

Generational Perspectives on Democracy: Migrants' Satisfaction Across National and European Levels

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Abstract

This study investigates the satisfaction with democracy among first- and second-generation migrants in both their national government and the European Union (EU). As immigrant descendants increasingly shape the socio-political context of their host countries, understanding their attitudes toward democratic systems offers key insights into their integration trajectories. While research has explored their socio-demographic behaviours in terms of education, labor market participation, and social inclusion, less is known about their political attitudes and democratic satisfaction. This paper addresses this gap by comparing first- and second-generation migrants to provide an intergenerational perspective on democratic satisfaction at both national and supranational levels.

Our expectations are informed by theories of electoral representation and migrant integration. On the one hand, neo-assimilation theory suggests that second-generation migrants, sharing more socio-economic and cultural traits with natives, should align with natives' positions. On the other hand, the socialization hypothesis emphasizes the enduring influence of migrant family background, suggesting that second-generation migrants may adopt attitudes similar to the first generation, reinforcing intergenerational continuity.

Using the 2024 European Election Study (EES), we apply multilevel modelling to account for demographic, political, and country-level factors. Preliminary results show that second-generation migrants generally do not follow first-generation patterns. They report higher satisfaction with both national and EU democracy. However, migrant generation and social class interact in shaping democratic satisfaction. While second-generation migrants in the upper social class do not significantly differ from other groups, long-term first-generation migrants in the upper class report lower satisfaction with both EU and national democracy. This suggests that higher social status does not necessarily translate into greater political satisfaction for well-integrated migrants, but rather that migration status continues to pose structural barriers to democratic experience.

Our findings contribute to the broader discussion on immigrant descendants' socio-political behavior by showing how migrant integration and intergenerational dynamics influence democratic satisfaction.

Keywords: Immigrant descendants, Satisfaction with democracy, Migrant Integration, Intergenerational dynamics, Social Class

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