

**Authentic Votes by “Inauthentic” Citizens:
Voting Experience of Marriage Migrants in South Korea**

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Abstract:

Scholars of immigrant political incorporation have identified voting as the key indicator of immigrants' adaptation to the host country's political system (Bloemraad 2006; Bueker 2005; Jones-Correa 2001). Frequently viewed as “the emblematic form of political participation” in a democracy (Jones-Correa 2002, 42), studies on immigrant voting usually assume that turning out at the polls indicate immigrants' understanding and internalization of the host country's political process and norms. Consequently, immigrant voting has been viewed as largely a function of three mechanisms: immigrants *adapt* or *resist* to the host country voting practice or *transfer* the practice of their country of origin (Voicu and Comsa 2014; White et al. 2008). Although the mechanisms provide general framework to understand immigrant voting behavior, the extant studies on immigrant voting have relatively overlooked how such mechanisms are manifested among immigrants who are in complex social locations in the host country.

International marriage creates strong bridging ties within the family, linking marriage immigrants with non-coethnic marital family members (Gidengil and Stolle 2009, 732). Studies on immigrant political incorporation have acknowledged the particular importance of bridging ties in facilitating political learning and involvement (Gidengil and Stolle 2009; Hagan 1998). Thus, it is expected that marital family members would have profound influence on marriage immigrants' political incorporation. Although marriage immigrants are incorporated directly into the host families, families are by no means isolated from the larger society. Women's voting practice may also be shaped by the larger framework of the society. The host country's institutional and discursive environment toward immigrants provide both opportunities and constraints for immigrants' political activities (Koopmans 2004; Voicu and Comsa 2014). In the past couple of decades, marriage migration has become a major migration flow in East Asia (Jones and Shen 2008; Kim and Oh 2010; Jones 2012). As foreign spouses, marriage immigrants undergo expedited naturalization process in countries like South Korea and Taiwan. However, not much attention has been paid to how spousal and family relations influence marriage immigrants' political participation in general and voting practice, in particular.

In this study, I address this gap by examining voting practice of Filipina marriage

immigrants in South Korea (henceforth Korea). Drawing on Kandiyoti's concept of "patriarchal bargain" (1988) and in-depth interviews of Filipina marriage immigrants residing in both urban and rural Korea, I argue that women's vote choices are closely related with their position according to gendered hierarchies within the family. Seen as a family affair, voting decisions are the result of women's constant negotiation with the gendered norms and expectations they face within the family and community. Thus, I challenge the extant use of voting in immigration scholarship as the primary indicators of immigrants' understanding and internalization of the host country's political system. Instead, this study highlights the need to actually examine the gendered context in which immigrants' political participation is realized, and what meaning immigrants give to this practice.

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