**Who is Your Ally? Political Parties as Elite Allies of Immigrant Associations
Locally**

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Abstract

Cities and towns are the proximity context where immigrants interact with political actors who can channel their demands. Treating immigration as a salient policy field in this setting reveals how political parties and immigrant associations relate to each other. In this paper, I study when political parties become (or do not become) elite allies of immigrant associations following the approval of policies of exclusion at the local level. To answer my question, I qualitatively study the interaction between these actors with regards to the approval of two policies in two cities in Catalonia, Spain: the burka regulation in Lleida and the exclusion of undocumented immigrants from the local census in Vic. The findings make evident that local factors related to the political conflict over immigration and the associational web provide immigrant associations with varying degrees of agency that condition their relationships with political parties as elite allies.

Key Words

Elite allies, Political parties, Immigrant associations, Politicisation, Local level, Spain

The growing scholarly interest in immigrant-related politics in European and North American cities over the last two decades has left unexplored how immigrant associations interact with elite allies such as political parties. This is especially relevant to understand the capacity immigrants have to mobilise their claims as a collective actor in contexts where immigration is politicised. As social movement scholars have stated, the possibilities social actors have to mobilise are closely linked to the presence of elite allies who facilitate collective action (Kriesi et al. 1995; Tarrow 2012). Accordingly, this paper asks *when political parties become allies (or do not) of immigrant associations in local contexts of politicisation*.

Sidney Tarrow (2012, 79) refers to elite allies as “influential” actors who can act as “a friend in court, as guarantors against brutal repression, or as an acceptable negotiator on behalf of constituencies.” They can include “members of the judicial system, the legislature, the president, business, political parties, organised labour, scientists, the church, and intellectuals” (van Dyke 2003, 230). This idea, to which this paper subscribes, refers to those “influential” allies that support social actors’ short or long-term objectives and provide access to material and symbolic resources (Rucht 2004; Triviño-Salazar, 2018). Political parties as elite allies may facilitate or hinder the success of social actors through their position in the government or in the opposition and their position as mainstream or peripheral political parties (Kriesi 2015). Although immigrant associations may seek allies from a plethora of actors, political parties enjoy expediting access to decision-making institutions through their elected representatives (Michon and Vermeulen 2013, 599). Immigrant associations are defined as non-profit organisations founded by immigrants at all stages of immigration with the purpose of addressing practical and cultural issues related to their integration in host countries (Schrover and Vermeulen 2005; Babis 2016). Immigrant associations may find in elite allies such as political parties the support they need for their claims and their own survival as an organisation. Political parties, in turn, may see in immigrant associations a channel to expand their electoral reach and legitimise their position on immigration for reasons ranging from instrumental to ideological (Schrover and Vermeulen 2005; Triviño-Salazar, 2018).

I ground my question on the politicization of immigration locally, more specifically, on the approval of policies of exclusion. In his study on Italian municipalities, Maurizio Ambrosini (2013, 138) defines policies of exclusion as “the measures that in various ways target the exclusion of immigrants as a legitimate and recognised part of the local community.” They are the outcome of political conflict over the negotiation of the presence of immigrants in local contexts (Ambrosini 2013). It is expected that the presence of such policies “sharpen the oppositional edge of immigrant groups” (Nicholls and Uitemark 2017, 882). Immigrant associations may become visible nodes of political mobilisation around these policies by acting as “mouthpieces of their constituency or being used as such by local authorities” (Vermeulen 2006, 12). I argue that external pressures related to the process of politicization of immigration locally and internal dynamics within and among immigrant associations mediate the way they relate to political parties as elite allies.

To answer my research question, I build an analytical framework applicable to the selected actors at the local level. Then I qualitatively study the mobilisations following the approval of two policies of exclusion in two cities in Catalonia, Spain: the burka regulation in Lleida and the exclusion of undocumented immigrants from the local census in Vic. I present my findings by focusing on the conflictive environment leading to the policies of exclusion and the mobilisation that occurs in response to their approval. By doing so, I problematise the role of associations in relation to political parties as an elite ally. I conclude by highlighting my contribution to the immigration literature on political participation.

Building the Lens to Study Allies

The research on the political participation of immigrants as a collective actor has mainly analysed how institutional and cultural factors define their organisation and mobilisation (Koopmans and Statham 2000; Hochschild and Mollenkopf 2009). Nevertheless, the mobilisation of immigrant associations vis-à-vis central allies such as political parties remains largely underexplored. Moreover, the literature has overlooked binomial relationships between immigrant associations and other actors that can be indicative of their participation in host societies.

The literature has focused on how national and local-level characteristics affect the patterns of participation immigrants follow locally. Scholars following the national strand perspective argue that immigrants develop participatory forms that reflect national political opportunities (i.e. citizenship regimes and integration models) (Ireland 1994; Fennema and Tillie 2004). However, a local turn in the literature in recent years has recognised the centrality of cities in the political participation of immigrants as a collective actor (Giugni and Morales 2011; De Graauw and Vermeulen 2016). Scholars who share this point of view argue that local political and social institutions help to build infrastructures that contribute to the immigrants' collective organisation (Borkert and Caponio 2010; Michon and Vermeulen 2013). This localist approach is not homogenous as it does not accord the same strength to institutional characteristics in explaining participation. Some studies have focused on institutional dynamics to explain the participation of immigrant associations in local policy networks (Caponio 2005) or immigrant-elected representatives in local councils (Garbaye 2005). Other studies have explicitly departed from this institutional focus by giving a more prominent role to immigrant mobilisation in local social movements and their alliances with non-state actors (Cappiali 2016, 2018; Nicholls and Uitermark 2017; Zepeda-Millán 2016). It is precisely to this localist strand that this study ascribes.

Notwithstanding the different lines of research, the literature has prioritised the political opportunity structure (POS) approach in the study of the political participation of immigrants locally (Giugni and Morales 2011; Vermeulen and Brünger 2014). Originally developed by social movement scholars (see Kriesi et al. 1995; Tarrow 2012), political opportunities refer to “the extent to which powerful groups, including governments, are vulnerable or receptive to new claims made by groups that hold a marginal position in the political system” (Schrover and Vermeulen 2005, 828). I

believe that the logic behind the POS approach can be successfully applied to study allies locally. I particularly refer to its strength to analyse institutional and social characteristics that shape the collective action of immigrants. However, as Hassan Boussetta (2000) warns, immigration scholars' interpretation when using the POS should be cautious to not misrepresent immigrants as passive actors vis-à-vis institutional ones (e.g. political parties with legislative representation). Però and Solomos (2010, 29) recommend conceiving the POS as a "non-deterministic concept" based on actors and interaction. The framework using this approach should be dynamic and able to show how change occurs due to structural and agential factors (Cappiali 2018). Moreover, following scholars interested on immigrant movements locally (e.g. Cappiali 2016; Zepeda-Millan 2016), the framework should incorporate political conflict and mobilisation as two rationales deeply embedded in the relationships among actors.

Against this backdrop, I suggest focusing on two analytical dimensions which draw their inspiration from immigration and social movement scholars. The first dimension refers to the conflict environment leading to local policies of exclusion. As Koopmans et al. (2005) state, immigration and ethnic relations are highly politicised issues. In fact, "state actors have largely contributed to [the] politicization by framing the issues and implementing immigration and integration policies" (Koopmans et al. 2005, 144). I propose to reconstruct the process that contribute to the problematisation of specific aspects related to immigration as a political conflict. The second dimension refers to the political mobilisation in response to the approval of policies of exclusion. According to social movement scholars (Kriesi et al. 1995; Van Dyke 2003), the presence of political conflict may bring elite allies closer to social actors or distance them. However, we cannot assume straightforward stimulus-response logic. As social movements scholars focused on organizational features state (Zald and Ash-Garner 1987; Diani 2015), actors do not mobilise exclusively in response to external pressures. Organisations are also subject to internal pressures that together with the external ones affect their internal structure and ultimate success in attaining their goals (Zald and Ash-Garner 1987). By looking at the mobilisation of actors, I seek to identify contextual (i.e. related to the policy of exclusion), historical (i.e. traditional allies) and internal elements (i.e. ideology, sources of legitimacy, leadership) that move immigrant associations to relate to political parties. From here, I reconstruct the existing alliances and non-alliances between both actors in this setting.

Methodology

To answer my research question, I focus on the political conflict around two policies of exclusion approved in one mid- and one small-sized Catalan city in 2010. Hence, my case-selection and the data collection follow a conflict-driven logic. Following van der Bruug, et al. (2015) and Castelli-Gattinara (2016), I selected diverse cases that offered contrasting elements in the politicization process, namely the cultural or economic rationales behind the policy debate and the political orientation of the politicizing actors

(left-wing or right-wing governments). The selection then resulted in the case of the burka regulation in Lleida proposed by the governing left-wing Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSC), and the exclusion of undocumented immigrants from the municipal register in Vic proposed by the governing coalition led by the right-wing party, Convergence, and Union (CiU). Although these episodes took place at the local level, they received extensive media attention at the national level since they were the first cities to openly advance local policies of exclusion not addressed in other Spanish cities.

I rely on qualitative methods to study these two cases. I gathered information about those actors who mobilised around the policies of exclusion: salient immigrant associations and political parties visible in the Catalan media. To collect that information, I held semi-structured interviews and engaged in archival research. Semi-structured interviews were the primary source of information. I conducted 31 interviews (see Appendix): 11 interviews with councillors representing all the political parties in the two local councils, three local party leaders with no elected position, 10 immigrant associations' leaders, seven pro-immigrant NGOs' leaders and one local officer all between March and June 2013. The information comprises the years 2010-2011 when the politicised issues erupted and evolved. I triangulated the information with archival research (local council sessions, reports, and newspaper articles) which helped me to reconstruct the background around the policies. I used thematic analysis to code my information by identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data.

Placing the Cases in a Seemingly Non-Conflictive National Environment

Several migration scholars agree that the levels of political conflict over immigration in Spain have not been as salient as those in other southern European countries such as Italy or Greece (Zapata-Barrero and Garcés-Mascreñas 2012; Ros and Morales 2015). The issue becomes more intriguing if we consider that Spain went from having 2.5% foreign-born residents in 1999 to 12% in 2009 out of a population of 46 million (INE 2018). Most of the new residents, mainly from Morocco, Eastern Europe and Latin America, came in response to the need for low-skilled labour in the construction, service, and agro-industrial sectors (Arango et al. 2011). A plausible explanation provided for the low levels of politicization is the lack of electoral space at the national level for the formation of far-right political parties after Franco's ultraright dictatorship (Burchianti and Zapata-Barrero, 2014). Equally important is the consensus featured in the political debate in the democratic period.

Despite the abovementioned scenario, over the last two decades the politicization of immigration at the national level around specific local conflicts has certainly been present. Some of the most visible political conflicts were derived from particular events such as the xenophobic riots against Moroccan agricultural workers in the Andalusian town of El Ejido in 2000 (Zapata-Barrero and Garcés-Mascreñas 2012), the protests organised by undocumented migrants asking for their regularization in cities between 2000 and 2004 (Zapata-Barrero et al. 2010) or the local opposition to opening mosques organised by neighbourhood associations especially in Catalonia (Astor 2012).

Nevertheless, with the economic crisis affecting Spain since 2008, the politicization of immigration at the national level decreased, although not disappeared, due to changes in political priorities (Ros and Morales 2015).

The local level in Spain is of paramount importance to understanding the emergence of conflicts over immigration. A multilevel system of competencies on issues affecting the immigrants' well-being (e.g. health, education, housing) make of cities and towns co-responsible for their integration (Arango et al. 2011). This situation makes immigration part of the local debate and the local electoral context of competition between political parties (Pérez-Nievas et al. 2014).¹ Locally, immigrants from 12 non-EU countries can vote² while EU citizens can vote and run for elections (464,119 are registered voters representing only 1.32% of the Spanish electoral census).³ In this scenario, addressing immigrant groups with voting rights help expand the political parties' constituency; addressing those with no voting rights also help political parties legitimise particular stances on immigration with their mainstream electorate (see Triviño-Salazar, 2018). In both situations, immigrant associations emerge as visible contact points for local authorities and political parties seeking to access certain groups. For immigrant associations, political parties constitute an avenue that facilitates or hinders their political access to local institutions.

The decrease in the politicization of immigration in Spain after the start of the economic crisis did not translate into a similar decrease in Catalonia. This eastern autonomous community in Spain had a spectacular rise in its immigrant population from 6.3% in 2001 to 17.7% of the total population in 2012 (7.5 million). In 2010, mid- and small-sized Catalan cities experienced the most visible cases of discourses and policies of immigrant exclusion in the recent past in Spain (Burchianti and Zapata-Barrero 2014). Unlike in other parts of the country, the presence and expansion of the far-right Platform for Catalonia (PxC) in certain municipalities had an impact on the Catalan party system, especially on mainstream political parties (Burchianti and Zapata-Barrero 2014). Mainstream political parties such as the left-wing Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSC), the right-wing nationalist Convergence and Union (CiU) and the right-wing People's Party (PP) took harder stances on immigration in certain cities and towns. In this scenario, the two cases of Lleida and Vic (See table 1) emerged as paradigmatic.

Lleida is a provincial capital a two hours' drive from Barcelona. The city has had left-wing majorities led by the PSC since the first municipal elections in the post-Franco era in 1979. Immigrants mainly from Romania, Morocco and Algeria arrived in Lleida in the early 2000s to work in the agro-industrial sector. On June 29, 2010, the Socialist government amended the local law of civility where it forbade access to any public building to any person wearing a burka or niqab or other accessories such as helmets or balaclavas. The modification was officially justified on "the fundamental right to equality between men and women."⁴ Known as "the burka regulation," it mobilised important sectors of the civil society in opposition. Critical voices interpreted the measure as an attack on local Muslim residents (interviews L1, L7, L10). After Lleida's example, five Catalan cities (Barcelona, El Vendrell, Girona, Manresa, Reus,) proposed similar amendments (Burchardt and Grier 2018). However, in May 2013, the Spanish

Supreme Court ended the controversy when it ruled that Lleida (or any Spanish city) could not legislate on this issue.

The second case happened in the small city of Vic. Located an hour's drive from Barcelona, the city has been a right-wing stronghold governed by CiU since 1979. Like in Lleida, low-skilled migrants mainly from Morocco, Ghana and India arrived in the city. On December 29, 2009, the coalition government announced the city would not register undocumented immigrants in the local census (the *padrón*).⁵ In Spain, being on the municipal register is an essential step to access social services (like healthcare or education). The mayor, Josep Vila d'Abadal, justified this decision was necessary to reorganise local immigration flows.⁶ However, the mounting pressure from different actors (mainly the national and Catalan governments and civil society organisations) made the city withdraw the measure months later. In the next section, the analysis identifies different elements that build a conflictive environment which is conducive to the two policies of exclusion studied.

[Table 1. Around here]

Politicization and local policies of exclusion: Different conflict environments, similar outcomes

The burka in public space: problematizing Muslims as the “cultural other”

In my analysis, conflict over the presence of a religious minority in public space seems to be a major challenge in accommodating immigrants locally. In Lleida, the burka regulation passed with the votes of the governing PSC and two parties in the opposition, the PP and CiU, while the remaining two parties in the opposition, the green-communists of Initiative for Catalonia-Greens (IC-V) and the ERC, opposed and abstained respectively. Political elites supporting the regulation defended civility as a precondition to the integration from certain parts of the immigrant population (interviews L2, L4, L5). Civility refers here to the “defence of the local society, pictured as liberal and civic, from illiberal practices and values from certain immigrant groups” (Mouritsen and Olson 2014). Additionally, Burchardt and Grier (2018) linked the debates over the burka in Catalonia to the conception that the (local) majority had about the ideal use of public space.

Ambrosini (2013, 138) explains that the existence of local policies of exclusion, such as the burka, has the symbolic intention of opposing the cultural pluralism brought by newcomers. By studying the conflictive environment surrounding the burka in Lleida, I identified, like Ambrosini, a larger conflict regarding the presence of Muslim residents in the city that went beyond the “claim for civility.” Political elites behind the burka regulation seemed to build a narrative that targeted certain Muslim residents as “the cultural other” based on different conflicts over the management of Islam (interviews L1, L4, L5, L16). This otherness translated into mechanisms that essentialised the culture and difference of Muslim residents. An interview excerpt (L6) with a PSC councillor illustrates this narrative:

...in a city where every day there are more veils, every day you see more people with burkas, it is clear that you need to act [referring to the burka regulation]. The people are not responding well to this input from the Muslim community [because] then everyone thinks that all the Muslims are the same [...] something had to be done.

Another councillor supporting the burka eloquently added (interview L3):

I was shocked the first time I saw a woman wearing a burka, it gave me goose bumps.

As the arrival of non-Christian immigrants increased in Spain, policy initiatives to manage religious diversity in a culturally-Catholic environment grew at the sub-national level (Griera 2012). Lleida, as other cities, assumed this approach by creating tools such as an interfaith platform (i.e. the Assembly of Religions) with local religious leaders in the quest to manage religious diversity (interview L15). Despite the seemingly accommodating approach, opposition to mosques and the alleged presence of Salafism within the Muslim community led by Imam Abdelwahab Houzi became visible sources of conflict (interviews L10, L11, L12, L16). Conflicts in Lleida are closely linked to the existence of two large communities grouped under two associations. The first is Lleida's Islamic Association founded by Imam Morro Jaiteh in 1992 and mainly formed by immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa (interview L16). Its location in a small prayer hall in the city centre called Omar Mosque which constantly exceeded its capacity generated conflicts with the neighbours. The other association is Islamic Unity and Cooperation. Founded by Imam Houzi, their meeting place was a prayer hall downtown known as North Street Mosque. Imam Houzi's preaching based on a stricter interpretation of the Koran and the large congregation exceeding the mosque's capacity drew negative attention from the local authorities (interviews L1, L8, L11, L13, L16). As a solution to the mosques, Houzi negotiated a place where he could build a proper one for his community with the local government. After disagreements on the location and opposition from the neighbours, the project stopped due to lack of funding in 2010 (L10). The suspicion of Houzi and his community and the unsolved problems of the mosques drew sharp criticism of the Socialist government in the public debate (interviews L1, L3, L16) (*El País*, August 10, 2010).

Van der Brug et al. (2015, 6) state that political parties must differentiate themselves from other opponents by politicizing specific issues. According to my informants (interviews L1, L5, L9, L10), the burka regulation was also the result of electoral competition fuelled by the conflicts surrounding the presence of Islamic communities in the city. The economic crisis affecting Spain since 2008 posed a serious threat to the PCS's possibilities of remaining in power locally and nationally. Not only that, the broad media coverage of the far-right PxC in their bid for a seat in the Catalan Parliament in 2010 heated up the electoral scene (Hernández-Carr 2011). Locally, the opposition party CiU unsuccessfully tried to pass a similar piece of legislation before the burka regulation was enacted in a clear move to own the issue of Islam in the city. The growing criticism of the government for their failed attempts to regulate the

presence of Islam in the city put pressure on Angel Ros, the mayor and leader of the local PSC (interviews L1, L7). The burka regulation seemed to emerge as an electoral strategy advanced by the governing PSC.

The local census: considering certain immigrants as an economic burden

In Spain, the reality of undocumented migrants has been very present in the recent history of the country as several large-scale immigrant regularisations show (Zapata-Barrero and Garcés-Mascreñas 2012). Several local conflicts drew national political and media attention to the issue. Notoriously the “sit-down strikes” by undocumented immigrants demanding their regularization in Barcelona churches in 2001 and 2004 (Zapata-Barrero et al. 2010). Despite this scenario, Vic did not seem to have any major conflicts about the presence of undocumented migrants (interviews V5, V6, V7, V8).⁷ However, the multi-coloured coalition government formed by the right-wing CiU and the left-wing PSC and Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC) proposed a measure that in their words would help organise large immigration flows in a context of economic scarcity (interviews V1, V3). The far-right PxC supported it while the left-wing ICV and the Unitary Popular Candidacy (CUP) opposed.

In general, the presence of immigrants in Vic has not been a source of social conflict. The only identifiable tensions were minor ones between neighbours in high-immigration, working-class neighbourhoods such as El Remei (interviews V4, V5, V10). The city formally had an inclusive approach to the integration of immigrants based on a broad consensus with local NGOs, trade unions and immigrant associations (an example was the existence of the Advisory City Council⁸ with state and non-state actors). Moreover, well-established associations in the city organised themselves under the Immigration Committee, a non-state initiative hosted by the Catholic organisation Casal Claret in their quest to cooperate with different state and non-state actors (Interviews V10, V12, V13). If there were no visible social conflicts, why did the city approve this policy?

From my analysis, it is possible to link the decision on the local census to a political conflict around the alleged competition between immigrants and the local population for scarce resources. The presence of PxC on the local scene since 2002 contributed to a discourse in which “welfare chauvinism” prevailed. “Welfare chauvinism” refers to excluding or restricting immigrants from any welfare provision to protect those who belong and contribute to a defined national-community (Kitschelt 1997). Hernández Carr (2011) places PxC in the nationalist-populist category that sees immigration as a threat to the local population. Their slogan “Locals first” (*Primers els de casa*) resonated in certain parts of the electorate that voted them to second place in the 2007 municipal elections. My informants directly blamed the presence of this discourse for the creation of a political conflict that justified actions such as the local census (interviews V6, V7, V8, V9, V10, V11, V14).

As the literature has extensively documented (van der Bruug et al. 2015; Castelli-Gattinara 2016), anti-immigration parties may create a contagion effect in mainstream

parties by affecting policy outcomes without entering government. For CiU, as the governing party in Vic since 1979, it was imperative to remain in power as the popularity of the PxC increased and the economic crisis threatened their position. The PxC had already proposed a similar piece of legislation related to the undocumented migrants as a policy to control the arrival of newcomers (interviews V6, V8, V14). The local census controversy sent an implicit message to the mainstream electorate fearful of the alleged threat immigrants posed to their well-being. According to my informants (interviews V6, V7, V14), the remaining parties in the coalition also felt compelled to support the CiU in an environment where immigration became the most polarizing aspect for the local electorate. As an immigrant leader told me:

The real problem was not the municipal census controversy which was a human rights violation; the real problem was that political parties were making concessions because of the pressure of the racist, far right. This is even more serious than the violation of rights. As the conflict over the local census disappeared, the problem [referring to the presence of PxC] persisted. (V8)

The conflictive environment in the two cases studied shows that social conflicts over the presence of immigrants are not necessarily a precondition for the politicization of immigration around policies of exclusion. While in Lleida the burka regulation was constructed around the different conflicts related to the mosques and the presence of a Salafism, in Vic the decision on the local census seemed to be built from the discourse of a far-right wing political party electorally threatening the governing coalition. Under these conditions, competition between the local political elites to own the framework under which the policies were approved is a central element to their politicization. In the next section, I reconstruct the mobilisation in response to the local policies of exclusion.

Mobilization in response to Policies of Exclusion: Testing Old Allies or Finding New Ones

Divided positions over the burka: Muslims appealing to old allies

The burka regulation made secular and religious-cultural associations representing Muslim residents central to the public debate. My findings reveal division not only from a secular/religious standpoint but also within the secular sector around the burka. On the one hand, the (secular) associations supporting the regulation aligned with the “claim for civility” put forward by the supporting political parties (PSC, CiU and PP). Moreover, they dismissed the burka as non-representative of Islam. As one Moroccan leader supporting the regulation told me: “We are in favour of people’s freedom. [...] A burka is good as long as it does not bother anyone, but if you are then you have to adapt to the rules of that country” (interview L11). On the other hand, the religious-cultural and secular associations opposing the regulation considered it to be instrumentalising Islam for electoral purposes (interviews L7, L9, L13, L14).

The divided positions among the associations impeded having a unified strategy to support or oppose the regulation. This is the case of those associations against the

regulation which were unable to mobilise together. For instance, Imam Jaiteh and Imam Houzi who represented the two most relevant religious-cultural associations in the city decided separately to stop attending the meetings organised by the local interfaith platform to protest the regulation (*El País*, June 2, 2010). One of them, Imam Jaiteh's association, filed a lawsuit against the burka regulation (*El País*, August 10, 2010). Another association, Watani, also filed a lawsuit against the regulation (interview L7). In the case of well-established associations supporting the regulation such as the Moroccan MagrebLleida or Arab Atlas, the controversy did not bring them together. Their leaders made separate public statements supporting the regulation and met local officials to support the government's position (interview L5, L11). It is apparent that the lack of a unified strategy illustrates deeper divisions among these associations, as shown below.

My findings reveal that the conflict reinforced existing alliances between certain secular associations (such as MagrebLleida) supporting the regulation and the left-wing PSC. Kriesi et al. (1995) explain that left-wing political parties, such as the PSC, tend to be the social actors' natural allies. Yet, when in government, the left seems to favour social actors that articulate limited claims and align with their electoral interests. The role of the PSC in their alliances with associations representing Muslim residents follows this thinking. Historically, this party was an ally of associations representing Muslim residents in the city. However, the various conflicts over the mosques deteriorated the alliances between the PSC and some associations, including the two most relevant religious-cultural ones. Widespread distrust from the immigrant leaders contributed to this situation where they felt used by local politicians (interviews L1, L9, L10). In this scenario, the party favoured relationships with less contentious associations such as MagrebLleida or religious-cultural ones such as Aloumma (interview L16). The shift towards the recognition of new leaderships helped legitimise the PSC's approach to managing Islam (including the burka) in the view of their electorate (interviews L1, L2, L8, L10). For the party, this position served to bridge the ideological dilemma of the left: satisfying a working-class electorate concerned with the consequences of globalization (and immigration) and an electorate identified with a cosmopolitan view of the world (see also Alonso and Da Fonseca 2012).

The PSC's dominant role in the city wittingly disempowered different associations representing Muslim residents in the city. In this situation, immigrant leaders created patterns of political powerlessness that distanced their communities from the possibility of having their own voice. The leadership of MagrebLleida was paradigmatic in the conflict among associations supporting the PSC. MagrebLleida started in 2002 as a meeting point for immigrants from the Maghreb region which offered several cultural activities (e.g. celebrating Muslim festivities and teaching Arabic). Although ideological closeness between associations like MagrebLleida and the PSC played a part in the support of the burka regulation, their proximity was attributed to the material incentives offered by the latter. In fact, MagrebLleida's leader told me that "All the political parties try to have a relationship with the community. Then you can get one thing or another. For instance, if you have a relationship or you are a party member and you talk with the party officials then you can get something" (interview L11). A similar situation

occurred with the small cultural-religious association Aloumma. Despite opposing the burka, they maintained the alliance with the governing PSC as they were negotiating to continue the mosque project stopped by Imam Houzi (interviews L10, L16). In both associations, close interpersonal ties with local politicians within the PSC contributed to their relationship (interview L5, L6, L9, L10).

Beyond the position associations adopted with regards to the burka, their dependence on local political elites was a major obstacle to their forming alliances with other political parties. This is evident among those which had an inclusive pro-immigrant agenda but were peripheral in Lleida such as IC-V. Although this party advocated for immigrant communities and was vocal in its opposition to the burka regulation, they were unable to find immigrant allies. The mobilisation of material resources by the governing political party created a situation where certain associations representing Muslim residents were dependent on it while turning their former allies into outcasts. As a local politician told me:

As soon as they organise, immigrant associations like MagrebLleida are grabbed up by those with power. [...] This is what happens with more consolidated immigrant associations in Lleida. Once you come into existence and you want projects, you depend [on them]. (interview L1)

I identified that the associations' various sources of legitimacy also shaped the relationships with political parties or the lack thereof. Vermeulen and Brünger (2014) argue that "socio-political legitimacy," or the acceptance of organisation's existence by external actors, and "cognitive legitimacy," or the acceptance of the organisation's existence by its constituents, affect the survival of immigrant associations. Overall, the associations in Lleida suffered from the lack of meaningful ties with other local non-state actors such as trade unions or active advocacy groups such as Amnesty International during the conflict (interviews L13, L14, L15, L16). Seeming lack of interest on the associations' side explained this situation. This led resource-poor organisations such as the secular associations and Aloumma to rely more on the recognition offered by the governing PSC or actors outside of Lleida (interview L17). Conversely, for the two largest religious-cultural associations representing the largest Muslim communities in the city the cognitive legitimacy granted by their constituents, as religious organisations, seemed to reinforce their position and their cautious approach to alliances (interviews L1, L14, L16).

United positions about the local census: immigrants discarding old allies, finding new ones

Immigrant association mobilisation in opposition to the local census is the picture of unity, however, it is also the picture of different strategies to oppose and place pressure on the government coalition responsible for the decision. Unlike in Lleida, the socio-economic framework acted as a cross-cutting element that affected, directly or indirectly, the very presence of immigrants in the city in symbolic or material terms.

Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) claim that when immigrants face greater hostility locally, in-group solidarity is expected to develop. The way immigrant associations mobilised around the local census illustrates this situation. In fact, the policy acted as a unifying factor. Soon after it was announced, immigrant associations openly opposed it. As their voices against the measure were raised, the local Immigration Committee called for an emergency meeting (interviews V10, V11). From there, they decided to request meetings with government officials, release a manifesto asking the local government to withdraw the policy and mobilise support among their networks, not only in Vic but all over Spain. However, their mobilisation strategy was not equally assumed by all the members.

Unlike with the burka regulation, the local census ban produced noticeable shifts in the alliances between the most active immigrant associations during the conflict and the local political parties. My findings show that the political parties in the coalition government struggled to keep their alliances. The governing CiU was considered in the high days of immigration a traditional ally of associations in Vic. As a Catalan nationalist party, CiU have traditionally had a civic conception of the Catalan identity which contributed to a positive stance towards immigration (see Franco-Guillén 2015). Despite this position, the local census conflict meant the party lost the trust of local immigrant leaders. According to my interviews (V10, V11, V12), the leaders were disappointed with CiU for their position on the conflict, however, they were even more so with the left-wing parties that supported the measure (PSC and ERC) with whom they had also collaborated in the past through common activities. For the political parties in the coalition government, the alliances with immigrants during the conflict served to legitimise their approach to immigration management with their electorate (Burchianti and Zapata-Barrero 2014) while maintaining good relations with immigrant leaders. Breaking alliances had practical effects such as losing support of former immigrant allies (i.e. Ecuadorians) who could vote for the first time in the 2011 municipal elections. In this situation, the differentiated role that certain nationalities with voting rights play in the electoral scenario emerged as a negotiating tool in the relationship with certain political parties. As an Ecuadorian leader told me (interview V10):

Even though they [councillors from the coalition government] talked to each one of us individually and as a group, we didn't trust them. We were suspicious. In the last elections [2011], the mayor ran for re-election, but neither I nor the other Ecuadorians supported him. We even met with the other associations and decided not to support him.

In her study on social movements around refugees in Europe, Della Porta (2018) argues that networks of supporters are central for mobilisations of resource-poor groups. In the case of the local census, the unified position not only contributed to breaking ties with the political parties supporting the measure but also bolstered those with central pro-immigrant non-state actors. The moral and material support that Catholic organisations such as Caritas or Casal Claret or pro-immigrant NGOs such as Tapis Foundation have traditionally lent to immigrant associations strengthened the position immigrants had

against the coalition government during the local census conflict. In fact, these organisations supported immigrant associations and the Immigration Committee by offering advice, helping them organise activities and fund-raising (V10, V11, V13). The presence of PxC and its connection to the approval of the local census acted as a factor that increased cohesion among the different pro-immigrant and immigrant actors.

Unlike in Lleida, immigrant leaders in Vic were central to the unified position in opposition to the local census. Leaders felt the moral obligation to defend their communities from an approach that questioned their very presence in the city. In fact, they saw themselves as the first line of defence against the threat posed by a coalition government that had assumed a similar stance to the far-right PxC's. The local census reinforced the cognitive legitimacy of immigrant associations within their communities and the socio-political legitimacy in relation to external supporters such as pro-immigrant actors. This, in the end, facilitated mobilizing material and symbolic resources for the associations who were against the measure as well as preventing alliances with the governing political parties.

Despite the unity within the Committee, a peripheral party, the CUP, emerged as a central ally for the immigrant association Veus Diverses. According to Kriesi (2015), peripheral parties are more accessible as allies to social actors who are critical of political elites than mainstream ones. The CUP is a left-wing party founded by activists involved in local anti-capitalist movements across Catalonia (interviews V6, V7). Veus Diverses is a local association formed by a mix of local and immigrant members with a history of denouncing racism and anti-immigrant politics (interviews V6, V7). The proximity between local leaders, such as the legal adviser for Veus Diverses and CUP councillors encouraged collaboration between the two when the local census controversy emerged (interviews V6, V7, V8). They formed a local platform with local activists from anti-racist organisations which organised several activities (e.g. distributing flyers or organising demonstrations) (interviews V6, V7, V8, V14). For the CUP, Veus Diverses legitimised their political agenda in their opposition to the presence of far-right politics locally. For Veus Diverses, the CUP's support gave salience to their cause against the local census while consolidating alliances with a broader network of pro-immigrant actors. Interestingly, the alliance did not seem to affect the relationship with the Committee as their immediate goal was to prevent Vic from having anti-immigrant politics (interviews V8, V14). Hence, the associations' united position against the local census prevented alliances with the governing political parties while allowing new ones to emerge.

The cases studied herein portray two contrasting images of the mobilisation of immigrant associations when faced with conflict: one of division and another of unity. Both explain contrasting dynamics of (non) alliances. While the burka regulation demonstrates division and disunity among the different associations that mobilised in the conflict, in the local census, a coalition of associations opposing the measure gave a visible face to the immigrant communities who were against it. As the findings show, division and unity are linked not only to the nature of the conflict and the actors promoting it but also to a history of cooperation or competition between the different

associations involved and the cognitive legitimacy they enjoy. With this information it is possible to understand the alliances with the PSC and non-alliances with other political parties in Lleida as well as the non-alliances with the governing political parties in Vic. Moreover, the lack of alliances in Vic gave space to peripheral political parties, such as the CUP, to emerge. Next, I conclude by discussing the main elements identified in the two cases.

Conclusion

This article contributed to the study of alliances in the immigration literature. To do so I focused on the mobilisation of immigrant associations around policies of exclusion and how they related to political parties as elite allies in this context. Although my study focuses on two actors very much embedded in the local institutional dynamics, I sought to depart from this understanding by analytically placing immigrant associations at the centre of the relationship. This decision sought to compensate for the seeming power asymmetry that the literature attributes to immigrants vis-à-vis political parties with representation in legislative bodies (Garbaye 2005; de Graauw and Vermeulen 2016). By doing so, I uncovered alliances and non-alliances as the outcome of a complex process of external and internal pressures where political parties and immigrant associations exposed changing patterns in their relationships. From studying the conflict environment behind policies of exclusion and the mobilisation that comes afterwards, I placed the interaction of both actors not only in relation to the conflict but also to their political socialization, background and sources of legitimacy. From these findings, I sustain my contribution with three main elements.

The first refers to the relevance of the local level as the source of immigrant mobilisation in opposition to the national one. Unlike studies focused on the local mobilisation of immigrants as a reaction to national level politics (see Mayer 2017; Nicholls and Uitemark 2017), my study presents mobilisation as a reaction to local level politics. From there, I demonstrated how local socio-political processes of conflict triggered the mobilisation of immigration associations. By doing so, my intention was not to neglect the importance of national-level debates on immigration but to highlight the capacity of the local level to politicise specific issues that mobilised local actors. In this scenario, local political parties emerged as central allies or adversaries to immigrants' claims while immigrant associations became the point of reference in the public debate by representing different immigrant communities.

The second element refers to the unequal role played by political parties in their alliances with immigrant associations. In the cases studied, governing political parties offer two situations: in the first, they were able to maintain their allies thanks to their position of power and the conflict between associations. In this situation, instrumental over ideological considerations seemed to weight more for both actors. This is the case of the PSC and the shifting alliances with different associations representing Muslim residents. In the second one, it seems that immigrant associations had the capacity to pick their battles as well as their allies. In this case, ideological over instrumental

considerations seemed to weight more. Immigrant associations saw having political parties as allies that could endanger their relationship with immigrant and pro-immigrant actors, in the case of Vic shows, or could endanger their position vis-à-vis their own communities, such as the religious-cultural associations in Lleida, inconvenient. This situation also opened the floor to new allies such as the CUP in Vic.

The third element of this study is related to the varying degrees of agency immigrant associations have. This is the capacity immigrants have to mobilise with their own voice (Però and Solomos 2010). This element helps to explain their alliances with elite allies such as political parties and the type of relationships they can establish. Studying the conflict around policies of exclusion uncovered how strong or weak these actors are in the local scenario. Analysing the associations' roles in these conflicts show how their political socialization and leadership contribute to pooling symbolic and material resources with political parties or other non-state actors (see also Però and Solomos 2010; Diani 2015). Moreover, the agency these actors have is directly related to the ways they negotiate the presence of their communities with governments, political parties and pro- and anti-immigrant actors. In these two cases, how immigrant associations mobilised conditioned their relationships with political parties as elite allies. Studying immigrant associations in these conflicts place their relationships with political parties on a continuum between subordination and autonomy. In this respect, the findings show that solidarity among the different associations and their sources of socio-political (external) or cognitive (internal) legitimacy conditioned the positions they adopted in the conflict and their alliances.

Acknowledging that the rapprochement of two actors depends on how politics is played confirms a reality: actors do not act in isolation from their environment and their constituents. From this study, the city emerges as a “relational incubator” which produces different mobilisation outcomes and alliances (Nicholls and Uitemark 2017, 33). These dynamics portray local level politics as a field of its own, separate from the national field (Giugni and Morales 2011). Future research should focus on the agency immigrants enjoy vis-à-vis different political scenarios and elite allies. Not only that, research at the local level should help explore multi-level dynamics of mobilisation where immigrants, state and non-state actors may form broader alliances and coalitions in response to politics and policies of exclusion.

Notes

¹ Local councillors are elected every four years and they choose the mayor.

² Spain fares better compared to other EU countries (e.g. France, Italy) (Mipex 2015).

³ INE. 2015. Número definitivo de electores. <http://www.ine.es/prensa/np902.pdf>

⁴ City of Lleida. 2010. “La Paeria aprova modificar l'ordenança de civisme,” May 26.

⁵ City of Vic. 2010. Plenary Session, January 13

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ City of Vic. 2018. *Consell de Ciutat* [online]. Available at: <http://conselldecitutat.vicentitats.cat/el-consell-de-ciutat/>

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Appendix. Interviews

Lleida

- L1. Spokesperson, IC-V party/June 3, 2013
- L2. Councillor, ERC party/June 5, 2013
- L3. Councillor, PP party/June 5, 2013
- L4. Councillor, CiU party/June 4, 2013
- L5. Councillor, PSC/June 4, 2013
- L6. Councillor, PSC/June 6, 2013
- L7. President, Watani association/June 3, 2013
- L8. President, Arab Atlas association/June 6, 2013
- L9. Spokesperson, IBN Batuta/June 5, 2013
- L10. Imam, Islamic Community Aloumma/June 4, 2013
- L11. Spokesperson, MagrebLleida association/June 5, 2013
- L12. Secretary, Unesco Association/June 11, 2013
- L13. Secretary, CCOO-Cite trade union/June 5, 2013
- L14. Coordinator, AMIC-UGT trade union/June 5, 2013
- L15. Spokesperson, Interfaith platform/June 4, 2013
- L16. Officer, City of Lleida/June 5, 2013

Vic

- V1. Councillor, CiU/May 2, 2013
- V2. Spokesperson, CiU/May 9, 2013
- V3. Councillor, PSC/May 7, 2013
- V4. Councillor, ERC/June 13, 2013
- V5. Councillor, IC-V/May 9, 2013
- V6. Councillor, CUP/May, 9, 2013
- V7. Councillor, CUP/May 9, 2013

- V8. Spokesperson, Veus Diverses/May 9, 2013
- V9. Spokesperson, Tapis Foundation/May 30, 2013
- V10. President, Ecuadorian association/May 2, 2013
- V11. President, Colombian association/May 16, 2013
- V12. President, Catalunya Diverse association/June 13, 2013
- V13. Spokesperson, Càritas/May 16, 2013
- V14. Spokesperson, Unitat contre el feixisme/May 30, 2013