

Exclusion sociale et xénophobie à l'échelle locale: mobilisation dans le contexte des votes sur la naturalisation en Suisse

Hanspeter Kriesi

Résumé des principaux résultats

A travers ce projet, nous avons l'intention d'analyser les raisons de taux de rejet variables des demandes de naturalisation dans des communes suisses ainsi que le rapport entre les citoyens/ennes suisses et des étrangers/ères désireux de se faire naturaliser. Nous tenterons de démontrer que la politique d'une commune en matière de naturalisation peut être rapportée à des facteurs culturels et politiques.

To our knowledge, Switzerland is the only nation-state in the world where naturalizations happen at the local level. Every municipality, be it a town of 100,000 or a village of 400 inhabitants, is accorded the right to decide who can become a Swiss citizen. As the regulations at the national and cantonal levels are very sparse, each political local entity decides according to which formal procedure and criteria its alien residents are naturalized. Given the high degree of autonomy possessed by municipalities in this policy field, the naturalization-procedures, the applied criteria, and consequently the ratio of rejected candidates vary greatly from one municipality to another. The main goal of this study was to explore these municipal naturalization procedures and to demonstrate that local political struggles leading to specific national self-understandings explain why some municipalities pursue a more restrictive naturalization policy than others.

Switzerland and its highly decentralized citizenship politics constitute a unique case for the study of citizenship politics, but this does not suggest that inferences from the findings of this case are not possible. On the contrary, it should be considered as a unique research opportunity, allowing us to discuss citizenship and nationalism from new perspectives. Taking a closer look at naturalization processes is revealing in that it enables us to go beyond formal regulations and citizenship laws and shows us how national citizenship models are interpreted and put into practice. Going local also allows us to go beyond classic works on citizenship or nationalism, which often adopt macro-sociological and historical approaches. Studying naturalizations in Switzerland further permits us to abolish the idea of homogeneous nation-states and to demonstrate that citizenship can take different forms and meanings within a nation-state, not only over time but also over space.

Many studies exploring divergent regional and local immigration, integration, and naturalization politics in European countries explain differences in policy outcomes with differing conceptions of citizenship and different attitudes of the regional and local authorities. In a similar vein, we hold the conviction that the way alien residents are naturalized depends on the prevailing national self-understanding which is, in turn, the outcome of political struggles. According to this view, it is ideologies and ideas about citizenship and nationality that shape how issues related to immigrants and candidates for naturalization are resolved. Rogers Brubaker's comparison of citizenship politics in Germany and France is probably the most prominent study adopting this approach. While ideological accounts have a high impact on how foreigners are naturalized, we must not forget that conceptions of citizenship take different forms within a nation-state and change over time. To account for these aspects we have to bring to mind the contentious and political nature of citizenship: the outcome of a specific naturalization policy is the result of ongoing political struggles over the questions of who we are and who belongs to us.

To investigate such struggles, Switzerland provides a unique 'laboratory', because in it the functioning of the contentious closure mechanism of national citizenship can be observed in clearly distinguishable local fields. We started out to set the stage by analyzing data from a large-N survey in more than 150 municipalities. The aim of this first survey was twofold: On the one hand, it enabled us to collect important data that has not been available so far; on the other hand, data from this survey helped us specify the factors influencing naturalizations before we fully applied our theoretical framework. We then have selected 14 municipalities, in which we have executed detailed case studies. We first analyzed various documents and conducted expert-interviews with representatives of the local administration to get to know better the local naturalization processes and especially the role, influence, and attitudes of the local actors. In a second phase 180 interviews have been conducted with all actors that are involved in the decision-making processes. In these face-to-face interviews we asked questions about the politicians' attitudes towards citizenship and the candidates and about their contacts to other local politicians. Both our large-N analysis and our case studies aimed at reconstructing the local naturalization fields and at distinguishing the ideas of local actors and power-structures within municipalities.

In our large-N analysis we were able to demonstrate that socio-economic and socio-structural factors have no influence on which naturalization policy is pursued in a municipality. A high unemployment rate, a large ratio of foreigners or a growing number of applicants from Muslim countries seem not to preoccupy the people who decide how many and which alien residents become Swiss citizens. Rather, cultural and political factors are decisive: The rejection rates increase when the local population has a restrictive understanding of citizenship, when the Swiss People's Party (SVP) is influential in local politics and/or when decisions are taken at open ballot. It thus clearly appears that it is how people think about citizenship, in which way political actors influence the naturalization procedures, and how decisions are taken, which tells us which policy is pursued. This points to the contentious and political nature of citizenship and is a first confirmation of our main hypothesis.

Citizenship politics was then analyzed in more detail in 14 case studies. By generating an indicator for the individual understanding of citizenship of local actors, we were able to distinguish diverging ideas on how cultural boundaries are drawn and how foreign residents who apply for Swiss citizenship are perceived. As we made clear from the outset, solely accounting for the way local politicians think about their nation leaves us in a somewhat unsatisfied situation. How do we know which attitudes are relevant when it comes to the final decision? To distinguish majority and minority positions and to explain why a specific construction prevails, we proposed to include the local power structures in our study. In order to trace the ways in which influence is exerted, we resorted to community power studies and social network analysis. As it turned out, accounting for both the symbolic and material aspects of naturalization politics enabled us to explain rejection rates and to distinguish various local citizenship models.

Besides the quantitative comparison of 14 citizenship models, we sought to illustrate our hypotheses by means of qualitative data. A detailed analysis of the naturalization procedures, the attitudes of the municipal politicians involved in the decision-making processes and the local influence structures once more revealed the highly political nature of naturalizations: At different stages various actors confront each other with their convictions of who should become a member of their community. Each municipality has an interesting story to tell us about how foreigners become citizens of Switzerland. This becomes most clear when diverging attitudes are presented toward topics that have been molding naturalization politics in Switzerland in recent years. In municipalities pursuing a restrictive naturalization policy, not only do local political actors screen the candidates more systematically and gather more information about them, in such municipalities more criteria have to be fulfilled to get a Swiss passport: It is often requested that the candidates speak the local dialects, that they know a lot about the political systems of Switzerland, their canton and their municipality, that they are members of local associations, are willing to give up their old nationality and/or that they have a job and do not benefit from social security or disability insurance. Local debates on the decisions that have recently been taken by the Swiss Federal Court have revealed whether citizenship politics constitutes

a political or rather an administrative issue for municipal politicians. Some hold the opinion that naturalized citizens become first and foremost citizens of a local community, and therefore local politicians or the entire population should be accorded the right to decide on each application individually. Opponents of the existing system criticize the arbitrariness of this system and demand that procedures be standardized. We were also interested in the opinions on candidates from Muslim countries. In recent years, the increasing immigration of people from the countries of the former Yugoslavia and from Turkey have led to violent debates on the question of how they can be integrated in Switzerland. It is thus all the more interesting to observe that opinions on whether they can and should be naturalized diverge a lot. While some defend the position that the cultural background of those immigrants is incompatible with Swiss traditions, others relate difficulties of integration to individual characteristics such as class or education.

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Prof. Dr. Hanspeter Kriesi
Institut für Politikwissenschaft
Seilergraben 53
8001 Zürich
Tel. +41 (0) 1 634 40 11
hanspeter.kriesi@ipz.uzh.ch

Contact
Marc Helbling
Tel. +41 (0) 1 634 39 86
helbling@ipz.uzh.ch