seniority ceiling on first-generation immigrants. Consistent with this interpretation, the gaps in incorporation between the first and second generation are largely closed when the seniority ceiling is controlled for.

Robustness and sensitivity tests. The results in Figure 5 replicate for two different sample restrictions. An estimation among only citizens (Appendix Figure F1) shows the same pattern of worse incorporation on the two higher compared to the two lower positions (Hypothesis 1a), which is fully explained by the seniority ceiling (Hypothesis 1b). We also observe the main results after restricting the data to recent elections (2002 to 2018), which extends the maximum number of years of residence in the municipality from 22 to 30 (see Appendix Figure F2).

These two robustness tests contradict a potential concern that Sweden's 2001 reform to legalize dual citizenship affects our main results. A similar concern may exist for Sweden's introduction of preference voting in 1998. Contradicting this concern are small gaps in preference votes, and often to immigrants' advantage (recall footnote 3). The main results also remain after restricting the data to pre-reform elections (1991 and 1994; see Figure F3).

The main results are also not sensitive to removing people who moved a relatively short distance from the category of native-born movers, approximated by moves within Sweden's 21 regions (Appendix Figure F4). A final sensitivity test confirms that the main results hold up running the analysis without the adjusted outcome, but with binary outcomes and fixed effects accounting for differences in average outcomes across time and space (Appendix Table F1).

6. Selection effects from the seniority ceiling

Length of residence. We test if the seniority ceiling specifically suppresses political incorporation more for immigrants with shorter lengths of residence and at higher career steps. We estimate Equations 1 and 2 replacing the immigrant indicator with separate indicators for brackets of lengths of residence. We graphically analyze if those with shorter lengths have worse incorporation, and whether the control variables for seniority-based advancement account for that pattern. The main text presents simplified plots corresponding to the panel on

the right of Figure 5, and the Appendix contains the coefficient plot (Figure A2; regression output in Table A4).

Figure 6 shows the results. Baseline levels of incorporation estimated without control variables demonstrate lower incorporation for immigrants with shorter lengths of residence across all four positions. Immigrants who have lived in Sweden for less than 10 years are 1 to 12% as likely to hold each of the four positions relative to native-born, while those with 20 or more years of residence are 33 to 88% as likely. Demographic and socioeconomic traits explain only small proportions of these gaps, and only for immigrants with residencies below 10 years (dark shaded areas).[7] Seniority-based career advancement explains large proportions of the incorporation deficit, and especially for the incorporation at higher career steps for immigrants with short lengths of stay.[8] These results support hypothesis 2.

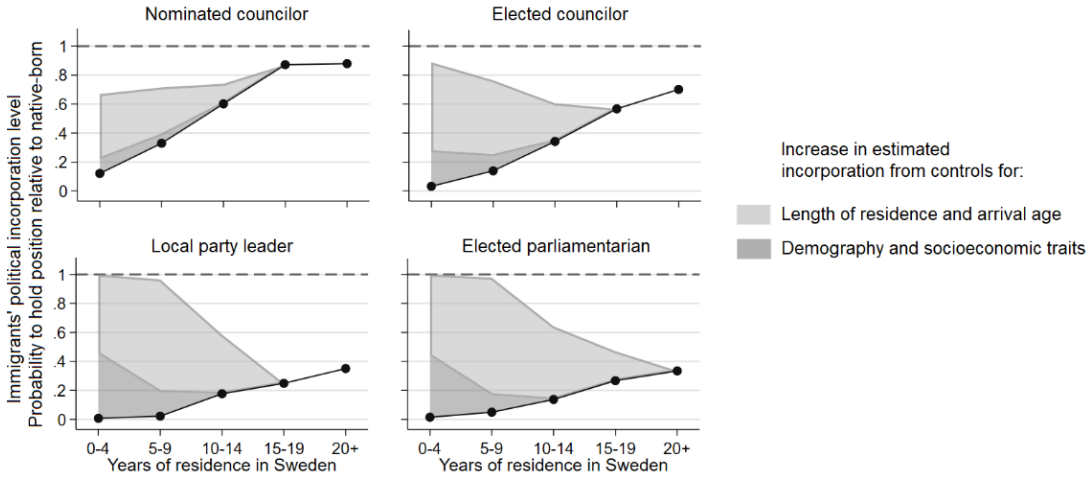

Figure 6. Selection effects by length of residence.

Notes: Results from replicating the analysis in Figure 5 for subgroups of immigrants by replacing the immigrant indicator in Equations (1 and 2) by indicators for subgroups indicated on the figure's horizontal axis. Regression output and sample sizes in Appendix Table A4.

[7] While recent arrivals have lower employment rates than native-born (40% in the first 5 years in Sweden relative to ~80% among native-born), their rate has caught up after 10 years in Sweden. Our controls can therefore no longer explain immigrants' lower likelihood to hold political positions at that point.

[8] At the highest positions, the gray area reaches all the way to the 1-line for immigrants with the shortest lengths of residence. This happens because of miniscule probabilities to become local party leader or parliamentarian for both immigrants and native movers who have lived less than 10 years in a municipality. Because both groups have a near-zero probability of holding the position compared to native non-movers, and accounting for this fact leaves no remaining gap from other sources between immigrants with short residencies and native non-movers.

Descriptive statistics for immigrant candidates and officeholders underscore the importance of the documented selection effects (Appendix Table A5). Adult immigrants who have lived in their municipality for less than 15 years account for nearly one half (47%) of the total population of immigrants, but just 11% of those who have become local party leaders and 11% of those who have become parliamentarians.

Age at arrival. Figure 7 presents the results for age at arrival. Adult arrivals clearly have worse political incorporation, and the level drops for each age bracket. These gradients are steeper for higher compared to lower positions, which shows that persons older at arrival are systematically less likely than younger arrivals to appear on higher positions on the political career ladder. Older immigrants have very weak incorporation on higher positions. Those who arrived after turning 40 have weak incorporation as nominated local candidates (a 30% probability relative to natives) but near-complete exclusion from the other positions (values of incorporation close or equal to zero). In contrast, immigrants who arrived between ages 10 and 18 also have high levels of incorporation, and those who arrived under age 10 show full incorporation—or even slightly higher probabilities of being candidates or officeholders—than native-born (i.e., incorporation >1).

Adding demographic and socioeconomic controls makes the gradients between incorporation and age at arrival even steeper. This occurs because the controls account for young arrivals' lower age in our analysis sample and their resulting lower likelihood to hold higher political positions.

The seniority ceiling explains a substantial share of the variation in incorporation both across the three adult arrival brackets and between child and adult arrivals. This is illustrated by the "wedge" of explained variance (the light gray area in the figure), which reduces the

gradient in incorporation across groups (as shown by the remaining white area between the gray region and the value of 1).[9] These results provide additional support for hypothesis 2.

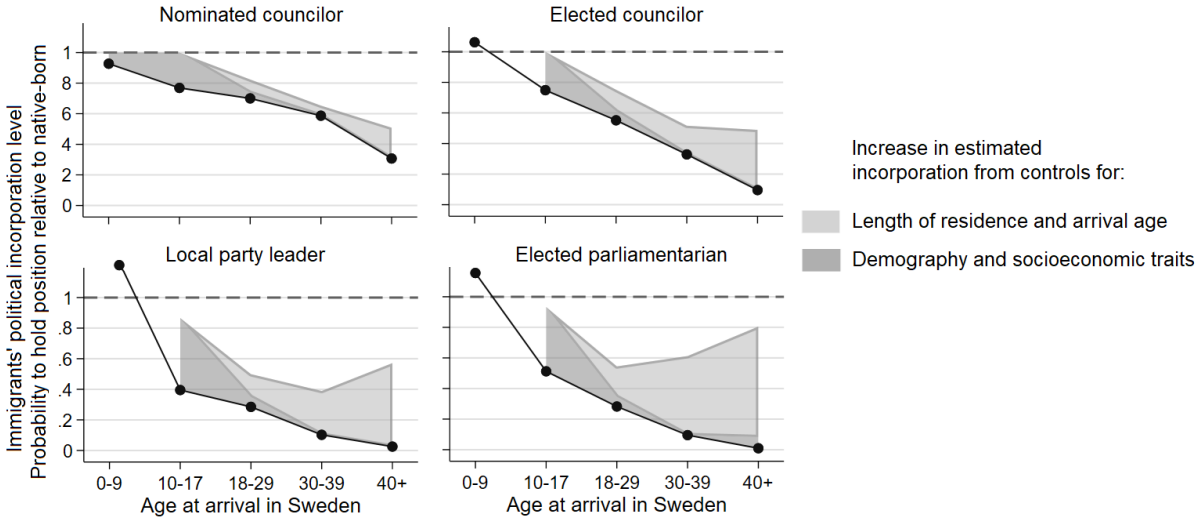

Figure 7. Selection effects by age at arrival.

Notes: Results from replicating the analysis in Figure 5 for subgroups of immigrants by replacing the immigrant indicator in Equations (1 and 2) by indicators for subgroups indicated on the figure's horizontal axis. Regression output and sample sizes in Appendix Table A6.

Examining the results more closely, we can see that seniority-based advancement explains a larger portion of the gradient in incorporation across brackets of arrival ages in adulthood (18—29, 30—39, and 40+) for the higher positions on the career ladder (indicated by the larger gray wedges in the figure). Its largest explanatory power—about 80%—appears for the oldest age bracket at arrival and the position with the longest qualification time (parliamentarian), likely reflecting the "aging out" mechanism described in our theoretical framework.

Summary statistics in Table A5 again emphasize the strength of the selection effects. Immigrants arriving after age 40 were 12% of the total immigrant population, but less than 1% of local party leaders and parliamentarians, respectively. The opposite pattern appears for

[9] Substantial variation in incorporation remains between child and adult arrivals even after accounting for the seniority ceiling's impact on adults. One explanation for this pattern involves the advantages of immigrating before adulthood, particularly the ability to gain context-specific skills, personal networks, and other resources by attending school in the same country as one embarks on a political career. Higher observed levels of incorporation among those who arrived at younger ages (0–10), compared to teenage arrivals (ages 10–17), support this interpretation.

immigrants who arrived as children. Arrivals before age ten are over-represented by a factor of three among local party leaders (12% of eligible and 31% of position-holders) and a factor of four among parliamentarians (12% of eligible and 40% of position-holders).

Western and non-Western immigrants. Non-Western immigrants arrived in Sweden more recently (recall Figure 2) and therefore have generally shorter lengths of residence. The median years of residency in our sample are 13 years for non-Western immigrants and 23 years for Western immigrants. Figure 8 shows a comparison of the distributions across the two groups.

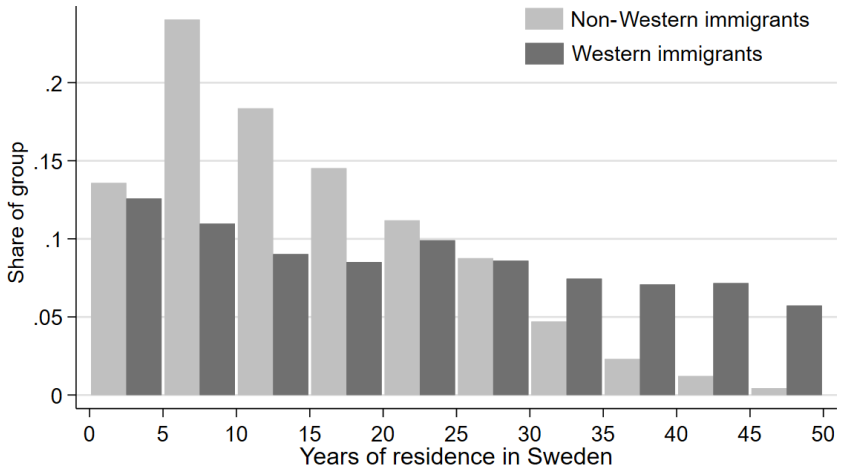

Figure 8. Comparison of non-Western and Western immigrants.

Notes: Distribution of lengths of residence in Sweden in five-year brackets for two groups of immigrants. The data are pooled cross-sections of individual-level observations in eight election years between 1991 and 2018. N(Western)=4,693,604; N(non-Western)= 2,861,215.

Figure 9 replicates the analysis from Figure 5, this time splitting the immigrant indicator in Equations (1) and (2) into separate indicators for Western and non-Western immigrants. The black markers show worse incorporation in higher political positions for both groups.[10] However, we do not observe a stronger gradient for the group with shorter lengths of residence.

[10] This similarity differs from some previous research on Swedish local politics. This discrepancy stems from methodological differences. We measure immigrants' probability to hold political positions relative to natives who live in the same municipality as them. Prior research instead compared the likelihood to hold a local position for all immigrants and natives in the national population. This measurement returns larger incorporation disadvantages for non-Western immigrants because they are more likely to live in larger municipalities. They have a smaller likelihood to hold political positions because they live in a large city where the number of positions per inhabitant is small, whereas Western immigrants are more likely to live in smaller municipalities where everyone—immigrant or native—are more likely to hold a political position.

Controlling for demographic and socioeconomic traits shifts all levels upward while preserving this overall pattern.

Controlling for seniority-based advancement produces large upward shifts in estimated incorporation levels for both groups—but twice as large for the group with shorter lengths of residence (light gray markers in Figure 9A; light gray area in Figure 9B). The ceiling partly explains the gradient of worse incorporation on higher political position for both groups. The results provide partial support for hypothesis 2. Seniority-based career advancement exerts a greater suppressive effect on the political incorporation of non-Western immigrants than Western immigrants in the Swedish context.

Our empirical method can assess the importance of seniority-based career advancement, but it cannot quantify the importance of other theoretically relevant drivers of immigrants' political incorporation. Most importantly, the estimate on the immigrant indicator in the full specification of Equation (2) does not capture the remaining deficit in incorporation that can potentially be explained by discrimination. Because immigrants experience discrimination for similar reasons across political and economic spheres, our controls for immigrants' labor market outcomes removes some unknown fraction of the variation attributable to discrimination (as discussed by Bäck and Soininen 1998).

Note also that analyzing probabilities to hold political positions among a country's full population will include immigrants with a near-zero probability of selection, for example, very recent arrivals. While this is informative for measuring overall incorporation, including individuals so far from the selection process strongly reduces precision for identifying unequal treatment by parties and/or voters for politicians "in the running" for certain positions or promotions (shown earlier in the Swedish setting by, e.g., Soininen and Etzler 2006; Blomqvist 2005; but cf. Grahn and Håkansson 2025; Grahn and Thisell 2024).

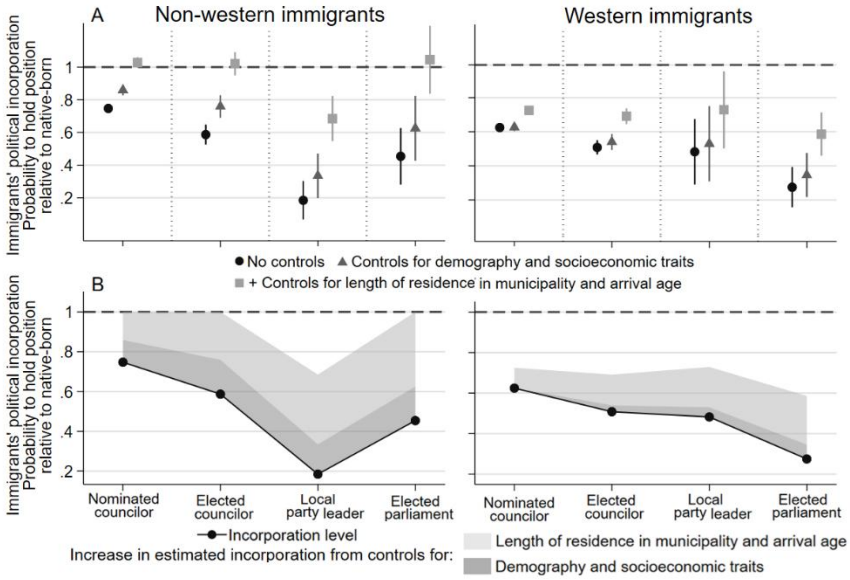

Figure 9. Comparison of immigrants by regions of origin.

Notes: Results from replicating the analysis in Figure 5 for Western and non-Western immigrants by replacing the immigrant indicator in Equation (1) with one indicator for each group. Western immigrants are persons born in Europe, North America and Oceania, and non-Western immigrants are persons born in Asia, Africa and South America. Standard errors are clustered at the individual level, and vertical lines represent 95% confidence intervals. Control variables are listed in the note to Figure 5. Sample sizes and regression output in Appendix Table A7.

7. Political parties and local social networks

Our data is less well-suited for analyzing the factors discussed in the theory as producing variation in the strength of the seniority ceiling, but this section summarizes the results from some crude tests (details in Appendix G).

Political parties. We repeat the analysis in Figure 5 for each of Sweden's four main political parties in Appendix Figure G1. The Social Democrats and Conservatives are the traditional left and right parties, and the Green Party and Sweden Democrats are examples of the new left and right. The Green Party entered parliament in 1988 and the Sweden Democrats entered in 2010. These four parties were represented in nearly all municipal councils during our study period and accounted for 70% of parliament after the 2018 election.

This exercise reveals lower levels of incorporation for immigrants in higher compared to lower political positions in all four parties. It also confirms our hypothesis that the seniority ceiling has greater explanatory power in traditional than in new parties. Comparing levels of

incorporation between the established and new party in each ideological pairing shows worse incorporation in the established party for the left-ideological pair, but not the right-ideological. Of course, omitted variables such as finer variation in party ideology strongly limit the validity of these results.

Pre-existing social networks. We provide suggestive evidence that the seniority ceiling is weaker in places where newcomers can more easily enter social networks that facilitate recruitment into politics. Following Bratsberg et al. (2021), we proxy neighborhoods with such social networks using the residential concentration of municipal councilors. Following Folke et al. (2024), we define a neighborhood as politician-dense if the neighborhood's share of the municipality's councilors exceeds its share of the municipal population.

As shown in Appendix Figure G2, movers who relocate to politician-dense neighborhoods enter lower-level political positions more quickly than movers who relocate to neighborhoods with a lower density of councilors. A gap of about 10–20 percentage points emerges roughly 10 years after the move. We do not observe a corresponding difference for higher-level positions, but those estimates are statistically imprecise and should be interpreted cautiously.

8. Conclusions

First-generation immigrants have worse political incorporation at higher compared to lower political positions. Political career ladders with seniority-based advancement produce this pattern by imposing a seniority ceiling on immigrants' incorporation as candidates and officeholders. Immigrants become under-represented in top positions when upward promotion requires qualification times at lower positions. This happens via two main mechanisms, which simultaneously affect which immigrants are under-represented at the top. Career ladders with seniority-based advancement are harder to climb for individuals who arrived in the country more recently (i.e., who have shorter lengths of residence) or who immigrated at an older age.

We document these effects by implementing a novel identification strategy in detailed Swedish data.

The selection effects uncovered in this paper highlight an absence from political positions—and especially from influential political offices—among some immigrant groups. Absences concentrate among those with recent experiences of navigating a country's immigration systems and establishing themselves in the labor market: immigrants who arrived more recently in the country, and those who immigrated as adults rather than children. These selection effects might have important policy implications. As many countries struggle with establishing well-functioning immigration systems, the people most intimately familiar with these processes are largely absent from the formal policy-making process in local and national political assemblies.

The selection effects uncovered for broad immigrant collectives have several implications for policy and research. Our results show that historical variation in immigration timelines across groups can create systematic variation in lengths of residence and, in turn, widely different impacts on incorporation from the seniority ceiling. These results can inform future research seeking to understand why some groups have worse incorporation than other. A clearer understanding of these explanations can inform interventions for more equal participation by governments, civil society, or political parties.

An important implication for research concerns the seniority ceiling's potential role as an omitted variable. This situation might arise in research seeking explanations for variation in incorporation between immigrant groups, or between immigrant groups at different political career steps. Empirical methods that ascribe "unexplained" covariate-adjusted (residualized) gaps to discrimination might be particularly vulnerable to bias. Many empirical contexts obviously lack the detailed data needed for implementing our proposed method of covariate-adjustment leveraging native-born movers. Future research might therefore develop methods

for holding variation from seniority-based advancement constant using variables more commonly available across empirical contexts.

Designing interventions to address the seniority ceiling is far from straightforward. Affirmative action that fast-tracks immigrants with shorter qualification times might cause backlash and implementation difficulties associated with record-keeping on minority status (illegal in Sweden, for example) or challenges in deciding which immigrant individuals should be subject to the policy (Folke et al. 2015). Uprooting parties' seniority principles might involve trade-offs with benefits for democracy stemming from this institution. Predictable career ladders make political parties more stable and cohesive (Huntington 1968, Dix 1992, Mainwaring 1999) and imply longer time periods of "learning on the job" as politicians spend more time in lower-level appointments before advancement. Importantly—a reduced role of qualification times in the candidate selection process might hurt more than help immigrants (Soininen and Etzler 2006, Soininen 2011). Shorter qualification times reduce party selectorates' opportunities for screening candidates on observable traits (skills, behavior, ideology, etc.) and raise the need for inferring quality from (shared) background traits (Widenstjerna 2020). Disadvantages may follow for immigrant candidates whose backgrounds are less relatable for members of nomination committees or other selectorates (Soininen and Etzler 2006, Bohnet 2016).

Despite the potential perils of interventions, there are several relevant avenues for action. Introducing term limits for higher positions cuts "wait times" in lower positions and the associated reliance on qualification times as a criterion for advancement. Increasing the number of immigrants on parties' selection committees might increase efforts to recruit immigrant candidates and recognize their qualifications. Material sent to voters in parties' internal primaries may include less detailed information about prior positions and offices, or make that information less salient, for example by listing candidates in alphabetical order rather than by

seniority. Changing nomination processes to reduce the reliance on primaries may help immigrants by improving the selection chances of highly skilled candidates with weaker social networks or name recognition in the party due to shorter tenures or homo-social networks.

Other interventions to improve immigrants' political incorporation should (of course) target the many social and economic structures that give non-immigrants a promotion advantage conditional on qualifications for the position. But that is the topic of a different paper.

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Supporting Information
The seniority ceiling: Why some immigrants struggle to rise in political office

A. Supplementary tables and figures

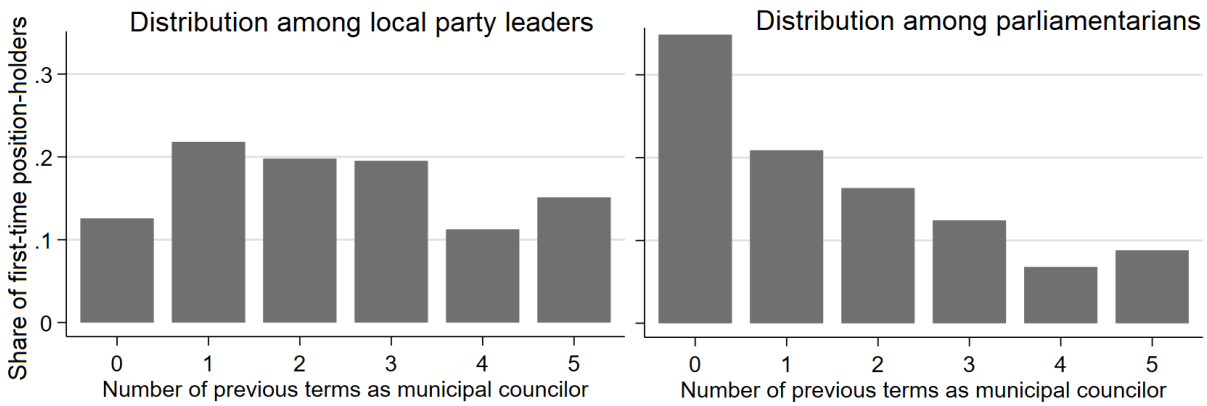

Figure A1. Previous experience in the municipal council among entrants on top positions.

Notes: Data for pooled cross sections of first-time local party leaders (left) and parliamentarians (right) in eight election years between 1991 and 2018. Previous positions as a municipal councilor between 1973 and entry. N(Local party leader)=4,306; N(First-time parliamentarians)=1,026.

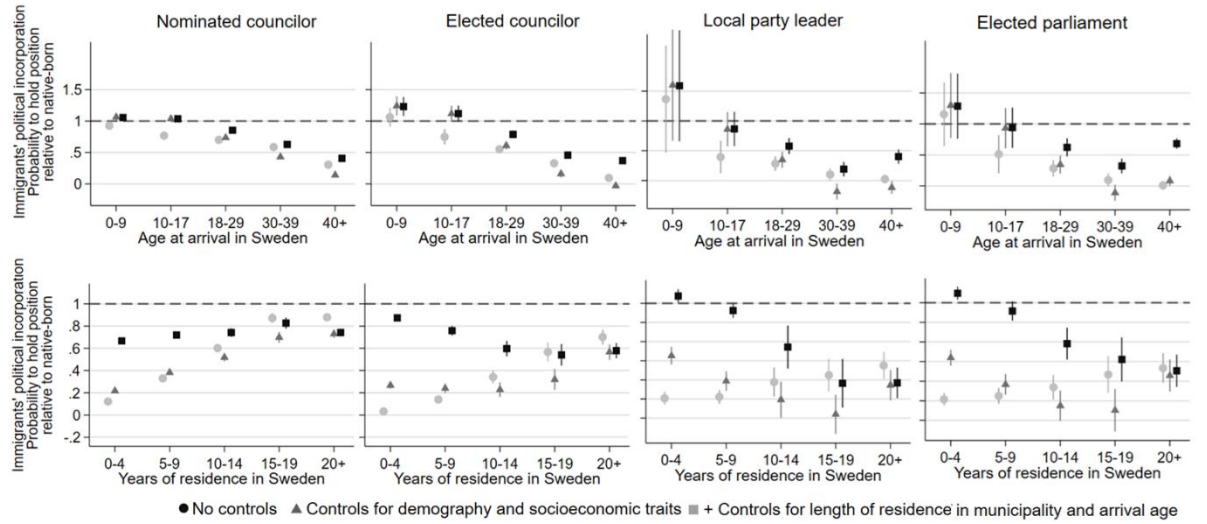

Figure A2. Explanations for immigrants' political incorporation by age of immigration and length of residence in Sweden

Notes: The figure reports results from replicating the analysis in the right side of Figure 5, with the difference of splitting the immigrant indicator in Equations (1) and (2) into five indicators for immigrants with either different ages of arrival or lengths of residence (brackets on the figure's x-axis).

Table A1. Immigrant-native gaps in preference votes.

DV: Residualized preference votes in standard deviations	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Nominated local politicians		Elected local councilors		Local party leaders	
Immigrant	0.046***	0.051***	0.130***	0.151***	0.226	0.299
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.034)	(0.033)	(0.325)	(0.306)
Observations	298,154	296,937	76,700	76,483	5,473	5,456
Demographic and socioeconomic Controls		x		x		x

Note: The outcome variable is the residual from the share of the preference votes within a local party obtained by a candidate regressed on dummy variables for each list rank. These residuals are transformed to a z-score. All regressions include fixed effects for party, municipality and year. See the note for figure 5 for a definition of the control variables. Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table A2. Party composition across political positions.

Average vote share	Nominated councilor	Elected councilor	Local party leader	Elected parliamentarian
Social Democrats	0.262	0.371	0.306	0.368
Conservatives	0.158	0.192	0.252	0.234
Sweden Democrats	0.026	0.038	0.053	0.047
Green Party	0.054	0.040	0.015	0.049
Christian Democrats	0.093	0.056	0.037	0.071
Liberal Party	0.103	0.069	0.061	0.077
Left Party	0.075	0.064	0.059	0.072
Center Party	0.146	0.127	0.174	0.074
New Democracy	0.002	0.003	0.001	0.009
Local parties	0.082	0.040	0.044	0

Table A3. Regression output for Figure 5.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Nominated councilor			
Immigrant	0.670***	0.710***	0.830***
	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Observations	57,239,519	55,319,520	55,319,520
Elected councilor			
Immigrant	0.537***	0.629***	0.803***
	(0.018)	(0.021)	(0.010)
Observations	57,227,271	55,311,273	55,311,273
Local party leader			
Immigrant	0.373***	0.459***	0.714***
	(0.069)	(0.083)	(0.087)
Observations	56,077,137	54,240,107	54,240,107
Elected parliament			
Immigrant	0.341***	0.466***	0.747***
	(0.055)	(0.061)	(0.062)
Observations	57,239,519	55,319,520	55,319,520
Controls for demography		x	x
Controls for socioeconomic traits		x	x
Years of residence in municipality F.E.			x
Age at municipal arrival F.E.			x

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the level of the individual in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Estimates from Equation (1) capture immigrants' political incorporation, their probability to hold the position relative to native-born. Pooled individual data for eight election years between 1991 and 2018, restricted to adults eligible to hold local elected office (details in Section A1). Demographic controls include dummies for (binary) sex at birth, dummies for 5-year intervals of age, and dummies for being married or divorced. Controls for socioeconomic traits include dummies for secondary and tertiary education, a dummy for being employed, and the log of annual disposable family income. Fixed effects for years of residence in the municipality are for 2-year brackets and three categorical variables for the age at arrival (18 to 29, 30—39 and 40 or older)

Table A4. Regression output for Figure 6.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Nominated councilor			
0 to 4 years of residence in Sweden	0.122***	0.218***	0.669***
	(0.007)	(0.010)	(0.010)
5 to 9 years of residence in Sweden	0.330***	0.383***	0.715***
	(0.010)	(0.012)	(0.013)
10 to 14 years of residence in Sweden	0.602***	0.519***	0.740***
	(0.016)	(0.018)	(0.019)
15 to 19 years of residence in Sweden	0.872***	0.699***	0.827***
	(0.023)	(0.025)	(0.025)
20 years or older of residence in Sweden	0.879***	0.730***	0.743***
	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Observations	57,239,519	55,319,520	55,319,520
Elected councilor			
0 to 4 years of residence in Sweden	0.033***	0.267***	0.888***
	(0.011)	(0.016)	(0.015)
5 to 9 years of residence in Sweden	0.140***	0.240***	0.764***
	(0.017)	(0.021)	(0.022)
10 to 14 years of residence in Sweden	0.342***	0.228***	0.606***
	(0.028)	(0.033)	(0.035)
15 to 19 years of residence in Sweden	0.567***	0.320***	0.550***
	(0.043)	(0.047)	(0.049)
20 years or older of residence in Sweden	0.701***	0.566***	0.591***
	(0.033)	(0.035)	(0.035)
Observations	57,227,271	55,311,273	55,311,273
Local party leader			
0 to 4 years of residence in Sweden	0.008***	0.452***	1.131***
	(0.034)	(0.047)	(0.036)
5 to 9 years of residence in Sweden	0.022***	0.188***	0.966
	(0.036)	(0.052)	(0.038)
10 to 14 years of residence in Sweden	0.177***	-0.007***	0.585***
	(0.077)	(0.096)	(0.113)
15 to 19 years of residence in Sweden	0.249***	-0.160***	0.204***
	(0.087)	(0.104)	(0.128)
20 years or older of residence in Sweden	0.351***	0.145***	0.178***
	(0.072)	(0.080)	(0.082)
Observations	56,077,137	54,240,107	54,240,107
Elected parliament			
0 to 4 years of residence in Sweden	0.015***	0.439***	1.173***
	(0.032)	(0.041)	(0.034)
5 to 9 years of residence in Sweden	0.050***	0.167***	0.978
	(0.040)	(0.053)	(0.050)
10 to 14 years of residence in Sweden	0.137***	-0.051***	0.642***
	(0.064)	(0.078)	(0.083)
15 to 19 years of residence in Sweden	0.267***	-0.097***	0.470***
	(0.095)	(0.110)	(0.114)
20 years or older of residence in Sweden	0.334***	0.258***	0.335***
	(0.077)	(0.084)	(0.084)
Observations	57,239,519	55,319,520	55,319,520
Controls for demography		x	x
Controls for socioeconomic traits		x	x
Years of residence in municipality F.E.			x
Age at municipal arrival F.E.			x

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the level of the individual in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. See note to Figure 6 for additional details.

Table A5. Ages at arrival and years of residence among immigrants in the adult population and immigrants in political positions.

Age at arrival	Adult population	Nominated councilor	Elected councilor	Local party leader	Elected parliamentarian
0—9	0.12	0.15	0.21	0.31	0.40
10—17	0.11	0.11	0.14	0.14	0.16
18— 29	0.43	0.44	0.43	0.36	0.35
30—39	0.20	0.18	0.13	0.10	0.05
40+	0.12	0.07	0.03	0.01	0.00
Years of residence, shares of adult arrivals					
0—4	0.16	0.04	0.01	0.00	0.00
5—9	0.18	0.10	0.06	0.02	0.03
10—14	0.13	0.12	0.10	0.09	0.08
15—19	0.10	0.13	0.12	0.11	0.13
20+	0.39	0.54	0.62	0.63	0.66

Table A6. Regression output for Figure 7.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Nominated councilor			
0 to 9 years at arrival in Sweden	0.927***	1.064**	1.059**
	(0.026)	(0.027)	(0.027)
10 to 17 years at arrival in Sweden	0.769***	1.037	1.036
	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.026)
18 to 29 years at arrival in Sweden	0.700***	0.736***	0.824***
	(0.013)	(0.015)	(0.015)
30 to 39 years at arrival in Sweden	0.587***	0.429***	0.653***
	(0.016)	(0.018)	(0.019)
40 years or older at arrival in Sweden	0.307***	0.141***	0.509***
	(0.013)	(0.018)	(0.019)
Observations	57,239,519	55,319,520	55,319,520
Elected councilor			
0 to 9 years at arrival in Sweden	1.062	1.241***	1.234***
	(0.075)	(0.077)	(0.077)
10 to 17 years at arrival in Sweden	0.749***	1.116*	1.119*
	(0.061)	(0.065)	(0.065)
18 to 29 years at arrival in Sweden	0.552***	0.611***	0.752***
	(0.027)	(0.030)	(0.030)
30 to 39 years at arrival in Sweden	0.329***	0.162***	0.517***
	(0.026)	(0.030)	(0.030)
40 years or older at arrival in Sweden	0.096***	-0.030***	0.489***
	(0.015)	(0.021)	(0.022)
Observations	57,227,271	55,311,273	55,311,273
Local party leader			
0 to 9 years at arrival in Sweden	1.366	1.602	1.598
	(0.456)	(0.474)	(0.474)
10 to 17 years at arrival in Sweden	0.395***	0.860	0.866
	(0.138)	(0.146)	(0.146)
18 to 29 years at arrival in Sweden	0.285***	0.349***	0.499***
	(0.060)	(0.068)	(0.069)
30 to 39 years at arrival in Sweden	0.103***	-0.184***	0.389***
	(0.052)	(0.067)	(0.066)
40 years or older at arrival in Sweden	0.026***	-0.116***	0.571***
	(0.037)	(0.054)	(0.094)
Observations	56,077,137	54,240,107	54,240,107
Elected parliament			
0 to 9 years at arrival in Sweden	1.156	1.299	1.291
	(0.260)	(0.267)	(0.267)
10 to 17 years at arrival in Sweden	0.513***	0.932	0.933
	(0.155)	(0.165)	(0.165)
18 to 29 years at arrival in Sweden	0.283***	0.345***	0.545***
	(0.067)	(0.074)	(0.075)
30 to 39 years at arrival in Sweden	0.095***	-0.110***	0.612***
	(0.052)	(0.065)	(0.065)
40 years or older at arrival in Sweden	0.010***	0.082***	0.805***
	(0.033)	(0.041)	(0.037)
Observations	57,239,519	55,319,520	55,319,520
Controls for demography		x	x
Controls for socioeconomic traits		x	x
Years of residence in municipality F.E.			x
Age at municipal arrival F.E.			x

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the level of the individual in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. See note to Figure 7 for additional details.

Table A7. Regression output for Figure 8.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Nominated councilor			
Non-Western immigrant	0.747***	0.859***	1.029*
	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Western immigrant	0.625***	0.626***	0.725***
	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Observations	57,239,519	55,319,520	55,319,520
Elected councilor			
Non-Western immigrant	0.587***	0.759***	1.021
	(0.031)	(0.035)	(0.036)
Western immigrant	0.508***	0.540***	0.691***
	(0.021)	(0.023)	(0.024)
Observations	57,227,271	55,311,273	55,311,273
Local party leader			
Non-western born immigrant	0.185***	0.335***	0.683***
	(0.060)	(0.069)	(0.070)
Western-born immigrant	0.482***	0.530***	0.729**
	(0.097)	(0.112)	(0.116)
Observations	56,077,137	54,240,107	54,240,107
Elected parliament			
Non-Western immigrant	0.554***	0.625***	1.046
	(0.088)	(0.101)	(0.106)
Western immigrant	0.275***	0.346***	0.586***
	(0.060)	(0.066)	(0.065)
Observations	57,239,519	55,319,520	55,319,520
Controls for demography		x	x
Controls for socioeconomic traits		x	x
Years of residence in municipality F.E.			x
Age at municipal arrival F.E.			x

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the level of the individual in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Estimates from Equation (1) capture gaps in immigrants' political incorporation relative to native-born. Data is restricted to individuals eligible to hold local positions. Data includes pooled cross-sections of all adults in all elections between 1991 and 2018 for political positions, and for the 2010 and 2018 elections for voting. Section 5 describes the eligibility requirements for local and national candidacy and officeholding. Demographic controls include dummies for (binary) sex at birth, being married/partnered. Socioeconomic controls include the log of disposable family income and dummies for secondary education, tertiary education and employment.

B. Eligibility criteria for candidacy, officeholding, and citizenship

Voting and running for office in local elections generally require 3 years of residence in the municipality, but some variation exists between regions of origin. People with citizenship from Iceland, Norway, or EU countries are automatically able to vote and run for office in the municipality when they register as a resident there. The same is true for Swedish citizens who move residency from one municipality to another. Citizens from all other countries and people who lack citizenship in any country can run for office if they have a current civic registration in the municipality and three consecutive years of registration in any Swedish municipality prior to election day.

Voting and running for office in the national election requires Swedish citizenship. Some variation exists between regions of origin during our study period (1991 to 2018). For refugees, citizenship requires 4 years of residency after receiving asylum. For people from the European Economic Area (EEA), it requires 5 years of residence and meeting the requirements for permanent right of residence. Citizens from Nordic countries are required to reside in Sweden for 5 years but do not need to meet the requirements for permanent right of residence. For a spouse or co-habitant of a native Swede, the requirement is 3 years of residency, conditional on cohabiting for the past 2 years. For Non-Nordic, non-EEA, non-refugees who are not partnered with a native, the requirement is 5 years of residency after receiving temporary or permanent residence status. Stateless individuals need 4 years of residency (Swedish Migration Agency).[11]

[11] https://www.migrationsverket.se/Privatpersoner/Bli-svensk-medborgare/Medborgarskap-for-vuxna/Tid-i-Sverige.html.

C. Illustration of the seniority ceiling for native-born movers

We graph immigrants' and internal movers' trajectories of political incorporation over time in the municipality. For each of the four political positions, we estimate:

$$Y_{it} = \alpha + \boldsymbol{\beta_{TN}}'(\boldsymbol{YrsMun_{it}} * Native_i) + \boldsymbol{\beta_{TI}}'(\boldsymbol{YrsMun_{it}} * Immigrant_i) + \boldsymbol{Demography_{it}} + \boldsymbol{Socioeconomics_{it}} + e_{it} \quad \text{(C1)}$$

where Y_{it} is the re-calculated binary indicator for whether individual *i* holds the position in election *t*. $YrsMun_{it}$ are binary indicators for four-year brackets of length of residence in the municipality, which we interact separately with binary indicators for immigrants ($Immigrants_i$) and internal movers ($Native_i$). The vectors of estimates on these interacted indicators (β_{TN} and β_{TI}) capture levels of incorporation for each group across categories of length of stay. We include the controls for demographic and socioeconomic traits (Table 1) and plot the two vectors of estimated incorporation levels for each political position in Figure C1.

We can first examine the estimated difference between the native-born movers and native-born non-movers. For each of the four political positions, the estimated gaps start below 1. This can happen if a group's movers have demographic and/or socioeconomic traits that should make them more likely to hold the position than native-born non-movers, and yet do not. The figure shows that native-born movers have converging probabilities to hold all four positions relative to native-born non-movers over time in the municipality. Although it takes longer for the more important positions, native-born movers are eventually fully incorporated to all positions (i.e. they have the same probability to hold them as native-born non-movers) after 20 to 22 years of residency in the municipality.

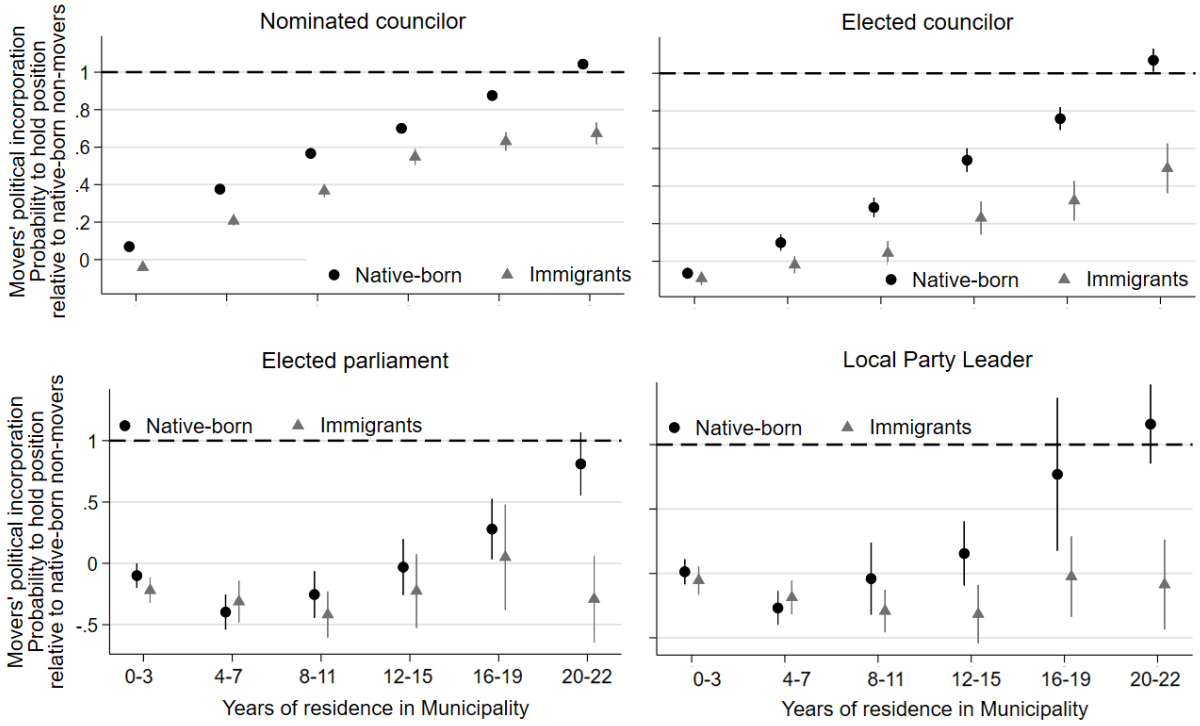

Figure C1 Political incorporation by municipality length of residence for immigrants and native-born movers.

Notes: Point estimates from estimating Equation (C1) with dummies for 4-year brackets for length of residence in the municipality (0 to 22 years) for immigrants and native-born movers. Standard errors are clustered at the individual level, and vertical lines are 95% confidence intervals. The reference group are native-born non-movers. The regressions include the control variables for demographic and socioeconomic traits listed in Figure 5.

Turning to the estimates for the immigrant movers, we can see that their incorporation is consistently either below, or at the same level as, native-born movers with the same length of residence. For the two lower positions, nominated and elected councilor, there is an immediate gap between immigrants and native-born movers, which expands with the years of municipal residence.

For selection to local party leader and election to parliament, there is no gap between immigrants and native-born movers until they have reached residence lengths of least 12 years in the municipality. This is because essentially no movers, irrespective of whether they are immigrants or native-born, reach the positions within fewer years of residence. However, after 12 years, native-born movers have accumulated enough years in the municipality to begin reaching these positions, but we do not see any such improvement in incorporation for

immigrants. As we reach 20 years of residency in the municipality, native-born movers have achieved complete incorporation on these positions, while immigrants continue to have a near-zero relative probability of holding the two positions.

D. Control variables for demographic and socioeconomic traits

Motivation for resource variables in Table 1. Research has emphasized how individual traits and resources can affect immigrants' likelihood of participating in politics. Starting with demographic traits, immigrants are often younger than natives, which puts them in a better position to participate in politics as candidates and officeholders. As shown in Figure 1, middle-aged people are much more likely to be candidates, officeholders, and (local) party leaders. These likelihoods peak in people's mid-50s and fall sharply in their 60s. Regarding sex at birth, women have a disadvantage in political promotion (Folke and Rickne 2016), making the control relevant even at relatively similar gender compositions of immigrants and natives (Table 1).

Civil status may affect candidacy and officeholding via time allocations and resource divisions in the household (Frödin et al. 2025). A romantic partner can facilitate a person's time investments in a political career by providing emotional support and taking on a larger share of childcare or household-related labor. To the extent that immigrants' family structures differ from natives' (see Table 1), this can affect their relative opportunities to obtain political positions as candidates or officeholders.

A growing research literature studies how education and economic status impact political candidacy and reaching higher political positions (e.g., Folke and Rickne 2025). Political parties are gatekeepers for these outcomes and may deselect people with lower economic status and education even if voters are not averse to these groups (for recent literature reviews, see Carnes and Lupu 2023; Gulzar 2021). In our context, immigrants' education levels are similar between native-born and immigrants (Table 1).

Human and monetary capital accumulated in nonpolitical settings of adult life facilitate political participation (e.g., Brady et al. 1995). A large literature documents positive relationships between these resources and political participation—also among immigrants (e.g., Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Reny and Shah 2018). Working in the labor market is an obvious pathway for acquiring skills and social networks that propel participation (Bratsberg et al. 2023; Lindgren and Österman 2023; Aggeborn and Andersson 2025). Immigrants are less likely to be employed and have lower family incomes (Table 1), which might constitute a structural barrier to equal rates of candidacy and officeholding.

Extended analysis using more detailed controls. We add two different sets of controls to the vector of socioeconomic variables and re-estimate the result in Figure 5.

The first set includes fixed effects for the 4-digit level of Sweden's nomenclature for occupations (SSYK), whose disaggregation distinguishes 353 occupations. Data availability for restricts this analysis to elections between 2006 and 2018. Results appear in Figure D1.

The second set of controls include stable and unstable employment following the definition in Dal Bó et al. (2023). Stable employment requires labor market earnings above 3.5 price base amounts in each of the past three years; unstable employment requires earnings above this threshold in the most recent year but not in all three. Price base amounts are an economic benchmark used in Sweden's social security system, with 3.5 price base amounts equal to approximately 17,000 USD in 2024. The analysis also includes fixed effects for 10 industrial sectors (the 1-digit level of Sweden's SNI nomenclature), four indicators for the type of employment (employed, business owner, business owner of a corporation, or sailor), and one indicator for being a full-time student. These results appear in Figure E2.

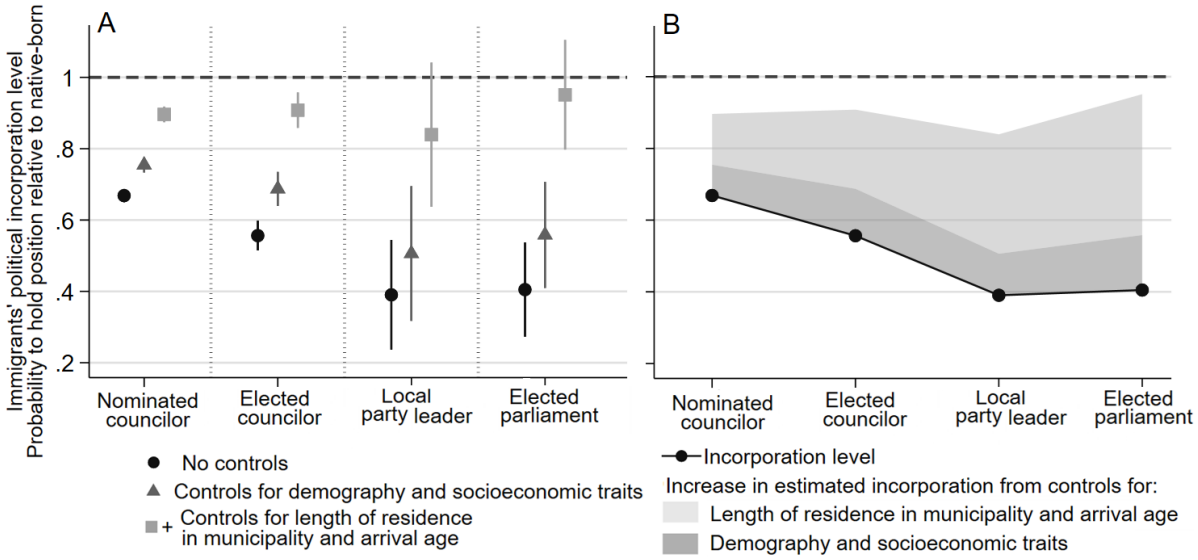

Figure D1. Explanations for immigrants' incorporation across political positions with occupation fixed effects.

Notes: The figure replicates the analysis in Figure 5 after restricting the data to elections in 2006 or later. Fixed effects for 353 occupations are added to the analysis. See note to Figure 5 for additional details.

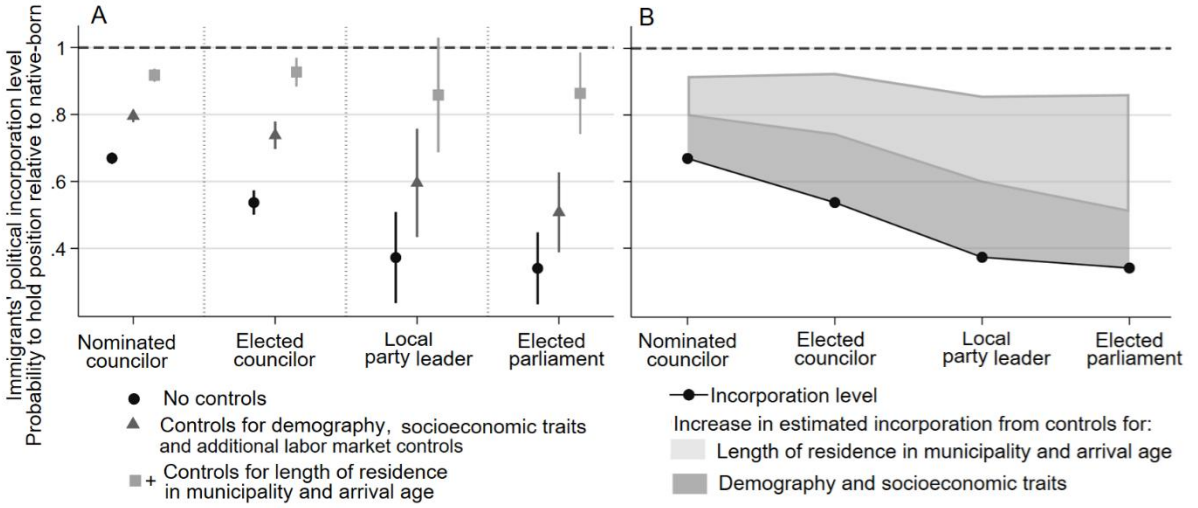

Figure D2. Explanations for immigrants' incorporation across political positions with additional labor market controls.

Notes: The figure replicates the analysis in Figure 5 but with additional labor market controls. Fixed effects for 10 types of industries, 4 types of employment and dummies for being a student, in stable employment and unstable employment are added. See note to Figure 5 for additional details.

E. Placebo analysis

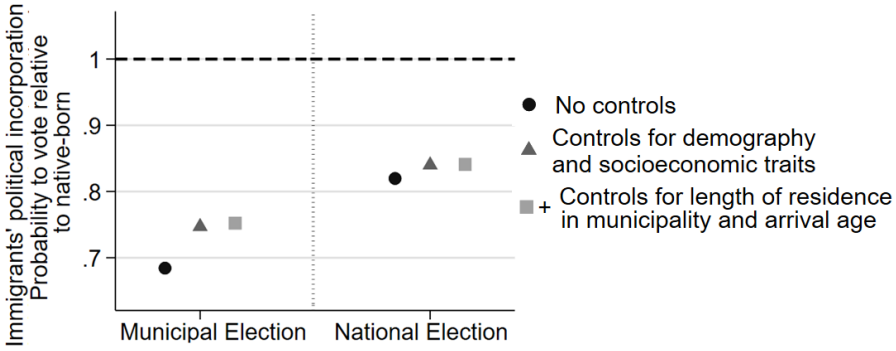

Figure E1. Explanations for immigrants' incorporation into voting.

Notes: The figure replicates the analysis in Figure 5 after restricting the data sample to Swedish citizens. See note to Figure 5 for additional details.

Table E1. Comparison of first- and second-generation immigrants.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Nominated councilor		Elected councilor	
1st generation immigrant	0.708***	0.830***	0.613***	0.802***
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.021)	(0.022)
2nd generation immigrant	0.980	0.981	0.940*	0.942*
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.031)	(0.031)
Observations	55,319,520	55,319,520	55,311,273	55,311,273
	Local party leader		Elected parliament	
1st generation immigrant	0.449***	0.704***	0.435***	0.736***
	(0.083)	(0.088)	(0.062)	(0.063)
2nd generation immigrant	0.886	0.893	0.867	0.872
	(0.150)	(0.150)	(0.116)	(0.117)
Observations	54,240,107	54,240,107	55,319,520	55,319,520
Controls for demography	x	x	x	x
Controls for socioeconomic traits	x	x	x	x
Years of residence in municipality F.E.		x		x
Age at municipal arrival F.E.		x		x

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the level of the individual in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1 denote p-values for estimated incorporation being different from 1. Estimates from adding an indicator variable for second-generation immigrants to Equation (2) capture 1st and 2nd generation immigrants' political incorporation, their probability to hold the position relative to native-born. 2nd generation immigrant defined as having at least one foreign-born parent. Pooled individual data for eight election years between 1991 and 2018, restricted to adults eligible to hold local elected office (details in Section A1). Demographic controls include dummies for (binary) sex at birth, dummies for 5-year intervals of age, and dummies for being married or divorced. Controls for socioeconomic traits include dummies for secondary and tertiary education, a dummy for being employed, and the log of annual disposable family income. Fixed effects for years of residence in the municipality are for 2-year brackets, and three categorical variables for the age at arrival (18 to 29, 30—39 and 40 or older)

F. Robustness and sensitivity tests

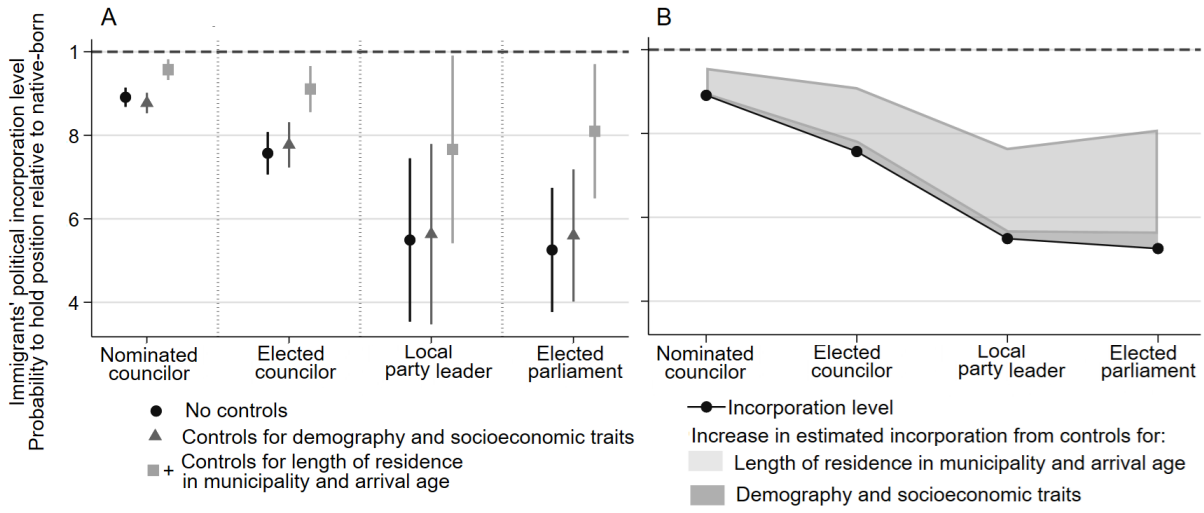

Figure F1. Explanations for immigrants' incorporation across political positions among Swedish citizens.

Notes: The figure replicates the analysis in Figure 5 after restricting the data sample to Swedish citizens. See note to Figure 5 for additional details.

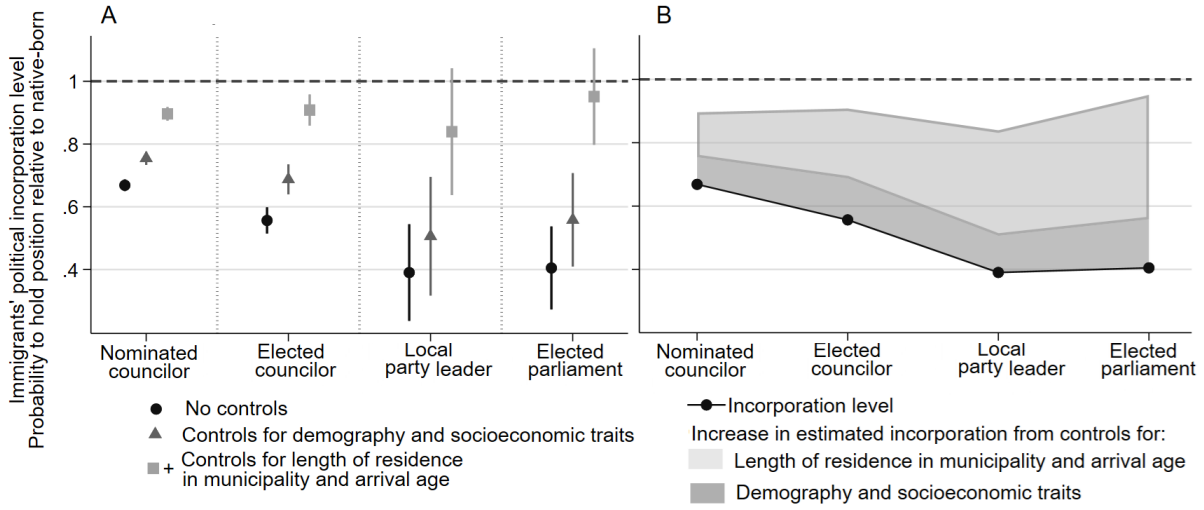

Figure F2. Explanations for immigrants' incorporation across political positions with time truncation extended from 22 to 30 years

Notes: The figure replicates the analysis in Figure 5 after restricting the data to elections in 2002 or later. Years of residence used to define movers extended to 30 years. See note to Figure 5 for additional details.

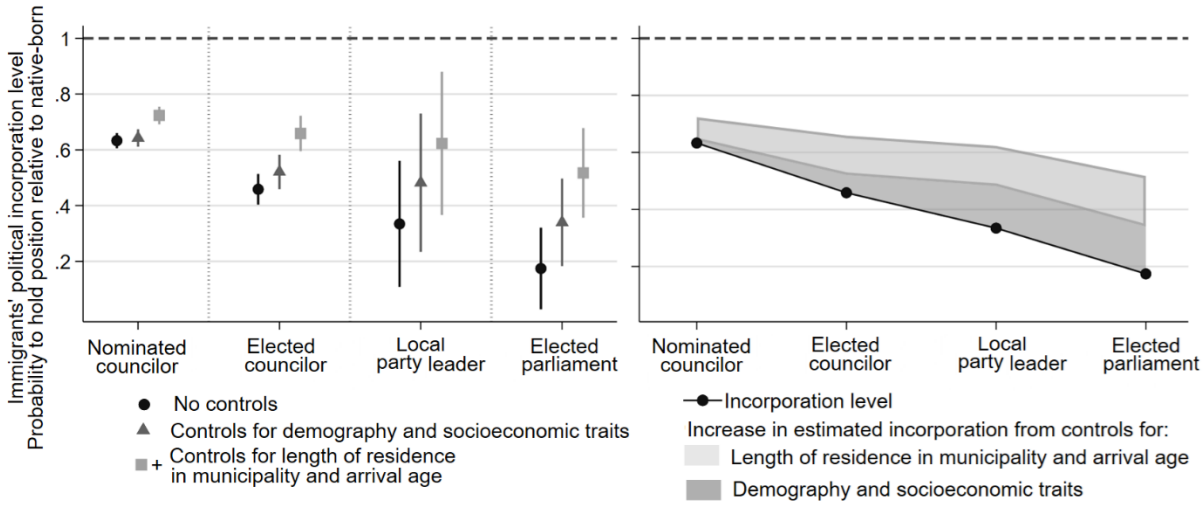

Figure F3. Explanations for immigrants' incorporation across political positions, data from 1991 and 1994 elections.

Notes: See note to Figure 5 for additional details.

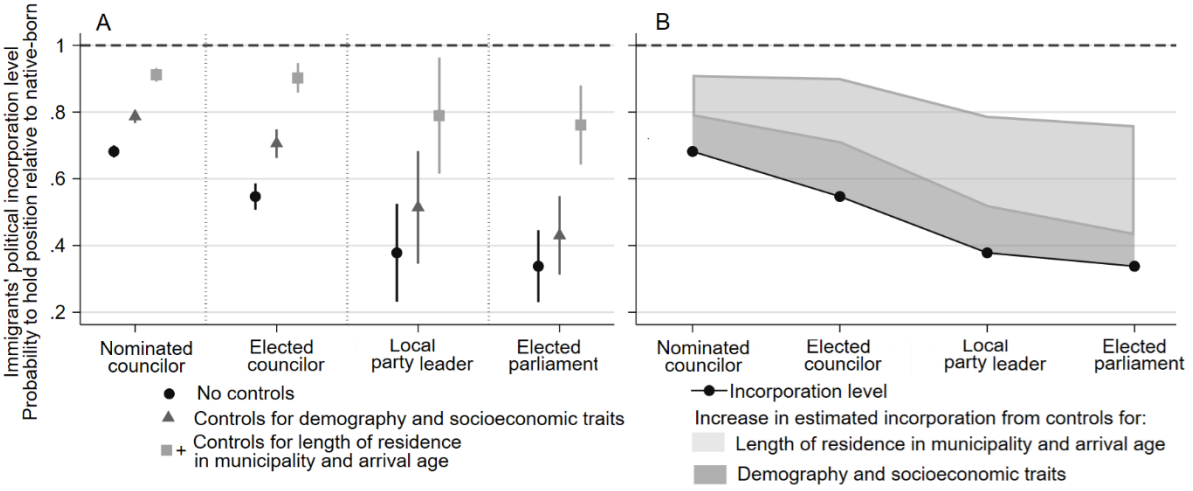

Figure F4. Explanations for immigrants' incorporation across political positions, removing native-born movers with short moves from that category.

Notes: The figure replicates the analysis in Figure 5 after removing from the category of native-born movers those who moved a relatively short distance, approximated by moves within Sweden's 21 regions. See note to Figure 5 for additional details.

Table F1. Replication of the main analysis with binary unadjusted outcome variables.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Nominated councilor (native-born average = 0.8042[a])			Elected councilor (native-born average = 0.2000 [a])		
Immigrant	-0.2173***	-0.1643***	-0.0851***	-0.0709***	-0.0481***	-0.0206***
	(0.0047)	(0.0053)	(0.0055)	(0.0021)	(0.0023)	(0.0024)
Observations	57,126,892	55,239,032	55,239,032	57,126,892	55,239,032	55,239,032
	Local party leader (native-born average = 0.0137 [a])			Elected parliamentarian (native-born average = 0.00537 [a])		
Immigrant	-0.0077***	-0.0054***	-0.0025***	-0.0036***	-0.0024***	-0.0008**
	(0.0004)	(0.0004)	(0.0004)	(0.0003)	(0.0003)	(0.0003)
Observations	57,126,892	55,239,032	55,239,032	57,239,519	55,319,520	55,319,520
Controls for demography		x	x		x	x
Controls for socioeconomic traits		x	x		x	x
Years of residence in municipality F.E.			x			x
Age at municipal arrival F.E.			x			x

Notes: The table replicates the analysis in Figure 5 but uses a binary unadjusted outcome variable. [a]Estimates and averages are all multiplied with 100 for presentational reasons. Fixed effects for the combination of municipality and election are included in the analysis of the local level outcomes and lection period fixed effects when election to parliament is the outcome.

G. Political parties and local social networks

Figure G.1 shows the split-sample analysis by party. The distance between the dark gray and light gray markers shows the explanatory power of the seniority ceiling for immigrants' deficits in political incorporation. These distances are generally larger for the established parties in the ideological left and right (the Social Democrats and the Conservatives) compared with the new parties (the Green Party and the Sweden Democrats).

Comparing levels of incorporation between the established and new party in each ideological pairing shows worse incorporation in the established party for the left-ideological pair, but not the right-ideological. The Sweden Democrats has lower levels on all four positions than the Conservatives. Anti-immigrant party ideology clearly confounds this crude comparison.

The results in Figure G1 should not be interpreted as evidence of better incorporation of immigrants in left-ideological parties. Such a pattern might be expected because left-ideological parties tend to be more positive to immigration and support social safety nets with positive redistribution effects for those with lower household incomes (Folke et al. 2025; and recall the

summary statistics in Table 1). The pattern of baseline levels of incorporation in Figure G1 could appear supportive of this pattern at first glance.

The pattern of better incorporation in left-ideological parties loses clarity once we exchange the comparison group: rather than comparing immigrants' share of officeholders with their share in the population, we compare it with their share among the party's voters. We calculate relative likelihoods to vote for each party between immigrants and native-born using data from Statistics Sweden's Party Preference Survey (PSU) from 2006 to 2025. Comparing these numbers to the relative likelihood to be a parliamentarian changes the results dramatically. The Conservative party performs the best, with immigrants' relative likelihood to vote and be a parliamentarian for the party almost perfectly equal (78% and 75%). In both left-ideological parties, immigrants are less likely to be parliamentarian than natives, but substantially *more* likely to be a voter. Immigrants are 80% as likely to be parliamentarians for the Social Democrats, but they are 48% more likely than natives to vote for it. Sweden Democrats have the worst outcomes for both benchmarks, with immigrants being 61% as likely as natives to vote, but just 0—20% as likely to be a parliamentarian, for this party.

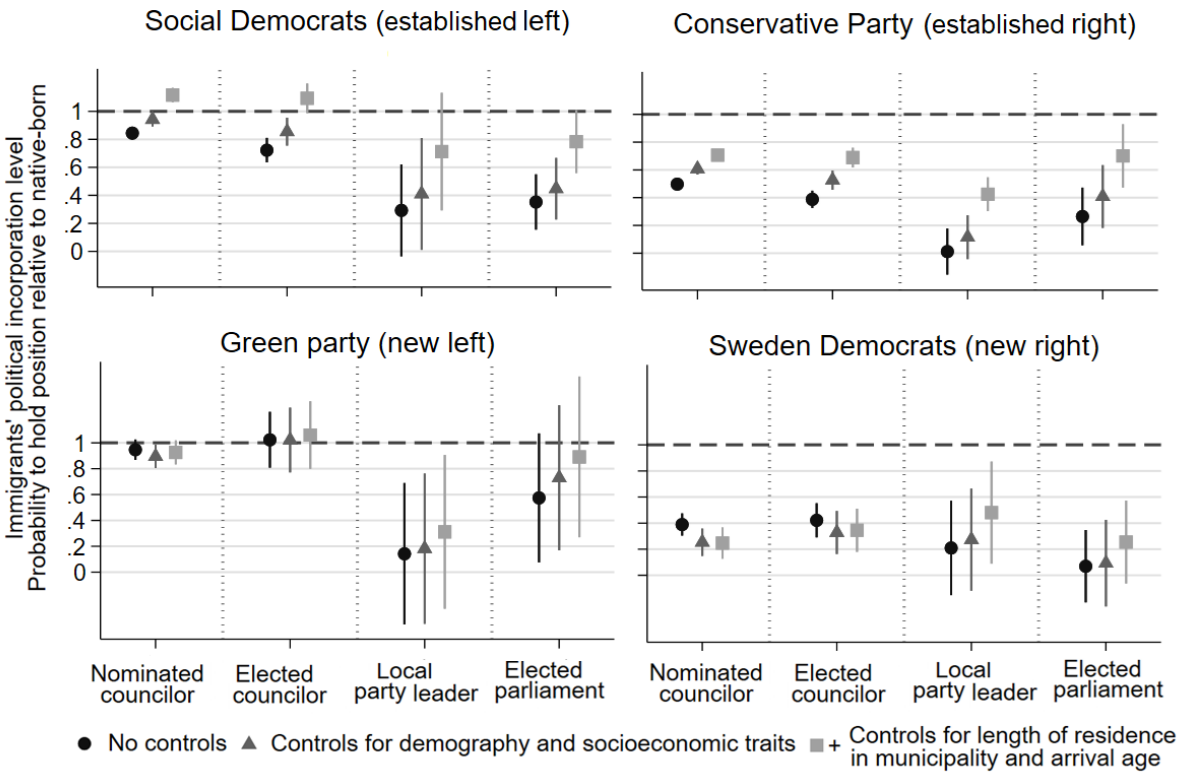

Figure G1. Replication of Figure 5 for four political parties.

Notes: The figure repeats the analysis in Figure 5 for Sweden's established left and right parties (top) and new left and right parties (bottom).

In the following analysis, we examine the potential role of pre-existing social network connections in the incorporation of movers. Bratsberg et al. (2021) show that immigrants who settle in politically active neighborhoods tend to become involved in local political participation more quickly. Motivated by this finding, we construct a measure of neighborhood political activity to capture movers' exposure to facilitating social networks. Specifically, we create a dummy variable indicating whether a neighborhood is overrepresented in the municipal council, following the methodology of Folke et al. (2024). According to this methodology, a high-density neighborhood is one whose share of the municipality's elected council members exceeds its share of eligible voters.

We define neighborhoods using the DeSo classification developed by Statistics Sweden. This classification divides municipalities into small areas averaging about 1,300 inhabitants, making it the most fine-grained neighborhood definition available in our data. DeSo data are available from 1982 onward. Therefore, we restrict our analysis of movers to elections from 2006 and later, since 2006 is the first election year in which we can observe each mover's neighborhood of residence in their year of arrival.

We replicate the analysis from Appendix C, which compared the incorporation of immigrant and native-born movers as a function of their years of residence in the municipality. The only difference is that we now compare movers based on the political context of their destination neighborhood. In other words, instead of distinguishing movers by where they were born, we distinguish them by whether they moved into a neighborhood with a high or low density of politicians. Figure G.2 presents the results of this comparison.

For the two lower political positions we can see that movers that move into a neighborhood with a high density of politicians have a clear advantage once they have lived in the municipality for more than 10 years. After this time the incorporation rate for movers that move to a

neighborhood with a high share of politicians is about 10-20 percentage points higher. For incorporation to local party leader and election to parliament, there is no consistent gap between the two groups of movers.

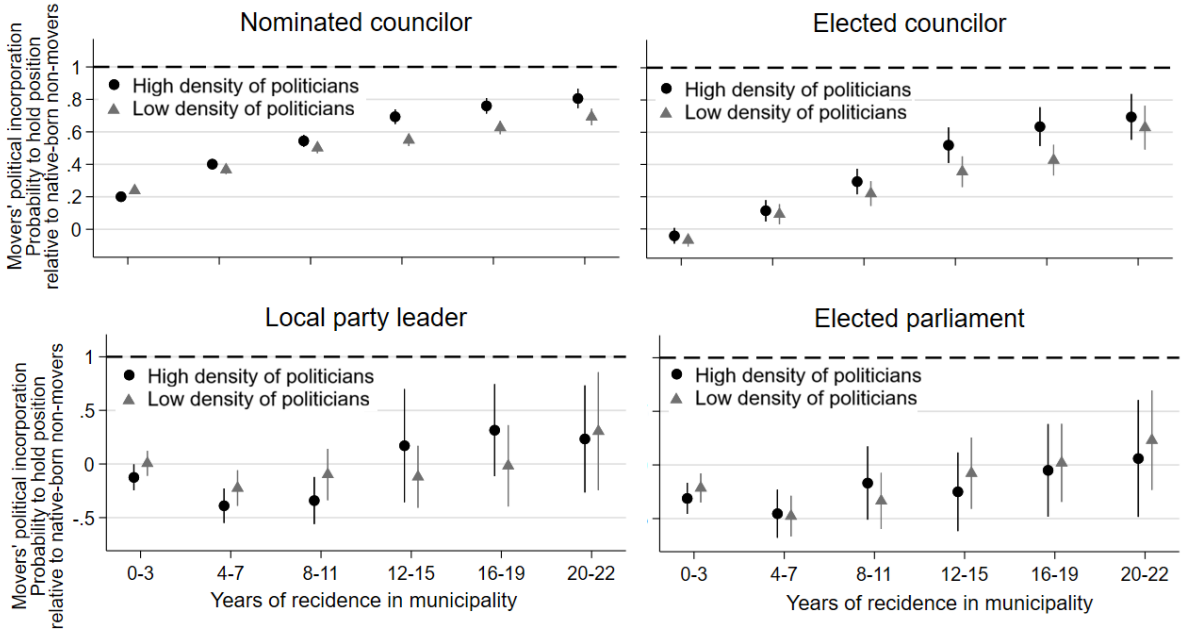

Figure G2. Political incorporation by municipality length of residence for movers entering neighborhoods with a low or high density of politicians.

Notes: Point estimates from estimating Equation (C1) with dummies for 4-year brackets for length of residence in the municipality (0 to 22 years) for movers moving to a neighborhood with a high or low density of politicians. Standard errors are clustered at the individual level, and vertical lines are 95% confidence intervals. The reference group are native-born non-movers. The regressions include the control variables for demographic and socioeconomic traits listed in Figure 5.

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