Alliances in the resolution of politicized immigration conflicts in the city

The construction of an interpretive framework

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Abstract

The political opportunity structure (POS) debate has mainly focused on how institutional and cultural factors shape the mobilization of immigrants in receiving societies. Nevertheless, they have not focused on alliances between specific actors as a political opportunity. This paper aims to construct an interpretive framework, within the POS, to study how the resolution of politicized immigration conflicts (PICs) at the local level facilitates alliances between political parties and immigrant associations. The guiding question is: How do alliances between political parties and immigrant associations emerge in the resolution of PICs at the local level? I argue that these alliances emerge because of the specific local political environment surrounding the resolution of PICs. This framework seeks to expand the POS debate by challenging the existing literature that considers alliances an explanatory factor of mobilization; highlighting the importance of specific alliances in the local management of immigration and offering a typology of alliances.

Keywords

Political parties, immigrant associations, alliances, politicized immigration conflicts, local level, political environment

Author’s biographical note

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Introduction

The political opportunity structure (POS) debate has emerged in the immigration literature as an analytical tool to explore the interplay among institutional, political and social actors (e.g. Ireland, 1994; Koopmans and Statham, 2000). Under this approach, studies have mainly focused on how institutional and cultural factors shape the mobilization, organization and interactions of immigrants in receiving societies (Ireland, 1994; Koopmans and Statham, 2000; Hoschild and Mollenkopf, 2009).

Interestingly enough, the study of those factors that account for certain interactions between particular actors (e.g. NGOs and political parties or political parties and immigrant associations) and under specific circumstances (e.g. politicization of immigration or urban conflicts) have not been studied.

Against this background, my objective is to propose an interpretive framework to study how the resolution of politicized immigration conflicts at the local level facilitates alliances between political parties and immigrant associations. This framework is theory-driven and it is proposed within the POS literature on immigration. In order to advance the objective mentioned above, I ask in the present paper: How do alliances between political parties and immigrant associations emerge in the resolution of politicized immigration conflicts at the local level?

I argue that alliances between political parties and immigrant associations emerge because of the specific local political environment surrounding the resolution of politicized immigration conflicts. Opposite to the belief that conflicts separate or divide, this argument is based on acknowledging that conflicts trigger the formation of alliances between these two actors in the search of support and solutions.

By proposing the framework mentioned above, I seek to expand the POS debate in three ways: first, opposite to treating alliances as one factor that explains mobilization; this framework refers to alliances not as a factor that explains mobilization but as an outcome interconnected with the local political environment. Second, I aspire to

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introduce in the POS literature on immigration the importance of studying the formation and consolidation of specific alliances in the local governance of immigration. Finally, I aim to propose a typology within the framework that allows classifying specific alliances between institutional and non-institutional actors that emerge under specific moments of politicization of immigration. Its potential applicability in empirical cases can show local patterns which define other opportunities of participation for immigrant associations.

By doing so, I bring an element from the POS literature on social movements to the one on immigration which refers to the relevance of specific institutional actors in the claims of social ones through their alliances (Rucht, 2004: 208). This literature considers alliances as an opportunity which can provide social actors with more chances to put forward their claims (Kriesi et al. 2004: 69).

In the proposed framework political parties with access to decision-making bodies are considered highly important institutional allies. This is because they have the power to propose and take decisions in the light of influences from various sectional interests, immigrants included (Bird, 2003: 20). Immigrant associations must be seen as multifunctional entities, not exclusively oriented towards politics, with potential access to institutional actors and decision-making institutions (Rex and Josephides, 1987: 19).

Immigration conflicts are understood as the confrontation derived from the interaction between newcomers and local population. This is connected to cultural aspects brought by newcomers and the redistribution of material resources in the receiving society (based on Koopmans, et al. 2005: 146). Its politicization occurs when it is exacerbated by institutional actors through restrictive policies and discourses.

The resolution of politicized immigration conflicts is understood as the search for mechanisms of re-stabilization and re-routinization of patterns of interaction between institutional actors and immigrants (Koopmans, 2004: 36). Conflict resolution is treated in this paper not as the final step of a PIC, but as part of a process of change and negotiation where relations between political parties and immigrant associations are established, reestablished or deepened.

This paper defends the city as the level of proximity. It is the setting where institutions and immigrants can interact more closely in the process of accommodation (Borkert and Caponio, 2010: 15). Further, the local level offers more concrete answers to the
immediate needs and claims of immigrant communities rather than the distant national level (Giugni and Morales, 2011: 9).

I will divide this paper as follows: first, I will concentrate on the need to expand the study of immigrants and specific alliances in the POS literature. Second, I will develop an interpretive framework to study the alliances which emerge in the local political environment surrounding the resolution of a PIC. Based on this, I propose a typology which classifies alliances as material, symbolic and mobilizing.

2. Drawing the problem: the POS and alliances

In this section, I will refer to three bodies of literature, all connected to the political opportunity debate, which are building blocks of the interpretive framework. In the first one, I justify the gap (alliances) by exploring how the POS has been used in the immigration literature. In the second one, I justify alliances as a political opportunity, and more specifically, alliances between political parties and immigrant associations. Finally, I refer to the conflictive politicization of immigration as the framing context to study the selected allies at the local level.

2.1. The gap: alliances

The study of the mobilization and organization of immigrants from the POS approach draws its logic from the original concept developed in the 1970s by social movement scholars studying political conflict and mobilization (Tilly, 1978; Tarrow, 1994; Giugni 1995; Kriesi et al., 1995; Koopmans, 2004a). It mainly explores the way powerful groups or institutions –and primarily the State –are susceptible or sympathetic to new demands made by groups that hold a marginal position in the political system (Schrover and Vermeulen, 2005; Bengtsson, 2007). It is defined as “consistent, but not necessarily formal or permanent, dimensions …that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure” (Tarrow, 1994: 85).

Based on this, the availability of allies is considered a political opportunity which can provide social actors with more chances to put forward their claims in the political sphere (Kriesi et al. 2004: 69). However, this literature on social movements has treated alliances as an explanatory factor which is part of those incentives social actors have to mobilize and organize. This situation has not questioned alliances as a dynamic element which is dependent on the political environment surrounding certain interactions (e.g.
media and immigrant associations or political parties and immigrant associations). This begs for attention to research which can contribute in understanding how alliances are formed and why.

Connected to the POS literature on immigration, the study of potential allies for immigrants has not been sufficiently explored; moreover, the study of the formation of alliances between specific actors (e.g. NGOs and political parties; media and immigrant associations or political parties and immigrant associations) and under certain circumstances has not been covered yet. Instead, this literature has focused on general institutional and cultural incentives that explain immigrants’ choices and strategies to access institutions at the national and local levels (e.g. Ireland, 1994; Koopmans and Statham, 2000; Odmalm, 2004; Caponio, 2005).

At the national level, this body of literature has focused on those features in the political system that define the collective actions of immigrants. The mechanisms used by receiving states and other social agents in their affairs with immigrants produce political opportunities that indicate the patterns of immigrants’ social actions (Ireland, 1994; Fenemma and Tillie, 1999; Koopmans and Statham, 2000; Mahnig, 2004). This means that immigrants develop participatory forms which reflect the national POS they face (Ireland, 1994: 25).

In his comparative study between two French and two Swiss towns, Ireland (1994) claimed that the participation of immigrants in the selected cities were shaped by the national institutional structure –namely: immigrants’ legal situation; social and political rights; citizenship laws, naturalization procedures, and policies of accommodation– and institutional gatekeepers –namely: political parties, trade unions, parliament, religious organizations, judicial bodies and humanitarian non-profit organizations acted as (1994: 10).

In this line of analysis, Koopmans and Statham (2000) focused on immigrants’ claim-making and mobilization in German, Dutch and British cities. They found that political opportunities were related to citizenship regimes and integration models which shaped immigrant identities and their patterns of organization and participation. They concluded that the incorporation of immigrants at the local level occurred along
nationally-defined lines. Citizenship regimes referred to the formal access to residence while the integration models refer to the cultural obligations that this access entails.

The literature on the POS for immigrants at the national level pioneered in the study of their political participation. However, it has been criticized for neglecting more localized dynamics between immigrants and institutions at other levels of government. As a response, some scholars developed another approach which defend the local level as an arena with its own dynamics (See: Giugni and Morales, 2011).

The literature on the POS for immigrants at the local level entails studying those aspects that shape and encourage the political involvement of immigrants. This perspective questions the primacy of the national-level in the institutional arrangement that provides political opportunities for the participation of immigrants (Bousetta, 2000; Caponio, 2005; Borkert and Caponio, 2010; to some extent Garbaye, 2005).

This literature has mainly focused on studying the incentives for the local organization and participation of immigrants in policy networks (Caponio, 2005) or social networks (Giugni and Morales, 2011); their representativeness in political institutions (Garbaye, 2005) and their mobilization strategies to push for specific issues (e.g. refugee centers) (Però, 2005).

As shown by Borkert and Caponio (2010: 13), questioning the national-level is based on experiences that show that immigration poses similar challenges to local governments in cities throughout Europe. In some cases, the local policy reactions to these challenges have even come before than national legislation (Penninx and Martiniello, 2004:154). According to Penninx (2011:12), this shows that the interactions between local governments and immigrants are informed by context-specific features.

By refining Ireland’s institutional channeling theory, Garbaye (2005) concentrated on framing the institutional structure which determined the minority politics at the local level. He explored how immigrants accessed local political elites by studying the election of local councilmen of foreign origin in Birmingham (U.K.) and Lille (France). He revealed that the local-central relation and the local political system were determinant in the chances of immigrant communities to have elected representatives in the local council.
Although the studies at the national and local levels are part of a growing body of literature on the subject, the study of the POS in relation to immigration is still in a quite early stage. Moreover, the study of actors has been a defining characteristic of both approaches; however, a more concise and specific approach on their relations begs for more sophisticated theory-driven tools. This means that focusing on specific actors and their alliances has not been pursued neither at the national nor local. In the case of immigrants, the importance of alliances is that they may increase their opportunities for participation in the policy-making as I will discuss in the next section.

2.2. Specific alliances as a political opportunity

Drawing again from the POS literature on social movements, political actors can become an important ally of social movements since their interactions may determine the opening of opportunities for either protest or policy change (Kriesi et al., 2004: 69). For Rucht (2004: 203), alliances are associated with partnership, closeness, and a spirit of mutual support. However, they cannot be considered unproblematic unifications or fusions; they can also involve, in certain moments, competition and even conflict. Alliances refer to those linkages social movements or organizations can have with social actors and potential elite allies (Rucht, 2004: 197). The possibilities of mobilization of social actors are strongly linked to the presence of allies who can serve their interests or to the presence of antagonist elites that can be a threat to them (Van Dyke, 2003: 226). Therefore, potential alliances with actors result from a process of coalition formation and strategic interaction (Kriesi et al, 2004: 74).

Actors in the POS can be divided in allies, opponents and those who are indifferent to the movements’ claims or aspirations (Kriesi at al, 2004: 199). Furthermore, those who are not part of the social movement or organization should be considered potential elite allies or antagonists to the movement (e.g. the legislature, political parties, judicial system, president, businesses, organized labor, scientists) (Van Dyke, 2003: 230). An important question posed by Diani (2011) is how to study alliances. He proposes to focus on the nature of the ties among social movements with other allies. In his research on alliances he suggests focusing on resource mobilization and tracing the exchanges between actors. For this, he studied NGOs in England and the exchanges they had with other organizations that they considered allies.

Kriesi et al (1995: xiv) states that alliances are dependant of the structure of alliances surrounding social actors. In this sense the structure of alliances include less stable
elements of the political environment such as the configuration of power, shifts in ruling alignments and the availability of influential allies. All these elements define the formation of alliances among political actors.

Applied to this study, political parties can emerge as a highly important elite ally who can improve the chances of immigrant associations to have a better access to the policy-making. Based on this, in the POS literature on social movements, political parties are potential allies with the ability of helping movements achieve their goals (Van Dyke, 2003: 231). The potential divisions of political elites in the legislative and executive branches may put closer or further away some actors over others. This, in turn, makes some elites either more sympathetic or antagonistic to the claims made by movements (Van Dyke, 2003: 244).

When political parties have access to the decision-making process, they become essential in the inclusion of underrepresented groups –such as immigrants –in the political system (Celis et al, 2011:5). Their importance in the democratic game is that when in government they provide the necessary parliamentary majority and the power to take decisions which are made in light of influences from various sectional interests (Business, labor, environment, immigrants etc.) (Celis et al, 2011:5).

Political parties are recognized as important determinants in the representation of ethnic minorities through the provision of membership and leadership to immigrants (Celis et al, 2011). This is mainly because political elites in recent decades have increasingly devoted attention to the socio-demographic representativeness of political institutions where immigrants are a concern and a target of inclusion (Bird, 2003).

Moreover, the literature has noticed the role political parties have had in politicizing immigration over the last two decades (Celis, et al. 2011). In this sense, it is assumed that parties of the left have historically favored liberal, multicultural or cosmopolitan policies, while right-wing parties have been seen to be more supportive of anti-immigrant positions (Hepburn, 2009).

As for immigrants themselves, immigrant associations emerge as the intermediaries between institutions and newcomers (Bengtsson, 2007: 1). In this process, they act as rational actors who seek to find those allies that suit better their interests and goals. They, immigrant associations, are aware of the potential political parties have, as an elite ally, in putting forward their claims and aspirations in the policy-making.
Moreover, the search for these allies can serve better their interests in the political system (Based on Rucht, 2004: 208).

From the institutional perspective, immigrant associations are considered key players in the process of accommodating immigrants because they can be potential partners in developing and implementing related policies. Its study from the POS debate has unveiled the importance of political institutions in channeling the organization and participation of immigrant associations (Koopmans and Statham, 2000, 2003; Vermeulen, 2006; Stromblad and Bengtsson, 2008). This is because they are considered ‘the expression of mobilized resources and ambitions’ (Penninx 2011:5).

I have defended in this section that alliances between political parties and immigrant associations are important because of their role in tackling the democratic deficit associated with the position immigrants have in the political system. Now, it is necessary to justify the need for a contextual framing which can contribute to their study.

2.3. Framing context: conflicts and their resolution at the local level

In the POS debate, conflicts appear as a mobilizing factor that forces the interaction between institutional actors and social movements and organizations (Kriesi, et al, 2004: 144). Their emergence is not a phenomenon only limited to a situation external to the movement and organization; conflicts can emerge within and among social actors due to competing views, strategies or ideologies (Kriesi et al, 2004:209). They –conflicts– can trigger changes which increase the opportunities for the mobilization of social actors (Kriesi et al, 2004:81). Conflict, in this respect, acts as a catalyst which mobilizes political institutions and social movements and organizations.

In the study of immigration, conflicts have been considered part of the management of immigration in receiving societies (e.g. Koopmans, et al, 2005; Zapata-Barrero, 2009; Mouritsen et al, 2008). Conflicts have been studied from an institutional perspective where they have been understood as part of the process of change and negotiation that immigration entails in receiving societies (Zapata-Barrero, 2009: 35).

Koopmans and Statham (2000, 2004) have worked extensively the study of immigration from a POS approach and a conflict perspective as mentioned in section 2.1.1. Accordingly, they have identified that immigration conflicts are related to the ethnic and religious diversity of newcomers and to the material redistribution of resources between
immigrants and local population and among immigrant communities (Koopmans et al, 2005: 148). All they are seen as a challenge to the interactions among institutions, local population and immigrants.

Accordingly, when immigration conflicts become part of the political agenda, they become politicized (Zapata-Barrero, 2009: 34). In this sense their politicization is related to restrictive discourses and policies made by institutional actors with decision-making power. Koopmans et al. (2005: 205) states that “immigration and ethnic relations have become highly politicized issues” and that “… state actors have largely contributed to this politicization by framing the issues and implementing immigration and integration policies.”

Drawing again from the POS literature on social movements, the resolution of a conflict can be understood as part of the need for conflicting parties to reach certain level of mutual predictability and reliability in their interactions (Koopmans, 2004b: 36). Accordingly, the more channels opened by institutional actors in the process of resolution should help in decreasing the polarization among them. Moreover, the literature has studied mechanisms where conflicting parties can reach cooperation by looking at those dimensions of the political environment which are more prone to change; for example, the change in parliamentary majorities or a less repressive view from the State (Rucht, 2004: 212).

When dealing with collective action and waves of protest, Koopmans (2004b: 36) discusses those contractive mechanisms which make social movements decrease or cease these protests. He states that so far the POS literature has included the closure of opportunities and the demobilization of social movements as reasons for this; however, he claims that the re-stabilization and re-routinization of patterns of interaction within the polity is a stronger reason why waves of protests and related-conflicts decrease or cease.

Accordingly, resolution and mediation mechanisms materialize as a channel to reach re-stabilization. These mechanisms include: first, the use of third parties (e.g. parliaments, the electorate, parliament, or the courts); this is because their legitimacy is accepted by conflicting parties. Second, routinized forums for negotiations, such as the systems of collective bargaining. Third, the exchange of information produced in the forums; this is
because they diminish the risks of unpredictability in the relations of conflict parties (Koopmans, 2004b: 38).

At the local level, the politicization of immigration generates “a renegotiated modus vivendi between the local power and the ethnic interests” (Garbaye, 2005: 286). This implies accommodating these interests according to the local context. In this process, the “renegotiated modus vivendi” mentioned above makes institutional and social actors seek for mechanisms to manage and resolve the tensions which may emerge.

In this context of interaction, the local level arises as the one where policies may have a more direct impact on immigrants (Giugni and Morales, 2011: 3). The importance of studying the local POS is that local governments are the first ones to act and react to the challenges brought by immigration. It is also the level where more immigrants can become politically active in everyday affairs through their involvement via conventional and less conventional avenues of participation (Giugni and Morales, 2011: 3). Because of proximity, it is at this level where immigrants, as collective actors, can forge links with social actors and institutional ones.

In this section I aimed to justify the study of alliances between specific sets of actors (namely, political parties and immigrant associations) in the POS at the local level and in the presence of conflicts. I uncovered two things: first, the POS literature on social movements has treated alliances as an explanatory factor without questioning other factors that also account for this interaction and second, the POS literature on immigration has not focused on the alliances between specific actors as an opportunity for immigrants at the local level. After presenting the object of study I am addressing to and justifying its study, it is time now to present the lens which will help tackling the gaps presented in the introduction.

3. Drawing the lens: the interpretive framework

In this part, I will present the framework to study how the resolution of politicized immigration conflicts at the local level facilitates alliances between political parties and immigrant associations. The way that I shall present it starts by establishing some general positions that guide the proposal of this framework. After this, I discuss the framework which is based on the analysis of the political environment surrounding the alliances between political parties and immigrant association. Within this
framework, I introduce a typology to determine the alliances that emerge in the resolution of a PIC.

3.1. General positions behind the proposal of the interpretive framework

The framework herein proposed takes as point of inspiration the conceptualization of alliance structures proposed by Kriesi, et al. (1995: xiv) and mentioned in the previous section (2.2.1.). It also draws from Rucht’s reasoning (2004: 209) where he states that alliances occur when there is a conjunction of factors that make two potential allies have common interests or goals with the aim of strengthening each others’ position. In this sense, alliances between actors are the main focus this framework aspires to address.

This framework is composed by a set of dimensions in the local political environment that inform specific alliances between specific actors –in this case political parties and immigrant associations. In this sense, these dimensions should be seen as factors in the local political environment that facilitate or not the formation of alliances between political parties and immigrant associations in the resolution of PICs.

In the POS literature on social movements the availability of allies has been considered one dimension of the political opportunity that explains how these movements mobilize and organize. However, this framework considers alliances not as a factor that explains how social actors organize but as the outcome of a context of interaction which depends on selected factors in the local political environment. This political environment is strongly shaped by institutional and issue-specific factors. In this sense, the framework is designed in a way that seeks to understand how these specific alliances emerge and tries to locate them under a typology that can give light on the incentives that take these two actors to support each other.

Although classical studies on the POS were initially done at the national level, its adaptation to the specificities of the local level has proven to be feasible (Giugni and Morales, 2011: 5). The study of the city as the most tangible arena to understand the alliances between political parties and immigrant associations can unveil new elements in the policy-making of accommodation. This is because the local level is the level where the challenges and conflicts related to immigrants are more visible to all residents as well as the political actions aimed to manage it.
Summing up, the proposed framework should help identifying how alliances are formed and what type they are under the resolution of politicized immigration conflicts.

3.2. Local political environment and alliances in the resolution of a PIC

The interpretive framework I propose acknowledges the politicization of conflict as a fundamental part that determines how actors ally with each other. Therefore I have chosen to construct it based on five dimensions that encompass those factors directly linked to these two actors in terms of institutional openness and power relations, the conflict and the relations established in the resolution. This implies considering the specific local political environment surrounding the resolution as composed by a first level that include a non-conflict and a conflict environments and a second level that refers to the interaction between the two selected actors in the resolution stage of the PIC.

The non-conflict environment refers to those non-related dimensions to the conflict which can indicate the openness of the policy-making structures to immigrant associations. The conflict environment refers to those dimensions which focus on the politicization of an immigration conflict and the interpretation given to it by political parties and immigrant associations. The resolution environment refers to the moment of interaction between political parties and immigrant associations I am interested in as Figure 3.1. shows.
3.2.1. The local political environment

Non-conflict environment

It refers to those dimensions in the political environment which are not related to the conflict itself. These are relevant factors that decide on the one hand the formal openness of the city to the claims of immigrant associations and on the other possible opportunities for immigrant associations to find interlocutors in the local council.

a) Institutional openness

This dimension refers to the openness of the local political system to the claims and demands made by immigrant associations. Kriesi et al (1995:27) refers to the formal structures as those that determine the openness of the state to social movements. Applied to this study, de facto openness is somehow dependent on the political will of the political elites in the city; however, the existence of specific channels may indicate the willingness to include immigrants in local decision-making structures. In the case of immigrant associations, consultative politics is the most visible arena for their institutionalized participation in the local policy-making (Martiniello, 2004: 20). Consultative politics are structured around consultative bodies or councils. They can be
defined as a democratic body set up at the local level to provide a forum of consultation between elected representatives and immigrants (GSir and Martiniello, 2004:11).

In this dimension, I will look at the existence or not of consultative bodies specifically created for immigrant-related issues. Examples of these consultative politics can be found in cities such as Barcelona and the Consell municipal de immigració (Municipal Immigration Council) or Florence, Italy and the Consigli delle Comunità Straniere (Foreign Residents Council). Both councils have representation from the local government, trade unions, pro-immigrant NGOs and a number of selected or elected (depending on the case) immigrant associations.

b) Configuration of Power

This dimension maps those political parties represented at the local level. Political opportunity theorists (e.g. della Porta and Rucht, 1995; Kriesi et al. 1995) have defended the importance of the configuration of power in facilitating the formation of alliances. Adapted to the study of immigration, the importance of this dimension for immigrant associations and more specifically for this study is that political parties with access to decision-making institutions can contribute in putting forward their claims and aspirations (Bird, 2004: 2). The configuration of power can also define which immigrant associations are recognized as interlocutors, as well as the type of demands and claims put forward.

In this dimension I will look at: first, the political parties represented in the local council (to identify the ruling and opposition political parties). Second, the type of ruling alignment a city has. This is whether they have a majority, minority or coalition governments.

Conflict environment

These are those issue-specific dimensions which are directly linked to the politicization of conflict. At the local level, certain sectors of the local population may interpret customs, habits and the mere presence of peoples who are not considered to be ‘like us’ as a threat to the way ‘we’ have known ‘our’ immediate space of social interaction –in this case the city (Zapata-Barrero et al., 2008: 16). Their politicization
generates discourses and policies which signal the presence of newcomers as a threat or a non-threat to the receiving societies.

c) Conflict framing

This dimension refers to the way each local political elite frame specific aspects related to immigration. Conflicts emerge due to the combination of cultural demands made by immigrants and ethnic groups and the perception of threat to the material interests of the host public (Koopmans et al., 2005: 148). Based on this conflicts can be framed according to a specific ethnic group, a religion or the redistribution of material resources. The first two frames imply considering immigrants as a threat to the receiving society’s cultural (Western) values. The last frame considers conflict as being related to the perception of immigrants as a threat to the material wellbeing of the receiving society.

Although it is possible that conflicts overlap in real life in their characteristics, the framing done by political elites and the media can show more elements of one type than the other. This is very relevant because the way a conflict is framed affects certain immigrant communities or all immigrants (e.g. the emergence of a religious conflict related to Islam may be derived from the opening of a Mosque by Moroccan nationals).

In this dimension I will study the way political elites politicize immigration conflicts by framing them as ethnic, religious or resource-based. I will also study whether this framing produces divisions within immigrant communities.

d) Position on the conflict

This dimension studies how political parties and immigrant associations position themselves on specific conflicts. An important characteristic in the study of alliances in the POS literature on social movements has been the actors’ position around specific issues or whether they agree or disagree with the claims made by other actors (Giugni and Passy, 1998: 17). The position that a political party assumes in a conflict is very relevant for immigrant associations. This can signal the type of relationship and potential alliance they can have.
In this case, I will use identify: the position political parties and relevant immigrant associations took on the PIC (for or against) and how they justify their position. This implies interpreting whether they see immigrants as a threat to the local system of values (ethnic/religious), a threat to the economic and social well-being of the local population (resource-based) or as a non-threat.

**Resolution stage**

The resolution of a politicized immigration conflict at the local level is guided by the interest of institutional actors to re-stabilize and re-routinize the patterns of interaction with immigrant associations (based on Koopmans, 2004b: 36). This process is underpinned by the way the actors involved interpret the conflict and its resolution. Drawing from Kriesi, et al. (1995: xiii), the resolution stage is the context where our two selected actors interact; it is the context where the identification of emerging or already existing alliances occur. For example, a ruling political party which banned the burka on the streets may see this dress as a threat against western values of gender equality; nevertheless, it will try to create spaces of legitimization with those immigrant associations that were for the measure.

e) Resolution strategies

Following Koopmans (2004b) and Rucht (2004: 212) reasoning on resolution, different strategies to re-stabilize and re-routinize the relations between the studied set of actors can be employed (e.g. bargaining, negotiating). In this sense, political parties with access to policy-making institutions may employ legitimizing or mobilizing strategies regarding immigrant associations in the resolution of a PIC.

The first one departs from the view that political elites need establishing relations with some immigrant associations for legitimizing their decisions in the area of immigration and accommodation (Toral-Martinez, 2008: 7). Hence, legitimacy can be defined as the general belief that the actions of an organization or institution are desirable, suitable and appropriate within a social system (Vermeulen, 2006: 49).

In this paper, legitimizing strategies involves the search, by those political parties which started or supported the conflict, of support and recognition from immigrant
associations in the resolution. In this sense, immigrant association legitimizes the political party and the government that initiated the conflict. Although immigrant associations have the choice to select whether to legitimate or not, it is the political party the one that invites the association to do so.

Legitimizing strategies can be through consultative or clientelistic mechanisms. Consultative mechanisms are those which involve the consultation of immigrant associations on how to resolve the conflict or spaces to inform them of the reasons that justify the party’s position. Clientelistic mechanisms are those which do not involve any type of consultation but the offer of material resources in exchange of support from any association which claims to represent immigrants.

Mobilizing strategies depart from the view that groups, social networks, crowds and social units may organize for political goal when they disagree with views proposed by the dominant political elites (Badie et al, 2011: 1589). This implies that some institutional and social actors may have an alternative view to the dominant one on how to resolve a conflict and how to manage immigration in the city.

These strategies imply the quest, by opposition political parties and immigrant associations, of alternative mechanisms to oppose to the conflict and its resolution and to offer an alternative model. Mobilizing strategies are two-way and they do not necessarily have to be started by just the political party or the immigrant associations. These strategies imply the formation of coalitions and platforms of activism which offer a new vision on the conflict. The actions derived from them can be protests, popular gatherings and lawsuits.

After describing the first part of the interpretive framework (summarized in Chart 3.1. below); it is time to focus on the formation of alliances per se and the different types there are.
Chart 3.1. Interpretive framework: the local political environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT</th>
<th>DIMENSIONS</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>STANDARDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Conflict Environment:</td>
<td>a) Institutional openness</td>
<td>Openness of the city to the claims and demands made by immigrant associations</td>
<td>- Existence or not of consultative bodies/commission/boards specifically created for the participation of migrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Configuration of power</td>
<td>It maps the different political parties present at the local level and the ruling alignments in the city</td>
<td>- Political parties represented in the local council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict environment:</td>
<td>c) Conflict framing</td>
<td>How each local political elite frame certain aspects of immigration as a conflict</td>
<td>- Type of conflict: ethnic, religious or redistribution of material resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d) Position on the conflict</td>
<td>Position assumed by political parties and immigrant associations</td>
<td>- Divisive or not divisive issue on the immigrants’ side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolution stage:</td>
<td>e) Resolution strategies</td>
<td>Strategies employed by political parties to establish, reestablish or deepen relations with immigrant associations in the process of conflict resolution</td>
<td>- Type of strategy: legitimizing strategies (based on clientelistic or symbolic mechanisms) or mobilizing strategies (based on coalition formation)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.2. Alliances in the resolution of PICs

In this framework, alliances between political parties and immigrant associations are understood as a relationship established between this set of actors in the resolution
of a politicized immigration conflict. In order to identify how alliances between these actors are facilitated in a context of conflict and resolution, it is necessary to propose a typology on alliances based on the five dimensions of the interpretive framework.

**How to classify the alliances that emerge in the resolution of a PIC?**

Alliances are based on the common interest and willingness both sides have to resolve a PIC. This focus entails, as mentioned by Diani (2011: 3), not focusing so much on the length of the alliance, the frequency of the encounters or the autonomy both allies have from each other; instead the focus is on the contact both sides have had in the context of resolution. This situation may not necessarily imply trust or sharing the same positions from one side or the other, but the recognition of the power relations underpinning the interactions between both actors.

Based on the non-conflict, conflict environments and the resolution stage; alliances between political parties and immigrant associations can be: material, symbolic and mobilizing.

**Material alliance:**

The purpose of this alliance is to exchange support for material resources between ruling political parties and immigrant associations. Through this provision ruling political parties expand their electoral base while securing support in the resolution of a PIC from a sector of the affected community. For the association, the provision of resources strengthens their position before the local government and gives them visibility vis-à-vis the ruling political party.

This alliance occurs when the city does not offer formal consultation of immigrant associations in the political system and where the ruling political party leads a majority or minority government. The lack of consultative bodies makes the local institutional openness restrictive in the resolution of the conflict.

When it comes to the conflict environment, these alliances are more likely to occur when it addresses the resolution of *ethnic or religious conflicts* that correspond to a specific community which has internal divisions. This is because these internal
divisions may help the ruling political parties to use a group of associations from one side or the other in the process of resolving the conflict.

In this type of alliance, ruling political parties assume a position where they justify the conflict on the need to protect the local population against the threat certain immigrant communities may pose to the city. In the same line, immigrant associations tend to justify the ruling political party’s position and the policy approach employed to solve it.

The resolution of a PIC is based on a tougher stance against those groups signaled for being problematic and a securitizing approach to immigration. The ruling political party uses a legitimizing strategy based on clientelistic mechanisms to. In this case, immigrant associations’ relation with the ruling political party during the resolution of the conflict is limited to the offer of positions in the government and in the party, specific grants through government or party structures and access to a larger network of actors.

Symbolic alliances

The purpose of this alliance is two-fold: the legitimization of the political parties’ discourse and the actions employed in the resolution of a PIC and the legitimization of local immigrant associations as the interlocutors of immigrants in a context of competition with other associations.

This alliance occurs when the ruling political party has started a PIC and seeks to re-stabilize and re-routinize the relations with immigrants by consulting representative immigrant associations. In this case the ruling political party will be the one establishing this type of contact.

In the conflict environment, the ruling political party or the coalition partner may assume a position where the PIC is justified through actions and discourses which protect the local society against a specific threat posed by immigrants. In this alliance immigrant associations recognize the need for opportunities to discuss the PIC with the ruling or coalition political parties. The discourse immigrant associations have on the conflict can vary: there may be associations which support the reasons to justify the PIC vis-à-vis the party while they may use other arguments before their communities;
however, in both cases immigrant associations seek to be consulted and taken into account in the resolution.

The resolution of a PIC under this alliance is based on a *legitimizing strategy* on the part of the political party. Ruling political parties may create consultative or informative sessions to discuss the issue with immigrant associations. This may imply that the ruling political party is the one which started the PIC and may use consultation as an action to demonstrate their willingness to solve it or justify it.

*Mobilizing alliance*

The purpose of this alliance is to mobilize *opposition political parties* and immigrant associations which are against the politicization of a conflict at the local level. An opposition political party makes alliances with immigrant associations as a mechanism to discuss alternative solutions to the conflict and to oppose to those political parties and local governments which initiated the conflict. In this case, opposition political parties, because of their position in the local political system, have more freedom to make alliances with immigrant associations.

For opposition political parties this alliance reaffirms their position and views on the resolution of the conflict. For immigrant associations, this alliance confirms their role in representing immigrants’ interests. This is evident when the local government and other political parties do not consider these associations as interlocutors of this group. In this case, immigrant associations tend to form alliances in an environment where they do not have a relationship with ruling political parties or access to consultative institutions.

The position political parties and immigrant associations have on the PIC is based on a discourse which considers it as an unnecessary, electoral move based on a perception of threat that does not exist. Their discourse entails a strong emphasis on public interventions to socialize immigration and educate the local population on its importance for the city.

This type of alliance is marked by a process of resolution which involves mobilizing strategies. An opposition political party and one or more associations may start a
Alliances in the resolution of politicized immigration conflicts in the city: The construction of an interpretive framework

platform of activism to oppose the PIC and discuss alternative possibilities to the management of immigration.
Chart 3.2. Type of alliance resulting from the political environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-conflict environment</th>
<th>Conflict environment</th>
<th>Resolution strategy</th>
<th>Type of Alliance (OUTCOME)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional openness</strong></td>
<td><strong>Configuration of Power</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conflict Framing</strong></td>
<td><strong>Position on the conflict</strong>&lt;br&gt;1. Pol. Party&lt;br&gt;2. Immig. Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No consultative body</td>
<td>Ruling political party that leads a majority or minority government</td>
<td>Ethnic or Religious conflicts that correspond to a specific community with internal divisions</td>
<td>1. Threat&lt;br&gt;2. Threat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultative body for immigrant associations</td>
<td>Ruling political party or coalition partner in charge of immigration-related issues</td>
<td>Indifferent</td>
<td>1. Threat&lt;br&gt;2. Threat/Non-threat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indifferent</td>
<td>Opposition political party</td>
<td>Indifferent</td>
<td>1. Non-threat&lt;br&gt;2. Non-threat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This part has aimed to build an interpretive framework which could be of use in future empirical research involving the study of actors, alliances and the policy-making of immigration at the local level. The importance of this framework involves going from a general context which studies the political environment to a very specific reality of interaction.

4. Conclusion

By doing a theoretical exercise of proposing a framework that could be applied to empirical cases, this paper has accomplished its main contribution which is to offer a specific theoretical tool to understand the institutional dynamics that shape specific alliances of immigrant associations in the city.

The next step is to show its viability by making cross-city comparisons where PICs have emerged and where political parties have had a key role in their politicization and resolution. The utility of such comparison might lead to possible explanations on why these alliances occur, their connection to party and local politics and the strategies immigrant associations employ when seeking for allies.

Alliances as a political opportunity can show greater dynamics that differentiate how political elites manage conflicts and their resolution. Moreover, focusing on alliances between political parties and immigrant associations is a good standard of how cities are confronting the rising politicization of immigration and how immigrants, as a collective actor, organize themselves under these circumstances.

Although this research focus on politicized immigration conflicts, it is important to highlight that conflict must be seen from a broad perspective. In fact those dimensions in the proposed framework related to the conflict itself can be interchangeable with situations of contestation in the political sphere where specific actors try to exert more power. For example contestation to a specific policy proposed or contestation which translates into waves of protests. Moreover contestation that makes those organized actors mobilize and look for better positions of influence. In these situations, these issues make relevant context-specific factors inform the positions of actors and their search for allies.
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