

Sociopolitical Control for Immigrants: The Role of Receiving Local Contexts

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Abstract

This study examines the individual and contextual factors associated with sociopolitical control expressed by immigrants in southern Spain. We used hierarchical linear modeling to evaluate the relations between individual (community participation, social connectedness, and perceived cultural competence of receiving community services) and municipality characteristics (city community participation, city social connectedness, and city community services' cultural competence) and immigrants' feelings of sociopolitical control. Data were analyzed using a two-level model based on 707 Moroccan immigrants in 25 municipalities. After adjusting for gender, educational level, and psychosocial confounding factors, we observed a positive association between social connectedness and sociopolitical control at the individual level. At the contextual level, we observed a positive association between (a) city community participation, (b) city social connectedness, and (c) city community services' cultural competence, and sociopolitical control. Indeed, living in a municipality where there are community services with high levels of cultural competence and where, on average, many people participate in organizations and neighbors are connected, was associated with higher levels of perceived control in the sociopolitical domain for immigrants. We also discuss implications for community-based research and practice.

Keywords: community participation, cultural competence, immigrants, multilevel approach, social connectedness, sociopolitical control

Sociopolitical Control for Immigrants: The Role of Receiving Local Contexts

In the current world economic crisis, migration from the poorest to the wealthiest countries is on the rise and is expected to increase. This process is turning groups once considered ethnocultural minorities into a critical part of society in receiving communities. Encounters between immigrants and receiving members represent a very complicated process, during which newcomers have to gain social legitimacy in the hosting country, while locals might worry about losing their social statuses (Hernández-Plaza, García-Ramírez, Camacho, & Paloma, 2010). Moreover, interactions with the new environment might represent a stressor for immigrants because of limited language proficiency, loss of family and friends, and uncertainties deriving from different cultural values and social, economic and political norms (Rodríguez, Myers, Mira, Flores, & Garcia-Hernandez, 2002; Romero & Roberts, 2003). In addition, the incorporation of immigrant populations into receiving societies often takes place in contexts of asymmetrical power relationships between immigrants and other groups in society. Thus, immigrants might experience stress when settlement processes in hosting countries are hindered by discrimination, insensitivity to immigrants' cultures, and restrictive policies regarding newcomers (Paloma, García-Ramírez, & Camacho, 2014). Empirical evidence supports these hypotheses, showing that immigrants report lower levels of physical and subjective well-being compared to receiving members (Alvi, Zaidi, Ammar, & Culbert, 2012; De Vroome & Hooghe, 2014; Silveira, Skoog, Sundh, Allebeck, & Steen, 2002; Vieno, Santinello, Lenzi, Baldassari, & Mirandola, 2009).

In spite of this, immigrants have the capacity to resist the adversities encountered in hosting societies and develop strengths and resources to cope with and transform the contexts that impede their well-beings (Watts & Serrano-García, 2003). In particular, immigrants'

experiences in hosting countries can be very different based on the opportunities offered by local communities and their abilities to create new social connections with people and organizations, which increase the possibility of responding to injustices. Indeed, some immigrants accept their social positions as an outcome of their relative lack of worth, which is out of their control, while others resist internalized oppression and take actions to transform their realities (McDonald, Keys, & Balcazar, 2007). For these reasons, various studies have focused on understanding the processes leading to immigrants' empowerment in receiving countries (e.g., Cakir & Guneri, 2011). Understanding these mechanisms is fundamental to developing strategies to allow immigrants to gain more influence on the decisions affecting their own lives, while promoting their levels of well-being.

In the case of immigrants, psychological empowerment is an active process in which newcomers gain self-perception of control in sociopolitical contexts that are important in their lives, acquire critical awareness and understanding of the oppressive conditions that they suffer in receiving contexts, and take effective actions to exercise that control to confront inequalities (García-Ramírez, De la Mata, Paloma, & Hernández-Plaza, 2011). These dimensions correspond to the intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral components of psychological empowerment, respectively (Zimmerman, 1995). However, “much of the empirical research on empowerment has focused on the intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment” (Christens & Peterson, 2012, p. 624). This is the case of this paper, since we focus particularly on sociopolitical control as a core element within the intrapersonal component. Sociopolitical control is defined as the manner in which immigrants feel “about themselves and their capacities to successfully intervene upon the world, and includes concepts such as perceived control, self-efficacy, and perceived competence” (Wilke & Speer, 2011, p. 973). This construct has been

widely used as a consolidated indicator of psychological empowerment in literature (e.g., Christens & Lin, 2014; Itzhaky & York, 2000). In addition, we assume that people's feelings of sociopolitical control are context-dependent and influenced by factors operating on other levels of analysis (Keys, McConnell, Motley, Liao, & McAuliff, 2017).

To date, only a few studies have examined factors associated with immigrants' empowerment, generally with a focus on specific challenges associated with migration experiences and cultural differences, such as domestic violence (e.g., Serrata, Hernandez-Martinez, & Macias, 2016) or the effectiveness of interventions aimed at promoting empowerment (e.g., Goossens, Onrust, Monshouwer, & Orobio de Castro, 2016; Itzhaky, 2003). Moreover, most studies investigating predictors of empowerment in the general population have either focused on individual factors or examined organizational and community aspects through individual perceptions (e.g., Wilke & Speer, 2011). As Christens and Lin (2014) underlined, there is a need to understand the community setting characteristics that most effectively foster sociopolitical control. For this reason, the current study aimed to analyze the association between community participation, social connectedness, and cultural competence in receiving communities' services (measured both through individual perceptions and aggregated at the city level) and sociopolitical control in a sample of Moroccan immigrants living in 25 municipalities in southern Spain.

In what follows, we introduce the theoretical background of two relevant and opposing psychological processes, powerlessness and sociopolitical control, which immigrants can show in receiving societies. Later, we identify three factors that may influence immigrants' sociopolitical control (i.e., community participation, social connectedness, and community services' cultural competence). Afterward, we describe the method of analysis and the results we

obtained. Finally, we discuss the study's main conclusions and implications for community-based research and practice.

Powerlessness and Sociopolitical Control among Immigrants in Receiving Societies

Oppression in receiving societies is considered a process of domination by which receiving groups gain privileges over newcomers (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). It is practiced through hegemonic ideologies and institutionalized through mechanisms of control such as discrimination, exploitation, and cultural control (Moane, 2003). For example, the Moroccan immigrant population in southern Spain often works in insecure jobs for low salaries as a result of a system that condones this exploitation; this population uses community services infrequently, as these are not sufficiently adapted to their cultural needs; they also have little contact with the local population, as they expect only rejection from them; and they participate very little in social spheres as a result of their exclusion from political settings (Hernández-Plaza et al., 2010). As a consequence of living in conditions of power inferiority, immigrants can develop a sense of powerlessness through which they may eventually accept, naturalize, and internalize their disadvantaged positions, becoming passive and incapable of initiating actions oriented toward changing asymmetrical power relations (Martín-Baró, 1994). In this way, powerlessness contributes to the perpetuation of oppressive conditions, usually leading to a lack of subjective well-being (Cakir & Guneri, 2011; Prilleltensky, 2008).

However, literature suggests that the effects of oppressive conditions on subjective well-being can be modified by strategies that enhance sociopolitical control over those conditions (Zimmerman, Ramírez-Valles, & Maton, 1999). In this regard, Paloma et al. (2014) found that believing in the possibility of social change and the self-perceived capacity to influence one's own context is positively related to subjective well-being for immigrants in southern Spain.

Moreover, sociopolitical control may play a key role in collective resistance to asymmetrical power relationships through the active involvement in community actions and organizations. Indeed, Balcazar and his colleagues (2012) in the United States described how a group of Latino migrant parents who had children with disabilities were able to take action to promote access to social activities for their children by developing perceptions of themselves as active persons with the possibility of influencing their futures. It is clear from the literature that sociopolitical control plays a key role in the promotion of subjective well-being and social justice among immigrants. However, there is a need to further advance the knowledge on factors promoting sociopolitical control for this group. Below, we list the three predictors we considered in this study at the individual and the contextual levels.

Factors Promoting Immigrants' Sociopolitical Control

Community Participation

Participation in community organizations seems to be a mechanism for the development of psychological empowerment, as participants can gain experience in developing strategies to achieve goals (Zimmerman, 2000). For example, African American women living in Detroit, Michigan who were members of organizations and participated in change-oriented activities reported higher degrees of perceived control than nonmembers (Becker, Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Klem, 2002). In particular, evidence shows community participation is associated with the development of sociopolitical control (Christens, Peterson, & Speer, 2011; Peterson, Lowe, Aquilino, & Schneider, 2005; Speer, 2000; Speer, Jackson, & Peterson, 2001; Speer, Peterson, Armstead, & Allen, 2013).

Community organizations run by immigrants have been proliferating, as they function as places for immigrants to socialize, to share troubles, to ask for advice, to network, and to fight

for rights in their challenging receiving local contexts (Espadas, Aboussi, & Raya, 2013; Paloma, García-Ramírez, De la Mata, & Amal, 2010). However, studies that analyzed community participation in relation to immigrants usually showed newcomers as receivers of others' social actions (Lough, 2010). As stated by Handy and Greenspan (2009), few researchers have considered immigrants as first actors for community participation. Among those researchers, Taurini, Paloma, García-Ramírez, Marzana, and Marta (2017) found that immigrant leaders involved in community activities increased their self-confidence and their abilities to be active citizens and face unjust social conditions in southern Spain.

Social Connectedness

Literature suggested that increasing social connection was useful in the promotion of psychological empowerment (e.g., Lenzi, Vieno, Pastore, & Santinello, 2013). Indeed, Christens, Speer, and Peterson (2011) found that alienation was negatively related to perceived sociopolitical control among individuals from five community-organizing initiatives. Moreover, Speer, Jackson, and Peterson (2001) found that individuals categorized as unconnected nonparticipants scored significantly lower than other groups (i.e., connected participants, connected nonparticipants, and unconnected participants) on perceived competence, suggesting the importance of social connectedness in influencing intrapersonal empowerment.

In the United States, a well-developed sense of community motivated Latin-American immigrants to support social actions to take care of themselves, their families, and their neighbors (Bathum & Baumann, 2007). In their work with oppressed ethnic minorities in New Zealand, Williams, Labonte, and O'Brien (2003) found that individuals who shared their life experiences with similar others achieved greater self-confidence, pride in their cultural identities, senses of belonging, and were sources of courage and inspiration to others. These authors stated

that “newly found subject positions ... are conducive to the exercise of individual and group power that can challenge institutional power and dominant social discourses and structures” (Williams et al., 2003, p. 39). Thus, connecting with others in the same position led individuals to develop senses of self-efficacy in relation to social change (Paloma et al., 2010).

Perceived Cultural Competence of Receiving Communities’ Services

Research supports that the existence of culturally competent community services in receiving contexts has been positively related to levels of immigrants’ subjective well-beings (Paloma et al., 2014). Cultural competence of community services is related to the existence of both organizational missions that value diversity and competent employees committed to the needs of immigrants (García-Ramírez, Hernández-Plaza, Albar, Luque-Ribelles, & Suarez-Balcazar, 2012). However, it was common for immigrant groups to perceive barriers in accessing community services, which were perceived as excessively centered on receiving populations and insensitive toward immigrants’ needs and customs (Dias, Gama, & Rocha, 2010; Ingleby, Chimienti, Hatziprokopiou, Ormond, & De Freitas, 2005).

Community services usually offer immigrant users various resources with the aim to facilitate their adjustment during their migration experiences (e.g., language lessons and assistance with bureaucratic issues and finding jobs). If those resources were allocated with cultural competence, community services facilitated contact among immigrants, who then had the opportunity to increase their perceived sociopolitical control, to develop critical thinking about power relationships, and to acquire abilities to transform their settlement contexts (Hung, 2012; Paloma & Manzano-Arrondo, 2011). Thus, the literature suggested that community services that were sensitive to diversity contributed to immigrant users’ processes of psychological empowerment (García-Ramírez et al., 2012).

Community participation, social connectedness, and cultural competence of community services might have an impact on immigrant sociopolitical control at the individual and the contextual (municipality) levels. Indeed, cities where community services were characterized by high levels of cultural competence, many people participated in organizations, and neighbors were connected may have triggered processes that benefited immigrants who were not directly involved in community organizations, neighboring relationships, or community services (Lenzi, Vieno, Santinello, & Perkins, 2013). For example, cities with these characteristics promoted networking, exchanging information about services and community actions, social support, and social capital, all of which were factors that promoted feelings of being in control in the sociopolitical domain. Although there were theoretical reasons supporting these associations, no studies have analyzed the roles of community participation, social connectedness, cultural competence of community services (conceptualized at the contextual level), and immigrant sociopolitical control. For this reason, the current study aimed to advance the literature in the field by examining the individual and contextual factors associated with sociopolitical control in a sample of immigrants living in southern Spain.

Method

Participants

The sampling process required mapping out the municipalities or, in the cases of large cities, the districts, of southern Spain. To select the municipalities, we used the Geographic Information System through the ArcGis software. We ensured representation of municipalities with at least 100 or more Moroccans registered in the census of Andalusia.

Once the municipalities of interest were selected, we interviewed an average of 30 Moroccan residents in every context. Their participation in the survey was voluntary, and we

assured their anonymity. The final sample consisted of 707 Moroccan people, distributed in 25 municipalities or districts. The average age was 31.9 years ($SD = 8.3$), and 52% were women. In terms of educational levels, 20.1% had no education, 67.2% had a primary or secondary education, and 12.7% had a higher education.

Instruments

Sociopolitical control. We assessed this using a two-item version adapted from the Peterson, Lowe, Hughey, Reid, Zimmerman, and Speer's (2006) revised version of Zimmerman and Zahniser's (1991) sociopolitical control scale. This scale assessed immigrants' perceived ability to organize people (i.e., "I can usually organize people to get things done for a just cause") and to influence policy decisions in receiving contexts (i.e., "People like me are generally well-qualified to participate in the decision-making in our neighborhood"). We used a Likert-type scale to measure responses, which ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*) and showed internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.8.

Community participation. We assessed this with the ad hoc question: "Do you participate in any organization?" Answers were dichotomous (*yes* or *no*).

Social connectedness. We measured this with the item: "I can recognize most of the people who live on my block," which we drew from Perkins, Florin, Rich, Wandersman, & Chavis's (1990) scale. We used a Likert-type scale to measure responses, which ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*).

Cultural competence of community services. We measured this through immigrants' perceptions of the degree of cultural competence of community services in their municipalities. To determine this, we used the item: "What degree of cultural sensitivity toward the Moroccan population do you think the following community services have? (a) Health services, (b) Police,

(c) Social services, and (d) Public administration?” Possible answers ranged from 1 (*not at all competent*) to 4 (*very competent*). We adapted this item from the European initiative Migrant Friendly Hospitals’ assessment tool (Krajic et al., 2004).

Confounders. We considered gender, educational level, and perceived rejection as confounders for the purpose of this study. We measured perceived rejection with Hernández-Plaza’s (2003)’ item: “Do the Spaniards living in your neighborhood think that Moroccans: (a) are culturally uncivilized, (b) take their religion too seriously, (c) are unreliable, (d) take jobs away from Spanish people, and (e) should leave Spain?” The possible answers ranged from 1 (*nothing*) to 3 (*a lot*).

Procedure

This work was part of a wider research project that we conducted in 2008 (see Paloma et al., 2014). For the development of the survey, we recruited 18 members of the Moroccan population. To avoid biases in representing the population under study, the research group urged that (a) community organizations could be used as a starting point, but not as the only source of recruitment, and (b) the interviewers should interview people of both genders, of different ages, with different work and legal situations. We used a bilingual questionnaire so the participants could select which language they wanted to use during the interview.

Analytic approach. The data used in the present study were inherently clustered (i.e., individuals were sampled within municipalities); hence, we chose the multilevel regression technique of hierarchical linear modeling as the analytical approach (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Multilevel models are statistical models of parameters that vary at multiple levels; thus, they are particularly appropriate for research designs with data organized at more than one level (i.e., individuals nested within geographical units).

The within-municipality (Level 1) model estimated the association between community participation, social connectedness, perceived cultural competence, and immigrants' sociopolitical control for individuals i in municipality j , controlled for gender, age, and perceived rejection. Community participation, social connectedness, cultural competence, and perceived rejection were centered on the municipality mean so that the estimate of municipality-mean measures were unadjusted for between-municipality variations in these variables. This method allowed the examination of the between-municipality influence of the aggregates of these variables at Level 2 (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). The individual-level model included three predictors and five control variables: $Y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}(\text{age}) + \beta_{2j}(\text{gender}) + \beta_{3j}(\text{edu medium}) + \beta_{4j}(\text{edu high}) + \beta_{5j}(\text{perceived rejection}) + \beta_{6j}(\text{commu part}) + \beta_{7j}(\text{connectedness}) + \beta_{8j}(\text{cultural comp}) + \varepsilon_{ij}$, for which β_{0j} was the intercept (that is, the mean outcome for unit j), β_{1-8j} were the parameters of the slopes for individual predictors, and ε_{ij} was the Level-1 error term. At Level 2, the intercept was initially treated as random, and the remaining coefficient was fixed: $\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + u_{0j}$, in which γ_{00} represented the grand-mean outcome in the population and u_{0j} the random effect associated with unit j .

The next step in the analysis was to evaluate the association between-municipality-level variables and immigrants' sociopolitical control. More specifically, we considered possible municipality effects on sociopolitical control as a function of municipality-level community participation, social connectedness, and community services' cultural competence, controlled for perceived rejection. The municipality-level model included three predictors and one control variable: $\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{MEAN munic rejection}) + \gamma_{02}(\text{MEAN munic commu part}) + \gamma_{03}(\text{MEAN munic connectedness}) + \gamma_{04}(\text{MEAN munic cultural comp}) + u_{0j}$, in which γ_{00} represented the grand-mean outcome in the population, γ_{01-4} was the parameters of the predictors at the

municipality level (grand-mean centered), and u_{0j} was the unique increment to intercept for municipality j .

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive statistics for the variables on each level of analysis are shown in Table 1 with a wide variation in participants' reports of their feelings of sociopolitical control ($SD = 0.96$).

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Within- and Between-Municipalities Analyses

A preliminary step in hierarchical linear modeling consists of fitting an unconditional model and estimating the variance of the dependent variable by partitioning it into individual- and municipality-level components. In the model examined, 76.7% of the variation in immigrant sociopolitical control was at the individual level, while 23.3% was at the municipality level. The estimated municipality-level variances in immigrants' sociopolitical control were statistically significant ($\chi^2_{(24)} = 218.18, p < .001$) and of sufficient size to proceed with multilevel modelling. The estimated reliability with which municipalities could be distinguished from the dependent variable was 0.72.

The within- and between-municipality models predicting immigrants' sense of sociopolitical control are shown in Table 2. At the individual level, only gender and social connectedness were significantly associated with immigrants' sociopolitical control. More specifically, females were negatively associated with immigrants' sociopolitical control, and participants who reported knowing most people in their municipalities scored higher in sociopolitical control.

At the municipality level, community participation was positively associated with immigrants' sociopolitical control. In municipalities where, on average, there were higher levels of participation among immigrants, participants reported higher levels of sociopolitical control. Moreover, social connectedness at the municipality level was positively connected to immigrants' sociopolitical control (i.e., in municipalities where most participants reported high level of connectedness with neighbors, they also reported higher levels of sociopolitical control). Finally, living in municipalities where people, on average, perceived higher levels of cultural competence toward the Moroccan community from community services and organizations was associated with higher senses of sociopolitical control. The final model explains 15% of the individual-level variance and 67% of the variance at the municipality level.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Discussion

With the aim of helping understand the ecological context of psychological empowerment, we examined the individual and contextual factors associated with the sociopolitical control expressed by Moroccan immigrants in southern Spain. Three quarters of the variation in immigrants' sociopolitical control was at the individual level, while a quarter was at the municipality level. At the individual level, we found that Moroccan immigrant women showed a lower degree of sociopolitical control; in addition, immigrants who were socially connected showed higher levels of sociopolitical control. However, we found no association between community participation or perceived cultural competence at the individual level of sociopolitical control. At the municipality level, we found that living in a city where there were community services with high levels of cultural competence, many people participated in

organizations, and neighbors were connected was associated with higher levels of sociopolitical control among immigrants.

These findings suggest the need to consider receiving local contexts' features in explaining the sociopolitical control of immigrants. First, the existence of community organizations in the new environment is related to the sense of sociopolitical control and feelings of powerlessness among immigrants. In addition, living in a city where many immigrants are involved in community organizations facilitates networking and information exchange among immigrants; this might benefit not only people who are actively participating in organizations, but whole immigrant communities. For instance, a Moroccan individual not involved in community organizations might easily identify a key person to contact to solve a problem based on organizational belonging. It is plausible that this awareness promotes feelings of sociopolitical control in cities with high levels of immigrant participation in community organizations.

Second, immigrants who lived in municipalities where most people knew each other showed a higher level of sociopolitical control than those who lived in municipalities where people felt isolated or disconnected from others around them. This finding can be explained with the fact that, in cities with high levels of social connectedness, people who are connected with others can benefit from the levels of social capital characterizing the community. Indeed, having even a few social ties in a very connected community might allow the exchange of many resources (e.g., information, social support), establishing social relationships in local communities. This process might favor the feeling that cities that provide access to a wide variety of social, emotional, and informational resources are connected to feelings of sociopolitical control.

Third, the presence of community services with cultural competence in receiving local contexts is associated to immigrants' sociopolitical control. When this feeling is shared in a city, it is also more likely that immigrants' use of services is higher; as a consequence, immigrants in the communities might share their experiences and opinions on community services with other who do not have any experience with the services. This way, immigrants without direct experiences of community services and their characteristics might develop high levels of trust in local services, which in turn could increase their senses of sociopolitical control.

At the individual level, immigrants who were socially connected expressed higher levels of sociopolitical control. This was in line with Christens and Peterson's (2012) findings which showed how non-White youth living in low-income urban areas in the United States who reported greater social support tended to report more sociopolitical control. Moreover, we found that Moroccan immigrant men tended to show higher levels of sociopolitical control than their peer women did. This was in line with the findings of Peterson et al. (2005), which showed that males tended to score higher on self-perceptions concerning leadership competence in a sample of rural residents in the United States. This result can be explained by historical patterns of asymmetrical power relationships between women and men, as women have been disproportionately affected by inequities. However, at the individual level, we did not find evidence to support the relationship between community participation or perceived cultural competence of community services and sociopolitical control in immigrants.

Our findings have social implications for enhancing the sociopolitical control expressed by immigrants. Indeed, our findings confirmed that "the settings and environments in which people live modify the form that empowerment will take within those contexts" (Speer, 2000, p. 52). Although we cannot determine the direction of causality for the variables under study, this

study suggests the need to boost community life in municipalities through promoting civic organizations. Community organizations, such as grassroots organizations or faith-based congregations, act as mediators between structural levels of society and individual spheres of immigrants, and are therefore ideal for areas in which changes are required to bring social justice and to promote subjective well-being (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977; Paloma & Manzano-Arrondo, 2011). Moreover, our findings support the importance of promoting social connectedness and a sense of community between individuals who live in the same towns. Finally, like Edge, Newbold, and McKeary (2014), we stress the need for community services in receiving societies to inspire immigrants to develop their own senses of psychological empowerment. In addition to the cultural competence of these services, considering organizational settings' empowering characteristics identified in literature can provide a useful framework for this endeavor. These characteristics are developed through active and inclusive leaderships, the existence of opportunities for members to take on participatory roles, feelings of social support among members, and shared belief systems that provide rationales for groups' actions (Maton, 2008; Maton & Salem, 1995).

Limitations

This study had some limitations, which will allow for the development of future research lines. First, the cross-sectional nature of the data did not allow causal inferences. Moreover, we did not consider the different types of community organizations in which immigrants participated (e.g., religious, recreational, political), or their degrees of involvement within them. This could explain the lack of evidence we found in regard to the relationship between community participation and sociopolitical control at the individual level. As suggested by Itzhaky and York (2000), "not all participation is necessarily perceived as affecting empowerment" (p. 231).

Participating or not could be less important than the characteristics of the community organizations in which immigrants participate (e.g., focus or not on social change, set or not by the immigrants themselves) and their degree of involvement within them (e.g. role played, time spent). Future research is needed to advance knowledge about “what kinds of organizations facilitate the strongest mediated relationships between participation and psychological empowerment, and why” (Christens & Lin, 2014, p. 221).

In addition, some limitations are related to the measures employed in the study. First, the measure of sociopolitical control was abbreviated from the original scale. The need to find a balance between making use of well-established measurement instruments and being comfortable enough to use them for data collection was a challenge for community-based research. Moreover, in order to make the questionnaire easier to understand and fill in by our study participants, community participation and social connectedness were measured through a single item. Although the items have been drawn from validated scales, this choice implies a reduced variability of these constructs among study participants. Thus, the lack of a significant association between community participation (measured at the individual level) and sociopolitical control might partly derive from this methodological feature. However, it is worth noting that social connectedness, which variability was analogous to community participation, showed a positive association with sociopolitical control (also at the individual level). Future studies should evaluate the association between community participation, social connectedness and immigrants’ sociopolitical control by employing validated scales allowing to obtain a more accurate and multifaceted measure of their levels of involvement in the community. Finally, we focused on three factors at two levels of analysis, but there might be other predictors not considered in our study. Including these factors, especially at the individual level, might

contribute to a deeper understanding of sociopolitical control in immigrants. Despite these limitations, we contributed to the understanding of the role that receiving municipalities play in the promotion of immigrants' psychological empowerment by highlighting the potential dynamics promoting sociopolitical control in municipalities with specific characteristics. In other words, we helped define the main characteristics of empowering municipalities.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Variables Included in the Study

	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max
<i>Individual level</i>					
Age	707	31.91	8.27	16.00	68.00
Gender	707	0.52	0.50	0	1
Education (medium)	707	0.67	0.47	0	1
Education (high)	707	0.13	0.33	0	1
Perceived rejection	707	2.17	0.53	1.00	3.00
Community participation	707	0.09	0.28	0	1
Perceived social connectedness (high)	707	0.93	0.26	0	1
Perceived cultural competence	707	2.66	0.65	1.00	4.00
Sociopolitical control	707	3.19	0.96	1.00	4.00
<i>Municipality level</i>					
Municipality rejection	25	2.17	0.23	1.61	2.69
Municipality community participation	25	0.08	0.10	0.00	0.39
Municipality social connectedness (high)	25	0.92	0.11	0.60	1.00
Municipality cultural competence	25	2.65	0.39	1.60	3.47

Table 2

Hierarchical Linear Model Predicting Individual Sociopolitical Control (N = 707)

	Coeff.	SE	T-Ratio	p-value
<i>Individual level</i>				
Age	-0.001	0.004	-0.28	0.777
Gender (female)	-0.481*	0.142	-3.38	<.001
Education (medium)	0.036	0.120	0.30	0.765
Education (high)	-0.185	0.136	-1.36	0.174
Perceived rejection [#]	-0.108	0.102	-1.06	0.289
Community participation [#]	0.150	0.135	1.11	0.266
Perceived social connectedness [#]	0.645*	0.249	2.59	0.010
Perceived cultural competence [#]	0.061	0.100	0.61	0.538
<i>Municipality level: Intercept γ_{00}</i>				
Municipality rejection ⁺	-0.166	0.250	-0.66	.516
Municipality community participation ⁺	1.328*	0.319	4.16	<.001
Municipality social connectedness (high) ⁺	1.959*	0.674	2.91	.009
Municipality cultural competence ⁺	0.476*	0.215	2.21	.039
<i>Variance components</i>				
Within municipalities	0.725			
Between municipalities	0.220			
<i>Percent of variance explained</i>				
Within municipalities	15%			
Between municipalities	67%			

Note. [#] = Municipality mean centered, ⁺ = Grand mean centered.

*p < .05