

The Politics of Presence and Multi-ethnic Sweden:

About Taking Your Seat in Democracy

Swedish text. English summary.

Swedish title: Närvarons politik och det mångetniska Sverige. Om att ta plats i demokratin

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Abstract

This book deals with the subject of political representation and the significance of the presence of immigrants in the political process. The official stance of the Swedish democracy is that immigrants are to be represented in the political process to the same extent as the rest of the population. In practice, however, the political representation of immigrants has long remained a non-issue.

The dissertation is based on the idea that in order to understand the politics of presence from an ethnic perspective, we should start from existing power structures and draw attention to the hierarchies of ethnic dominance and subordination, which separate groups of people and, which prevent and exclude the participation in society on equal conditions, based on ethnicity. The theoretical frame of reference consists of several different theoretical tools. Group representation – or the politics of presence as it is – is the central theory that is tested and developed further in the book.

The book consists of two empirical parts and it focuses on the arena of municipal politics. In the first part political representation is studied, such as issues concerning recruitment to the political parties and how the candidates perceive their role as representative. This part is based on material that was collected at the end of the 1990s until the municipal elections of 2002. Statistical analyses of survey data and qualitative analysis of interviews are the methods being used. The second empirical part tests the hypothesis, which implicitly underlies the theory of the politics of presence, that belonging to a certain ethnic group has an impact on the content of the political process. Here we follow the policy process(es) around a specific political interest (the demand for education in Finnish) that was articulated by a certain immigrant group (the Swedish Finns). Process tracing is used as method of analysis and the material mainly consists of public documents complemented by interviews. The results from this part of the dissertation are based on material from a period of almost forty years.

The main results are that the position in the ethnic hierarchy is significant for the recruitment of candidates for municipal politics. The ethnic hierarchy variable gives a significant result both with regard to the number of municipal political offices and the status of these offices. The position in the ethnic hierarchy has an independent effect in relation to the other explanatory factors like for example, the extent of time as a party member. It is easiest for candidates who are born in the Nordic countries, Western Europe and North America to assert themselves in the recruitment process. Next are people who were born in Eastern Europe, Southern Europe and Latin America. Candidates from Asia and Africa encounter the largest difficulties. These results support the idea that the position in the ethnic hierarchy constitutes an important factor in getting knowledge of the mechanisms behind immigrants' under-representation in the political process.

Furthermore, the results show that there is a cause for revising the preconditions for political representation. The study points out the need for a widened concept of representation, which takes into account the significance of representation on arenas other than the local and national parliaments. The results confirm the conclusion that immigrants change politics, but this is done through several different channels of influence (for example the administrative bureaucracy) and not only, or perhaps even mainly, through their presence in the political decision making assemblies.

Keywords

Political representation, ethnic hierarchy, group representation, politics of presence, immigrants, power, political interests, political process