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Article

Political Integration in Practice: Explaining a Time-Dependent Increase in Political Knowledge among Immigrants in Sweden

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Abstract

Scholarly findings suggest that immigrants in Western countries, in general, participate less in politics and show lower levels of political efficacy than native-born citizens. Research is scarce, however, when it comes to immigrants' knowledge about politics and public affairs in their new home country, and what happens with this knowledge over the years. This article focuses on immigrants in Sweden, a country known for ambitious multicultural policies, but where immigrants also face disadvantages in areas such as labor and housing markets. Utilizing particularly suitable survey data we find that immigrants, in general, know less about Swedish politics than natives, but also that this difference disappears with time. Exploring the influence of time of residence on political knowledge, the article shows that the positive effect of time in Sweden among immigrants remains after controlling for an extensive set of background factors. Moreover, the article examines this political learning effect through the lens of an Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) model. The findings suggest that the development of an actual ability to learn about Swedish politics—via education in Sweden, and by improved Swedish language skills—is an especially important explanation for the increase in political knowledge.

Keywords

ability; education; immigrants; language skills; motivation; opportunity; political information; political knowledge; Sweden; time-related differences

Issue

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1. Introduction

A number of studies have found that immigrants in Western Europe tend to be less active in politics and tend to believe that they have less political influence than native citizens (Adman & Strömblad, 2017; Fennema & Tillie, 2001; González-Ferrer, 2011). Moreover, this applies especially to immigrants from non-Western countries. When it comes to political knowledge, however, research is scarce. This is unfortunate, since politically well-informed members of society are important in at least two ways: an individual who knows a great deal about the political system and various kinds of political issues, is obviously better equipped to promote her/his self-

interest when participating politically; and well-informed citizens also promote democracy at large, such as contributing to decisions that are better for society in general. Considering that immigrants are currently a substantial part of the population in many Western countries, their political knowledge is important both from an individual and a societal perspective.

The existing empirical research consists primarily of case studies. The findings, mainly based on the US, indicate that recently arrived immigrants and ethnic minorities, in general, have limited knowledge about the political system and political issues in their new country (e.g., Caidi, Allard, & Quirke, 2010). As for immigrants in Western countries in general, however, less is

known. Moreover, few studies have looked at whether immigrants continue to be less informed, or if they, after some time, tend to report knowledge more on par with the rest of the population. If so, what explains such a development? Does a possible positive development have to do with increased abilities to understand politics in the new country due to education and improved language skills; or is the motivation to learn the decisive factor; or rather increased opportunities, because of overtime increased access to social networks where politics is discussed? The article aims at answering these questions. The set of possible explanations stem from an Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) model suggested by Luskin (1990) with the aim of being a general model for explaining differences in political knowledge between different groups (cf. Rasmussen, 2016). Limited political knowledge among immigrants should be particularly disturbing if it is caused by a lack of abilities rather than a lack of motivation, i.e., not because they won't but because they can't (cf. Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).

This study concerns immigrants in Sweden, a country with a reputation of being an immigration-friendly welfare state and also a well-functioning democracy (cf. Eger, 2010). With a tradition of ambitious multicultural policies, Sweden is ranked first among 31 developed countries in a comparison of integration policies and migrants' opportunities to participate in society using the Migrant Integration Policy Index (Migration Policy Group, 2015). Already in the 1970s, immigrants who were not Swedish citizens were granted the right to vote in local elections (see, e.g., Bevelander & Spång, 2017). Moreover, the government has, for many decades, provided ethnic organizations with financial resources and often expressed high hopes on the ability of these associations to contribute to political integration (see, e.g., Adman & Strömblad, 2017; Myrberg, Strömblad, & Bengtsson, 2017). At the same time, however, immigrants seem to be disadvantaged in Swedish society in several ways, for instance in terms of their position in the labor and housing markets and in associational life (OECD, 2012; Strömblad & Adman, 2010; cf. Koopmans, 2010). In light of this arguably unique combination of favorable opportunities and poor outcomes for immigrants, we argue that Sweden constitutes an interesting critical case for further examination of immigrant's political knowledge and how it develops over time living in this country. Rare survey data will be analyzed based on a sample of immigrants in Sweden and containing an extensive set of relevant items (presented in detail below).

The remainder of the article begins with a discussion of previous research. Then, the data and the measurements being used are presented, followed by the analyses section. In the final part, the conclusions are discussed.

2. Previous Research and Our Approach

Here, political knowledge is conventionally defined as the “range of factual information about politics that is

stored in long-term memory” (Carpini & Keeter, 1996). It concerns objectively verifiable cognitions, which are retained over time and available for future use. Moreover, a certain “range of knowledge” is concerned, normally areas such as how the political system is structured and works, who the main political actors are and what they do, and political issues of different kinds.

As pointed out above, in general, research is scarce when it comes to political knowledge among immigrants. It is true that in the American case, lower knowledge levels are well-documented among ethnic minorities compared with native-born citizens (see, e.g., Caidi et al., 2010). However, for immigrants in a Western European context, we have only found case studies of various ethnic groups and, hence, it is difficult to draw conclusions about general knowledge levels (Black, 1987; Hakim, 2006; Savolainen, 2008; see also, Caidi et al., 2010). The findings from these seem to be fairly consistent, however. It is evident that recently arrived immigrants, in general, have limited knowledge about the political system and political issues in their new country. Several potential barriers have been pointed out which may prevent relevant learning to take place, e.g., not knowing the language well enough, social isolation, information overload, difficulties identifying reliable sources, and no spare time/energy when trying to establish a life in a new country. Less is known about what happens over time in the new country, at least when it comes to wider country-based studies.

Judging from findings concerning other political attitudes—such as political efficacy, political and social trust as well as political participation—we may expect immigrants' knowledge about politics and public affairs to increase and, over time, eventually reach the average level of natives (see, e.g., Adman & Strömblad, 2017, 2015; Dinesen & Hooghe, 2010; Fennema & Tillie, 2001; González-Ferrer, 2011; De Vroome, Hooghe, & Marien, 2013). Still, this must be investigated, as we have found no studies on the topic, neither on Sweden nor on any other country.

In Sweden as well as in other Western countries, items on political knowledge are seldom included in extensive surveys, and samples focusing primarily on immigrants are very rare. Unsurprisingly then, we merely found a short passage in a report from the late 1990s, indicating lower political knowledge levels among immigrants than among Swedish born individuals (Petersson, Hermansson, Micheletti, Teorell, & Westholm, 1998, pp. 113–114); hence, a difference can be identified, which is in line with findings concerning other political attitudes and behaviors mentioned.

As for political knowledge, however, it was also found that immigrants who have been living for a rather long time in Sweden were almost as informed as Swedish-born citizens (Petersson et al., 1998, pp. 113–114). The report was based on a general Swedish sample which included a rather small number of immigrants and did not allow more detailed controls or research into why this

change occurred. The aim of this article is therefore to fill this gap.

As discussed above, this article also aims at explaining potential time-related differences in political knowledge between immigrants. Here, we draw on the quite universally applicable AMO model suggested by Luskin (1990; cf. Rasmussen, 2016). It may be considered as a general framework for factors that encourage learning, manifested in Luskin's "sophistication equation" terminology (Luskin, 1990, pp. 334–336). It is argued that people eventually become more politically sophisticated if the conditions for learning about politics and public affairs are beneficial. As suggested, the set of conditions in this regard should, to a large extent, be determined by a given individual's ability, motivation, and opportunity for acquiring political information (Luskin, 1990). Rather intuitively, information must not only be supplied within the context of the individual. She or he must also have the necessary ability and competence to organize and memorize the information, summing up facts and arguments.¹ Furthermore, such a "sophistication" process reasonably also requires that the individual is sufficiently motivated and thus interested to pay attention to things like public debates and political decision-making.

Focusing on potentially important ability factors, this study examines the influence of education in Sweden and (arguably closely connected) Swedish language skills, which in both cases are expected to promote knowledge about politics and public affairs in Sweden. The sensible relationship between schooling and political knowledge has been firmly and empirically supported among societal members in general (see, e.g., Jerit, Barabas, & Bolsen, 2006; for Swedish studies see: Holmberg & Oscarsson, 2004, pp. 208–16; Oscarsson, 2007). In our specific case, moreover, education in Sweden for immigrants may often involve the explicit learning of political facts about the new home country as part of the curriculum. Swedish language proficiency obviously facilitates the understanding of news and political information in Sweden. Financial resources are also considered. The idea is that money is beneficial for the ability to afford information supply and political news through mass media, via newspapers, and TV, as well as through computer and internet access (cf., Luskin, 1990).

As for motivation factors, Luskin does not specify in detail which ones should be included. Nevertheless, on a general note one may argue that psychological orientations proved to be important for political participation (cf., Verba et al., 1995, chapter 12) reasonably could have corresponding influences on political knowledge. Being politically interested and being political efficacious, due to a confidence in one's ability to understand politics, are properties that have long been known to enhance individual-level political activity (cf., Almond & Verba, 1963, chapters 7 and 9; Luskin, 1990). Such motivation factors may arguably also have a positive impact on the

propensity to obtain political knowledge. In this article, the analyses will also take into account the consumption of political news in mass media (cf., Jerit et al., 2006).

Opportunity factors, finally, may be regarded as determined within the social context of the individual (cf., Luskin, 1990). In line with this reasoning, it is assumed that an expanded access to social networks, aside from family and relatives, would facilitate an immigrants' acquisition of political knowledge concerning the new home country. Indeed, case study findings suggest that especially important sources for knowledge are interpersonal contacts, e.g., between colleagues, friends, and neighbors (see, e.g., Hakim, 2006). In sum, the access to social environments is assumed to increase the probability of being engaged in political discussions and thus a continuous political learning. Below, survey questions on the participation in both formally and informally structured arenas of exposure to political discussion and political information will be utilized.

3. Data and Measurements

For the empirical analyses, we rely on the large-scale Swedish Citizen Survey 2003 ('Medborgarundersökningen 2003'; for a more detailed description of the survey, see Esaiasson & Westholm, 2006). This survey employed face-to-face interviews with a stratified random sample of inhabitants in Sweden (aged 18 and over) which consists of a large over-sample of immigrants (originally selected on the basis of official registry data). Hence, the data were collected rather recently after a previous major flow of refugees to Sweden that took place in the 1990s. Moreover, just like the recent refugee wave, which had its peak in the autumn of 2015 (Riksrevisionen, 2017), a significant part of the refugees originated from countries with large Muslim populations (in the former case mainly coming from Bosnia and Somalia, and in the latter case from countries such as Afghanistan and Syria). Comparing the two time periods, there are many similarities, as evidenced by the domestic debate regarding Sweden's actual capacity to receive and integrate the refugees (cf. Byström & Frohnert, 2017). Therefore, we believe that our findings, although based on data from the early 2000s, are both interesting and enlightening, as they may very well shed light on the contemporary situation in Sweden than initially would have been expected.

The total sample in the Swedish Citizen Survey 2003 included 2,138 respondents of which 858 originally had immigrated to Sweden. The survey employed a complex sampling scheme, increasing the selection probability for refugees and for immigrants from developing countries, while under-representing immigrants from Nordic and Western European countries. At the same time, the design allows for necessary adjustments to produce representative samples of the total population, the native population and the population of immigrants, respec-

¹ According to Luskin (1990), it is also necessary to sum up the information to a meaningful whole, but we agree with other scholars who argue that this is actually not demanded in order for an individual to gather political knowledge (see, e.g., Boudreau & Lupia, 2011).

tively. Moreover, to our knowledge, it is one of few sources of information on political knowledge in Sweden and very suitable for investigating a large number of explanatory factors. Furthermore, it contains numerous questions on immigration-specific experiences and life circumstances.²

Items on *political knowledge* were included at the end of the questionnaire, to avoid effects on political attitudes. Three questions were asked, and the answers were added together to an index variable, scaled 0–1; results from a principal component analysis, using the Kaiser criterion, suggest one single dimension, explaining 56% of the variance (factor loadings vary between 0.4 and 0.7). The questions were:

- 1) In most places, there is a public authority to which you can turn when it comes to questions about, for example, the basic pension, the National Supplementary Pensions Scheme (ATP), children's pensions and widows' pensions. What is this authority called?

Results show that 48% gave the right answer—Försäkringskassan (the Swedish Social Insurance Agency)—in the full sample (51% in the immigrant sample).

- 2) How many parties currently have seats in the Swedish cabinet (*regeringen*)?

Results show that 27% gave the right answer—one party—in the full sample (21% in the immigrant sample).

- 3) What body makes the laws of Sweden?

Results show that 53% gave the right answer—riksdagen (the Parliament of Sweden)—in the full sample (48% in the immigrant sample).

The primary independent variable, *time in Sweden*, measures a respondent's length of residence in the new home country. The measure takes into account the number of years as well as months the respondent has been living in Sweden (also taking into account temporary periods abroad).

Turning to the ability factors, *post-migration education* measures the number of years spent in combined full-time schooling and occupational training in Sweden. When it comes to *Swedish language* skills, the survey data allows a construction of an additive index variable (ranging from 0–10), based on the following four questions answered by the *interviewer* after having conducted the interview with a respondent (thus aiming to

document skills more objectively, compared to an optional self-evaluation by each respondent): 'How would you assess the respondent's Swedish pronunciation?'; 'Apart from the question of accent, how would you assess the respondent's ability to express him/herself orally in Swedish?'; 'How would you assess the respondent's ability to understand spoken Swedish?'; and finally, 'How would you assess the respondent's ability to understand written Swedish?'. All assessments were made on a scale ranging from 0 to 10, where higher values represent better Swedish language skills.³ Income, finally, is measured by including registry data information on each respondent's disposable household income.

When it comes to social networks (opportunity factors) and the potential importance of working life in this sense, the dummy variables *weak labor force attachment* (coded 1 for respondents that are unemployed, or on disability/early retirement pension, or not working for other reasons; and 0 otherwise) and *pensioner* (coded 1 for those who are retired; and 0 otherwise) separates respondents in the corresponding categories from those who are employed, and thus may take part in social interaction in workplaces. Regarding civil society organizations, we include a measure of *associational activity*, based on questions about engagement in 28 different types of voluntary associations. The measure includes a wide-ranging array of recreational organizations, interest and identity organizations, as well as ideological organizations. The information was summarized in an additive index variable (the different types of organizations are mentioned in detail in Part 2 of the Annex). Moreover, we include an overall index measure of *political participation*, based on conventional forms of participation as well as acknowledged non-parliamentary ways to bring about societal change. The index variable consists of items on a total of 19 different modes of participation included in the survey (such as voting, party activities, personal contacts, protests, and political consumerism; the items included in the index are described in detail in Part 2 of the Annex).⁴ Analogous to the expected non-linear effects of length of residence, the associational activity and political participation variables are logarithmically transformed in the multivariate analyses below.

As for less formal networks, one variable is included measuring *political discussion*. It is based on the following interview question: 'How often do you discuss politics with others?' Possible answers were 'often' (coded as 1), 'sometimes' (0.67), 'seldom' (0.33), and 'never' (0).

As for motivation factors, *political interest* is measured via the question 'How interested are you in Swedish politics on the national level?' Possible answers

² Principal investigators were Karin Borevi, Per Strömblad and Anders Westholm at the Department of Government, Uppsala University. The fieldwork was carried out in 2002 and 2003 by professional interviewers from Statistics Sweden. The overall response rate was 56.2 percent. All analyses in this article have been conducted with proper adjustments for the stratified sampling procedure.

³ The construction of a one-dimensional index is supported by a principal component analysis (not shown). It should be mentioned that the survey interview involved showing each respondent many cards with written information (with the purpose to efficiently convey response options); hence, by the end of the interview, it is, therefore, likely that the interviewer had a good grip on the respondent's ability to also understand written Swedish.

⁴ A scree-test, based on a factor analysis, in fact, gives some support for treating political participation as a one-dimensional phenomenon (for a similar approach, see, e.g., Verba et al., 1995, especially p. 544).

were 'very interested' (coded as 1.00), 'Fairly interested' (0.67), 'not especially interested' (0.33), and 'not at all interested' (0). *Media consumption* is an index variable (ranging 0–1) based on the following four questions about how often the respondent does the following concerning news about Sweden: reads about politics in a daily newspaper; listens to or looks at news programs on the radio or on TV; listens to or watches programs on politics and social issues on the radio or on TV; and uses the internet to obtain information on politics and society. Possible answers to each question were 'every day' (1), '3–4 days per week' (0.75), '1–2 days per week' (0.5), 'less often' (0.25), and 'never' (0). Supported by factor analysis, the answers were summarized into one index variable, rescaled to run between 0 (equivalent to answering 'never' on all four questions) and 1 (answering 'every day' on all questions). *Internal political efficacy* is based on the interview subject's assessment of her/his capacity and competence to influence political and administrative decisions compared to that of other citizens. The measurement is an additive index based on three interview questions concerning interview subjects' views on their opportunities to persuade politicians to consider their demands, communicate their demands to politicians, and seek redress if treated wrongly by a government agency. For all three questions, the answers are given on a scale of 0 ('much less opportunity than others') to 10 ('much greater opportunity than others').⁵ The index variable for *external political efficacy* is constructed in a highly similar way and based on three identical questions with the difference being that the items concern the respondent's views on the opportunity for *people in general* to affect political and administrative decisions (both indices on efficacy are scaled 0–1).

When it comes to control factors, the demographic factors age and gender have sometimes been found to correlate with political knowledge and will be included (see, e.g., Jerit et al., 2006; for analyses of Sweden, see: Holmberg & Oscarsson, 2004, pp. 208–216). The variable *female* is coded 1 for women and 0 for men, and *age* is the respondent's age the year the interview took place.

As for potentially important migrant-specific variables, potential differences due to reasons for migration is captured by the variable *refugee* (coded 1 for people who migrated to Sweden either because they were refugees themselves, or because they accompanied or joined a relative with refugee status; and 0 for those who came to Sweden for other reasons, such as for work or studies). We also constructed a set of dummy variables separating immigrants into three categories based on

their respective origins in different regions of the world (Myrberg, 2007). The first category 'West' (used as a reference category in the statistical analyses in the next section) consists of immigrants from Western and Anglo-Saxon countries; specifically, other Scandinavian countries, North-western Europe, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the US. Next, the second category 'East' consists of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe. Finally, the third category 'South' consists of immigrants from Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America. The trichotomy is admittedly crude, but Myrberg (2007) has nevertheless demonstrated its empirical validity when it comes to conditions for immigrants in Sweden.⁶

Pre-migration education measures the number of years spent in combined full-time schooling and occupational training before migrating to Sweden. *Economic expansion* is a simple dummy variable, measuring whether the respondent arrived in Sweden in times of economic expansion, here measured as the 1960s and earlier and the 1980s (coded as 1), or in times of recession, i.e., the 1970s and 1990s (coded as 0).⁷ Descriptive statistics for all variables are presented in Table A1, in Part 1 of the Annex.

4. Empirical Findings

Starting with basic descriptive analyses, immigrants report lower levels of knowledge than Swedish-born individuals (0.38 on the 0–1 knowledge scale, compared with 0.43 for Swedish-born participants). Moreover, these differences especially apply to immigrants from non-Western countries, as the means are 0.37 for immigrants from Eastern countries, 0.29 for immigrants from Southern countries, and 0.44 for immigrants from Western countries. Furthermore, in bivariate regression analyses, findings in previous research are replicated when it comes to knowledge levels increasing over the years lived in Sweden, reaching the levels of Swedish-born individuals after approximately 30 years living in Sweden.

Moving on with multivariate analyses, firstly we investigate whether there seems to be a genuine positive learning effect of living in Sweden on political knowledge when controlling for background factors. Results from multiple regression analyses (OLS) are reported in Table 1.⁸ In Model 1, pre-migration education and gender show expected effects in line with previous research with higher educated and men scoring higher on the knowledge index, controlling for the other factors. Age is not related to knowledge. The country origin differences seem to remain concerning immigrants from Southern

⁵ Imputation was applied for this variable; respondents were assigned a value as long as they answered at least two of the three questions.

⁶ All models have been rerun using a more detailed set of dummy variables, based on a categorization of 21 world regions, presented in Part 2 of the Annex; the effects were only changed to very minor degrees. In additional analyses (not shown) we also control for geographic location in Sweden by including dummy variables indicating the type of place of residence of a given respondent at the time of the interview (rural area; village; small town; larger city). This control does not affect the reported coefficients to any noticeable degree.

⁷ We have also rerun these analyses using a variable measuring the unemployment levels the exact year of immigration. Unfortunately, data were not available for rather many years, and therefore we have chosen not to show these findings. However, these additional analyses show very similar results as reported above.

⁸ All main analyses have been rerun using ordered logit analysis. The findings are in general very similar to what is presented here and do not change the main conclusions.

Table 1. Predicting political knowledge (0–1) among immigrants in Sweden, considering time-related differences and ability, motivational, and opportunity factors.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Time in Sweden (log)	0.137*** (0.032)	0.030 (0.036)	0.009 (0.036)
Female	−0.084*** (0.023)	−0.091*** (0.022)	−0.067*** (0.022)
Age	0.003 (0.005)	0.007 (0.005)	−0.003 (0.006)
Age squared	−0.00005 (0.000)	−0.00005 (0.000)	−0.00008 (0.000)
Pre-migration education	0.013*** (0.003)	0.016*** (0.003)	0.012*** (0.004)
Refugee	0.046 (0.031)	0.035 (0.030)	0.031 (0.029)
<i>Origin</i> (West = ref.)			
East	−0.029 (0.032)	−0.023 (0.032)	−0.028 (0.031)
South	−0.092*** (0.033)	−0.069** (0.033)	−0.065** (0.032)
Economic expansion	0.049* (0.027)	0.041 (0.026)	0.029 (0.026)
Post-migration education		0.013*** (0.004)	0.008** (0.004)
Swedish language skills		0.025*** (0.007)	0.026*** (0.007)
Income		0.029** (0.013)	0.032** (0.013)
<i>Labor market position</i>			
Weak labor force attachment			0.038 (0.033)
Pensioner (Employed = ref.)			−0.165*** (0.059)
Associational activity (log)			−0.005 (0.008)
Political participation (log)			0.001 (0.018)
Political discussion			0.044 (0.044)
Political interest			0.162*** (0.048)
Swedish news consumption			0.108* (0.058)
Internal political efficacy			−0.096 (0.076)
External political efficacy			−0.106* (0.064)
Constant	−0.085 (0.131)	−0.441*** (0.147)	−0.257*** (0.164)
<i>N</i>	666	666	666
<i>R</i> ²	0.098	0.162	0.197

Notes: *** $p < .01$ ** $p < .05$ * $p < .10$. Entries are ordinary least-squares (OLS) estimates with standard errors in parenthesis. The sample is weighted to be representative of people who have immigrated to Sweden; the dependent variable political knowledge runs from 0 (no correct answer) to 1 (correct answers on all three knowledge questions).

countries (but not Eastern countries). Moreover, a positive effect is also discovered for economic expansion, i.e., arriving in Sweden in a decade characterized by a strong economy seems to be positively related to being informed about Swedish politics later in life. The variable measuring the reason for migration, whether being a refugee or other reasons, is however not significantly correlated with political knowledge. Turning to the variable of our main interest, the effect of years lived in Sweden; a strong and statistically significant effect is discovered. In other words, this result supports the hypothesis that there is a true learning effect of living in Sweden.⁹

Hence, the attention is now directed to the second research question, i.e., explaining the effect of time spent in Sweden using the AMO model. In Model 2 the ability factors are introduced. All three behave as expected, showing positive and statistically significant effects. Moreover, the coefficient for time in Sweden is now considerably weakened, and not statistically significant. Hence, no direct effect of years lived in Sweden remains, and in line with the AMO model, the reason seems to be that immigrants increase their abilities to learn about Swedish politics over time.¹⁰

In Model 3, all other AMO factors are added. The ability factors are still substantially and statistically significant, in contradiction to surprisingly many of the motivation and opportunity factors. Only political discussion, political interest, and the pensioner dummy show expected signs and statistically significant effects. Moreover, time in Sweden remains rather unaffected, and not statistically significant, when all these other variables are introduced. In Model 1 in Table A.2, in the Appendix, the same model is shown but with the ability factors excluded. The motivation and opportunity factors still, to a large extent, show similar effects and, even more notably, a significant effect of time in Sweden is displayed. Hence, the inclusion of ability factors is necessary in order to explain why political knowledge levels increase with years lived in Sweden. Model 2 in Table A.2 helps us qualify our finding even further. Here only two of the ability factors are controlled for, i.e., post-migration education and Swedish language skills. Looking at the coefficient for time in Sweden, it is clear that these two factors have a strong impact. Adding income (cf., Model 2 in Table 1) affects the time variable coefficient only to a small extent.¹¹ Hence, our findings are rather clear-cut: with time, immigrants get more educated in Sweden and they improve their Swedish language skills. Consequently their knowledge about Swedish politics increases. Increased motivation and opportunity (in terms of social networks), as well as income, do not constitute the main explanation of the learning process.

Two-way causality may, of course, affect the results to some degree. Arguably, this problem is most present

when it comes to motivational factors; political knowledge is more likely to affect political interest and political efficacy than to affect educational achievements in Sweden or Swedish language skills. Taking potential two-way causality into consideration then adds to the picture that motivational factors do not constitute the main explanation at work here.

Another potential method problem concerns self-selection. A general desire to integrate in Sweden could affect both time spent in the country (the person in question wants to stay) and political knowledge (the person wants to know more about Swedish politics). We cannot rule out the existence of such effects, but we do think the controls here are rather ambitious, firstly considering the number and composition of background factors controlled for in Model 1 in Table 1; and, secondly, considering that the effect of time in Sweden also remains to large extent, after controlling for motivational factors but not ability factors (cf., Model 1 in Table A2, in Part 1 of the Annex). In a further analysis, which is not shown, two additional factors are considered, which should also be rather good measures of a general will to integrate: whether the respondent is a Swedish citizen and whether he/she wishes to continue living in Sweden. This additional test does not change the aforementioned to any notable degree.

5. Conclusion

Findings in previous research have repeatedly pointed to a lack of political integration in Western democracies. This article contributes by looking at political knowledge, an aspect of political integration rarely studied before. Our findings—based on evidence from the significant immigrant country of Sweden, with a reputation of being immigration friendly—show similar signs of inequality as immigrants, in general, are less informed about Swedish politics than individuals born in Sweden. As expected, these differences primarily concern immigrants from non-Western countries. However, from an integration perspective, it is promising that our analyzes, being the most rigorous in the Swedish contexts, show increasing knowledge levels over the years living in Sweden, an effect that remains after rather ambitious controls.

A major task of this article has been to explain why knowledge levels increase with the years living in Sweden. Using the AMO model our results are clear; the increase in knowledge is possible to explain, and it is especially post-migration education and improved Swedish language skills that boost this learning process. In other words, more recently arrived immigrants have less political knowledge, not because they don't want to, but because they have no means of obtaining it; they lack Swedish education and language skills, which make it

⁹ The coefficient is even stronger, substantially, when the control factors are included (0.14), compared with when controls are excluded (0.08).

¹⁰ Moreover, years lived in Sweden has, both substantially and statistically, very strong and positive direct effects on education in Sweden, Swedish language skills, and income.

¹¹ This pattern is also confirmed if controlling for the three ability factors one by one, in separate analyses, which also shows education and language skills impacting to a similar extent.

more difficult to become politically informed. As it takes a substantial number of years before immigrants reach the knowledge levels of native-born Swedish individuals, supporting faster learning of the Swedish language as well as promoting further education in Sweden seem called for, in order to strengthen political integration among more recently arrived immigrants.

It is true that education and language skills may capture not only the ability to learn but also, to some extent, an ambition to learn; and, educational institutions may provide social opportunities to be exposed to political information (cf., Luskin, 1990). Hence, we cannot be sure that these factors affect political knowledge exclusively via improved cognitive skills or language skills. Still, a rather ambitious set of factors were included in our analyses, aimed at measuring motivation and opportunity more directly, and these additional factors did not contribute to any substantial degree. Hence, we find it rather unlikely that education in Sweden and Swedish language skills should only (or mainly) capture motivation (or opportunity), and not ability. Other kinds of data are needed, such as panel surveys, to investigate this more thoroughly.

This article has concerned Sweden, which is a rather special case considering, on the one hand, its reputation as an immigration-friendly welfare state and of having a tradition of ambitious multicultural policies, and, on the other hand, immigrants' rather poor position in the labor and housing markets. We encourage future studies with a similar general approach like ours, but conducted in immigrant countries different from Sweden, in order to find out whether our findings are valid only in the Swedish context or apply to other contexts as well.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Annex: Part 1
Table A1. Descriptive statistics.

	Min.	Max.	Mean	St.d.
Political knowledge	0	1	0.41	0.30
Years in Sweden	2	73	27.65	14.96
Age	20	81	48.81	14.86
Female	0	1	0.54	0.50
Pre-migration education years	0	25	9.05	5.50
From Eastern country	0	1	0.25	0.44
From Southern country	0	1	0.27	0.45
Refugee	0	1	0.25	0.44
Economic expansion	0	1	0.53	0.50
Weak labor force attachment	0	1	0.14	0.35
Pensioner	0	1	0.15	0.35
Associational activity	0	9	1.07	1.31
Political activity	0	19	3.40	3.16
Political discussion	0	1	0.59	0.29
Political interest	0	1	0.59	0.28
Swedish media news	0	1	0.46	0.21
Internal political efficacy	0	1	0.47	0.18
External political efficacy	0	1	0.46	0.20
Post-migration education years	0	23	4.22	5.05
Swedish language skills (index)	0	10	5.76	1.91
Disposable family income	0	16076	2829	1654

Notes: The sample is weighted to be representative of foreign-born people living in Sweden; N = 666.

Table A2. Predicting political knowledge (0–1) among immigrants in Sweden, considering time-related differences and ability, motivational, and opportunity factors.

	Model 1	Model 2
Time in Sweden (log)	0.091*** (0.032)	0.053 (0.034)
Female	−0.064*** (0.022)	−0.091*** (0.022)
Age	−0.006 (0.006)	0.008 (0.005)
Age squared	0.00007 (0.000)	−0.00006 (0.000)
Pre-migration education	0.012*** (0.004)	0.017*** (0.003)
Refugee	0.039 (0.030)	0.038 (0.030)
<i>Origin (West = ref.)</i>		
East	−0.022 (0.031)	−0.017 (0.032)
South	−0.076** (0.032)	−0.069** (0.033)
Economic expansion	0.032 (0.026)	0.036 (0.026)
Post-migration education		0.013*** (0.004)
Swedish language skills		0.025*** (0.007)
Income		
<i>Labor market position</i>		
Weak labor force attachment	0.012 (0.033)	
Pensioner (Employed = ref.)	−0.187*** (0.060)	
Associational activity (log)	−0.003 (0.008)	
Political participation (log)	0.011 (0.019)	
Political discussion	0.012 (0.044)	
Political interest	0.194*** (0.049)	
Swedish news consumption	0.163*** (0.057)	
Internal political efficacy	0.006 (0.075)	
External political efficacy	−0.123* (0.065)	
Constant	0.044 (0.149)	−0.307** (0.133)
<i>N</i>	666	666
<i>R</i> ²	0.168	0.142

Notes: *** $p < .01$ ** $p < .05$ * $p < .10$; entries are ordinary least-squares (OLS) estimates with standard errors in parenthesis; the sample is weighted to be representative of people who have immigrated to Sweden; the dependent variable political knowledge runs from 0 (no correct answer) to 1 (correct answers on all three knowledge questions).

Annex: Part 2

Types of organizations included in the associational activity index: ‘Sports club or outdoor activities club’; ‘Youth association (e.g., scouts, youth clubs)’; ‘Environmental organization’; ‘Association for animal rights/protection’; ‘Peace organization’; ‘Humanitarian aid or human rights organization’; ‘Immigrant organization’; ‘Pensioners’ or retired persons’ organization’; ‘Trade union’; ‘Farmer’s organization’; ‘Business or employers’ organization’; ‘Professional organization’; ‘Consumer association’; ‘Parents’ association’; ‘Cultural, musical, dancing or theatre society’; ‘Residents’ housing or neighborhood association’; ‘Religious or church organization’; ‘Women’s organization’; ‘Charity or social-welfare organizations’; ‘Association for medical patients, specific illnesses or addictions’; ‘Association for disabled’; ‘Lodge or service clubs’; ‘Investment club’; ‘Association for car-owners’; ‘Association for war victims, veterans, or ex-servicemen’; and ‘Other hobby club/society’.

Items included in the political participation index: Voting in the local elections (2002), and whether one—in trying to bring about improvements or to counteract deterioration in society—during the last 12 months has: Contacted a politician; Contacted an association or an organization; Contacted a civil servant on the national, local or county level; Membership in a political party; Worked in a political party; Worked in a (political) action group; Worked in another organization or association; Worn or displayed a campaign badge or sticker; Signed a petition; Participated in a public demonstration; Participated in a strike; Boycotted certain products; Deliberately bought certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons; Donated money; Raised funds; Contacted or appeared in the media; Contacted a lawyer or judicial body; Participated in illegal protest activities; Participated in political meetings.

21 world regions, used in additional tests mentioned in the text: East Africa; West Africa; Central Africa; South Africa; North Africa; West Asia (Middle East); Caucasus and Central Asia; South Asia; Southeast Asian; East Asia; North America; Caribbean; Central America; South America; Australia and New Zealand; Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia; The Nordic countries; Northern and Western Europe (excluding The Nordic countries); Eastern Europe; Balkans (excluding Greece); and Southern Europe.