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No representation without taxation: Which political parties support contributivism and how?

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ABSTRACT

Contributivism refers to the principle of conditioning rights to political participation on economic and other contributions. Access to citizenship and voting rights for immigrants often requires ‘doing something for’ the host society, which is usually measured in material terms. The limited research on ‘contributivism’ to date has focused on laws, norms, and public opinion. Little is known about the *politics* of contributivism, the positions of different parties, and the reasons for supporting or opposing it. This article analyses parliamentary debates on voting and citizenship rights in four European countries – Italy, UK, France, and Germany – since 2010 to identify the different interpretations that European legislators attach to the concept of ‘contributivism’. The discourse analysis reveals that a range of contributions are identified as prerequisites for participation: economic contributions, such as tax and pension payments, knowledge, and labour skills; social contributions, such as boosting demographic growth; civic contributions, such as voluntary work; and symbolic contributions, such as winning Olympic medals. The findings indicate that contributivist frames are typically advanced by centre-left and progressive parties to justify extending the franchise to immigrants, and are often contrasted with ethno-identitarian views of citizenship. Consequently, this study suggests a shift towards pragmatist arguments and reciprocity-based understandings of contributivism among centre-left parties.

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1. Introduction

Participation rights have hardly ever come for free. States have a long history of granting citizenship on the basis of individuals’ achievements and contributions (Dzankic 2014; Tanasoca 2016). Voting rights were also traditionally accessible only to those who paid sufficient tax, owned enough property, or did not have debts to the state (Hultin Rosenberg and Sundevall 2022). The first wave of democratization changed this. From the 1920s, the conditions for citizenship became more based on the idea of a ‘genuine link’ with the state, for example, by birth in territory (*jus soli*), by the

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citizenship of one or both parents (*jus sanguinis*), or by residence in a country for a significant period (*jus domicilii*) (Ferracioli 2017). And the right to vote became formally equal, that is, accessible regardless of an individual's economic situation. In recent years, however, economic contributions to the state as a precondition for citizenship and the right to vote have re-entered public and political debates. As a result, contributivism, the idea that contributing to society is a necessary condition for obtaining the right to participate (Beckman 2006; Hultin Rosenberg and Wejryd 2022), has made a strong comeback.

Prior research on citizenship and voting rights suggests that contributivism has multiple meanings. Its most common understanding is in terms of economic requirements for citizenship, such as investor citizenship programmes, whereby citizenship is acquired by investing money in a state (e.g. Bauböck 2018; Dzankic 2014; Hidalgo 2015; Mavelli 2018). However, citizenship may also be granted for non-economic contributions, such as performing in the Olympic Games on behalf of a state (Jansen 2019; Shachar 2011) or bringing specific skills to the workforce (Bauer and Kunze 2004; Kiwan 2010). While the implications of contributivist regulations, especially regarding investor citizenship, have been extensively studied, the broader phenomenon of contributivism has been largely overlooked, and the concept of contributivism remains underdefined. It is therefore evident that a more rigorous investigation of the meaning attached to contributivism and how it redefines the relationship between the individual and the political community is called for.

This paper attempts to fill this gap by looking at recent parliamentary debates on voting and citizenship rights for immigrants in four European states: France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom. Drawing on the tradition of frame analysis in parliamentary debates on voting rights (Gherghina, Tap, and Soare 2022; Goenaga 2019; Jacobs 1998; 1999; Østergaard-Nielsen, Ciornei, and Lafleur 2019), it examines contributivist frames, and more specifically their context, content, and political use. The central aim of this study is to explore the *politics* of contributivism, that is, *the potential that this principle has to shape citizenship and voting regulations*.

To this aim, the paper firstly examines how far and in which context parliamentarians use contributivism as an argument in four European countries. A second step is to map the multiple meanings and dimensions that European legislators attach to the idea of 'contributivism' as a requirement for voting or citizenship rights. This involves looking beyond the narrow category of tax contribution to a broader spectrum that includes other types of economic contribution, as well as other types of contribution as such, namely social, civil and symbolic types. Because parliamentary debates are directly linked to law-making, such discursive material is a good source for capturing a conception of contributivism that is not merely speculative, but politically and institutionally relevant. The third step is to identify which political parties use contributivist arguments and for which political purpose. Our research thus aims to investigate whether contributivist conditions nowadays play a role not only in shaping immigration policy but also in the regulation of citizenship and voting rights.

In the following section, we discuss previous research on contributivism as a concept, and the practices associated with this phenomenon. Next, we explain our research design and offer a preliminary definition of what we regard as a contributivist frame or argument. We then present our results in three parts: (1) the role of contributivist frames in recent debates, (2) the different subvariants of contributivism, and (3) the political

and partisan identity of contributivist arguments. The Discussion and Conclusions sections offer some additional observations and tentative explanations of our findings, discuss their implications, and suggest avenues for future research.

2. Contributivism and citizenship

In simple terms, ‘contributivism’ can be defined as the principle of granting participation rights on the condition that an individual makes a contribution. There are many historical examples of the link between political participation and economic contribution. One of the best known is the eighteenth-century American colonists’ demands for political recognition in exchange for the taxes they paid to their British rulers, captured in the revolutionary slogan ‘no taxation without representation’. This link remains highly relevant, although the dynamics have undergone a remarkable reversal: instead of citizens claiming their right to participate on the basis of their labour, it is now governments and states that are seeking economic contributions from individuals in exchange for granting them either the right to citizenship or the right to vote.

With regard to citizenship, for example, Van Houdt, Suvarierol, and Schinkel (2011) examine the broad phenomenon of ‘earned’ citizenship, which they attribute to the rise of neoliberal communitarianism. This new political-ideological context, they argue, consists of an increased emphasis on community and shared cultural values, in parallel with a greater appreciation of individual autonomy, rationality, and self-responsibility. The combination of these two elements, the authors claim, has led to a system in which citizenship can be earned once individuals have made sufficient economic *and* cultural contributions to the community.

Joppke (2021) further explores two developments that manifest the contemporary trend of ‘earned’ citizenship. The first is the rise of *asset-based citizenship* – the possibility for non-citizens to gain citizenship by investing money or buying property, which some countries offer. Citizenship by Investment Programmes (CIPs) are the most well-known and explicit form of economic contributivism today. They allow individuals to more or less ‘buy’ citizenship for a large investment or sum of money by waiving other restrictions, such as length of residence or language skills (Kratk 2018). Several countries around the world, including St. Kitts and Nevis, the Commonwealth of Dominica, Cyprus, and Malta have or have had such programmes at some point (Dzankic 2014). The practice has led to criticism from the EU Commission and a heated debate among academics (Erez 2023; Kochenov 2021; Surak and Tsuzuki 2021), many of whom criticize it for being discriminatory (Shachar and Hirschl 2014), ‘neo-medieval’ (Tanasoca 2016), and a move that commodifies and marketizes a public good (Mavelli 2018). To be sure, often a CBI citizen who has not resided in the country will not obtain voting rights unless they move to the country. Hence, this type of citizenship acquisition is not by default connected to voting rights acquisition.

The second development through which earned citizenship has grown is the proliferation of *economic criteria for naturalisation*, which are required in many countries (Joppke 2021). Foreigners have to pay increasingly high fees for naturalisation, provide proof of income or employment for example by regularly paying taxes, or show that they have not been on welfare for a certain period of time. Joppke confirms that naturalisation laws in Europe have become increasingly restrictive, especially in countries with a strong radical right presence, where citizenship is seen not as the beginning but as the end

of integration. Foreigners need to become ‘super-citizens’ (Badenhoop 2017), who need to clear increasingly narrow economic, penal and cultural conditions to gain citizenship. Joppke argues that earned citizenship is still liberal in that it does not return to essentialist exclusions based on ethnicity, race or sex, but rather neoliberal in its emphasis on individual productivity, and nationalist in its shift towards citizenship as an exclusive ‘privilege’ rather than an inclusive ‘right’ (Joppke 2021, 160). In a similar vein, Lenard also stresses the double-edged nature of contributivism: while it risks exploiting or unfairly treating newcomers, it also broadens the grounds for citizenship acquisition beyond the narrow criterion of residence (Lenard 2023, 108–131).

Not all contributivist schemes involve an *economic* type of contribution. One example is Olympic citizenship. Since the beginning of the Olympics, athletes have changed their nationality, and some countries, such as Qatar and Turkey, have actively tried to attract athletes in exchange for citizenship (Jansen 2019). This growing controversial practice does not require an economic contribution from the athletes; rather, it is the states themselves that have begun to pay large sums of money for athletes to naturalise or choose one passport over another (Shachar 2011; Spiro 2014). Another example is that of elite artists (opera singers, ballet dancers, actors, musicians, fashion models) who become global elite migrants as countries compete to attract their talent and increase their global socio-cultural impact (Isaakyan 2022). The emergence of a *jus talenti* shows that migrants are not only selected for their material assets (e.g. wealth or property), but that they are themselves marketable assets that can be ‘bought’ by states, seeking international prestige through sport or the arts (Oonk 2022).

In sum, existing literature has explored both economic and symbolic types of contributions that countries use to condition access to citizenship today, as seen in Table 1.

Based on the above, a central hypothesis of this study is that, under the influence of neoliberalism and nationalism, citizenship, and consequently the right to vote, has increasingly become something ‘to be earned’ rather than a right (Joppke 2021; Van Houdt, Suvarierol, and Schinkel 2011). Citizens have become not only bearers of assets, but are themselves seen as assets. This is because states not only sell citizenship to those with sufficient assets (Bauböck 2018; Dzankic 2014; Mavelli 2018), but also compete for those perceived as useful – or highly skilled – while seeking to repel those with low skills and a propensity for welfare dependency (Bauer and Kunze 2004; Joppke 2021; Oliinyk et al. 2021). As a result, access to citizenship becomes increasingly unequal, measured by the quantity and quality of the ‘contribution’ that newcomers can make.

3. Contributivism and voting rights

In addition to research on ‘*earned citizenship*’, recent studies have increasingly focused on contributivism as a normative principle for electoral participation. Indeed, the term

Table 1. Types of contributivist conditions for CITIZENSHIP discussed in previous literature.

Contributivism, in relation to citizenship	
Economic	Symbolic
invest or pay a large sum	increase country’s prestige through sports
pay taxes	increase country’s socio-cultural impact
pay high naturalisation fees	
bring new working skills	

‘contributivism’ was first used by Beckman (2006) to capture a variant of the so-called all-affected principle: individuals could claim to be affected by a government’s decision and therefore claim a right to participate in the decision making process if they had some stake in it. Participation is seen here as stemming from property and production rights. For example, according to Beckman (2006), owning property can establish a right to influence how the state allocates and spends the taxes extracted from one’s property. In this case, the right to vote is granted in anticipation of a *future* contribution, such as the tax windfall that an investment will generate.

Hultin Rosenberg and Sundevall (2022) add that economic conditions for voting rights can also be justified on the basis of reciprocity. In this case, non-voters claim the right to vote, not for an expected future contribution, but as a way for the state to reciprocate their *past* labour which has directly financed the common tasks that the political entity performs. In other words, their economic contribution has already been made. The authors go on to argue that the contributivist rationale for the franchise, whether based on property or reciprocity, is always undemocratic because it fails to make those who are governed (including those who do not pay taxes) into those who govern, thus violating the democratic ideal of self-government (Hultin Rosenberg and Sundevall 2022).

The principle of ‘contribution’ differs from the older criteria that limited the franchise to wealthy citizens, and must be distinguished from the principle of ‘competence’ (*capacité*) that was a requirement for enfranchisement in the nineteenth century. Competence was defined as ‘the ability to act on the basis of reason’. Material possessions were only a proxy criterion of ‘reason’, a proof that the individual possessed the moral and intellectual capacity to vote (Rosanvallon 1992). The principle of ‘contribution’, on the other hand, turns material status into a direct criterion for the right to vote: those who possess property or income are eligible on the sole basis that they contribute to the socio-economic prosperity of the community.

Contributivism thus works in favour of those who pay taxes and own property. For example, it grounds the inclusionary argument that foreign residents should vote as long as they contribute financially to the state in which they live. Conversely, contributivism can lead to the exclusionary disenfranchisement of those who do not contribute economically, such as the poor, the disabled and the elderly (Beckman 2006). In this respect, it has been argued that citizenship laws have evolved as a method of controlling and directing the mobility of the migrant poor, becoming at times more inclusive and at times more exclusive (Kalm 2024).

Notwithstanding the benefits and costs associated with contributivism, there are indications that it is gaining traction. Conditioning voting rights on economic requirements is not only popular with the public, at least in the US (Hultin Rosenberg and Wejryd 2022), but also with legislators. Indeed, some recent studies of parliamentary debates on voting rights point to a clear presence of contributivist frames. For example, Goenaga (2019) compares French and Swedish debates on voting rights for immigrants over the last five decades and finds one discursive frame (out of eight) that singles out labour and tax contributions as evidence that foreign residents have a stake in the communities that should entitle them to vote (Goenaga 2019, 876) – he calls this a ‘fairness’ frame.

Some attention to contribution is also noted in parliamentary debates on emigrant voting rights. Østergaard-Nielsen, Ciornei, and Lafleur (2019) recognise a ‘stakeholder’ frame that includes taxpaying among a variety of arguments used in support of emigrant voting rights. Despite recent arguments that immigrant rights are being ‘de-ethnicized’ while emigrant rights are being ‘re-ethnicized’, Østergaard-Nielsen, Ciornei, and Lafleur (2019) find that the stakeholder frame for emigrant voting is frequently used across party families alongside ascriptivist frames. Likewise, Gherghina, Tap, and Soare (2022) have identified a ‘utilitarian’ frame, that refers to the large sums of money that Romanian emigrants allegedly send to ‘the motherland’ in the form of foreign direct investment, VAT and remittances, which has been used to argue for granting them voting rights (13). These studies provide a clear indication of the consistent presence of contributivist frames, as summarised in Table 2. But since they do not focus exclusively on contributivism, they cannot offer the resources necessary to conceptualise this particular frame in sufficient detail. How lawmakers debate contributivist policies and the principles that circulate in these debates remain largely unexplored territory.

4. Research design

In order to understand the meaning that lawmakers ascribe to contributivism, this study examines how politicians use the concept in legislative debates. Previous studies have shown that the analysis of parliamentary debates can provide useful insights into how participation criteria for migrants are conceptualised and justified (e.g. Goenaga 2019; Jacobs 1998). Our focus is on debates about laws and policies that directly or indirectly regulate access to participation, which are typically debates about voting rights, but also debates regulating access to citizenship for foreign residents (immigrants) and non-resident nationals (emigrants). Voting in national elections is almost always a consequence of acquiring citizenship. Local voting rights, however, are often disconnected from citizenship; they are either semi-automatic for EU citizens (within the EU) or based on legal residence for third-country nationals. As the right to participate encompasses both national voting rights derived from citizenship *and* local voting rights, contributivism is a principle encountered in debates on citizenship and naturalisation, as well as in debates on different types of voting rights as such.

The analysis involved coding parliamentary debates in France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom (see Appendix 1 in Supplementary material). The selection of countries is based on population size: studying the four largest countries in Europe means that the ideas expressed here will be representative of broad shifts in the understanding of contributivism among European citizens. The period covered is from 2010 to 2023

Table 2. Types of contributivist conditions for VOTING RIGHTS discussed in previous literature.

Contributivism, in relation to voting rights
Economic
Property, e.g. investment
Reciprocity, e.g. working and paying taxes

and was chosen to coincide with the emergence of CIPs, as these correlate with an increase in economic arguments for citizenship rights. This increase is reflected in three parliamentary debates on CIPs (Prats 2023, 182–189), which took place in parallel with the debates on citizenship and voting rights that we examine. Our assumption is that the rise of CIPs and earned citizenship indicates a neoliberal shift in the conception and design of voting rights, and thus a rise in contributivist frames more generally.

A review of all debates on citizenship and voting rights since 2010 in the four countries was conducted, with data sourced from the official parliamentary websites. Subsequently, one to four debates per country were selected for inclusion in the study, based on the criterion that they feature at least one contributivist frame. They were read in the original languages (Italian, French, German and English), and quotes were translated with DeepL/Translate. Relevant debates were identified by using search words related to voting rights and citizenship, such as ‘migrant voting’ and ‘Einbürgerung’ (naturalisation), as well as through a review of country reports and the global citizenship law dataset from the Global Citizenship Observatory (globalcit.eu).

These data were analysed using framing analysis. A growing body of literature focuses on how political parties frame their positions on policies related to voting rights and citizenship reform (Gherghina, Tap, and Soare 2022; Goenaga 2019; Jacobs 1998; 1999; Østergaard-Nielsen, Ciornei, and Lafleur 2019). In this context, frames refer to the arguments that a political party or social movement uses to explain and justify its position on a particular policy issue (Helbling 2014). Analysing frames can not only provide a more nuanced understanding of a party’s position and its public justification, but also illuminate the various connotations of key political concepts. In line with this tradition, we used both inductive and deductive methods to develop our contributivist frames and their subcategories.

We defined a generic *contributivist frame* as ‘a statement about granting citizenship or voting rights to those non-citizens who make a contribution to a host society’. This definition draws on previous descriptions of contributivism (e.g. Beckman 2006), but is more specific in that it identifies access to citizenship and voting rights as the exchange value for contribution. In this *generic frame*, the type of contribution remains unspecified. Based on the literature, we expect contributivism as a generic frame to compete with ethno-identitarian or communitarian frames, which require foreigners to ‘earn’ citizenship, not by contributing something of material value, but by learning and adopting the language, history, norms, and mores of the host society.

Contributivism as a generic frame is further subdivided into more *specific frames*, based on the type of contribution being referred to. Previous research has mainly identified contribution with tax payments and similar economic contributions (an ‘economic’ frame), while studies of, for example, Olympic citizenship have highlighted the relevance of non-economic, in-kind contributions (a ‘symbolic’ frame) (see [Tables 1 and 2](#)). The latter regard contributions to the growth, prosperity and international prestige of the host society, and typically involve sport and other international achievements. In general, we expect to find more politicians invoking economic rather than symbolic contributions, such as tax payments or financial self-sufficiency, and a stronger tendency for neoliberal politicians to mobilise such arguments. However, as detailed studies of contributivism are scarce, we also expect to find context-dependent types of contributions that have not yet been studied.

In what follows, we present the results of a framing analysis of French, Italian, German, and British legislative debates on voting rights from 2010 to 2023. In a nutshell, the aim is to identify (1) the degree to which contributivist frames are mobilised as discursive frames; (2) the ways in which these frames redefine our understanding of contributivism; and (3) how these frames relate to the partisan affiliation of the speakers. We begin by discussing the first point, the presence and significance of contributivist frames.

5. Results

a. The role and salience of contributivism

Contributivist frames were used by politicians in almost all parliamentary debates on citizenship and voting in all four countries, and were typically mobilised in support of broadening the franchise. However, contributivism is not *equally* present in all debates. For example, in the 2016 German Bundestag debates on the reintroduction of the ‘compulsory option’ (i.e. the obligation for immigrant children to choose between a German or a foreign citizenship), only two out of 41 arguments were contributivist. Notably, the number of contributivist frames was much higher in the Bundestag debates on the federal government’s plan to speed up naturalisation in 2022, when some 38 out of 92 arguments mentioned some form of contribution. Although the aim of this article is not to offer a thorough quantitative assessment, we can attest that contributivist frames are visible but are not the leading frames.

In general, contributivist frames compete with ethno-identitarian frames, which are centred on ethno-national identity and communitarian values. The specific terms used in these frames differ from country to country: ‘having ties to our country’ in the UK, maintaining social cohesion in Germany, the existence of civic links between individuals in France, and a prize for integration and adoption of the national identity in Italy. Typically, legislators who use these competing frames believe that material contributions are not sufficient for citizenship. They argue that economic integration cannot be the main condition for obtaining citizenship. Instead, social integration (for left-wing parties) or cultural integration (for right-wing parties) are more important conditions for granting citizenship or the right to vote.

Other frames that compete with contributivism but support the same goal of widening the franchise include those that appeal to notions of fairness, morality, and democratic norms. In Germany and the UK, for example, it is argued that allowing more people to vote is ‘good for democracy’, and that allowing people who have made a home in their country to vote is simply ‘the right thing to do’, regardless of their economic contribution to the country. In summary, we observe a clear presence of contributivist frames in voting rights debates in all four countries, albeit only in specific debates and not necessarily as the central argument.

b. The multiple meanings of contributivism

Contributivist frames take many different forms. In this section, we focus on the conceptual definition of ‘contribution’ within different contributivist arguments, rather than on the individuals, contexts and reasons behind the formulation of such arguments. In

addition to the ‘economic’ and ‘symbolic’ contributions known from previous secondary literature, our primary material revealed two more specific frames, namely ‘social’ and ‘civic’ contributions. This section elaborates on each of the four different frames – economic, social, civic and symbolic – and discusses the exact form of contribution that each refers to.

i. Economic contributivism

Not surprisingly, the most frequently mentioned types of contributions are those that can be classified as either direct or indirect economic contributions. Examples of direct economic contributions are tax payments (national and municipal), social insurance payments, and contributions to the pension system. Consumption is also mentioned as another type of economic contribution. Broader terms, such as contribution to the economic development, economic performance, future viability, national wealth, growth and prosperity of a country, or to simply ‘driving the country forward’, are also used. Here is one such reference to direct economic contribution from a German Liberal MP:

I think it is wrong that the third generation of guest workers who have been *paying taxes* in this country for three generations are still not German citizens [emphasis added]. (Kuhle, FDP, 2022)

A more indirect appeal to economic contribution is when reference is made to migrants’ professional skills, work capacity or knowledge that would improve the economic situation of the country. These arguments were particularly prominent in Germany, where the federal government’s plan to liberalise naturalisation policy was explicitly aimed at solving the problem of labour shortages (Nouripour, Alliance 90/The Greens, 2022), as well as in the British debates on plans to naturalise EU citizens after Brexit, where a Labour MP stated that:

We also need to think of the industries that depend on them – science and academia, large parts of the public sector, especially the NHS and social care [...] Consumers will suffer if the food and drink industry suddenly loses its workforce, which includes over 100,000 EU nationals at all skill levels. (Baroness Hayter, Labour, 2017)

ii. Social contributivism

However, not all the contributions mentioned are of an economic nature. In Italy, parts of the debates focused on the low birth rate in the country and the need to increase population growth. A social contribution to reversing the demographic decline was one of the four main reasons cited in the explanatory memorandum of the bill. Speaking of ‘oliganthropia’, i.e., the lack of humans, an Italian centre-right MP explained the logic in these terms:

I would like Italy to become great by overcoming the dramatic demographic crisis that the country finds itself in today, but also by opening its doors to those who are already there; not to those who are to come, not by bringing in millions of people, but by giving those who are already there the chance to participate in the Italian national community. (Buttiglione, UdC, 2015)

In this same vein, immigrants are said to contribute by having served or being willing to serve in the host country’s army. During the debates on the Election Bill in the House of

Lords in the UK, a reference was made as to why Commonwealth citizens were granted voting rights in the UK on the basis of their residence in the UK, without having to become naturalised. It was argued that they were given the vote 'in recognition of the fact that many people from the Empire had given their lives in the First World War' (Lord Desai, Non-Affiliated, 2022). The right of Commonwealth citizens to participate is justified by the past contribution of former colonies to the war effort. Of course, the individuals involved can no longer benefit from this arrangement. But, by making this point, the speaker emphasises that serving in the army and sacrificing their lives for the host country is also a kind of objective contribution that is valuable and should be a condition for political recognition, as it has enhanced the survival and prosperity of the country.

iii. Civic contributivism

Another type of contribution invoked as a worthy reason for granting the franchise is civic contribution. Migrants are described as deserving to vote because they are active citizens in the community, engaged members of their local societies and volunteers. For example:

Another person lives there for 365 days a year, works in the local area and pays taxes, volunteers at the local food bank, is an upstanding member of the community and gets involved in litter picks, is an active citizen in the community [...] but, because of either where they came from or when they came to the UK, they do not have a vote. (Lord Scriven, LD, 2022)

The contribution of immigrants to social movements and trade union struggles for better working conditions is also cited as a relevant reason for enfranchisement. A rapporteur from the French Socialist Party cites in particular the mobilisation of immigrant factory workers in the 1970s and 1980s, which was such that they improved working conditions in general (Bachelay, PS, 2013). Similarly, the positive impact of immigrant associations on the social wellbeing of the population as a whole is also cited as a civic contribution that entitles them to political rights.

iv. Symbolic contributivism

Several politicians also point to the value of symbolic contributions. Maintaining international relations with the countries of origin of immigrants is one such contribution, albeit an indirect and passive one. In Germany, for example, it is argued that people with dual citizenship can 'build bridges between countries', while in the UK, members of parliament worry that stripping European citizens of their rights after Brexit will damage relations with their countries of origin. However, international relations do not seem to be as prominent an issue in most of the debates.

A few mentions of immigrants' cultural contribution were also found. They underline the fact that immigrants contribute by enriching the culinary and cultural scene of a host country. For example, in a 2013 French report on the enfranchisement of elderly immigrants, the Socialist Minister of Culture argues that the right to vote will, among other things, recognise 'the cultural contribution of immigrant populations' (Filippetti, PS, 2013).

A more pertinent illustration is the contribution of those who have won literary and scientific prizes, Olympic medals, and other forms of sporting or international

achievement. In Italy, for example, there has been debate about whether top athletes from other countries could be fast-tracked for citizenship. Higher rankings in international sports competitions would raise Italy’s international status and boost national pride. In Germany, it was even argued that dual citizenship should be allowed, as this practice enabled Germans ‘to become Pope’: the German Pope Benedict XVI could not have been appointed if he had not been allowed to hold dual Vatican and German citizenship (Beck, Alliance 90/The Greens, 2016). The appointment of a Pope was presumably a great honour for Germany and enhanced its prestige on the world stage, especially among Catholics.

In summary, a close look at the meaning attributed to the concept of contribution when it is invoked as a ground for enfranchisement reveals that contribution is predominantly understood in economic terms, and more specifically in terms of paying taxes, social security and pension fees, but also in terms of filling labour shortages, bringing in new skills, knowledge and talent, creating businesses and jobs, consuming goods and generally contributing to the economic success of the host country. In addition, there are a number of other understandings of what constitutes a contribution to the host society. These take the form of social contributions, such as reversing demographic decline and fighting in the host society’s army; civic contributions, i.e., being active in political, social and trade union movements; and symbolic contributions, such as enriching culture, enhancing international prestige through sport or other international achievements, and even helping diplomatic relations between the host country and their countries of origin. Table 3 summarises how the broader idea of contributivism is constituted by several specific frames.

c. Political parties’ stances on contributivism

Having established that the principle of contributivism consists of multiple frames that reflect different types of contributions on which participation rights are based, the next level of analysis relates these frames to political parties. A cartography of the politics of contributivism is constructed by examining the ideological and partisan background of these frames, starting with an observation of which parties most frequently use contributivist arguments.

Table 3. Types of specific contributivist frames, cited in the parliamentary debates.

Economic Contributivism	Social Contributivism	Civic Contributivism	Symbolic Contributivism
pay taxes	reproduce and reverse demographic decline	are politically active	enrich culinary & cultural scene
pay contributions to pension system	serve in the army (sacrifice their lives)	are active in voluntary organizations	increase country’s prestige in sports
pay social security contributions		are active in trade unions	increase country’s socio-cultural impact
complete workforce (fill in less attractive jobs/reverse labour shortages)			improve relations with other countries
bring new skills and knowledge			
create businesses and jobs			
consume goods			
contribute to economic development and success			

i. Centre-left and progressive parties

To our surprise, contributivist frames are generally articulated by centre-left and progressive parties, and the frames are used to justify liberalising citizenship and voting rights laws or maintaining existing liberal policies. In Germany, the Skilled Labour Immigration Act, which aimed to attract migrants with vocational training by shortening the naturalisation time, was introduced by the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), the Free Democratic Party (FDP) and Alliance 90/The Greens coalition government. The SPD Minister of the Interior argued that liberalising naturalisation procedures in Germany would make the country ‘more attractive for foreign skilled workers’ and was essential for the country’s economy. A reform of the nationality law was necessary ‘to make Germany fit for the future’ (Özdemir, SPD, 2022). Similarly, in France, a member of Europe Ecology–The Greens, proposed that third-country nationals should be granted access to municipal voting rights on the basis of their tax contributions (Benbassa, EELV, 2011)

In Italy, contributivist frames in favour of speeding up enfranchisement were also voiced by centre-left parties, including the centre-left Partito Democratico (PD), and the Christian-left Democrazia Solidare. Marilena Fabbri of the ruling PD, rapporteur of the bill to naturalise the children of immigrants, argued in these terms:

It is also an instrument of economic growth, because it is a choice that favours the permanence in our territory of an important part of the active population, the most vital, enterprising and educated. (Fabbri, PD, 2015)

In the UK, most of the calls to secure the rights of EU citizens after the Brexit referendum were made – on contributivist and other grounds – by members of the Liberal Democrats, the Labour Party, Plaid Cymru, the Scottish National Party and some centre-left or left-wing members of the crossbench in the House of Lords. Special mention was made of the many health workers of European origin. A member of the Scottish National Party explained why the political rights of EU citizens should be maintained after Brexit:

In this country, EU nationals contribute to our communities and public services. Some 130,000 of them are health and social care workers – doctors, nurses and the people who might be looking after our relatives. (Dr Whitford, SNP, 2017)

It is not uncommon for those with a contributivist stance to support their arguments with references to scientific reports, as in the case of Dr Whitford above, who cited a report on falling nurse registrations and rising nurse vacancy rates to illustrate how acute the risk of losing EU workers was. The Italian MP above also cited statistics on the high rates of school or university education among immigrant children in Italy to highlight their educational capital and thus their contribution to the Italian economy. They also quote economic experts, as Nouripour of Alliance 90/The Greens did when defending the liberalisation of the German citizenship law to attract foreign workers and increase Germany’s potential as ‘a business location’.

ii. Radical left parties

While centre-left parties typically use contributivist frames to argue for the participation rights of immigrants, radical left parties often challenge this perspective, perceiving it as inherently inequalitarian and exploitative. For example, a French radical left MP describes

it as a ‘utilitarian concept of naturalisation that prioritises the most privileged and leaves those who have not experienced such good fortune in the shadows’ (Laborde, PRG, 2011). The problem described here is that it attracts the educated and highly skilled elites from low-income countries, thereby undermining the future development of their home countries. At the same time, these individuals are being exploited, as they are likely to be paid much lower wages than the French themselves. Similarly, a member of the British House of Lords from the left-wing Green Party criticised contributivist regulations for treating persons as ‘a bargaining chip’, when they should be treated as human beings ‘made in the image of God’ (Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb, Green, 2017).

It should be noted that radical left parties are not opposed to granting participation rights to migrant groups in general. However, they do reject the contributivist frames, which they see as promoting inequalities between the privileged and the underprivileged. This denunciation of contributivism as ‘unfair’ is relatively rare, as it is linked to the left’s more global vision of inequalities. It is far more common to conflate the concepts of fairness and contributivism. In the context of the Brexit debates, for instance, it was seen as ‘fair’ that those who had contributed economically should be able to claim citizenship and participation rights.

iii. Centre-right parties

In contrast to left-wing parties, centre-right parties and politicians used contributivist frames, sometimes to support and sometimes to oppose the extension of participation rights. Some moderate members of the British Conservative Party supported the idea that EU citizens’ rights should be secured and used contributivist frames similar to those used by centre-left parties. For example, a Conservative member of the House of Commons stated:

Little England has no appeal for me. We must remain a magnet for international talent and a beacon for those who want to come here to study and work. We must act quickly to resolve the status of EU nationals, who contribute so much to my constituency [Cheltenham in SW England] and the wider United Kingdom. (Chalk, Con, 2017)

In Germany, the centre-right Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU/CSU) has a more mixed view. They seem to agree that migrants can be the solution to labour market shortages in Germany, but that allowing dual citizenship or shortening naturalisation time is not the way to go. Instead, they argue that existing procedures ‘for approving appointments’ and recognising professional qualifications should be simplified (Frei, CDU/CSU, 2022). Similarly, British centre-right parties MPs do not deny the importance of economic contributions as a moral basis for citizenship or voting rights (e.g. Lord Cormack, Con, 2023). However, MPs from these parties assume that economic contributions are insufficient and place more emphasis on shared values and a sense of community. When using contribution as a condition for obtaining citizenship rights, they are more likely to refer to contribution to the country or community in general, sometimes combining it with ethno-identitarian and communitarian arguments, where it is most important that immigrants ‘share our values’ and goals (Frei, CDU/CSU, 2022).

In France and Italy, centre-right politicians disagree in principle and strongly with contributivist arguments. In France, Prime Minister Fillon of the conservative Republican Party argued that the state reciprocates the economic contributions of immigrants by allowing them to use the public services for which they pay taxes. The right to vote is irrelevant in this transaction. Citizenship should still be earned, but not by contributing to the economic prosperity of the country.

I find this census-based and ultimately utilitarian vision of democratic participation shocking. [...] A local authority is not a company in which you can become a shareholder by paying tax. Clearly, the right to vote cannot be bought; it must be earned by the will of the heart and mind. (Fillon, UMP, 2011)

A similar attitude can be observed in Italy. The centre-right parties describe citizenship and the franchise for the children of immigrants as a reward, a ‘prize’ (*premio*) for having completed a cycle of social integration and educational achievement, the final place of such a process, which one had to earn (Bianconi/Nuovo Centrodestra, 2015). They admit that ‘those who, although not born in Italy, live, work, consume, pay taxes in Italy, in short, contribute to the social and collective life of our country’ should be integrated, but not by unconditionally granting citizenship. Citizenship should be a recognition and ‘crowning’ (*coronamento*) of a path of social and cultural integration that has been *completed* (Bianchi/Nuovo Centrodestra, 2015), not an economic integration that is expected (by the children of immigrants) in the future.

iv. Radical right parties

Compared to centre-left and centre-right parties, radical-right parties use contributivist frames the least. When they do, they mobilise them to exclude immigrants. For example, a member of the far-right party Alternative for Germany argues against plans to shorten the naturalisation time in the following way:

The fact is: the more foreigners immigrate and are naturalised, the more Germans emigrate because the taxes are too high to finance the fun. The whole thing is one big law to expel skilled labour. (Curio, AfD, 2022)

In Italy, a member of the Lega Nord criticises the argument that second-generation children of immigrants should receive citizenship by default in order to preserve the pension system. He argues that this ‘debases’ the concept of citizenship, which cannot be ‘purely and exclusively economic’. What matters, by contrast, are the values and ‘the history they can bring to our country’ (Invernizzi, LN, 2015). In other words, contributivism is rejected as a perspective on citizenship and participation that is too shallow, materialistic and lacking in moral depth.

In summary, contributivist arguments are most prominent among left and centre-left parties, which use this framework to argue in favour of extending and facilitating enfranchisement – alongside arguments based on fairness and social inclusion. Radical parties on both sides of the political spectrum generally reject contributivist arguments for opposing reasons; the radical left sees the granting of civil and political rights to immigrants based on their ability to contribute to society as a method of excluding the poor and underprivileged, while the radical right wants to exclude immigrants regardless

of their level of skills and labour value, and may paradoxically condemn contributivism as ‘neo-colonial’ (Italy/Bragantini/LN).

Centre-right parties are more ambivalent about contributivist arguments. In the UK, the Conservatives are divided on the relationship between economic contributions and political rights, with some arguing that the UK should remain a magnet for highly skilled workers and others rejecting the relationship between taxation and voting rights. In the other countries, the centre-right is more directly opposed to using contributions as a means of justifying the granting of civil and political rights, describing them, for example, as overly utilitarian and an indirect return to census suffrage (France/Fillon/UMP). One might have expected the opposite: that centre-right parties with neo-liberal economic agendas would have been more sympathetic to economic perspectives on citizenship. In contrast, contributivist arguments are mostly mobilised in favour of extending the franchise, rather than the opposite.

To the extent that they acknowledge the importance of economic contribution, centre-right parties see economic contribution as something to be achieved *prior to* naturalisation. In Italy, for example, the economic contribution of parents – verified by minimum economic criteria – and the cultural integration of children – verified by the completion of schooling (*ius scholae*) – are considered relevant for the naturalisation of immigrant children. The centre-left, on the other hand, tends to see economic contribution as something that comes *after* naturalisation, as the Italian centre-left rapporteur pointed out: new citizens bring new energies and support the social security system; citizenship is seen as an instrument in this direction. We can therefore say that, in this context, right-wing parties link citizenship to *past* economic contributions to the host society, while the left-wing parties link it to *future* economic contributions. However, this tendency cannot be attributed to a preference for property-based views at the expense of reciprocity-based views (see Hultin Rosenberg and Sundevall 2022), but to the specific context of the debate: it cannot be argued that children (of immigrant origin) have *already* contributed economically to the host society, as they have not yet entered working life. It is therefore more appropriate to describe their contribution as one that is projected and expected of them in the future. In this sense, granting voting rights to migrant children is also described as an ‘investment’ in the social fabric of the country (Italy/Chaouki/PD).

To sum up, economic contribution is a frame that is systematically mobilised by centre-left, progressive, and moderate centre-right parties in favour of extending the franchise, while centre-right and radical right parties tend to deny its relevance for obtaining citizenship or voting rights.

6. Discussion

This study sought to explore the *politics* of contributivism, i.e. the role that this principle plays in motivating participation regulations, whether its use is linked to party affiliation, and the meaning that legislators ascribe to it. We find that contributivist frames are present in recent parliamentary debates, although the extent of their presence varies between specific countries and debates. The widespread presence of contributivism in parliamentary debates is consistent with previous literature on citizenship and voting rights. Van Houdt, Suvarierol, and Schinkel (2011) and Joppke (2021) argue that

neoliberal communitarianism, in which citizenship becomes less a right and more a privilege ‘to be earned’, is on the rise across Europe. Hultin Rosenberg and Wejryd (2022) also highlight the popularity of contributivism among US respondents, and possibly among legislators. Indeed, our data contained numerous references to contributivism, both positive and negative, from across the political spectrum.

It should be noted, however, that while contributivist frames are sometimes very prominent, for example in the debates on post-Brexit voting rights for EU citizens in the UK, they often play a minor role compared to other frames, such as moral or ethno-identitarian ones. They tend to be limited in debates on the enfranchisement of immigrant children in Italy and Germany, which do not offer the same discursive opportunities. This can be explained by the age of the potential voters targeted in these debates, since minors who have not yet entered the labour market have not contributed economically to the tax and pension systems, which makes contributivist arguments less relevant in this context. Conversely, contributivist arguments are more pronounced when discussing the enfranchisement of individuals who are currently or were previously employed in the country, such as EU nationals in the UK after Brexit. Framing analysis using quantitative methods and a larger sample of countries could provide a more complete picture of the extent to which contributivist frames are present in voting rights debates, and identify which types of debates have a higher concentration of contributivist frames.

Contributivist frames are mostly used by centre-left parties (Social Democrats, Left and Greens), while centre-right parties (Christian Democrats, Conservatives and Liberals) are sceptical or opposed to them, and populist radical right parties are clearly against them. This finding challenges previous literature and our own hypothesis. Joppke (2021) argues that the conditioning of citizenship on an individual’s ability to achieve and contribute is of neoliberal origin. Accordingly, one would expect economically right-wing parties to support contributivism. Although contributivist frames were also present among members of right-wing parties, the majority came from progressive left-wing parties. One explanation is that as socialist parties in Europe have moved increasingly to the centre since the 1990s, they have also adopted a more openly neoliberal agenda and a more pragmatic style of reasoning. At the same time, right-wing parties – and especially radical right-wing parties – are mostly culturally, not economically, conservative, and it is therefore natural for them to prefer ethno-identitarian frames. A historical analysis could show whether there is a continuity or a rupture in the positive approach to contributivism by centre-left parties, and to what extent there is a significant shift in their line of argumentation.

Our finding is surprising because in the literature contributivism is described as a restrictive frame that is inegalitarian and limits access to the franchise (Joppke 2021; Van Houdt, Suvarierol, and Schinkel 2011). In parliamentary debates, however, contributivist frames are mainly used to justify the extension of the franchise and the inclusion of migrants. This use is consistent with the way contributivism was originally described by Beckman (2006): a principle according to which all those who participate in the economy should have the right to vote, including all resident foreigners who do so.

This inclusivist use of contributivism is closer to reciprocity-based arguments rather than property-based ones (Hultin Rosenberg and Sundevall 2022). Contribution is invoked in terms of the past work of non-voters, which has already and for a long

time financed public goods, for which the state must now reciprocate by offering the franchise to these workers. By contrast, property-based arguments, according to which the state should offer political voice in exchange for taxes that will be generated in the future by the purchase of property – an argument more akin to citizenship-by-investment schemes – are completely absent from debates on voting rights for immigrants. The reciprocity claim is closely related to other arguments based on ‘fairness’ (Goenaga 2019) that describe access to voting rights for non-citizens as fair, just, and moral – a relationship that further normative analysis could explore.

The emphasis on potential voters as individuals who work, pay taxes or otherwise contribute materially to society means that they are seen as an ‘asset’ that adds value to an economy and society, provides a vital service to the community, makes the country ‘better’. As such, economic contribution is not so much proof of the moral and intellectual competence (*capacité*) of prospective voters to judge what is in the best interests of the host society, as was argued by nineteenth-century advocates of limited suffrage. Today, economic contribution is seen as an intrinsic value in which a country can invest through the instrument of voting rights. Further theoretical analysis can explore how contributivist frames develop an image of the voter as a materially conditioned socio-economic subject, as opposed to conventional ethno-identitarian conceptions of voters as historicised cultural subjects.

Although most arguments for contribution refer to economic contribution, our findings show that these are nuanced, context-specific, and often go beyond a narrow material understanding. They include the payment of income and other taxes, which has also been discussed in previous literature (Beckman 2006; Hultin Rosenberg and Wejryd 2022; Joppke 2021; Van Houdt, Suvarierol, and Schinkel 2011). Compared to these studies, this article traces several additional dimensions of economic and non-economic contributions that are invoked as reasons for granting voting rights. For example, some contributivist arguments highlight how immigrants fill jobs that nationals are unwilling to fill (e.g. nurses in the UK), while others point to the importance of attracting talent and highly educated immigrants (e.g. Germany’s Skilled Labour Immigration Act). Quantitative content analysis of a larger sample of countries could identify additional types of economic contribution cited by legislators as relevant for granting voting rights.

Our study differs from previous studies of contributivism in that it highlights the fact that contribution is not always economic, but often takes on a broader meaning that refers to social, civic and symbolic types of contribution. These include, for example, addressing the problem of demographic decline, contributing to social movements or improving the international standing of the host country. Further theoretical analysis can probe how these non-economic contributions relate to, contradict or interact with the conventional frames used to limit enfranchisement and naturalisation.

Among the limited number of studies that have examined contributivism as a principle for voting rights and citizenship acquisition, our study is the first to focus exclusively on contributivism from a discourse-analytic and political perspective, examining how parties use this frame in parliamentary discourse and what meaning they ascribe to it. One of its main findings is that legislators systematically appeal to contribution as a ground for enfranchisement, but not only to economic contribution, which is straightforward and measurable: broader and less visible types of contribution, which are social, civic or symbolic, are also brought to the table. The second key finding is

that, in contrast to the literature on ‘earned citizenship’, which sees the latter as a very neoliberal and unjust approach to citizenship, contributivism has a predominantly emancipatory force in parliamentary discourse, as it is typically used by progressive parties to argue for the extension of the franchise, while right-wing parties tend to reject this frame. These findings add to our knowledge of how political parties understand the socio-economic dimension of citizenship and voting.

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