

# Surge in immigrant Conservative voters, but most vote Labour

*In the general election of 2013, over 60 per cent of voters with an immigrant background from Africa, Asia and Latin America voted for centre-left parties, with the Labour Party being the most popular. This share was even higher in earlier municipal elections. If we compare the general election in 2013 with the municipal elections in 2011, support for the Conservative Party among this group of immigrants has more than doubled. The voting pattern of those with a European immigrant background is more similar to other Norwegian voters, but support for Labour is also extensive among this group.*

---

Johannes Bergh,  
Tor Bjørklund and  
Vebjørn Aalandslid

---

How did voters with an immigrant background vote, i.e. those born outside Norway and their Norwegian-born children, in the general election in 2013? The ordinary election surveys do not throw any light on this since their samples of the immigrant population are too small. Nevertheless, it is possible to gain some insight since a representative sample survey of immigrants in a parliamentary election was conducted for the first time in 2013.

Previously, such surveys were only conducted at municipal elections. The votes of foreign nationals - who were given the right to vote in 1983 - were recorded in the four municipal elections held between 1987 and 1999. In the local elections in 2003 and 2007, Norwegian citizens with an immigrant background were also included in the survey. Here the party choice was recorded for immigrants and Norwegian-born to immigrant parents who had Norwegian and foreign citizenship. Although this enables us to draw comparisons with the survey from the 2013 election, the basis for comparison is limited since foreign nationals are not entitled to vote in general elections.

## **Voter turnout remains low**

As immigration has increased, so too has the number of voters with an immigrant background. The figure has almost doubled since 2005, and accounted for around 6 per cent of all voters at the general election in 2013. Voters with a European background (see textbox) accounted for about a third of all immigrants who were eligible to vote, while two thirds originated from Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Although the share of eligible voters with an immigrant background increases in each election, the immigrant votes do not make up the corresponding share



**Johannes Bergh** (left) is a political scientist and researcher at the Institute for Social Research. (johannes.bergh@samfunnsforskning.no)

**Tor Bjørklund** is a professor of political science at the University of Oslo. (tor.bjorklund@stv.uio.no)

**Vebjørn Aalandslid** is a political scientist and senior adviser in Statistics Norway, Division for development cooperation. (vebjorn.aalandslid@ssb.no)

## **Country background**

A distinction was previously made between immigrants with a western and non-western background, but this is no longer practised by Statistics Norway. Slightly different definitions are used in this article, namely Norwegian citizens with a background from Europe, where we distinguish between countries within and outside the EU/EEA, and voters with a background from Asia, Africa and Latin America. The sample in the election survey also included a few voters from North America and Oceania, but these have been excluded for the purposes of this article since there were so few. Norwegian-born to immigrant parents have the same background as their parents in this survey.

of the total number of votes cast. Voter turnout in this group is significantly lower than among the general population, and has been around 50 per cent in the last general elections (see figure 2) - which is about 25 percentage points lower than among the general population.

It should be noted that voter turnout varies considerably according to what country an immigrant is from. For example, only about one in every three eligible voters from Croatia, Macedonia and Kosovo cast their vote. Among immigrants from Sri Lanka, Somalia and Poland, participation is higher, with a turnout of around 60 per cent respectively. In previous elections, there has been a clear correlation between long periods of residence and a high turnout. Older age groups have also participated to a greater extent than the younger age groups.

### New patterns

These patterns are now less clear. Immigrants who have the right to vote for the first time now have a higher participation rate than immigrants who have been resident in Norway for 20-29 years. With regard to voters of African descent, the group with the shortest period of residence has the highest turnout, and the youngest voters (18-25 years) have a higher voter turnout than the elderly (60 years and over). In other words, the immigrant groups participating in elections have changed in recent elections - and this is also likely to affect voting patterns.

### Who did the immigrants vote for?

Voting patterns of those from what is often referred to as “the global south” (Asia, Africa and Latin America) deviate more from those of the electorate at large than voters with a European background. In the 1990s, there were small disparities between how western foreign nationals voted and the overall election results. With regard to foreign nationals, the following was concluded in relation to the 1990s: “Voters with a western background (...) have supported the left-wing parties to the same extent as the general voting public in the last two elections (1995 and 1999). Support for the centre parties, however, has waned somewhat, in favour of the Conservative Party primarily.” (Bjørklund and Kval 2001, p. 63).

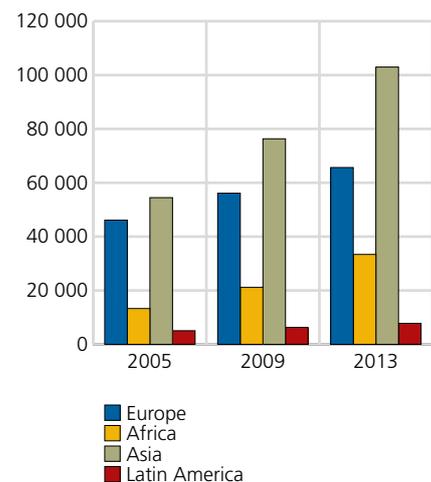
Table 1. Voting by voters with an immigrant background from Europe – in and outside the EU/EEA – at the general election in 2013. Per cent

	Europe (EU/EEA)	Europe (not EU/EEA)	Total Europe	Election result 2013
Red Party	2	*	1	1,1
Socialist Left Party	3	5	4	4,1
Labour Party	27	57	41	30,8
Centre Party	1	2	2	5,5
Christian Democrats	3	*	2	5,6
Liberals	4	1	3	5,2
Conservative Party	37	23	31	26,8
Progress Party	17	7	12	16,3
Green Party	5	4	4	2,8
Others	1	1	1	1,8
	100	100	101	100

No. of respondents (171) (103) (274) (2 836 029)

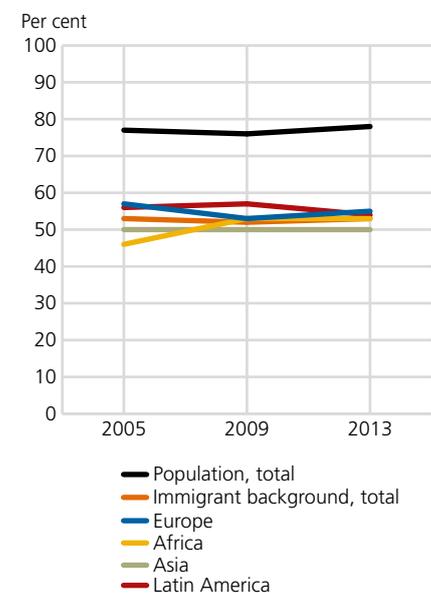
Source: Election survey of immigrant population 2013, Institute for Social Research/Statistics Norway.

Figure 1. No. of voters with an immigrant background, by region. General elections 2005-2013



Source: Election statistics, Statistics Norway.

Figure 2. Voter turnout in the population in total and among persons with an immigrant background, by region. General elections 2005-2013



Source: Election statistics, Statistics Norway.

Table 2. Voting among immigrants with a background from Africa, Asia and Latin America at the municipal elections in 2007 and 2011 (Norwegian citizens and foreign nationals) and in the general election in 2013 (Norwegian citizens). Per cent

	Municipal elections		General election 2013	Election result 2013
	2007	2011		
Red Party/REA	4	2	3	1,1
Socialist Left Party	20	6	6	4,1
Labour Party	54	64	55	30,8
Centre Party	1	*	*	5,5
Christian Democrats	3	4	3	5,6
Liberals	3	5	3	5,2
Conservative Party	10	13	26	26,8
Progress Party	2	4	3	16,3
Green Party	-	-	1	2,8
Others	2	1	*	1,8
	99	99	100	
No. of respondents	(311)	(508)	(368)	
Red Party/REA/ Socialist Left/Labour	78	72	64	36
- menn	80	81	67	31
- women	76	65	62	41
	+4	+16	+5	-10

Source: Election statistics, Statistics Norway; Election surveys among the immigrant population 2007, 2011 and 2013, Institute for Social Research/Statistics Norway. Aardal, B., J. Bergh and A.H. Haugsgjerd (2014): Velgervandringer og valgdeltakelse ved stortingsvalget 2013. De første resultater fra Valgundersøkelsen, Oslo: ISF note (4:2014), Institute for Social Research.

Among Norwegian citizens with a European immigrant background who voted in the general election in 2013, the centre parties were still under-represented, but to a much greater extent than was registered in the 1990s for western foreign nationals. The Progress Party was also under-represented in 2013 (see table 1). The Conservatives and, in particular, the Labour Party were the parties that benefitted from this. The disparities between 2013 and the late 1990s are mainly due to the fact that the composition of the western immigrants has changed, the element of countries from outside the EU/EEA has increased, and new EU countries from the former Eastern Bloc have been established as voter groups in Norway.

The voting patterns of those with an immigrant background from a European country outside the EU/EEA are in many ways similar to that of voters from the global south, with over half voting for the Labour Party. Voting to the left of centre is, however, slightly more common among voters with a background from Asia, Africa and Latin America than for those from Europe outside the EU/EEA. In previous election surveys, more thorough studies were conducted of voters who were previously characterised as non-western than immigrants from western countries.

### Voters from Asia, Africa and Latin America

The party distribution in 2013 of voters with a background from the global south is compared to the municipal elections in 2007 and 2011 in table 2 (see the textbox describing which groups are eligible to vote in the different elections).

The party distribution among foreign nationals with what was referred to as a non-western background in the 1990s was very similar to the distribution in 2007. What was striking in the period from the 1990s to 2007 was that about three out of four voters voted left of centre. At the local elections in 2011, however, a noticeable shift occurred in the left-wing parties. The Socialist Party experienced a drop in support and lost its position as the second largest party, with half of its voters from 2007 announcing their shift of support to the Labour Party in 2011.

The fall in support for the Socialist Party in 2011 has been interpreted as a consequence of the terror attack on 22 July (Bjørklund and Bergh 2013). The election campaign was put on hold. The Labour Party came into focus, and the Socialist Party faded into the background. The question was whether the decline in support for the Socialist Party would be temporarily linked to the special context of the election. The outcome of the election survey in 2013 suggests a prolonged downturn for the Socialist Party. The party has clearly lost its position as the second largest party among immigrants with a background from the global south. This position was taken by the Conservative Party, which has shown an upswing in support.



Despite retaining a solid share of the votes, support for the parties to the left of centre among immigrants from the global south saw a decline from 2007 to 2013. However, a stable feature is that the men are more left-wing than the women (see table 2). The opposite pattern can be observed among voters generally, where women have been more likely than men to vote left of centre since the 1980s (Bergh 2008). It should be noted that the group of voters in general elections is different to the group of voters in municipal elections (see textbox).

One possible reason for the gender divide in politics among immigrants is the differing reasons for immigration. A majority of the women came to Norway as a result of family immigration, while a higher share of men were migrant workers and refugees. Among the women, we also find those who have married someone without an immigrant background and who are more likely to vote the same way as the general population.

### Africans vote for parties to the left

The most left-wing voters - measured by support for the Labour Party and parties further to the left - are voters of African descent, followed by those with an Asian and Latin American background, as shown in table 3.

One possible explanation for this is that the Latin Americans have the longest period of residence among these groups. Among the voting immigrants from Latin America in our survey, 70 per cent have lived in Norway for 20 years or more, compared with 29 per cent of Africans and 47 per cent of Asians. This in turn can result in a voting pattern that is more similar to that of Norwegian citizens without an immigrant background.

### Integration and voting

Another indicator of integration (in addition to period of residence) is how many friends a person has without an immigrant background - a question that is asked in the survey (see textbox). If we take the sum of the categories "none or almost no one with an immigrant background" and "some, but well below half", we find the majority - 59 per cent - of Latin Americans in this category, compared with 20 per cent of those with a background from Africa and 33 per cent with an Asian background.

Voters with a background from the global south who report that less than half of their friends have an immigrant background are less likely to support parties to the left than others. Fifty-four per cent of this group voted for parties to the left in the general election of 2013. Among those who report that the majority of their friends have an immigrant background, 69 per cent vote for parties to the left. Closer integration into Norwegian society is assumed to contribute to a voting pattern that is more similar to Norwegian voters in general.

### What do the immigrants think?

Finally, we look at the political attitudes of voters with an immigrant background. Over several decades we have observed that voters with a back-

#### About the survey

Survey participants were eligible voters with an immigrant background who voted at the general election in 2013. The respondents were asked about voting in the election as well as a series of questions about their attitudes to various political issues. A sample of 2 000 individuals with an immigrant background was drawn, who according to the electoral roll actually voted in the election. Of these, 753 persons took part in the survey, which corresponds to a response rate of 38 - about the same level as a similar survey conducted in conjunction with the municipal elections in 2011. Of the 753 surveyed, 673 were immigrants, while 80 were Norwegian-born to immigrant parents. For more details about the survey, choice of methodology, sample plan, imbalances in the sample, error margins and weights, see the separate documentation report for the survey (Høstmark 2014, to be published).

#### Right to vote

Only Norwegian citizens are entitled to vote in general elections. Our survey therefore covers the part of the immigrant population with Norwegian citizenship who are over 18 years of age. Foreign nationals with a minimum period of residence of three years in Norway are entitled to vote in local elections (as from 1983). Nordic citizens are entitled to vote in local elections if they have lived in Norway since 30 June in the election year.

Table 3. **Support for the left (Red/REA, Socialist Left, Labour) and right (Conservative, Progress Party), by immigrant background. Municipal elections 2007 and 2011 and the general election in 2013. Per cent**

	Municipal elections				General elections		(No. of respondents)		
	2007		2011		2013		2007	2011	2013
	L	R	L	R	L	R			
Africa	86	4	81	8	73	13	54	90	89
Asia	78	12	70	15	62	33	211	322	214
Latin America	71	10	69	15	53	34	46	96	64

Source: Election surveys among the immigrant population 2007, 2011 and 2013, Institute for Social Research/ Statistics Norway.

Table 4. Attitudes to different political issues, by country of origin. Immigrants and Norwegian-born to immigrant parents. Per cent "agree"/"yes"

	Europe (EU/EEA)	Europe (others)	Africa	Asia	Latin America
<b>Values</b>					
Support for women's right to choose abortions	68	71	29	48	60
Euthanasia should be allowed	58	56	31	45	59
Gays and lesbians should be free to live their life as they wish	92	85	52	78	80
Begging should be prohibited in Norway	64	70	57	68	56
We should not accept more control and monitoring even if it can help protect us against terror	43	38	37	40	40
<b>Economic issues</b>					
We should accept greater wage disparities than today in order to encourage people to work hard	35	39	47	47	45
Many public activities could be performed both better and at a lower cost if they were transferred to the private sector	40	29	33	37	39
<b>Immigration</b>					
Refugees and immigrants should have the same right to social assistance as Norwegians, even if they are not Norwegian citizens	45	48	78	63	49
<b>Environment</b>					
Climate changes are mostly man-made	69	75	74	78	85
No. of respondents (average)	(182)	(107)	(96)	(233)	(68)

Source: Election survey among the immigrant population 2013, Institute for Social Research/ Statistics Norway.

## References

Bergh, J. (2008): "Årsaker til kjønnsforskjeller i stemmegivning – En kunnskapsstatus" (Reasons for gender disparities in voting – a knowledge status), *Tidsskrift for samfunnsforskning*, vol. 49, p. 421-434, Institute for Social Research.

Bergh, J., T. Bjørklund and V. Aalandslid (2008): "Stemmer til venstre, men er ikke venstreorientert" (Vote for the left, but not left-wing), *Samfunnsspeilet* 2/2008, vol. 22, p. 2-11, Statistics Norway.

Bjørklund, T. and J. Bergh (2013): *Minoritetsbefolkningens møte med det politiske Norge: Partivalg, valgdeltakelse, representasjon* (The minority population's interface with the political Norway: party choices, voter turnout, representation), Oslo: Cappelen Damm.

Bjørklund, T. and K.E. Kval (2001), *Innvandrere og lokalvalget 1999* (Immigrants and the local election 1999), Report 2: 2001, Oslo: Institute for Social Research.

Høstmark, M. (2014 to be published): Undersøkelse om stemmegivning blant personer med innvandrerbakgrunn (Survey of voting among persons with an immigrant background), Dokumentation report, Statistics Norway.

ground from the global south have a left-oriented voting pattern. Does this also mean that this group has left-wing or liberal attitudes on political issues? Our survey measures the attitudes of a number of political issues (see the textbox about the survey). The results are presented in table 4.

Given that voters of Asian origin, and even more so those with an African background, have a particularly left-oriented voting pattern, liberal attitudes could be expected among these groups. However, there is no evidence of this in table 4. If we look at the issues that reveal significant differences between the groups, we generally find more conservative attitudes among Asians and Africans (who have the most left-oriented voting patterns) than among Europeans from the EU/EEA area (who have the most right-oriented voting patterns).

## Values

For example, we find that there is extensive support for women's right to choose abortions among Europeans, while the support is significantly weaker among Asians and even weaker among Africans. Support for euthanasia is also clearly greatest among the Europeans. A majority of all groups believes that gay men and women should be allowed to live the way they want, but this attitude finds least favour among voters with an African background.

## Right or left

In a classic economics question on accepting greater wage differentials, right-wing attitudes are mainly found among those of African and Asian descent. Most people in these groups believe that increased wage differentials should be accepted in order to increase the willingness of the individual to work hard.

Some questions reveal little or no disparities between the groups. However, with regard to the issue of refugees and immigrants' rights to social assistance it is clear that Asians and Africans have the most left-wing views.

## Minority defenders

All in all, we find support for our assertion in an earlier edition of *Samfunnsspeilet* on immigrants: "Vote to the left, but are not left-wing" (Bergh et al, 2008). The explanation of the left-oriented voting pattern does not therefore lie in political attitudes, but rather in a collective idea that the parties to the left are defenders of the minorities (Bjørklund and Bergh 2013). The attitudes of voters with an immigrant background suggests that the parties to the right have the potential to win voters from this group. The election in 2013 was thus a sign of the Conservative Party's growth potential.