Why Voting Rights Matter
A Conceptual Framework

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Abstract: The article examines the meaning of migrants' (dis)enfranchisement within democratic polities, focusing on ideas of political authority and agency derived from democratic theory. Building on the notion that democratic voting represents a mutual and second-personal exercise of authority, the article argues that the disenfranchisement of migrants signifies their exclusion from agential authoritative relationships in politics, and ultimately, from a quintessential democratic mode of political agency. We recall some of the principles for expanding voting rights and acknowledge that there may be reasons in favor of exclusion. However, we highlight how any such exclusion (re)shapes the political relationships instantiated in the practice of voting. While we rebut the challenge of "voting fetishism," we conclude by discussing how alternative forms of political participation for migrants, though important, cannot compensate for the unique impoverishment of political authority and agency that disenfranchisement specifically incurs.

Keywords: democracy, democratic authority, enfranchisement, migration, voting rights

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What is at stake in the decision to (dis)enfranchise migrants?[1] This article offers a conceptual framework for addressing this question from the perspective of a democratic theory of political authority and agency. The conceptual framework is necessary and helpful for thinking about the various political and social factors that may influence the decision as it shapes and reshapes political relations in a democratic polity. The article is divided into two main parts.

In the first part, we present our conceptual framework by exploring how democracy constitutes a distinct form of government, characterized by the relationships of political authority and agency it establishes among citizens. These relationships allow for a unique form of political participation distinguished by its mutual and second-personal nature. Disenfranchisement is especially salient in the context of migration because people who migrate straddle between multiple citizenries and are thus exposed to serious threats to their package of fundamental political

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rights and duties. Such threats are heightened by the combination of the lack of political rights with other social, economic, ethnic, and cultural vulnerabilities.

We then delve into the implications of this conceptual framework for migrants' (dis)enfranchisement, illustrating our points by reference to voting as a primitive exercise of democratic political agency and authority. By calling it "primitive," we intend that the right to vote is constitutive of the democratic character of a political community, in a way that, for instance, socioeconomic rights or even other forms of political participation (e.g., political activism) are not. We treat voting as the practical manifestation of citizens' mutual recognition of each other's authority as political agents. By contrast, exclusion from voting rights is argued to lead to an impoverishment of political authority and agency, stemming from being cut off from distinctive agential authoritative relationships at the political level.

In the second part, we use this conceptual framework to discuss possible factors motivating migrants' disenfranchisement taken from the literature on the expansion of migrants' voting rights. Through the conceptual lenses of democracy as a specific authority-conferring practice for the exercise of political agency, we analyze several prominent factors including migrants' perceived lack of long-term investment in a community; their ability to participate competently and consistently in a polity's political and cultural discourse; considerations of national self-determination; the risk of doubling some migrants' political powers; and the intricate trade-offs between the volume and extent of rights necessary to balance varying rates of migration with different understandings of a polis.

While we reject the accusation of voting "fetishism"—namely, of overemphasizing the import of the right to vote—we also explore alternative forms of political participation, such as protest and activism. Although these modes of participation hold significance, we argue that they cannot substitute for the kind of political authority and agency inherent in the right to vote. We conclude, therefore, that whatever normative stance we take on the decision to (dis)enfranchise migrants, our conceptual framework allows us to understand, appreciate, and reflect on the unique threats to people's normative status as mutually authoritative agents that the decision implies.

In this sense, our primary objective is to shed light on the stakes implicated in migrants' (dis)enfranchisement. While our view does not offer a substantive normative argument outlining the conditions and boundaries of migrants' (dis)enfranchisement,[2] it presents a normatively relevant conceptual framework for assessing different forms and models

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of political participation, in view of their implications in terms of democratic political agency and authority.

Democracy as an "Authority-Constituting Practice"

Democracy fundamentally operates as a rule-based political practice for the government of a polity.[3] Within this framework, the defining rules of democracy orchestrate interactions among individuals who assume specific roles as citizens. These rules confer a unique normative status on the role occupants, endowing them with normative powers (i.e., right and duties) that are novel to the practice and confined to its parameters (Hindriks 2009; Searle 1969, 1995). To grasp the distinctiveness of democracy as a form of government, it is crucial to delineate the logic inherent to this specific practice and the particular normative relationships that the democratic rules establish among citizens. Such an exploration is pivotal for comprehending the nature of the political authority that democracy constitutes among its citizens and the core of political agency within a polity governed by democratic rules.

To achieve this objective, we adopt a framework that identifies the critical role within the democratic practice with that of a political agent responsible for making collectively binding decisions (Ceva and Ottonelli 2022). The attribution of this decision-making political authority to political agents through established procedures is fundamental for understanding the dynamics of democratic practice. From this perspective, democracy can be conceptualized as an authority-constituting practice, exemplified at a basic level by democratic voting. Reference to democratic voting serves to exemplify a primitive exercise of democratic political agency, wherein citizens uniquely partake in the authority to decide for one another how they should live their political lives.

Democracy certainly extends beyond voting. However, regardless of the broader or narrower interpretations of democracy one may adopt, voting remains an integral and distinctive component of the structure of any polity rightfully called democratic. This is underscored by the general consensus that societies that exclude significant segments of their citizenry from voting cannot satisfy the minimal demands of political equality. Similarly, the disenfranchisement of citizens is typically viewed as an exceptional, often punitive measure (as seen in cases of repeated felonies).

Within the democratic framework, voting transcends the mere expression of opinion or judgment. Voting is not just another procedural device; it is a primitive form of enactment of the unique normative powers

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and status bestowed upon participants in the practice of democracy. This is the power and status of the members of a political community that share the authority to define the terms of their own interaction through a joint exercise of agency. Viewed through this lens, as will be further expounded in what follows, voting becomes a tangible manifestation of people's political agency and the network of authoritative relationships that supports the democratic decision-making process.

From this vantage point, we can begin to see how the denial of voting rights to migrants represents more than just a procedural exclusion; it signifies a deeper and more substantive disavowal of their participation in the normative relationships and roles that form the bedrock of democratic political authority and agency. When a polity must decide on the opportunity and the terms of such exclusion, the stakes of the decision touch upon the very fabric that binds it together, particularly in relation to the primitive aspect of this mode of government as an authority-constituting practice. Therefore, the decision on whether and how to enfranchise migrants is a decision about the opportunity and terms of their involvement in the basic relationships that define political agency and authority in a democracy.

The general claim that the decision about the enfranchisement of migrants has significant implications for the recognition of their normative status as politically authoritative agents may sound neither unexpected nor particularly controversial. However, while the claim may prima facie resonate with people's (more or less reflected) intuitions, the specific philosophical grounds of the claim require some clarification. To this end, we offer a conceptual framework to explore the logic of democracy. This framework is necessary and helpful to bring out the basic features of the exercise of decision-making authority that democratic practice enacts through the establishment of political agency that comes with the attribution of voting rights.

The Meaning and Implications of the Democratic Right to Vote

The powers that accompany the role of a democratic voter are fundamentally normative in nature. These powers enable the alteration of the normative status of entities and individuals (Beckman 2017; Waldron 2000); in this sense, they can also be viewed as Hohfeldian powers, (see Hohfeld 1919). Voting transcends the mere expression of preferences or judgments; it embodies a unique form of political authority that people have over each other as political agents. The voting process in a democracy

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is a collective decision-making exercise (Lau 2014), where each participant's decision carries its weight on the outcome without being unilateral. Thus, when citizens vote, they are not making an isolated, definitive decision. Instead, they activate their share of normative powers, contributing to the final decision in concert with the actions of other voters. In this sense, the attribution of democratic voting rights changes people's normative status because it changes in a fundamental sense the recognition of someone as endowed with the political authority to make binding decisions about themselves and others.

Democratic voting is characterized not only by equality (Dahl 1956) and jointness (Beerbohm 2012) but also by its mutual and second-personal nature (Ceva and Ottonelli 2022). The mutuality of democratic authority is visible in the shared exercise of political authority among citizens as political agents. Democratic authority is mutual because citizens exercise it jointly over one another in the political domain. What distinguishes democratic voting is that people vote (either directly or indirectly via their representatives) on rules and rights that will apply to themselves as members of a polity. Thus, we can elucidate how the attribution of the right to vote establishes democratic citizens as mutual politically authoritative agents: democratic voting confers powers that people may exercise jointly only over those who possess those same powers within the same polity (Ceva and Ottonelli 2022).

In this context, the decision concerning the opportunity and terms of migrants' (dis)enfranchisement can be understood as a decision about the very terms of membership in a polity. The decision bears on the normative status of people, touching on not only their package of rights but also the capacity in which they possess those rights as politically authoritative agents. Focusing on this capacity is crucial for identifying who is entitled to make claims against one another as political agents engaged in relations of mutual authority.

To appreciate this consideration, it is important to notice that democratic political authority is not only mutual, but also, importantly, second-personal. While first-personal authority pertains to self-governance (it is the authority people have over themselves, for example, the authority of conscience), and third-personal authority emanates from a higher order entity (it is the authority that comes from a perspective entirely extraneous to the agent, for example, the authority of the judiciary), second-personal authority is inherent in interpersonal relationships between mutually accountable agents (Darwall 2006; also see Feinberg 1970: 244–245, 249–250).

The establishment of democratic voting rights instantiates this kind of second-personal authority in the political domain because it establishes

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the right-holders as the determinants of what they owe to one another (see also Beckman 2017; Waldron 2000). It makes voters accountable to each other for shaping the very boundaries of their political life together. This joint possession of voting rights engenders a political relationship among democratic voters that surpasses simple "I–you" interactions. It forms a new collective "we" — a community of rights-holders who, in that capacity, jointly recognize each other as the ultimate arbiters of their reciprocal claims and duties (Ceva and Ottonelli 2022). Engaging in such relationships is important because it compels the participants to reckon with their political agency and recognize their ultimate authority over each other in the political arena.

Through this authority-based conceptual framework, we can illuminate how exactly the decision concerning the enfranchisement of migrants is not simply about extending a privilege or enhancing their opportunities for influence. It is an acknowledgment of their role within this mutual and second-personal authority structure in the political domain. Therefore, deciding whether and how migrants could participate in elections, for example, means deciding whether they should count as members of the group that may actively shape the "we" of the democratic political community.

We can thus elucidate why enfranchisement transcends merely giving voice or securing impact. It signifies the reciprocal recognition of a normatively relevant status that signposts the attribution of the special mutual and second-personal political authority, which the practice of democracy distinctly enacts between political agents. Therefore, and conversely, we can better appreciate how and why the exclusion of migrants from voting is not merely a denial of a right. It entails an impoverishment of their political authority and agency by negating their normatively relevant role in the special political decision-making practice that defines and shapes a democratic society.

Arguments For and Against Enfranchisement

The authority-based conceptual framework developed in the first part of the article can be usefully employed as a compass to navigate the current multifaceted normative debate about the contours of the attribution of voting rights in a democratic polity.

In recent years, such debates have concentrated on the rights of refugees, with some commentators' claiming that they should be enfranchised as soon as they receive refugee status (Bender 2020).[4] Others (notably Miller 2016) have adopted more conservative positions. The

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decision about the enfranchisement of migrants seems therefore to remain a classic "migration-policy dilemma" (Bauböck et al. 2022).[5]

For instance, Christian Barry and Luara Ferracioli (2018) argue that "there is not a simple route from recognition of equal moral status for those living and participating in the economic life of a state to the requirement that the state extend a full range of political rights to them." The list of objections to the enfranchisement of migrants is long and composite (Groenendijk 2008) as it includes: giving "due weight" to voting rights; preventing foreign influence and interference; preventing ethnic parties; encouraging naturalization rather than devaluing it, and so on.

Relevant arguments burgeon rapidly if emigrants are considered together with immigrants (see Fliss and Østergaard-Nielsen 2021; Umpierrez de Reguero et al. 2023). Legal scholars and European Union jurisprudence (Lappin 2016, especially discussing Shindler *v* UK App No 19840/09 [ECtHR, 7 May 2]) have considered several reasons for disenfranchising emigrants (such as lack of knowledge, undue influence, mismatch between taxation and representation, and so on). Some of these arguments, as discussed below, matter also for the decision about the enfranchisement of migrants more broadly.

We do not intend to settle these disputes. Our aim is, rather, to deploy the authority-based conceptual framework for interpreting them through a unifying lens. Such a lens is helpful to appreciate the stakes the various arguments in the debate implicate for the recognition of migrants' normative status as political authorities and agents.

Establishing the meaning of attributing the right to vote as a constitutive component of democratic government does not automatically provide final reasons to prioritize the attribution of voting rights when determining the terms of migrants' political participation in a democratic polity. Similarly, to understand how and why disenfranchisement entails an impoverishment of migrants' political authority and agency does not inherently counter the critical perspectives we review in what follows.

However, our discussion clarifies the stakes of any critical appraisal of these perspectives; it aims to identify what considerations should be included in the complex balancing exercises between reasons for and against migrants' (dis)enfranchisement. Such balancing exercises are significant as they often require challenging trade-offs, for example between principled normative claims and pragmatic empirical considerations. The deployment of our conceptual framework in the discussion seeks to clarify how such trade-offs could be approached with an awareness of what is lost when enfranchisement is foregone for other contrasting considerations.

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Arguments Based on Sovereignty and National Democratic Autonomy

By granting the right to vote, a democratic polity arguably permits non-citizens to influence its character and identity (Wilcox 2004: 559). The magnitude of this claim is highlighted through the lenses of our conceptual framework, which illuminates the meaning of enfranchisement within the practice of democracy as an authority-constituting practice among political agents. As we argued earlier, deciding about the (dis)enfranchisement of migrants means determining whether they should be considered members of the "we" that can actively shape the democratic collective. This claim suggests that enfranchising migrants might not only affect the political outcomes that a democratic polity pursues but could also alter the very self-understanding and self-representation of the polity.

The likelihood of such a change depends on the actual scale of any migration wave over time. It is theoretically plausible to argue that a large and sudden influx of non-citizen voters might subvert or disrupt the trajectory of a polity's self-determining practices. Michael Dummett (2001: 14–15, 115), in an account otherwise sympathetic to migration, refers to the extreme version of this issue as the problem of "swamping." In such instances, the protection of sovereign national self-determination might necessitate migration control measures and limits to migrants' enfranchisement.

Arguments Based on Competence

The right to vote, as we have seen, establishes its holders as second-person authorities that can mutually determine their present and future as a political collectivity. Yet, the establishment of this authority arguably comes with prerequisites. Commonly, it is accepted that the democratic right to vote should not be granted to a child due to their lack of maturity and understanding. Similarly, one might argue that caution should be exercised before granting this right to someone who has just arrived in the country, does not speak the language, and is unfamiliar with local parties and the political system. At a minimum, the argument would go, newcomers would need the time to become acquainted with the voting process and the issues at stake.

This competence-based argument extends to participation in local politics, a sphere where full citizenship is not always a prerequisite for enfranchisement and where migrants are often authorized to vote (see some examples in Song 2009: 608, 614). From this perspective, the competence challenge to migrants' enfranchisement becomes particularly

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relevant, building on the special significance of voting practices that our conceptual framework teases out. Precisely because, the argument could go, the attribution of the right to vote grants an individual a final (albeit not unilateral) authority over others—a mirror of the authority that others hold over this person—it is crucial to ensure that the individual possesses the necessary competencies to cast a meaningful vote. Without such competencies, a vote could be rendered meaningless, reduced to mere political noise.

Furthermore, lacking a basic understanding of the political system and either national or local politics, migrants might be disinclined to vote and miss the commitment to engaging in practices that uniquely shape their lives within the polity. This predicament would matter, from the conceptual authority-based perspective we have developed, because it would diminish the practical relevance of enfranchisement as transforming the normative status of people as mutual authoritative agents.[6]

Arguments Based on Responsibility

A further qualification concerning migrants' (dis)enfranchisement arises from considerations of responsibility (Miller 2016: 127–129). The argument suggests that when a polity makes decisions about substantial matters—typically subjects of the right to vote—it is crucial that enfranchised members are not only competent but also motivated to act responsibly.

Considering that migrants represent approximately 3 percent of the world's population (IOM 2022 records 3.6 percent) and that some are enfranchised as permanent residents and prospective citizens, the statistical norm is that votes are cast by those people who share the stakes of a political life together, as well as its accompanying interests. Overly easy and rapid access to enfranchisement, and the voting rights exercised by those only briefly present in the country—consider the extreme example of short-term visitors—could undermine the incentives to act responsibly, thereby affecting the overall stability of the political system.[7] The stability or longevity of one's membership in a polity is significant from this point of view. Issues as important as pension schemes or sustainable and renewable energy policies are weighted differently over varying timeframes, with longer-term members having greater stakes and, therefore, potentially weightier responsibilities.

The importance of taking responsibility for the exercise of voting rights becomes even more apparent when it is interpreted through our conceptual framework. We can, in fact, see it as a part of a joint exercise of political authority, where people are mutually and ultimately accountable.

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Arguments Based on Equality

Ordinarily, we see the right to vote as an enhancer of political equality.[8] The disenfranchisement of migrants might exacerbate other forms of marginalization or outright discrimination: social, economic, and legal (Council of Europe 2019; Rudiger and Spencer 2003). This predicament is particularly acute considering that migrants often move from poorer (and less powerful) countries to places where their prospects are (or should be) more optimistic (Simpson 2022). A prima facie argument for migrants' enfranchisement might thus arise, considering the pivotal role that equality plays among the fundamental ideals of a democratic polity.

However, this general picture does not cover all migration cases or aspects. It is of course possible that some migrants be more resourced than their compatriots who remain in the country of origin. On average, it has been observed that people who develop migration plans are among the wealthiest in their countries (Pelham and Torres 2008), and possess the necessary assets – social, cultural, material, intellectual, along with good health – to consider relocation.

The implications of (dis)enfranchisement for equality in such scenarios are not straightforward. For example, unless we assume that granting the right to vote in the new political community negates the right to vote in the country of origin, enfranchising migrants could create disparities in political influence, where some people might vote twice, enhancing the power of those already better off and more influential. From a global perspective, access to the right to vote needs careful harmonization with democratic political equality. Moreover, seen through the lens of our conceptual framework, such a disparity would impact a quintessential dimension of political authority and agency in a democracy.

Following this line of reasoning, theorists like Claudio López-Guerra (2005) have advocated for the disenfranchisement of migrants who are already enfranchised elsewhere. However, this argument overlooks the complexities of making decisions about non-citizens' voting rights, as migrants often find themselves between different communities. As highlighted by Valeria Ottonelli and Tiziana Torresi's insistence on "the right not to stay" (2022), approximately half of all migrants contemplate returning to their home countries, relocating, or simply remain undecided about their long-term plans.

Still, while revoking the right to vote elsewhere is often impractical or unreasonable, the issue of double (or triple, or plural) enfranchisement persists. Given that inequality poses a significant political challenge globally, any measure that could exacerbate it warrants careful

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scrutiny. Our conceptual framework offers a useful lens to appreciate how such a scrutiny is warranted to the extent that it affects the core of democratic life.

Real-World Contextual Applicability

Sarah Song (2009) has summarized a relatively recent overview of the state of non-citizen voting rights around the world. Our conceptual framework is general enough to be relevant for various contexts. Its generality must nonetheless be adapted to appreciate the exact magnitude of the challenges and implications that the decision about the enfranchisement of migrants can bring with itself across contexts.

There are currently 193 members of the United Nations. Even if not all of them can be considered democratic, nor all apply some form of suffrage, the contexts of application multiply when one considers local suffrage. If we consider enfranchisement, like naturalization, as the "second admission" migrants need after having entered a country (Walzer 1983: cited and discussed in Song 2009: 147n7) it seems that the border could be moved here or there depending on circumstances and the identity and choice of the national community, just like migration, as long as one remains within certain limits set by justice. Therefore, while democratic theory would certainly rule out permanent – and, most probably, also protracted – disenfranchisement for an individual or group of migrants who do not fall within the constraints set by the counterarguments previously recalled, there would still remain room for a broad spectrum of policies.

Let us consider, for example, three empirical factors. One is national identity and character: it could be either more open and flexible or more closed and conservative. Another is the "sheer number" (Brock 2023) of non-resident citizens. This matters to see how the same qualitative phenomenon can translate into the problem of "swamping," as recalled above, or, conversely, when numbers are low, into the risk of the oppression of minorities. Finally, there is the substantiality of the right to vote itself. For example, it is one thing to consider the issue from the point of view of Japan, which refers to a continuously reigning monarchy and a relatively closed, ethnically homogeneous culture over centuries. It is quite another to do so from the standpoint of Australia, whose recently formed national identity is currently being discussed from the myriad points of view of its great diversity of inhabitants and which is still in flux.

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Similarly, it is one thing to grant non-citizen voting rights in Qatar, where the overwhelming majority of the resident population is made up of migrants and citizens are fewer than half a million. It is quite another to do so in Indonesia, where the percentage of migrants is extremely low. Both absolute and relative numbers contribute to determining the practical impact and import of enfranchisement.

Finally, voting rights in a semi-direct democracy have a very different significance than in a country where elections are rarer and the range of issues that can be decided by vote is more significantly restricted.

There would be, of course, a number of other elements to be factored in. For instance, cultural and ideological proximity—or diversity—is quite relevant in enfranchising resident non-citizens. Depending on the context, migrants' enfranchisement can range from the irrelevant to the fateful. When we discuss issues of migrants' rights in Western countries, we usually do so with problems such as minority rights and democratic respect in mind. But in a country like Lebanon, where 25 percent of the population is foreign-born, an expansion in voting rights could determine such existential matters as the country's fragile mosaic of ethnic and religious groups, whether Hezbollah obtains a majority in parliament or not, and ultimately even whether to engage in war. Likewise, the foreign residents of Taiwan could theoretically tilt the balance in elections; and in combination with entry laws, enfranchisement laws can decide the fate of a political community.

The famous trade-off between numbers and rights (Ruhs and Martin 2008) remains therefore very important. But the national character, the kind of democracy in place, and many other factors—including some that are difficult or impossible to quantify—also play a central role.

Adopting our authority-based conceptual framework to engage with such plurality makes it possible to see how the mutual and second-personal political authority instantiated by enfranchisement operates differently across diverse contexts. The establishment of voting rights not only acknowledges migrants' roles within the political community but must also consider factors like national identity, population demographics, and the specific nature of the democratic system in place. In countries with a homogeneous national identity or where migrants constitute a significant portion of the population, the mutual recognition inherent in enfranchisement carries distinct implications for the "we" of the democratic community. Therefore, applying our conceptual framework necessitates and enables a nuanced understanding of how these empirical factors influence the dynamics of second-personal authority and the shaping of political agency among all members of society.

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Beyond "Voting Fetishism"

Without claiming to be exhaustive, the previous section outlined and discussed from the perspective of a unified conceptual framework several arguments that provide prima facie considerations against granting voting rights to migrants.

In this section, we examine arguments that do not oppose enfranchisement but, rather, qualify claims in favor of it. While our conceptual framework clarifies how voting practices represent a primitive instantiation of a quintessential democratic form of political authoritative agency, enfranchising migrants is not a panacea. Surely by using our conceptual framework, we can see an important dimension of democratic government that is at stake whenever decisions about (dis)enfranchisement are made. However, an awareness of these stakes should not lead to fetishizing or idolatrizing the attribution of voting rights, as if it were sufficient to establish democratic authority and facilitate political agency under any circumstances.

Arguments Based on Alternatives

Political participation might take forms other than voting. For example, Isin (2017, 2019) has famously theorized a "performative citizenship" that exceeds formal and institutional recognition. Actions such as protests, volunteering, legal advocacy, and other forms of activism can and often do have a greater impact and receive more social recognition than participation in voting practices.

These diverse forms of political participation are not per se disconnected from voting practices. In fact, many of them have historically been instrumental in securing voting rights. Without the suffragette movements and the hard work of women in the place of men during wartime, women's enfranchisement would have taken much longer. The Civil Rights Movement for the full political inclusion of African Americans is another fitting example. One cannot give oneself the right to vote through a vote. Therefore, once the constitutive significance of the right to vote is established, as our conceptual framework allows us to do, integrating it with these alternative modes of political participation recalls that, in many cases, it was only through them that suffrage was ultimately granted.

In addition to these instrumental considerations, the inherent value of informal practices of political participation is frequently upheld (for a recent example, see Koukouzelis 2022). Voting, which requires elaborate

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and lengthy mechanisms, demands significant political and economic investments. Sometimes, it is plausible to argue that protests and other forms of extra-institutional political action, including revolution in its most extreme form, can redress political injustices and express political authority more immediately and directly than voting could ever achieve. The immediacy and impact of this kind of action is often implicitly recognized when the causes advocated by striking, protesting, campaigning on the press, and so on are eventually granted.

Therefore, considering the important role that non-voting political actions have played in achieving voting rights and the causes they have managed to further, it would be unreasonable to dismiss the importance of these complementary practices. Most importantly, there is no compelling reason to view them as mutually exclusive alternatives to voting.

To discuss this issue from the vantage point of our conceptual framework allows us to make an additional point in this respect. While alternative modes of political engagement such as protests, activism, and advocacy are crucial forms of political expression, they operate in a different sphere of political agency compared to voting. These activities, as we have pointed out, have historically been pivotal in expanding the franchise and effecting social change. However, it is crucial to distinguish these acts of political expression from the unique authority status conferred by the right to vote, particularly in the context of migrants' enfranchisement. While protests and activism are powerful tools for voicing dissent, demanding change, and shaping public discourse, they do not in themselves confer the mutual and second-personal authoritative agency that voting does.

As elucidated earlier, the right to vote is a primitive political expression of a special kind of mutual and second-personal authoritative agency within a democracy. Through voting, individuals are more than just heard; they are empowered as active participants in the collective decision-making process. Moreover, as previously discussed, participation in voting practices uniquely transforms individual voters into a "we," shaping the terms and conditions of their political life together. This transformative feature can hardly be replicated through protests or other forms of activism, where participants are often viewed as (ant)agonistic competitors rather than cooperative, mutually authoritative partners.

Thus, our conceptual framework brings to the fore how, for migrants, participation in voting practices represents more than just a means of political influence – it signifies their inclusion in a web of political relations endowed with unique normative powers. It symbolizes their full recognition as authoritative members of a polity, entitled to equal consideration without the need for special efforts. While, as discussed earlier, there

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may be sound reasons to exercise caution in granting such recognition – especially if not appropriately conditioned or contextualized – reference to our framework offers the necessary conceptual resources for making well-informed decisions that consider the implications and required trade-offs of such enfranchisement.

The stakes involved in attributing the right to vote extend beyond allowing voices to be heard to highlight injustices and advocate for change; they institutionalize a special normative status, establishing forms of political agency that cannot be replicated by other means. Without fear of fetishism, the right to vote can be seen as the primitive instantiation of the distinctive logic of the democratic practice, rather than merely one of its components or instruments.

Arguments Based on the External Limits to the Right to Vote (for example, Liberalism vs. Democracy)

In an era marked by challenges to liberal democracy, further limitations to the right to vote might easily be proposed. Since Marc Plattner's seminal 1998 article, scholars have critiqued the inadequacy of electoral practices in safeguarding basic rights, particularly those of minorities. This discussion has frequently taken the form of a debate between safeguarding liberalism and realizing democracy. Many participants in this debate, Plattner included, have advocated for an essential link between liberalism and democracy as mutually supportive institutional ideals. This suggestion underpins, for example, the claim that political institutions that secure legitimate voting practices but discriminate against or violate the fundamental rights of some of their citizens, cannot be regarded as fully democratic. This discussion aligns with the critiques of "illiberal democracies" advanced by Fareed Zakaria (1997) and others.

The usefulness of our framework does not depend, however, on settling the debate on the relationship between liberalism and democracy. Emphasizing the status of the right to vote as a primitive instantiation of the logic of democracy does not equate to the claim that voting is the sole component of democratic governance (Ceva and Ottonelli 2022). Conversely, neither alternative modes of participation – such as protests and activism – nor the equal recognition and distribution of fundamental rights, which characterize liberalism, are sufficient on their own to define democracy and make sense of its specificity. It would be similarly implausible to label a regime as "democratic" merely because it is liberal.

Thus, concerns about the extrinsic limits and relative insufficiency of the right to vote do not undermine the relevance of our conceptual framework. It retains its function as a tool for understanding the stakes

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involved in the practice of democracy and the decisions about who should have voice within it. Democratic voice through voting is expressive and performative of mutual, second-personal relations of authority exercised by political agents who recognize each other as partners. These relations, as previously discussed, are constitutive of democracy itself.

Our discussion extends the use of this framework to the context of migrants' (dis)enfranchisement. It shows how and why what is at stake when a polity deliberates about this extension is not just the provision of an instrument for the protection of migrants' basic rights. Enfranchising migrants means recognizing in them a special kind of political agency that they are fully entitled to exercise over other members of the polity as mutual and second-personal authorities.

Arguments Based on the Inherent Limits of Voting

The examples we discussed earlier highlight some inherent limits of the right to vote: its meaning and significance cannot transcend the context and socio-institutional setting within which it is exercised. Voting does not occur in a vacuum but always involves choosing between predetermined alternatives, which themselves cannot be subject to voting without leading to an infinite regress. This illustrates the inherent limitations in efforts to make elections "more democratic" through measures like primaries. The idea of organizing primaries for primaries, and further layers beyond, quickly becomes impractical. Ultimately, as Marxist and realist theorists have frequently emphasized, electoral processes are significantly influenced by extra-electoral factors such as economic and social influences or even personal relationships, as seen in familism and political dynasties. Reflecting on these dynamics, Paul Krugman (2020) cautioned that even liberal-democratic countries might be "less of a democracy and more of an oligarchy than we like to think."

Setting aside any excessive optimism, particularly in the discourse surrounding migrants' (dis)enfranchisement, it is crucial to recognize the potential for formalism and irrelevance in voting practices to avoid fetishizing the vote. This recognition is essential because, even when enfranchised, resident non-citizens often remain a minority within any specific country, and their ideological diversity could render their votes practically insignificant.

Our conceptual framework offers a philosophical lens for acknowledging the importance of these limitations by clarifying the stakes implicated in the attribution and exercise of voting rights. It prompts a deeper examination of how democratic systems can genuinely integrate diverse voices into the political process, ensuring that every participant

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can exercise meaningful political agency and authority as a cornerstone of the democratic practice.

Therefore, this sobering realization regarding the inherent limits of voting aligns with, rather than contradicts, our discussion. It underscores the importance of a conceptual framework that can facilitate a deeper understanding of the logic of democracy as an authority-conferring practice. Recognizing these complexities within a unified conceptual framework helps illuminate why the right to vote is crucial in a democracy and why its thoughtful application is pivotal. From this perspective, we can better appreciate the nuanced and multifaceted role of voting within democratic societies, emphasizing its limitations as well as its indispensable function.

Conclusions

The article has presented and used a conceptual framework for understanding the stakes implicated in the decision about the enfranchisement of migrants.

In the first part, we have presented our conceptual framework by elucidating the specific and significant role of the right to vote as a practice that constitutes people as second-personal authoritative agents. Particularly, we have emphasized the salience of conceptualizing democracy as an authority-conferring practice in the context of deciding whether migrants should be enfranchised. In the second part, we used the framework to discuss various counterarguments and qualifications that could potentially explain some restrictive practices under certain conditions.

Leo Chavez (2013: 10) powerfully argued that

> Who we let in to the nation as immigrants and allow to become citizens defines who we are as a people. Conversely, looking at who we ban from entry, or for whom we create obstacles to integration into society and to membership in the community of citizens, also reveals how we imagine ourselves as a nation—that is, as a group of people with intertwined destinies despite our differences.

Through our framework, we can see how not only is this true of entry; it holds as well for enfranchisement (and naturalization practices). A polity that poses undue challenges to its newcomers before these can express their political agency thereby threatens its democratic character. Conversely, when voting rights are conceded too hastily and lightly, the practical and expressive significance of the right to vote could be deflated.

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By adopting our authority-based conceptual framework, we can see how instances in which extending the franchise might be deemed unreasonable, unnecessary, or harmful do not detract from the pivotal role that the right to vote plays in making a polity democratic and conferring the relevant normative status upon its inhabitants. Through our framework, we can appreciate how voting furthers a practice that respects and nurtures second-personal, authority-constituting relationships among individuals who recognize themselves as fellow political agents within the same polity. From this perspective, our framework provides the conceptual toolkit for recognizing and reckoning with the utmost importance of the decision whether to enfranchise migrants; it addresses a fundamental element of any democratic polity by questioning the very terms and conditions of authoritative political interactions among its agents.

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NOTES

1. It is notoriously difficult to provide a definition of "a migrant." By "migrants" we here refer to the people covered by the IOM (2019: 132) definition: "[migrant is an] umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. The term includes a number of well-defined legal categories of people, such as migrant workers; persons whose particular types of movements are legally defined, such as smuggled migrants; as well as those whose status or means of movement are not specifically defined under international law, such as international students." This includes refugees and asylum seekers, destituted migrants working in poor or even slave-like conditions (see the Centre for Research on Modern Slavery 2020), as well as "expats" and migrants who are relatively well-off. The great diversity of such conditions poses, of course, the first challenges when conceptualizing the right to vote in relation to "migrants."
2. For a normative democratic theory of migrants' enfranchisement, see Zsolt Kapelner's contribution to this issue (Kapelner 2024 focuses on refugees' enfranchisement).
3. The first and second sections follow a line of argument originally presented in Ceva and Ottonelli 2022.
4. For an overview of the debate, see, among others, Angell 2020; Angell and Huseby 2017; Goppel 2022; Kapelner 2024. For general theoretical discussions, see also Brock 2023 and Song 2018, and Kayran and Nadler 2022 for the empirics.
5. On the dilemmatic nature of this and related issues, see also Song and Bloemraad 2022.
6. In his forceful argument against enfranchisement, Ketcham (2023) shows, among other reasons, how the lack of competence in voting could damage migrants themselves.
7. Sometimes, this challenge may be raised just as a proxy or a mask for xenophobia (see, e.g., the criticism in Banting et al. 2012).
8. See, for instance, Christiano 1990 on the relation between voting and equality; Christiano 2008 on democracy and equality; and the discussion on residence/citizenship abroad and voting rights in Lappin 2016.

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