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POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

Unequal Participation Among Youth and Immigrants: Analyzing Political Attitudes and Behavior in Societal Subgroups

Edited by Arndt Leininger and Sabrina Mayer

Volume 13

2025

Open Access Journal

ISSN: 2183-2463

Politics and Governance, 2025, Volume 13
Unequal Participation Among Youth and Immigrants: Analyzing Political Attitudes and Behavior in Societal Subgroups

Published by Cogitatio Press
Rua Fialho de Almeida 14, 2° Esq.,
1070–129 Lisbon
Portugal

Design by Typografia®
http://www.typografia.pt/en/

Cover image: © Alessandro Biascioli from iStock

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Available online at: www.cogitatiopress.com/politicsandgovernance

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https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.10364

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EDITORIAL

Open Access Journal

Unequal Participation Among Youth and Immigrants: An Overview

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Submitted: 19 March 2025 **Published:** 3 April 2025

Issue: This editorial is part of the issue "Unequal Participation Among Youth and Immigrants: Analyzing Political Attitudes and Behavior in Societal Subgroups" edited by Arndt Leininger (Chemnitz University of Technology) and Sabrina Mayer (University of Bamberg), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.i426

Abstract

This thematic issue covers the political participation of youth and immigrants in contemporary democracies. The articles in this issue advance knowledge in youth studies, migration studies, and political behavior, theoretically and empirically. They do so by proposing innovative perspectives on voter turnout, political efficacy, protest behavior, representation preferences, and intersectional dynamics among young and immigrant-origin voters. Utilizing diverse methodological approaches, including quantitative analyses, qualitative interviews, and intersectional studies, the contributions highlight significant participation gaps and the factors that influence these disparities. The findings underscore the importance of addressing inequalities to strengthen democratic representation and stability.

Keywords

immigrants; minorities; political participation; representation; voting; youth

1. Introduction

Among all forms of political participation, voting has a crucial position: It has the highest usage rates (compared to other participation forms such as demonstrations or support party organizations) and promises the highest level of political equality as every eligible citizen's vote counts equally and disparities in turnout, along levels of income, education, or other characteristics, are less pronounced than for other forms of political participation. However, even though "[v]oting is less unequal than other forms of participation […] it is far from unbiased" (Lijphart, 1997, p. 1). Not all social groups participate at the same rates in elections (e.g., Gallego, 2010; Schäfer et al., 2016).

This pattern is problematic as unequal participation can have detrimental consequences for the representation of societal subgroups, democratic satisfaction, or regime stability more broadly (Diehl & Blohm, 2001). The lower the political involvement of social groups, the lower the incentives for political actors to consider their interests in the political process, which might reinforce itself and lead to societal disintegration in the long run. Previous research has shown considerable participation gaps—for turnout as well as other forms of participation—based on age (Rossteutscher et al., 2022; Smets, 2012), ethnicity, immigrant origin (Rapp, 2020; Spies et al., 2020), or education (Gallego, 2010).

In this thematic issue, we focus on particularly pronounced and societally relevant participation gaps among immigrant-origin/non-ethnic voters and young citizens, as well as their intersection. The political participation of youths and immigrants are becoming increasingly important in the context of transnational migration and demographic change, as well as in light of many initiatives and developments about lowering the voting age and extending the right to vote to foreigners. However, due to their relatively small shares in the population and as many group members are (still) barred from voting, they do not constitute a pertinent political constituency and are often not considered relevant subjects for academic research on political behavior.

Due to demographic change, electorates in most established democracies are growing older and older, fueling discussions around voting age reductions (Eichhorn & Bergh, 2020; Leininger & Faas, 2020; Stiers et al., 2021). Given that turnout in one's first election strongly affects turnout in future elections (e.g., Dinas, 2012), it is essential to understand what can motivate youths to vote. Considering that a good deal of political socialization happens in childhood and adolescence—the so-called "impressionable years" (Neundorf & Smets, 2017)—it is crucial to study youths and perhaps even children directly rather than making inferences about adult respondents' childhood.

Similarly, immigrants and their descendants are marginalized in politics. Although the number of immigrants and naturalized citizens is increasing in most Western European democracies, previous research has largely overlooked this group. It is well established that turnout among immigrants is usually lower than among native-born populations. However, while classical theories on individual differences in voter turnout apply similarly to immigrant and native voters, they do not fully account for the turnout differential between the two groups (Spies et al., 2020). Moreover, the electoral choices of immigrants and ethnic minorities often display distinct patterns (Bird et al., 2011; Goerres et al., 2022). Therefore, it is essential to gain deeper insight into this heterogeneous group's political attitudes and beliefs and understand how various factors—such as identities or experiences of discrimination—may influence their political participation (Schildkraut, 2005).

Despite their differences, both groups share one important feature: They are too often overlooked by politics and political science. Both groups include members eligible to participate fully in the political system and those who are not. Those who are eligible—young adults and naturalized immigrants—form a small part of the electorate. While other group members lack the right to participate in formalized political representation, the latter will, over time, integrate into the political system. Furthermore, the two groups we focus on, youths and immigrants, offer opportunities for intersectional research on young immigrants that merit more attention from empirical social science.

2. Introducing the Articles in This Issue

The contributions to our thematic issue address the political participation of youths, immigrants, and ethnic minorities from various angles. They include articles dealing with youths (with varying age definitions), immigrant-origin/ethnic minority voters, or the intersection of both and focus on key outcomes, such as turnout, other forms of participation, and political attitudes. The first four articles focus on youths among the general population, examining voter turnout, political efficacy, protest behavior, and representation preferences across different European countries.

Eichhorn and Huebner (2025) study whether lowering the voting age to 16 and the resulting early voter boost observed in other countries persist over time. Using survey data from Scotland—seven years after the voting age was lowered there—they provide a quantitative analysis of various measures of political engagement, including voting in the 2021 Scottish parliament elections. Their findings suggest that lowering the voting age may have a lasting positive effect on voter turnout but does not influence non-electoral political engagement.

Garritzmann et al. (2025) examine the role of internal political efficacy in explaining unequal voter turnout among newly enfranchised young citizens. Using original longitudinal survey data from three German federal states, they quantitatively analyze voter turnout in first and subsequent elections. Their findings indicate that while internal efficacy significantly predicts electoral participation among all young voters, its effect is stronger for individuals from lower-class backgrounds. Once lower-class individuals participate in their first election, their likelihood of voting again aligns closely with their higher-class peers, suggesting that strengthening political efficacy among disadvantaged youth could reduce long-term inequalities in political participation.

Portos (2025) examines protest behavior among youth in Greece, Italy, and Spain, analyzing whether the determinants are similar across these three countries, which have often been grouped together in previous studies. Drawing on the EURYKA survey (2018), which includes oversamples of 18–24-year-olds and 25–34-year-olds, the author conducts a quantitative cross-sectional analysis. His findings highlight the heterogeneity of these three national cases, offering a cautionary perspective on treating them as a single entity—Southern Europe—when studying social movements and protests.

Kurz et al. (2025) focus on the age of political representatives. They analyze whether the age of representatives matters to voters using online survey data collected in Germany (2023). Their findings reveal strong in-group preferences for candidates from one's own age group among both younger (up to 30 years old) and older citizens (60 years and older). However, out-group bias differs between the two groups: while elderly citizens are not averse to young representatives, younger citizens exhibit a different pattern, favoring younger representatives.

The next five articles focus on immigrant-origin voters and racialized minorities, examining key aspects of political participation and representation. These studies utilize diverse methodological approaches—including quantitative analyses based on electoral data and large-scale surveys and qualitative insights drawn from interviews and focus groups—to explore voter turnout, group-based voting behavior, and perceptions of political representation. The articles span various contexts, covering Europe and North and South America.

Liang and Harell (2025) focus on voter turnout in Canada among the White majority and racialized minority groups. They rely on data from several surveys conducted in Canada (2020–2023), examining voter turnout and self-reported racial identity. Their findings suggest a significant turnout gap for almost all racialized minority groups. In explaining these disparities, they show that socio-economic and psychological factors may offer some insights; however, a substantial portion of the gap remains unexplained.

Morales et al. (2025) focus their quantitative study on voter turnout in Chile, relying on data from Chile's electoral census for elections from 2012 to 2023. Relying on Chile's unique voting regulations—non-citizens can vote in national elections after five years of residence—they analyze the impact of introducing compulsory voting in 2021. Their findings show that while compulsory voting significantly increased turnout among citizens and non-citizens, a substantial gap remains between the two groups.

Oshri and Itzkovitch-Malka (2025) focus in their quantitative analysis on Muslims' voting behavior in Western Europe. They argue that exclusion and perceived discrimination heighten the saliency of group interests among Muslims, making them more likely to vote as a group for left-wing parties. They begin by analyzing pooled data from the European Social Survey spanning 2002–2020 across various Western European democracies before narrowing their focus to the British case, incorporating regional-level indicators of social exclusion. Their findings indicate that feelings of discrimination relate positively to supporting left-wing parties.

Vermeulen et al. (2025) provide a qualitative analysis of perceptions of descriptive and substantive representation among Dutch citizens of immigrant origin. The Dutch case is particularly interesting due to the presence of several parties focusing on immigrants and a significant number of immigrant-origin candidates. Drawing on data from six focus groups (2022) among different country-of-origin groups, their findings reveal that while descriptive representation matters as a starting point, it is insufficient, as participants consistently emphasized the importance of having their interests meaningfully represented.

Stünzi et al. (2025) conducted a qualitative study on the political involvement of immigrants' descendants in Switzerland as elected members of local parliaments. They draw on more than 30 semi-structured interviews conducted in 2016 with elected young politicians of both immigrant origin and Swiss descent. By examining the trajectories that led to the political involvement of immigrant descendants, they highlight the crucial role of local schools in political socialization and the influence of cantonal institutional and discursive contexts.

Intersectional approaches have gained increasing prominence in research on political participation, highlighting the nuanced dynamics within different demographic groups. The final four contributions in this thematic issue adopt this perspective, explicitly focusing on the intersection of youth and immigrant-origin voters. These studies explore how perceived discrimination, national identity, parental influences, and gender shape political attitudes, participation, and engagement among young immigrant-origin individuals.

Hoffmann and Benoit (2025) provide a quantitative cross-sectional analysis based on the German sample of the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey in Four European Countries (CILS4EU), wave 5, conducted in 2015. They focus on conventional and unconventional political participation of young adults (ages 18–30) by examining the moderating effect of perceived discrimination and national identification on indicators from the civic voluntarism model. Their findings show that moderating relationships with the civic voluntarism model vary. For example, they find contrary effects of perceived discrimination on recruitment networks and

unconventional participation, which are positive for individuals with a migration background and negative for individuals without a migration background.

Kleer et al. (2025) focus on political interest as an essential determinant of political participation. Relying on data from the CILS4EU (waves 1-3 2010-2013; ages about 15-17), they provide an analysis of the direct relationship of discrimination experiences as well as the moderating effect of discrimination on the relationship between social participation and political interest among young adults without and with migration background. Their findings show a positive relationship between discrimination and political interest but no amplification of the link between social participation and political interest through discrimination.

Guglielmi and Maggini (2025) focus on the role of parental influences for political engagement, measured by an additive index including political interest and partisan attachment, among late adolescents. Their quantitative cross-sectional analysis is based on data from the MAYBE project (2023–2024; ages 18-19) conducted in Italy's Lombardy region. They show that immigrant and native-born adolescents differ regarding the relationship between socioeconomic status and intergenerational social learning (political discussions at home or parent-child political similarity) with political engagement.

García-Albacete et al. (2025) add an additional facet by including gender in their analysis of political interest among adolescents with and without immigrant backgrounds. Relying on the CILS4EU data set (wave 2, 2011-2012; ages about 15–16), they show that immigrant-origin girls have the highest levels of political interest. However, there are no differences between those who migrated themselves (first generation) or are descendants of parents who migrated to the respective host countries (second generation).

Acknowledgments

We thank the contributing authors for their dedication and hard work, the *Politics and Governance* editorial board for their support and professionalism, and the anonymous reviewers for their critical and constructive insights. Several articles in this thematic issue were discussed at a workshop we organized in Berlin in June 2022. We are grateful to all the participants for their valuable contributions.

Funding

The workshop *Actors Without Arena? Bringing the Political Behavior of Youths and Immigrants Into the Mainstream*, at which some of the contributions to this thematic issue were presented, was supported by a grant from Fritz Thyssen Foundation (Az. 20.20.0.04150).

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Politics and Governance
2025 • Volume 13 • Article 9283
https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.9283

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ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Longer-Term Effects of Voting at Age 16: Higher Turnout Among Young People in Scotland

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Submitted: 11 September 2024 **Accepted:** 9 December 2024 **Published:** 22 January 2025

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Unequal Participation Among Youth and Immigrants: Analyzing Political Attitudes and Behavior in Societal Subgroups" edited by Arndt Leininger (Chemnitz University of Technology) and Sabrina Mayer (University of Bamberg), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.i426

Abstract

Debates about the lowering of the voting age to 16 often include claims about the possible longer-term outcomes of earlier enfranchisement for the electorate. It has been shown that, when eligible to vote, 16-and 17-year-olds turn out to vote in higher proportions than slightly older peers (Zeglovits & Aichholzer, 2014). However, questions remain regarding the longevity of this early voter boost and whether it carries on as young people grow older (Franklin, 2004, 2020). Using original survey data collected from 863 young people in Scotland, we investigate the outcomes of being eligible to vote in elections from age 16/17 and its effects on political behaviour for young people aged up to 24. We compare levels of political engagement, including voting in the 2021 Scottish parliament elections, among cohorts of young people who were enfranchised at age 16/17 to cohorts who experienced their first election aged 18 or older. We show that young people who were eligible to vote at 16/17 exhibited greater levels of turnout in the 2021 Scottish parliament elections, up to seven years after the initial lowering of the voting age than those who got to vote for the first time at 18 or older. This finding provides new evidence in support of theories on the longer-term effects of voting at age 16/17 on electoral political engagement. However, we find no similar pattern for non-electoral political engagement, showing that the outcomes of the lowering of the voting age may be limited to turnout.

Keywords

enfranchisement; political participation; Scotland; votes-at-16; voting age; youth

1. Introduction

Supporters of the lowering of the voting age to 16 often argue that the reform leads to a sustained increase in political engagement among younger people and greater voter habit formation. While there is general agreement that previous reform (the lowering of the age of enfranchisement from 21 to 18) contributed to a long-term decline in voter turnout (Franklin, 2004; Mycock et al., 2023), there are reasons to believe that for young people who experience their first election at ages 16 or 17, the longer-term outcomes may be more positive. Based on theories of political socialisation and voter habit formation, Franklin (2004, p. 65) first argued that when young people start voting at age 16 or 17, while still living in the parental home and in full-time education—instead of in the often highly transitory stages of ages 18 and beyond—there is more support and there are more opportunities for young people to form long-lasting habits of voting.

This article investigates this argument empirically by comparing levels of political engagement, including voting among cohorts of young people who were enfranchised at age 16 and 17 to cohorts who experienced their first election aged 18 or older. To what extent do young people enfranchised at age 16 or 17 show lasting higher levels of turnout and non-electoral political engagement when compared to peers who experienced their first election aged 18 or older?

So far, much research on the lowering of the voting age to 16 focused on the reform's immediate outcomes, showing that voter turnout among newly enfranchised 16-and 17-year-olds can be higher than among slightly older first-time voters (Electoral Commission, 2014; Faas & Leininger, 2020; Zeglovits & Aichholzer, 2014) and that young people benefit from earlier enfranchisement in terms of political interest, engagement with political information, and non-electoral political engagement (Eichhorn, 2018; Sanhueza Petrarca, 2020; Zeglovits & Zandonella, 2013). There are doubts however about the durability of these outcomes beyond the initial boost of a reform of the voting age (Eichhorn, 2018; Franklin, 2020; Huebner, 2021).

To address questions on the durability of outcomes of earlier enfranchisement, we take a longer-term perspective, using original survey data from Scotland collected, among 16-to 31-year-olds, seven years after Scotland lowered the voting age to 16. The data was collected specifically to allow for the consideration of cohorts with different ages of enfranchisement. The survey sample includes cohorts of young people who experienced their first opportunity to vote at age 16/17 as well as cohorts who experienced their first election aged 18 or older, between four years before and up to seven years after the change of the franchise. Due to the timing of elections in Scotland and because the voting age for UK general elections remains 18, our sample also includes cohorts who experienced their first election at age 18 or older even after the lowering of the voting age for Scottish elections.

We make use of this unique mixture of cohorts of young people between the ages of 16 and 31, who were enfranchised at different ages and in the context of elections of different relevance, saliency, and marginality, in a cross-sectional research design. We compare levels of turnout and non-electoral political engagement for cohorts of young people who experienced their first election at age 16/17 to those who first voted aged 18 or older, controlling for other relevant factors of political socialisation such as family background, peers, and access to civic education.

Evidence on what voting age reforms can mean for young people's political engagement in the medium to long-term is important and particularly timely in the context of persistent debates about declining turnout rates and wider democratic disaffection (c.f. Blais et al., 2004; Grassi et al., 2024; Norris, 2011; Zilinsky, 2019). As debates about lowering the voting age to 16 have emerged in more than 25 countries (Huebner & Sanhueza Petrarca, 2024), a longer-term view of what happens when the minimum voting age is lowered has significant potential to inform the decision-making on and implementation of future reforms.

We first give an overview of the factors that explain young people's political behaviour and the extent to which they form different habits of voting and non-electoral political engagement, before outlining what can be expected based on theories of political socialisation and voter habit formation when the voting age is 16 instead of 18. We review existing evidence from countries that lowered the voting age to 16 prior to Scotland and introduce our original empirical data and analytical strategy. Our findings show that young people in Scotland who were eligible to vote at 16 or 17 exhibited greater levels of turnout in the 2021 Scottish parliament elections, seven years after the lowering of the voting age, than those who got to vote for the first time at 18 or older. This provides new evidence in support of a likely longer-term effect of lowering the voting age to 16 on turnout. However, we find no similar pattern for non-electoral political engagement, showing that the outcomes of the lowering of the voting age may be specific to electoral participation. Using representative data that was timed to allow for the consideration of people enfranchised both before and after they turned 18 allows us to deepen our knowledge about how earlier enfranchisement does or does not affect political engagement. This will help to inform ongoing policy debates adding relevant nuance.

2. Political Socialization and the Effects of the Voting Age

Political behaviour, such as voting in elections or engaging with political issues outside of elections, is learnt behaviour. A young person's political engagement is shaped by different socialisation factors: parents and the socio-economic status they pass on (Neundorf et al., 2013; Quintelier, 2015b; Verba et al., 2005), peers and social networks (Jennings et al., 2009; Quintelier, 2015a), civic education and what experiences young people have in schools (McDevitt & Chaffee, 2000; Neundorf et al., 2016; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). These socialisation factors contribute to determining whether someone engages in things such as petitioning, protesting, or political consumerism, and, when a young person is eligible to vote in their first-ever election, whether they turn out to vote or abstain.

Once young people experience their first-ever election, their future political behaviour is additionally shaped by the experience of voting itself. Voting in elections is theorised to be habit-forming (Denny & Doyle, 2009; Dinas, 2012; Gerber et al., 2003; Meredith, 2009; Plutzer, 2002). All else being equal, young people who turned out to vote in their first-ever election are more likely to vote in future elections. This means that some young people will become habitual voters, while others will abstain repeatedly. Research similarly suggests self-reinforcing effects over time for non-electoral behaviour, meaning participation experiences earlier in life can have persistent effects into adulthood (Marien et al., 2010; Quintelier & Hooghe, 2011), and there is evidence of a close relationship between voting and other forms of non-electoral engagement, meaning those who become habitual voters may also be more likely to engage in things such as petitioning, protesting, or political consumerism over the course of their lives (Blais, 2010; Oser, 2017).

2.1. The Significance of the Voting Age

The age at which young people experience their first-ever election can have an impact on how these processes of political socialisation and habit formation play out. Compared to older people, young people typically have lower levels of engagement with elections: the likelihood of turning out to vote increases with age until it falls again late in life (Dassonneville, 2017). This is largely attributed to factors that make voting difficult earlier in life, such as increased residential mobility, lower political efficacy, and less stable social networks. In particular, first-time voting comes with considerably higher costs for young people, such as having to register to vote and develop an understanding of party differences (Plutzer, 2002). Young people are also less often targeted by political campaigns (Endres & Kelly, 2018), cannot usually rely on friends and peers who are voters to get mobilised, and are most likely affected by transitory circumstances (e.g., finishing secondary education or moving out of the parental home)—all factors that depress turnout.

When exactly young people experience these difficulties associated with first-time voting may have a longer-term effect: Franklin (2004) argues that the lowering the voting age to 18 contributed to a lasting decline in turnout in established democracies—not only because it added more people to the electorate who were generally less likely to vote, but also because over the course of their lives, cohorts of young people who were enfranchised at age 18 continued to vote at lower rates compared to people who started voting at 21. However, when young people are enfranchised earlier than age 18, some of these barriers to electoral participation may be diminished. Franklin (2004) hypothesises that, when young people experience their first election at 16 or 17, while they still live in the parental home and are in secondary education, they may experience more support to form the habit of voting. Therefore, cohorts who are eligible to vote at 16 may exhibit lasting higher levels of engagement compared to cohorts whose first vote was at age 18. Bhatti and Hansen (2012) show that young people are indeed more likely to vote when they experience their first election whilst still living in the parental home. They attribute this finding to the effect of parents, who, if themselves engaged, can support the political engagement of their children, compared to the growing influence of low-voting peers later. Instead of simply increasing with age, turnout in fact declines in the early years after a young person becomes eligible to vote before increasing again later into adulthood (Bhatti et al., 2012). If more young people had their first election at an earlier age and were thus more likely to still live at home, we might find that their turnout trajectory would start from a higher baseline, similarly leading to higher levels of engagement with political issues outside of elections. While we would still expect a drop in political engagement in early adulthood, as young people move out of the home and go through many major transitions, the level of turnout in the early 20s may not be as low, as it would have been the first election already fallen into this early adulthood phase for more young people.

Due to the close relationship between voting and forms of non-electoral political engagement, a higher baseline for turnout may also influence longer-term engagement with political issues outside of elections. Insights from qualitative research with young people affected by voting age reform suggest that being allowed to vote earlier affords young people an opportunity to form autonomous opinions and take responsibility for their involvement in democratic decisions—important precursors for electoral and non-electoral political participation alike (Breeze et al., 2017; Sanghera et al., 2018). Indeed, discussions about a lowering of the voting age often note the engagement of young people beyond elections as one of the key features that could be enabled alongside electoral participation. The initial lowering of the voting age to 16 in Scotland, spurred by the extensive engagement of youth civil society organisations that were able to

reach out to a wider range of young people than before (Eichhorn & Huebner, 2023), saw strong waves of engagement with political issues other than voting among young people, such as in demonstrations, boycotts, political parties, or with members of parliament (Huebner & Eichhorn, 2020).

However, longer-term habit formation through voting in elections has previously only been shown to hold for voting, not for other forms of political engagement (Dinas, 2012). Even though political engagement outside of elections can enhance the likelihood of regular voting, evidence from older voters suggests that "casting a ballot only boosts turnout, not non-electoral participation" (Dinas, 2012, p. 431). For non-electoral political engagement, barriers to participation and the specific age at which young people collect their first participation experiences may be less decisive. Unlike voting, access to less institutionalised forms of engagement is not formally restricted by age and thus can be more straight-forward, at least for some young people (Arya & Henn, 2021). Young people are also shown to choose a variety of ways to voice political opinions outside of elections (Pickard, 2019) and, rather than compromising in high-barrier institutionalised forms of politics, young people often see opportunities in movement-based engagement forms shaped by younger people themselves (Pickard et al., 2020). This highlights the need to distinguish the investigation of longer-term outcomes of the voting age on voting behaviour from outcomes for other forms of political engagement.

2.2. Empirical Insights From Countries With Voting Age 16

Few countries afford empirical insights into what happens in the longer-term, when the voting age is lowered from 18 to 16. Research from countries that lowered the voting age prior to Scotland (including Austria, Brazil, Nicaragua, Ecuador, and Argentina) points towards a lasting increase in youth voter engagement in up to 20 years after such reform (Aichholzer & Kritzinger, 2020; Franklin, 2020). Franklin (2020) compares turnout in Austria and several Latin American countries that lowered the voting age to 16 (Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, and Nicaragua) to countries that did not adopt the reform, finding that countries that enfranchised young people at age 16 saw a significant boost in turnout in the ten to 20 years following the reform. Similarly, but applied to reform at the sub-national level, young people in Germany who were enfranchised at 16/17 turn out at higher levels than older first-time voters (Rossteutscher et al., 2022) and federal states that allow 16 and 17-year-olds to vote in regional and local elections showed a distinct boost in turnout from 2017 to 2021 federal elections (Eichhorn & Huebner, 2022). This turnout increase was held for cohorts as old as 25–29 years, who benefited from a lowering of the voting age in their federal state up to 10 years prior.

Two studies provide possible explanations for this lasting turnout increase, linking it to factors that are important in electoral and non-electoral political engagement. Aichholzer and Kritzinger (2020) find signs of lasting earlier political socialisation in Austria. For up to seven years following the reform of the franchise, Austrian 16 and 17-year-olds consistently showed higher levels of external efficacy and were more satisfied with democracy compared to 18-to 20-year-olds. Across Latin American countries that adopted the reform, Sanhueza Petrarca (2020) finds that these effects last as young people grow older, with people who were first eligible to vote at 16 or 17 showing higher levels of trust in parliament and political parties (though not the government) and being overall more satisfied with democracy than citizens who could only vote at an older age.

There are doubts however about the durability of these longer-term effects of being eligible to vote from age 16. Some of the effects of early participation experiences may well diminish with increasing age. Over time, new social connections and particularly salient political events lead people to re-orient and change

their participation habits established earlier in life (Dinas, 2014). This means that the persistence of voting habits may be overstated (Rapeli et al., 2023). In particular, social connections and discussions with peers contribute to changing participation patterns (Quintelier, 2015a; Rapeli et al., 2023). Investigating this argument empirically is additionally complicated by the fact that findings may be subject to recall error (Franklin, 2020) and that the electoral context in which a young voter is enfranchised matters for a cohort's starting level of political engagement (Smets & Neundorf, 2014).

Few countries so far afford insights into cohorts enfranchised at 16 over the long run. Data from Scotland, where the voting age was lowered to 16 first for the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence and from 2015 for all Scottish but not UK-wide elections, allows us to look across cohorts enfranchised in different kinds of elections, distinguishing short-term transitory effects on turnout that are primarily affected by a specific election from longer-term outcomes affecting turnout and non-electoral political engagement not just at young people's first election but beyond. Due to the timing of Scottish elections and because the voting age for UK-wide elections remains 18, a decade after the lowering of the voting age in Scotland, there are cohorts of young people who experienced their first election (a) in different electoral circumstances, (b) aged 16/17 or 18 and older, and (c) shortly before and after the voting age was lowered. Research conducted in the context of the reform of the franchise in Scotland found a positive effect of being eligible to vote at age 16/17 on young people's likelihood to vote in future elections, while any increase in political engagement outside of elections was largely explained by the particularly high levels of political mobilisation in the population overall, at the time around the 2014 referendum (Eichhorn, 2018). Qualitative research with young people in Scotland also cast doubt on the extent to which this positive effect on voting behaviour would carry forward to future elections and future first-time voters (Huebner, 2021).

Building on the theoretical reflections and existing empirical evidence, we address two research questions:

> RQ1: Controlling for the impact of family socialisation, civic education, and peers, are young people who were enfranchised and experienced their first election at age 16 or 17 more likely to report having voted in the 2021 Scottish parliament election than young people who were allowed to vote at age 18 or older?
>
> RQ2: Controlling for the impact of family socialisation, civic education, and peers, are young people who were enfranchised and experienced their first election at age 16 or 17 more likely to report being engaged in non-electoral political action than young people who were allowed to vote at age 18 or older?

3. Methods

We address these questions using original survey data collected among 16-to 31-year-olds, seven years after Scotland lowered the voting age to 16. Panel data on young people's political engagement over time is not available and Scottish election studies do not typically include sample sizes large enough for breakdowns among cohorts of young people. We, therefore, conducted an online survey (with the provider Breaking Blue) on political engagement among young people using an online panel provider and quota-based sampling to encourage representativeness. The questionnaire was based on existing Scottish social surveys: the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, Growing Up in Scotland, and previous surveys on youth political

engagement (Eichhorn et al., 2014, 2021). The study was reviewed by the ethics committee of the University of Edinburgh, ensuring adherence to ethical, data protection, and purdah standards.

The data was collected online over a period of three weeks after the 2021 Scottish parliament election. To represent the target population of 16—to 31-year-olds in Scotland, we used quota-based sampling, specifying quotas for gender, region, and parental social class based on the most up-to-date population statistics or, where official statistics were not available, proxies based on the latest Scottish Social Attitudes survey. The final sample matched the characteristics of the target population of 16—to 31-year-olds in Scotland, except for an oversampling of female respondents and higher socio-occupational classes—as is common in surveys on political behaviour (Keusch, 2015). In total, after cross-validating respondents to avoid duplicate participation, 863 young people were included in the final sample. To adjust for deviations from population statistics, we use individual design weights in all analyses (Huebner & Eichhorn, 2025).

3.1. Analytical Approach

Using this sample of 16-to 31-year-olds in Scotland, we analyse differences in turnout and non-electoral political engagement according to the age at which young people experienced their first election. To do so, we created cohorts of young people according to the first election or referendum they were eligible to vote in by matching election dates with the young people's self-reported year and month of birth (Meredith, 2009). Cohorts were grouped to compare those who experienced their first election at age 16/17 to those who were aged 18 or older at the time of their first election. Due to the timing of elections and because UK general elections retain a voting age of 18, there are cohorts who experienced their first election at age 18 or older even after the lowering of the voting age in Scotland. This means that both groups include young people who were first eligible to vote in low-salience elections (for example, local elections) and in high-salience votes (for example, UK general elections or the 2014 Scottish independence referendum). While we recognise the difficulties of disentangling age—from cohort-related patterns in cross-sectional data (Bell, 2020; Serra & Smets, 2022), by exploiting the unique mixture of cohorts after the lowering of the voting age in Scotland and grouping the cohorts according to age at the time of their first election, we separate the effects of age from those of the age at which young people experienced their first election. Crucially, the arguably highest-salience vote, the 2014 independence referendum is contained for a substantial part of the sample in both groups, as some young people would have been 16/17 at the time of the referendum, while other first-time voters were already 18 or 19. Both groups also contain one low-salience election—a local election—and two Scottish parliament elections. While general elections only applied to those enfranchised at 18 or older, overall, both groups show similar salience splits (Table 1).

We compare levels of turnout and non-electoral political engagement for cohorts of young people who experienced their first election at age 16/17 to those who first voted aged 18 or older using logit regression analysis while controlling for other relevant factors of political socialisation: age, gender, geography, the social class of the household young people grew up in, the influence of peers, and access to civic education. Turnout is measured by asking respondents whether they had voted in the most recent election, the 2021 Scottish parliament election (all question wording is available in the Supplementary File). While we expect some social desirability bias and over-reporting of electoral participation, there is no reason to believe that this was greater in one group than another and should not impede our ability to compare respondents by enfranchisement age. For turnout, a logistic regression was estimated.

Table 1. First-time voter experience groups in the final weighted survey sample, $N = 863$.

Age range (in years) in May 2021	First election enfranchised at	Age at 1st election (groups)	Sample size (*N*)
16–17	Scottish parliament 2021	16–17	177
18–19	Scottish parliament 2021	18+	97
19–20	General election 2019	18+	31
20–21	Local elections 2017	16–17	83
21–22	Scottish parliament 2016	16–17	90
22–24	Independence referendum 2014	16–17	103
24–26	Independence referendum 2014	18+	85
27–28	Local elections 2012	18+	32
28–29	Scottish parliament 2011	18+	37
29–31	General election 2010	18+	128

Non-electoral political engagement is measured in terms of the number of actions respondents have previously ever undertaken: signing petitions, buying/boycotting for political reasons, contacting a political/government official, and taking part in demonstrations. For non-electoral engagement we use an ordinal regression model and the logit link function to estimate the number of political activities aside from voting in elections (out of four) respondents participated in.

In models for both dependent variables, we control for gender, age, where in Scotland young people reside (Central, North, South, and Glasgow), and the socio-occupational class of the household the young people grew up in. We use an occupational measure of parental social class (the chief income earner), asking respondents to think back to their household's circumstances at age 16 and classify answers according to the National Readership Survey scale, where we distinguish young people who grew up in (a) upper and middle-class households (A and B, such as higher or intermediate managerial, administrative, or professional workers), from (b) lower middle-class households (C1, such as supervisory, clerical, junior managerial, and administrative workers), (c) skilled working-class households (C2, semi-skilled workers), and (d) working-class households or households of non-working parents (D/E). Knowing that young people's political behaviour varies along the lifecycle, we include controls for age in terms of six cohorts. This is to not make assumptions about the exact shape of the lifecycle effect, which we expect to neither be neatly linear nor curvilinear. To avoid endogeneity from modelling both the voting age at enfranchisement effect and the age, we ensured that age groups cut across enfranchisement ages and, crucially, we know that those enfranchised at 18 or older are present across nearly the entirety of the age range. We consider the Scottish region where young people currently live because, in Scotland, political engagement levels are contingent on where respondents reside (Sturge, 2021).

Additionally, we extend our models to account for the effects of socialisation experiences known to shape young people's political behaviour differently at different ages of enfranchisement: the effect of family and peers, civic education, and political discussions in school. We include controls for whether respondents had recently (within the last three months) discussed political issues with friends and family, whether they had ever taken modern studies, the main subject in the Scottish curriculum providing civic education, and whether they recalled ever taking a class in school in which political issues were discussed (in case this occurred outside of

modern studies). We ask the latter to account both for young people who might not have taken modern studies but had political discussions featured in other classes and to ensure that we capture respondents having had actual discussions of political issues rather than more technical introductions to the political system.

Finally, we conduct a robustness check for both sets of models. Research indicates that the youngest first-time voters are consistently more likely to vote than slightly older cohorts (Bhatti et al., 2012; Konzelmann et al., 2012; Zeglovits & Aichholzer, 2014). Since we are interested in assessing longer-term effects beyond such a first-time turnout boost, we replicate our models for 18-to 31-year-olds only to check whether differences between being enfranchised at 16 or 18 hold when the group of current 16-and 17-year-olds is excluded.

4. Results

Figure 1 shows the levels of reported electoral participation in the 2021 Scottish parliament elections for 16- to 31-year-olds, broken down according to the first election at which those young people were allowed to vote and distinguishing whether the voting age for those elections was 16 or 18. Based on the literature, we would have expected to find a curvilinear relationship between age and turnout—a rough U-shape, indicating an initial first-time voter boost and subsequent decline in turnout in the early years of adulthood, before going up again in the late 20s and early 30s (Bhatti et al., 2012). However, Figure 1 shows a different pattern for young people in Scotland.

First, we find that 16-and 17-year-olds tend to turn out in higher numbers than 18-to 20-year-olds, who were enfranchised in the same election, confirming theories of a first-time voter boost particularly among 16-and 17-year-olds (Rossteutscher et al., 2022; Zeglovits & Aichholzer, 2014). Second, and addressing our research question on the longer-term outcomes, we find that there is a second peak of turnout among young people aged 21 to 24. These are young people who were enfranchised at 16/17 in the 2016 Scottish parliament election or the 2014 independence referendum and they show relatively high levels of

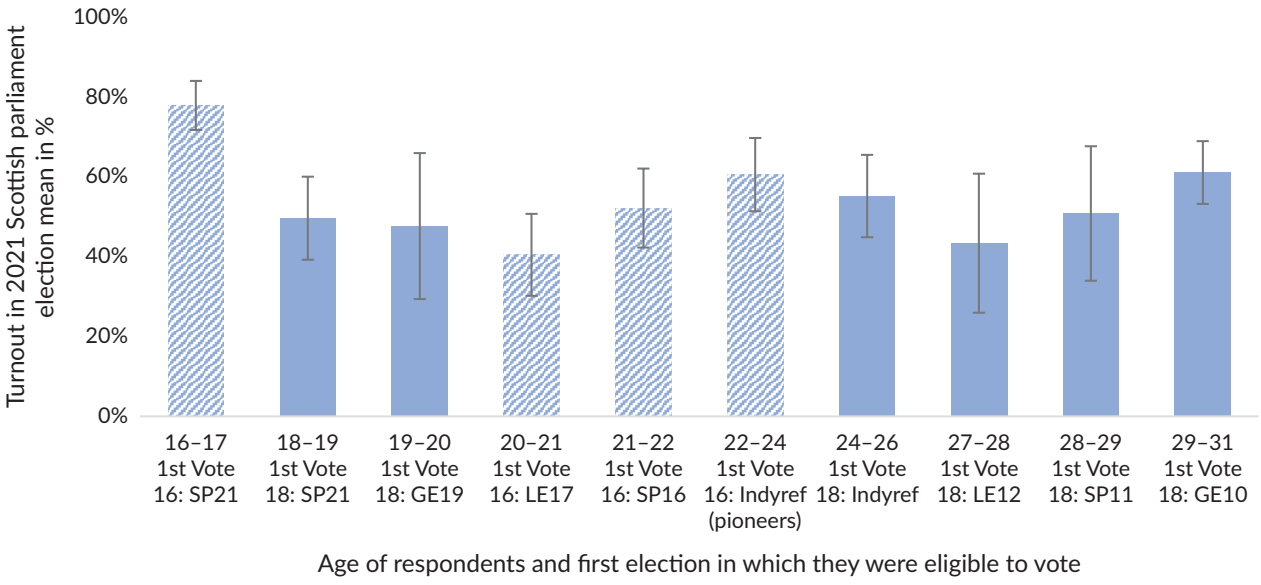

Figure 1. Voter turnout in the 2021 Scottish parliament election per cohort, self-reported. Notes: Mean in %, with 95%-confidence interval: 16-to 31-year-olds; *N* = 863.

participation, similar to the group aged 29 to 31, a cohort whose first election was a high-salience UK general election. The salience of the election in which young people were first eligible to vote appears to matter similarly for both enfranchisement age groups. For both those enfranchised at 16/17 or 18 and older respectively, local elections as first vote experience had the lowest turnout levels. Similarly, the independence referendum had higher turnout levels for both groups than most other elections (except for those at the end of the age distributions). Overall, the findings suggest that for electoral engagement the usual pattern of a decline in voter participation in early adulthood does not hold uniformly for young people in Scotland.

Our regression models (see Table 2) confirm this: controlling for relevant factors that can explain political behaviour such as age, gender, region, and social class (model 1), young people who were first eligible to vote in an election aged 16 or 17, regardless of the type or saliency of that first election, had significantly greater odds of turning out in the 2021 Scottish parliament elections than those who were 18 or older at their first election. When we additionally account for socialisation influences such as access to civic education and discussions with family members and peers (model 2), the odds for young people who were first eligible to vote in an election aged 16/17 were double those who were 18 or older at their first election. The finding also holds when we exclude those young people who were 16 or 17 at the 2021 Scottish Parliament elections to take away the effect of the first-time voter boost (model 3).

While age shows the expected lifecycle effect, being enfranchised at 16 or 17 works in the opposite direction, thus explaining the picture seen in Figure 1. Compared to 16-and 17-year-olds, current 18-to 23-year-olds were generally less likely to vote, unless they were members of a cohort that experienced their first election at age 16/17. Additionally, as expected, we see strong effects of social class and socialisation influences. Young people in higher social classes and respondents who talked about politics with friends and family were more likely to turn out. It is noteworthy, however, that there was no additional longer-term effect of having taken modern studies or remembering classes in which politics were discussed in our comprehensive models. However, in the long-term, civic education shows the expected positive effects when we exclude questions about whether respondents had been talking about politics with friends and family recently (not included in Table 2), indicating that discussions about politics today are associated with past educational experience but current peer-effects matter more.

For non-electoral engagement (Table 3) we do not find any significant differences between young people who were enfranchised at 16 or 18. We also see no significant differences in terms of age for non-electoral engagement: young people are equally likely to report having engaged in different forms of non-electoral political action regardless of their age. While, similar to our findings for turnout, social position and talking to friends and family about politics are related to greater non-electoral participation, we find an additional effect of remembering to take classes where politics was discussed. Young people who do, report a greater number of non-electoral forms of political engagement.

Table 2. Logistic regression models (including robustness check) for electoral participation, $N = 863$.

Dependent variable: Having voted in the 2021 Scottish parliament election (logistic regression)	Social position model (16–31 years) (1)		Socialisation model (16–31 years) (2)		Socialisation model (18–31 years) (3)	
	OR	s.e.	OR	s.e.	OR	s.e.
Age at first vote (Reference: 18 or above)						
16/17	1.62	0.23*	2.01	0.25**	1.96	0.27*
Age (Reference: 16/17)						
18–20	0.41	0.27***	0.48	0.29*		
21–23	0.30	0.24***	0.30	0.26***	0.69	0.28
24–26	0.63	0.30	0.94	0.32	1.98	0.26**
27–29	0.59	0.35	0.76	0.37	1.58	2.8
30–31	0.85	0.36	1.15	0.39	2.43	0.30**
Gender (Reference: Male)						
Female	0.99	0.01	0.99	0.01	0.99	0.01
Region (Reference: Tayside/Central)						
North/Islands	0.88	0.23	0.98	0.25	0.97	0.27
Lothians/South	1.11	0.22	1.08	0.23	1.04	0.26
Glasgow/Strathclyde	1.23	0.19	1.23	0.20	1.17	0.22
Social class of chief household earner at age 16 (Reference: AB)						
C1	0.55	0.21**	0.55	0.22**	0.47	0.24**
C2	0.52	0.21**	0.56	0.23**	0.41	0.25***
DE	0.31	0.21***	0.37	0.23***	0.30	0.24***
Talked with family about Scottish governance (last 3 months)			3.10	0.17***	2.47	0.18***
Talked with friends about Scottish governance (last 3 months)			2.54	0.15***	2.64	0.17***
Has ever taken modern studies in school			0.98	0.18	0.87	0.20
Has ever taken a class in which political issues were discussed			1.25	0.16	1.09	0.18
Intercept	3.46	0.34***	0.61	0.40	0.47	0.34*
−2 Log Likelihood	1447.7		1043.3		874.2	
Nagelkerke Pseudo R^2	0.117		0.251		0.208	
N (unweighted)	863		863		683	

Notes: Significance values: $^{+}$ $p \leq 0.10$, * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$; displayed are odds-ratios (OR) with standard errors (s.e.); results are weighted to match population parameters.

Table 3. Ordinal logistic regression models (including robustness check) for non-electoral participation, $N = 863$.

Dependent variable: Number of non-electoral engagement forms participated in (ordinal regression with logit link function)	Social position model (16–31 years) (1)		Socialisation model (16–31 years) (2)		Socialisation model (18–31 years) (3)	
	OR	s.e.	OR	s.e.	OR	s.e.
Age at first vote (Reference: 18 or above)						
16/17	0.98	0.20	1.08	0.20	1.08	0.22
Age (Reference: 16/17)						
18–20	0.84	0.22	0.96	0.23		
21–23	0.73	0.20	0.81	0.20	0.85	0.24
24–26	0.94	0.25	1.25	0.25	1.28	0.21
27–29	0.93	0.29	1.17	0.30	1.21	0.23
30–31	0.85	0.30	0.97	0.31	1.01	0.24
Gender (Reference: Male)						
Female	1.01	0.01*	1.01	0.01**	1.01	0.01^{+}
Region (Reference: Tayside/Central)						
North/Islands	0.67	0.20*	0.74	0.20	0.61	0.22*
Lothians/South	0.80	0.19	0.77	0.19	0.65	0.22*
Glasgow/Strathclyde	0.81	0.16	0.79	0.16	0.64	0.18*
Social class of chief household earner at age 16 (Reference: AB)						
C1	0.67	0.17*	0.69	0.17*	0.67	0.20*
C2	0.53	0.18***	0.55	0.18***	0.55	0.20**
DE	0.59	0.18**	0.70	0.18*	0.70	0.20^{+}
Talked with family about Scottish governance (last 3 months)			1.48	0.14**	1.66	0.16***
Talked with friends about Scottish governance (last 3 months)			2.76	0.13***	2.60	0.15***
Has ever taken Modern Studies in school			0.87	0.14	0.81	0.16
Has ever taken a class in which political issues are discussed			1.88	0.13***	1.77	0.15***
−2 Log Likelihood	1548.0		2295.3		1872.5	
Nagelkerke Pseudo R^2	0.034		0.154		0.160	
N (unweighted)	863		863		683	

Notes: Significance values: $^{+}$ $p \leq 0.10$, * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$; displayed are odds-ratios (OR) with standard errors (s.e.); results are weighted to match population parameters.

5. Discussion

Our findings suggest that being eligible to vote at 16/17, instead of 18 or older, is associated with increased voting well into young people's early 20s. We find that young people who were eligible to vote at 16/17 in Scotland show higher levels of turnout, up to seven years after their first election, compared to peers who experienced their first election aged 18 or older, even when we control for social position and socialisation factors. This matches findings from other countries where longer-term outcomes associated with the lowering of the voting age to 16 have been observed (Aichholzer & Kritzinger, 2020; Franklin, 2020; Sanhueza Petrarca, 2020). It suggests that enfranchisement at age 16 can counter some of the difficulties that affect turnout among young people. To some extent, though limited to electoral engagement, it also supports prior research that linked the experience of voting at 16 to increased political engagement among young people in Scotland (Eichhorn, 2018).

For engagement with politics beyond voting in elections, however, we find no lasting difference between young people who were eligible to vote at 16 versus 18. The experience of voting at age 16/17 did not make a difference in young people's non-electoral engagement in early adulthood. This observation lends support to theories that reducing the voting age to 16 specifically addresses age and social network-related barriers to voting (Bhatti & Hansen, 2012; Franklin, 2004)—for example by affording young people more support with registering to vote, residential stability, and family or school to rely on to get mobilised to vote—while barriers to other forms of political engagement remain.

In line with this social class inequalities, remain a strong factor in determining political engagement—both electoral and non-electoral—among young people in Scotland regardless of their age of enfranchisement. We find considerable social class differences among all cohorts of young people for electoral and non-electoral participation. If voting at age 16/17 affords young people more support to form the habit of voting, e.g., from parents or peers, it is plausible to expect this support to not be equally distributed among young people (Rossteutscher et al., 2022; Schäfer et al., 2020). This highlights that, while positive in terms of electoral turnout for some, lowering the voting age to 16 is not a solution for all issues addressing inequalities in youth political engagement.

For governments contemplating a lowering of the voting age to 16, there are important implications. First, to maximise the civic payoff, the voting age should be extended for all elections (as in Austria or Argentina, for example). This increases the chances that young people get to vote in an election, and thus benefit from this experience, while they are aged 16 or 17. If, like in Scotland, voting at 16 is restricted to some elections, there will be young people who will miss out on the opportunity to vote at 16 or 17, simply because gaps between elections are bigger. Missing out on the opportunity to vote can also lead to frustrations among young people, especially when peers are eligible to vote at an earlier age (Huebner, 2021; Leininger et al., 2022). Second, regardless of age and voting age, strengthening discursive citizenship education is important. In line with previous research (Jennings et al., 2009; Quintelier, 2015a), we find that civic education has an additional effect on non-electoral participation, and discussing political issues with family and friends on both voting and non-electoral participation, with both factors likely related. Sixteen-to 31-year-olds who recall discussing political issues in the classroom are more likely to discuss political issues with family and friends and more likely to engage with political issues.

Our data and findings come with the usual limitations of cross-sectional research. While the specific Scottish context allows us to compare groups of young people with heterogeneous enfranchisement experiences, our analysis may include unmeasured differences that are associated with higher turnout. Therefore, it cannot replace studies using panel data that establish longer-term developments within individuals. To the best of our knowledge, no such panel data on young people's turnout since the lowering of the voting age in Scotland exists to date. It would be highly desirable to produce and analyse such longitudinal data to trace the impact of different first-time voter experiences over time. Similarly, although our data includes cohorts enfranchised over the course of several and sufficiently different elections in terms of saliency, relevance, and marginality, it does not allow us to fully disentangle effects specific to being enfranchised at 16 from cohort—and election-specific effects. It is known that the political context, in which newly eligible voters come of age, such as the overall turnout and degree of polarisation, matters for the formation of long-term voting habits and contributes to explanations of cohort-specific differences in turnout (Smets & Neundorf, 2014). Our results may reflect this to some extent as cohorts included in our sample of young people enfranchised at 16 came of age in the highly salient and polarised time around the 2014 independence referendum. Future research making use of alternative data sources covering a longer timespan may bring to light whether our results hold when excluding cohorts that came of age during this highly politicised time in Scotland. Nevertheless, since our analyses cover several cohorts of 16-and 17-year-old voters, including some enfranchised well after the time of the referendum and in the context of local or less polarised Scottish elections, our findings contribute to a growing body of literature on longer-term outcomes associated with voting from a younger age.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the Scottish Government for funding the data collection for this research and Dr Andrew Bell at the University of Sheffield as well as the anonymous reviewers for feedback on an earlier version of this article.

Funding

The data collection for this research has been funded through a grant from the Scottish Government.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

The dataset used for the analyses has been deposited with the UK Data Service and is accessible here: Huebner, C., & Eichhorn, J. (2025). *Survey of young people's voting behaviour after the introduction of votes at 16 in Scotland, 2021* [Data set]. UK Data Service. https://reshare.ukdataservice.ac.uk/857551

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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Politics and Governance
2025 • Volume 13 • Article 9196
https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.9196

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ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Unequal Turnout Among the Newly Enfranchised: The Role of Political Efficacy

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Submitted: 16 August 2024 **Accepted:** 13 January 2025 **Published:** 29 January 2025

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Unequal Participation Among Youth and Immigrants: Analyzing Political Attitudes and Behavior in Societal Subgroups" edited by Arndt Leininger (Chemnitz University of Technology) and Sabrina Mayer (University of Bamberg), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.i426

Abstract

Unequal political participation increasingly challenges democracies. The turnout gap is particularly large among younger voters, with severe implications for future developments of democratic representation, legitimacy, and quality. This article focuses on the role of political efficacy beliefs in explaining unequal turnout among newly enfranchised citizens. We argue that internal political efficacy beliefs are particularly important for turnout among the newly enfranchised from lower-class backgrounds, as they lack alternative mobilizing factors such as politically aware and active parents, political knowledge, and mobilizing networks. Furthermore, we argue that once these voters successfully turn out in their first election, they are as likely as those from higher-class backgrounds to turn out in their second election. We empirically test these arguments using original longitudinal data on newly enfranchised citizens from three German federal states (*Bundesländer*). Overall, our results support the argument: Political efficacy beliefs are a stronger predictor of first turnout among young adults from disadvantaged backgrounds compared to those from more advantaged backgrounds, and those who do turn out are as likely as those with higher-class backgrounds to turn out in their second election. This highlights the relevance of political efficacy beliefs in the (re)production of persisting political inequality.

Keywords

first-time voters; Germany; habitual voting; multilevel system; panel studies; political efficacy; political inequality

1. Introduction

Most European democracies are troubled by declining and increasingly unequal voter turnout (Hooghe & Kern, 2017; Kostelka & Blais, 2021). Individuals with lower levels of education, income, or professional status turn out the least (Armingeon & Schädel, 2015; Dalton, 2017; Dassonneville & Hooghe, 2017; Gallego, 2015; Markovich & White, 2022; Schafer et al., 2022; Schäfer et al., 2020). There is also ample evidence that young citizens turn out less frequently than older citizens (Blais et al., 2004; Kitanova, 2020; Konzelmann et al., 2012; Sloam, 2007; Smets, 2012, 2016; Wattenberg, 2008). Moreover, among younger voters, the turnout gap is particularly large: those from disadvantaged backgrounds show the lowest participation rates and vote at significantly lower rates than in decades past (Schäfer et al., 2020). By contrast, young citizens from advantaged backgrounds still participate in elections to a very high degree; their participation patterns have rarely changed. As the turnout gap between advantaged and disadvantaged voters is much smaller among older citizens, the decline in turnout we have witnessed in recent decades in almost all European democracies is predominantly due to unequal turnout among young voters (Franklin, 2004; Kostelka & Blais, 2021; Schäfer et al., 2020).

Although the decade-long decline in turnout and increase in turnout inequality seem to have halted in recent years, the sources of these new developments remain ambiguous. Some research convincingly points to increased political polarization as an explanation (Harteveld & Wagner, 2023), while the advent of populist parties seems to have had less of an influence on political participation (Leininger & Meijers, 2021), let alone participatory inequalities (Huber & Ruth, 2017; Marx & Nguyen, 2018). The apparent stabilization of turnout rates in recent years—at much lower levels than decades ago—notwithstanding, unequal political participation among young citizens remains a pressing concern.

Several mechanisms linking (low) socioeconomic status (SES) or (low) social class to (low) turnout have been discussed in the literature. First, economic hardship, material constraints, and unemployment cause feelings of social isolation and political alienation (Schaub, 2021), and undermine the motivation to acquire political knowledge (Jungkunz & Marx, 2021; Macdonald, 2020; Marinova & Anduiza, 2020). Experiences of material deprivation are especially relevant if they are experienced early in life (Akee et al., 2020; Jungkunz & Marx, 2024). Second, the decline of collective organizations such as labor unions, which historically tied lower classes to party politics, has increased the number of disadvantaged households that are no longer politically engaged. This lack of collective mobilization is transmitted from parents to their children (Gray & Caul, 2000; Schäfer et al., 2020). Third, individuals with lower SES or lower class backgrounds might feel powerless as they perceive that politics only caters to the needs and interests of the better-off (Gilens, 2012; Schäfer & Zürn, 2023), and such beliefs are also passed from parents to children.

In this article, we focus on internal efficacy beliefs because, as many of the above accounts imply, a disadvantaged family background impedes "the development of subjective political competence" (Marx & Nguyen, 2018, p. 920). We investigate the role of internal political efficacy beliefs in explaining, firstly, first-time turnout among newly enfranchised citizens in general and, secondly, unequal turnout among first-time voters in particular.

It is a well-established finding that efficacy beliefs impact political participation (see Lane, 1965). Similarly, we know that young people from disadvantaged family backgrounds possess lower efficacy beliefs than

their more advantaged peers (e.g., Cheadle, 2008; Nie et al., 1996; Niemi et al., 1991; Verba et al., 2005). In consequence, newly enfranchised citizens from disadvantaged homes turn out less frequently than those from more advantaged backgrounds.

Building on these insights, we argue that efficacy beliefs are particularly important for overcoming the hurdle of first-time voting (cf. Plutzer, 2002) for young citizens from disadvantaged backgrounds. Not having turned out before, they lack experience and familiarity with the electoral system and often do not know the parties and candidates competing for their votes very well (Franklin, 2004; Roßteutscher et al., 2022; Schäfer et al., 2020). Young citizens from advantaged homes, by contrast, are mobilized to turn out by a multitude of factors, such as support and role models from more politicized parents, placement in higher educational tracks with more time allocated to civic education, or higher frequency of political talk with peers (Roßteutscher et al., 2022; Verba et al., 2005). In other words, young citizens from advantaged backgrounds have a high probability of turning out, while those who are less advantaged lack alternative resources and would clearly benefit from believing more in their own political capacities.

Moreover, we know that participating in one's first election strongly increases the likelihood of also participating in future elections (e.g., Cutts et al., 2009; Dinas, 2012; Franklin, 2004; Gerber et al., 2003; Schäfer et al., 2020). Having managed the initial hurdle of the first election strengthens voters' self-image of being politically competent (Gerber et al., 2003; Plutzer, 2002), i.e., increases their internal political efficacy and thus renders turnout in the second election less costly. As the costs of first-time voting are particularly high for young citizens from disadvantaged homes, we argue that especially these citizens will profit from turning out in their first-ever election.

Using original panel data on young citizens from three federal states in Germany, we show that individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds have lower political efficacy and lower turnout rates than individuals from advantaged backgrounds. As expected, internal political efficacy is more strongly related to the first-ever turnout among individuals from more disadvantaged backgrounds. Furthermore, we show that first-ever turnout is a strong predictor of second-time turnout among both groups and that internal efficacy drives this effect.

This article thus contributes, firstly, to the rich literature on first-time voting by exploring one possible mechanism—internal efficacy—of why some individuals have a higher propensity to turn out in their first election than others. Secondly, we contribute to the literature on political (in)equality by inquiring whether the strengthened internal efficacy of young voters from disadvantaged backgrounds might help to overcome the turnout gap. Finally, we at least tentatively contribute to the literature on habitual voting by exploring how successful turnout in the first election predicts turnout in further elections and how this differs by individual background.

2. The Political Importance of Internal Efficacy

At the core of the concept of self-perceived efficacy is the idea that people believe they can order their lives rationally and control external events (Lane, 1965). Individuals with high efficacy feel that they possess mastery over their environment, while those with low levels of efficacy perceive the world "as an unpredictable place in which their influence is minimal" (Lane, 1965, p. 148). This idea is very similarly conceptualized in many

disciplines (Gecas, 1989). In social psychology, for instance, perceived "self-efficacy" is defined as "personal judgments of one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action to attain designated goals" (Bandura, 1982, 2000; Zimmerman, 2000, p. 83).

Efficacy develops early in life (Bandura, 2000; Gecas, 1989; Lane, 1965). While there is no consensus on how early in a child's life these processes unfold, evidence suggests that there are already stark differences in political competence and knowledge stratified by family background among primary school children (Abendschön & Roßteutscher, 2015). Using German household panel data, Bacovsky and Fitzgerald (2023) show that parental impact on children's preconditions for later political participation is greatest between the ages of nine and 11, further confirming that family background is highly significant for developing efficacy beliefs.

Early experiences of being efficacious are also crucial since they are generalized to different domains of life (Bandura, 1977, p. 194; Lane, 1965, p. 149). This is because efficacy includes the conviction that one can successfully cope with difficult and new situations (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995; Sherer et al., 1982); personal efficacy is thus activated as a reference whenever persons enter a new domain. Experiences in a new domain will lead individuals, on the one hand, to update their efficacy (Gist & Mitchell, 1992), and on the other, to develop domain-specific efficacy (Gecas, 1989, p. 297).

Politics is an essential new domain that individuals enter when growing up. As young adults become eligible to participate in their first-ever elections, they develop political efficacy (Condon & Holleque, 2013, p. 168). Political efficacy is typically considered to consist of two components: internal political efficacy, which refers to the belief that one is able to understand politics and become politically involved (A. Campbell et al., 1960; Lane, 1965), and external political efficacy, which relates to individuals' beliefs in whether or not political actors are open to their demands (Beaumont, 2011; Karp & Banducci, 2008). Numerous empirical studies have demonstrated a robust positive link between such efficacy beliefs and political participation (e.g., Beaumont, 2011; Marx & Nguyen, 2016, 2018; Nie et al., 1996; Verba et al., 1995, 2005).

Among these efficacy beliefs, internal efficacy appears more strongly linked to first-time turnout (Condon & Holleque, 2013; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995; Sherer et al., 1982) than external efficacy, which takes shape when young adults learn how political parties and governments act on behalf of their vote (Bacovsky & Fitzgerald, 2023). Keeping in mind that fundamental efficacy beliefs are developed early in life (Bandura, 2000; Gecas, 1989) and that internal political efficacy is known to be relatively stable throughout individuals' lives as well as a strong predictor of political participation (Beaumont, 2011; Nie et al., 1996; Verba et al., 1995, 2005), we therefore focus on internal political efficacy and how it affects turnout of young adults from families with advantaged versus disadvantaged family backgrounds.

2.1. The Social Stratification of Internal Political Efficacy and Unequal Turnout Among First-Time Voters

Already in the late 1950s, Lane (1965, pp. 149–150) postulated that those belonging to the "dominant group," those who possess high social status and power (men, individuals from highly educated or wealthier backgrounds, and those from high-status professions), perceive far more internal capacity to master their environment than individuals of the "subordinate" group (women, children from families with lower

education, little income, or little professional prestige). SES-related differences in children's personal efficacy originate from differences in their homes, where they are provided better or worse opportunities for mastery experiences, and because parents are essential role models for children (see Becker, 2019; Gecas, 1989; Roßteutscher et al., 2022; Verba et al., 2005). For example, Lareau (2011) shows how middle-class parents aim at fostering their children's skills via various organized leisure activities, which also promote their efficacy, while working-class and poor parents do not provide their children with such experiences (see also Cheadle, 2008; Nie et al., 1996; Niemi et al., 1991).

Moreover, recent research highlights further channels through which material deprivation and economic hardship associated with lower class status affect political attitudes and behavior. For one, being exposed to severe material grievances, such as unemployment, negatively impacts the sense of mastery and control over one's life, generally and in the political realm (Marx & Nguyen, 2016, 2018). Moreover, poor economic conditions often imply a lack of time for searching out and processing political information, as time is spent on addressing the difficult economic situation (Hassell & Settle, 2017; Marx & Nguyen, 2018). Hence, if children experience these constraints both indirectly, through their parents, and directly themselves in their formative years, this has a long-term impact on their political engagement (Akee et al., 2020; Jungkunz & Marx, 2024).

Empirical studies regularly confirm that internal efficacy is socially stratified (Ho, 2010; Wiederkehr et al., 2015; see also Cheadle, 2008; Condon & Holleque, 2013; Gecas, 1989; Marx & Nguyen, 2016, 2018; Nie et al., 1996; Niemi et al., 1991; Verba et al., 2005). Knowing that political efficacy positively influences political participation (e.g., Beaumont, 2011; Nie et al., 1996; Verba et al., 1995, 2005), we suggest that the social stratification of internal efficacy can help to explain turnout inequality among first-time voters. Thus, our first hypothesis is the following:

> H1: The correlation between individuals' social class background and their turnout is weaker once we control for their internal efficacy.

In other words, we expect differences in first-time turnout rates between young citizens from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds to decrease once we control for individuals' levels of internal political efficacy.

Building on this, we further argue that the positive effect of internal political efficacy on first turnout is stronger for young voters from disadvantaged social backgrounds. This argument draws on a large body of evidence showing that children from advantaged backgrounds receive manifold participation stimuli from voting parents as role models, politicized peer networks, and political media consumption, among others (see, e.g., D. E. Campbell, 2009; Condon & Holleque, 2013; Nie et al., 1996; Plutzer, 2002; Roßteutscher et al., 2022; Verba et al., 2005). Individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, in contrast, lack such mobilizing factors. They discuss politics less at home, have less politicized peer networks, and see their parents turn out for elections less often. Accordingly, Condon and Holleque (2013) find that the effect of general self-efficacy on turnout is strongest for young voters from low SES backgrounds. We suggest that this also holds for their internal political efficacy, and thus formulate our second hypothesis:

> H2: The (positive) correlation between internal efficacy and turnout is stronger for individuals with lower-class backgrounds than for individuals with higher-class backgrounds.

2.2. The Lasting Impact of First Turnout

First turnout is crucial for subsequent turnout (e.g., Brody & Sniderman, 1977; A. Campbell et al., 1960; Franklin, 2004; Milbrath, 1965, p. 31; Miller & Shanks, 1996, p. 62; Plutzer, 2002; Verba & Nie, 1972, p. 148). Several studies suggest that voting is habit-forming (e.g., Cutts et al., 2009; Dinas, 2012; Franklin, 2004; Gerber et al., 2003) and that the custom of voting (and of non-voting) is characterized by "inertia" during the individual life course (Plutzer, 2002). Green and Shachar (2000) define voting as habitual if voting in one election increases the probability of voting in the next election, all else being equal. Hence, the act of voting matters, independent of a person's predisposition, social background, or attitudinal makeup. In line with this, Schäfer et al. (2020) show that citizens who voted in their first election also reported very high levels of intention to vote in the subsequent election. By contrast, those who abstained are less committed to future voting. Consequently, the classic determinants of turnout—including efficacy—are less relevant for habitual voters (Aldrich et al., 2011; Fowler, 2006; Franklin, 2004; Melton, 2014; Plutzer, 2002; Schäfer et al., 2020).

In line with this literature, we expect that internal efficacy barely affects the second turnout when the first turnout is taken into account. Thus, our third and final hypothesis is:

> H3: The first turnout is a similarly strong predictor of the second turnout for young voters from both higher and lower-class backgrounds, irrespective of their individual internal efficacy.

3. Data and Methods

To empirically investigate our arguments, we draw on two original panel surveys of young citizens conducted in three German federal states (*Bundesländer*). These surveys are particularly well-suited to addressing our claims. In contrast to national election (panel) studies, which are typically based on representative samples of the entire electorate (with very low case numbers of newly enfranchised citizens), our surveys focus on young adults who face their first elections and cover two subsequent elections—state elections (*Landtagswahlen*) in the first waves and national elections (*Bundestagswahlen*) in the second waves—within a relatively small timeframe, allowing us to assess the start of individuals' careers as habitual voters or non-voters.

This particular sequence of elections—that is, state elections considered "second-order" elections (Reif & Schmitt, 1980; but see Giebler, 2017) followed by a national election considered to be a "first-order" election—implies that we study a least likely scenario for the development of habituation effects. On the one hand, a second-order election is less mobilizing than a first-order election, and on the other, a first-order election strongly mobilizes citizens independent of their previous electoral participation. Our analysis therefore provides a conservative test of the habituation hypothesis.

At the same time, this scenario is increasingly representative of how young adults experience their first-ever elections. As more and more jurisdictions reduce the voting age, usually from 18 to 16, and do so for second-order elections first, an increasing number of young people will become eligible for the first time in their lives to participate in a "second-order" election (see also Leininger et al., 2023).

3.1. The Surveys

The first wave of the first survey was administered in Schleswig-Holstein shortly after the state election on May 7th, 2017. The second wave was fielded after the national election on September 24th, 2017. The first wave of the second survey was fielded shortly after state elections in Brandenburg and Saxony on September 1st, 2019. The second wave was fielded shortly after the national election on September 26th, 2021.

Both surveys applied official register sampling and contacted respondents via mail to invite them to take part in our online survey. In the first survey waves, we were able to interview over 10,000 respondents in total: 3,897 citizens aged 15 to 18 in Schleswig-Holstein, and 6,699 respondents aged 15 to 24 in Brandenburg and Saxony. Response rates in the first waves of the survey were 18.4% in Schleswig-Holstein, 14.8% in Brandenburg, and 15% in Saxony. All respondents who took part in the first survey waves were re-invited to take part in the second-panel waves. In Schleswig-Holstein, we were able to re-interview 1,900 respondents in the second wave (a response rate of 55.7%). In Brandenburg and Saxony, we were able to re-interview 1,230 and 771 respondents, respectively, with corresponding response rates of 37.9% and 36%. The surveys were carried out anonymously and contact details provided by respondents for re-contact were stored separately from the survey data.

Although both surveys are very similar in terms of their administration, questionnaire, and focus on young adults, they cover different elections and span a different period of time from one wave to the next: In Schleswig-Holstein, both waves were conducted in 2017, with only roughly four months in between the state and national elections (and thus the survey waves). In Brandenburg and Saxony, the first survey wave (covering state elections) was conducted in September 2019, and the second survey wave two years later, in September/October 2021 (shortly after the national election). Furthermore, the elections are characterized by different eligibility thresholds: While eligibility in national elections (in September 2017 and 2021) is restricted to citizens aged 18 or older, eligibility in state-level elections is age 16 in Schleswig-Holstein and Brandenburg, but age 18 in Saxony. Due to differences in timing and some divergent item formulations, we treat the two sets of surveys (Schleswig-Holstein vs. Brandenburg and Saxony) as separate studies and present the results accordingly.

As we are interested in the association between first-time voting and internal efficacy and how the experience of first-time voting impacts further electoral behavior, we excluded two groups of respondents from our analyses: firstly, respondents who were not first-time voters in wave one of the surveys, which applies to individuals who had already been eligible in the national election of 2017 in the Brandenburg/ Saxony survey and also to respondents who were not yet eligible in the first survey wave of either survey. Roughly a third of the respondents in the Brandenburg and Saxony survey had been eligible to vote in the European election in May 2019, which had a minimum voting age of 18. Unfortunately, we do not know whether respondents actually voted in the European election. Instead of excluding this large number of respondents from the analyses, we added a control indicating whether respondents had been eligible. In Appendix 9 in the Supplementary File, we replicate the main models, excluding all those who had been eligible in the European election; the results are highly similar to those presented in the main section of the article.

Secondly, when focusing on individuals' second turnout, we excluded respondents who were not eligible to vote in the national elections in 2017 or 2021, respectively, because we obviously cannot observe their second

turnout. This applies to all 16-year-olds in the Schleswig-Holstein survey (as they were by no means eligible for the national election the same year) as well as all 17-year-olds who had not turned 18 between May and September 2017 for the second survey. As a result, our main analyses are based on between 2,689 (wave 1) and 524 (waves 1 and 2) respondents from Schleswig-Holstein and on between 2,304 (wave 1) and 655 (waves 1 and 2) respondents from Brandenburg and Saxony (numbers refer to individuals with no missing values on the relevant variables detailed in Section 3.2).

3.2. Variables

Our dependent variable is self-reported turnout. As our surveys were post-election surveys, we simply assessed respondents' self-reported turnout by asking whether they had participated in the (state or federal) election (with "yes" coded as 1 and "no" as 0).

Our main independent variables are individuals' internal political efficacy and their class background. Our measures of internal political efficacy differ slightly between the two surveys. The Schleswig-Holstein survey contains a single item for internal political efficacy: "I am confident that I can take an active role in a group that engages in political issues" (In German: "*Ich traue mir zu, in einer Gruppe, die sich mit politischen Fragen befasst, eine aktive Rolle zu übernehmen*"). While internal political efficacy is usually measured by two items, several other studies, including the German Longitudinal Election Study's long-time online tracking panel, also only incorporate one item for internal efficacy. In the Brandenburg and Saxony survey, internal efficacy is measured by two items: "I understand important political issues" and "I am confident that I can actively participate in political discussions" (In German: "*Wichtige politische Fragen kann ich gut verstehen und einschätzen*" and "*Ich traue mir zu, mich an einem Gespräch über politische Fragen aktiv zu beteiligen*"). In all instances, responses are recorded on a five-point *agree-disagree* scale. As the items correlate strongly in the case of the Brandenburg and Saxony survey (as measured by a Pearson's correlation coefficient of 0.59, and a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.74), and do so for both high (r of 0.6 and alpha of 0.75) and low social classes (r of 0.56 and alpha of 0.72), we translated them into a five-point index by taking the mean of the responses to both items.

To measure class background, we asked respondents in both surveys to which social class they would (subjectively) allocate their parental home, offering six ordinal response categories: lower class, working class, lower middle class, mid-middle class, upper middle class, and upper class. We coded the first three categories as indicative of having a lower-class background and the last three as having higher-class background. According to our coding, about 25% of respondents in Schleswig-Holstein and 33% of respondents in Brandenburg and Saxony have lower-class backgrounds (the modal category was, as in other surveys, "mid-middle class"). These shares are similar to those in other established surveys, as we show in Appendix 8 in the Supplementary File. In Appendix 5 in the Supplementary File, we alternatively replicate our analyses with parental education instead of social class, which is available in the Schleswig-Holstein survey only. In the case that at least one parent attained "Abitur," the educational level that qualifies one for tertiary education, we coded this as "parents with higher education"; all other instances were coded as "low." The results regarding parental education are similar to those presented in the main body of the article.

All analyses include several control variables. With regard to demographics, we control for migration background, age, and gender. For the Schleswig-Holstein survey, migration background is based on an item asking respondents whether they or their family have a migration background (with *yes* coded as 1 and *no*

coded as 0). In the Brandenburg and Saxony survey, we treat all respondents who report that at least one of their parents was not born in Germany as having a migration background. Age is based on registered data on respondents' dates of birth. With regard to gender, the Schleswig-Holstein survey distinguishes between female and male, while the Brandenburg and Saxony survey also offers "diverse" as an answer.

Beyond these demographic controls, we also control for the type of school individuals attended. In Germany, education policy falls under the authority of the federal states; school types, tracking age, and other aspects of the educational system thus differ across states. In all three states in our study, the education systems have one school type that exclusively offers an academic/general school track (*Gymnasium*) and several school types that offer primarily or only non-academic/vocational tracks (at the level of secondary education, these are *Oberschule* in Brandenburg and in Saxony, *Gesamtschule* in Brandenburg, and *Gemeinschaftsschule* in Schleswig-Holstein). Since individuals' class backgrounds correlate with their school track, we expect that including school type as a control variable reduces the coefficient on social class.

We also control for respondents' levels of political interest, which is strongly predictive of turnout (e.g., Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Prior, 2010; Verba et al., 1995), and correlates with internal political efficacy as well. In the Schleswig-Holstein study, we further control for sense of civic duty to vote, which is another important predictor of turnout (Feitosa et al., 2020). In the Saxony and Brandenburg survey, we control for eligibility in the EU election that took place earlier in the year and for federal states.

Finally, we estimate additional models that account for alternative mobilizing factors. Specifically, we control for parental turnout as reported by respondents, respondents' assessments of how many of their friends voted, and the frequency of political discussion with friends and family (measured as the number of days on which politics was discussed with friends or family in the last week before the election; for distributions of these by social class, see Figures A1 to A7 in Appendix 2 in the Supplementary File).

3.3. Analytical Strategy

To test H1, we focus on the first wave of each survey and regress respondents' self-reported turnout in the first election based on their family's social class, then add internal political efficacy. We expect diminishing differences between advantaged and disadvantaged groups upon the inclusion of internal efficacy; this would show that the association between class background and turnout is (partly) explained by individuals' internal efficacy. For testing H2, we expand upon the analyses from H1 by adding an interaction term between internal efficacy and social class.

Finally, to test H3, we regress individuals' second turnout based on their first turnout, social class, and the interaction between the two variables. In additional analyses, we further include individuals' internal efficacy measured in wave one (after the first election) to test whether internal efficacy accounts for the link between first and second turnouts. In each of these analytical steps, we use linear probability models. In the models based on the Brandenburg and Saxony surveys, we additionally include the state to control for differences—e.g., in voting age—between states.

4. Findings

We begin with a descriptive graph before discussing our regression analyses in more detail. Figure 1 shows the distribution of internal political efficacy among individuals with lower—and higher-class backgrounds in the two sets of surveys. In both surveys, we see that differences between individuals with lower and higher-class backgrounds are particularly large in the category of *very low* internal political efficacy. In both surveys, around twice as many individuals with lower-class backgrounds than those with higher-class backgrounds indicate that they have very low internal efficacy. With regard to *very high* internal efficacy, similarly, the share of individuals with lower-class backgrounds is lower than the share of highly efficacious individuals with higher-class backgrounds, in particular in the Brandenburg and Saxony survey. These findings indicate significant class-based differences in efficacy beliefs, while also showing that there are sufficient case numbers for all combinations of efficacy and class to allow for robust multiple regression analysis.

Continuing our descriptive assessment, Table 1 displays mean turnout rates for the different social groups in waves one and two of the surveys. The first column provides turnout rates for all respondents in the first waves, the middle column shows the turnout rates in the first waves among all those who participated in both waves (i.e., the sample we use to test H3), and the third column reports turnout rates for respondents in the second waves. Respondents' self-reported levels of turnout are higher than official turnout rates, but not more so than in other reputable election surveys—as detailed in Appendix 7 in the Supplementary File. It is not surprising that we see a well-known pattern of self-selection (cf. Granberg & Holmberg, 1991; Sciarini & Goldberg, 2017; Selb & Munzert, 2013) in our survey as well.

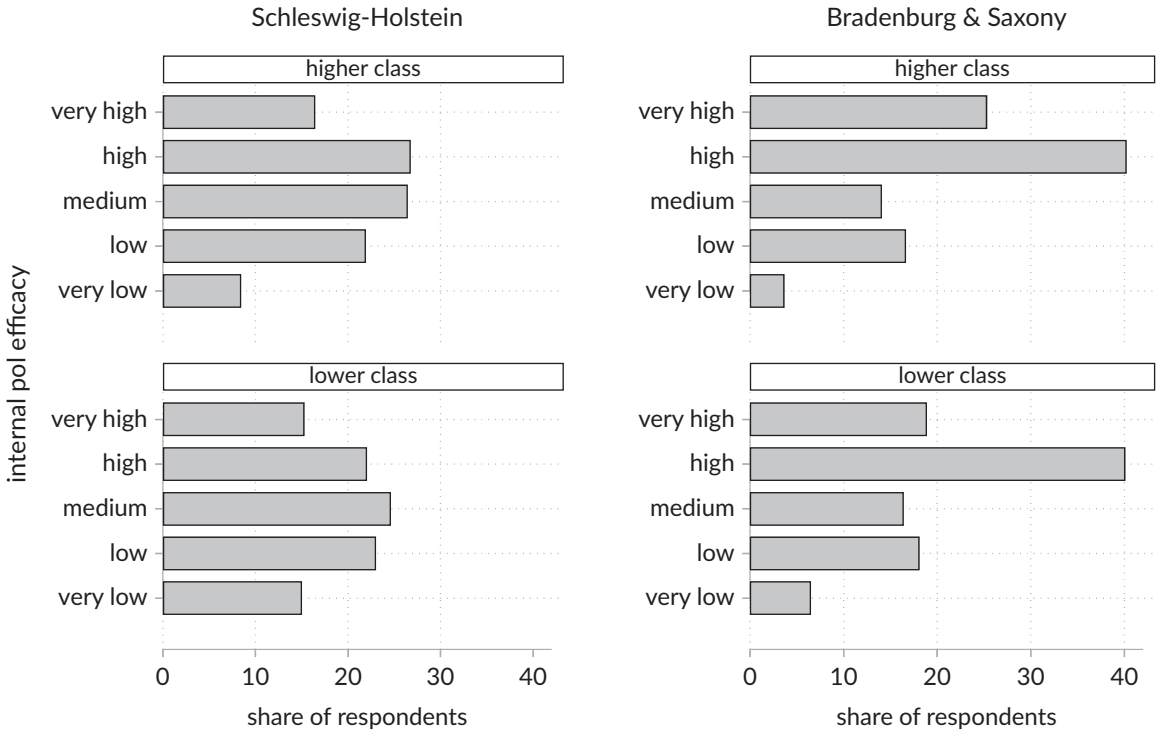

Figure 1. Distribution of internal political efficacy in the two sets of studies.

Table 1. Turnout rates among individuals with lower and higher-class backgrounds in the two sets of surveys.

	Turnout W1 — Full sample mean (sd)	Turnout W1 — Panel sample mean (sd)	Turnout W2 — Panel sample mean (sd)
Schleswig-Holstein			
Lower class	0.73 (0.447) *N* = 655	0.85 (0.357) *N* = 135	0.95 (0.223) *N* = 135
Higher class	0.86 (0.349) *N* = 2,015	0.87 (0.336) *N* = 417	0.94 (0.238) *N* = 417
Brandenburg & Saxony			
Lower class	0.80 (0.401) *N* = 608	0.89 (0.310) *N* = 187	0.93 (0.255) *N* = 187
Higher class	0.92 (0.274) *N* = 1,563	0.95 (0.224) *N* = 512	0.97 (0.157) *N* = 512

Reporting bias aside, self-reported turnout is higher among individuals from higher classes than among those from lower classes, as expected. Although this difference is most pronounced in the first waves of the surveys, it also applies to the reduced panel sample in the first waves and to the second waves. The smaller class-related difference in turnout in the reduced sample respective to second waves compared to the full sample in the first waves is due to self-selection: individuals who stayed in the panel were also those who were more likely to turn out. More concretely, non-random attrition implies that individuals who were less interested in the topics of the surveys—i.e., politics—also were less likely to turn out and less likely to respond to the second-wave questionnaire. Their dropping out thus leads to higher mean turnout rates in the second survey waves. Such non-random attrition might bias our results. In order to address this concern, we re-estimate the main models using only individuals with full information on the relevant indicators in both waves (see Appendix 6 in the Supplementary File); the results are very similar to those reported in the main sections.

The fact that we observe higher turnout rates in the second waves than in the first waves of the surveys is driven by the reporting bias just discussed and by the first election being "second-order" (state) and the second election being "first-order" (national). Again, we note that this latter aspect of the sequence of elections is common in multilevel systems, where an individual's first eligibility may occur in a municipal, state-level, or national election depending on their birth date.

Turning to the analytical results, we start with our first hypothesis, expecting that the association between individuals' class background and their turnout is weaker once we control for their internal efficacy (i.e., that internal efficacy helps to explain the lower turnout among individuals with lower-class backgrounds). Figure 2 illustrates our regression results for the key coefficients: Individuals with lower-class backgrounds are significantly less likely to indicate turnout in their first-ever election than those with higher-class backgrounds. The size of the turnout gap between those from higher and those from lower-class backgrounds amounts to over 10 percentage points in both sets of surveys. Internal efficacy, in turn, is positively related to turnout: individuals with high internal efficacy are around 5 percentage points more likely to have turned out in their first election than individuals with a medium level of internal efficacy.

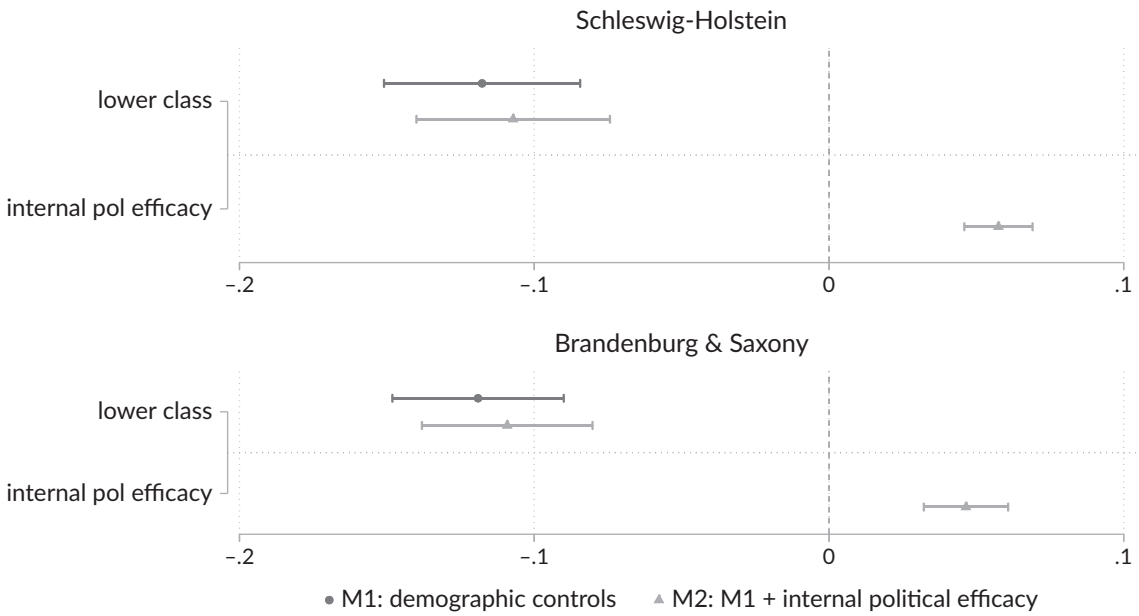

Figure 2. Evidence on H1: Association of social class and internal efficacy with turnout. Notes: Results of linear probability models: point estimates with 95% CIs of coefficients on internal efficacy and social class; dependent variable = first turnout (full results in in the Supplementary File, Appendix 4, Tables A3 and A4).

However, while the point estimate on those with a lower-class background decreases slightly after the inclusion of individuals' internal political efficacy (model 2, marked with a grey triangle in the figure), the confidence intervals overlap substantially, indicating that the decrease in coefficient size is not statistically significant. This implies that, although disadvantaged individuals have lower internal efficacy, this does not contribute much to explaining their lower turnout rates in their first elections.

We tested the robustness of this result by adding further variables that could lead individuals to turn out in their first elections: school type, political interest, sense of civic duty to vote (only in the Schleswig-Holstein study), eligibility in the previous EU election (only in the Brandenburg and Saxony study), turnout of parents and friends, and political discussion with parents and friends. Most of these variables barely change the coefficients on respondents' backgrounds (see Appendix 3 and Figures A8a and A8b in the Supplementary File). However, there are two exceptions. First, parental turnout reduces the effect of social class, which suggests that this mobilizing factor contributes significantly to the turnout gap between individuals with different class backgrounds. Second, political interest reduces the coefficient on internal efficacy due to the strong positive correlation between these two political predispositions.

A central limitation of our approach is that our surveys measure internal efficacy and self-reported turnout concurrently. As successful turnout might boost internal efficacy, in particular among disadvantaged individuals with lower such beliefs (Condon & Holleque, 2013; Gecas, 1989; Gerber et al., 2003; Melton, 2014; Shineman, 2018), the results here may understate the importance of internal efficacy, thus representing conservative estimates. That is, if individuals from lower-class backgrounds have profited more from their first turnout experiences in terms of their internal efficacy than individuals from higher-class backgrounds, their levels of internal efficacy are less different after their first election than before.

Our second hypothesis posits that internal political efficacy is more strongly correlated with turnout among disadvantaged individuals than those with an advantaged family background. To test this, we focus on the interaction between individuals' internal efficacy and family backgrounds in predicting turnout (all measured in the first waves of the surveys). Figure 3 illustrates the results of the respective analyses by showing the average marginal effect of internal efficacy on the first turnout by social class.

As expected, the coefficients on internal efficacy are larger among individuals with lower-class backgrounds in both surveys. Although the confidence intervals slightly overlap, the coefficients are statistically significantly different from each other at a significance level of 0.05 in both studies, as evidenced by statistically significant coefficient estimates on the interaction between internal efficacy and social class (see Appendix 4, Tables A5 and A6 in the Supplementary File). This is in line with our second hypothesis, suggesting that internal efficacy is indeed more important for turnout among individuals with lower-class backgrounds.

Substantively, the coefficient on internal efficacy for lower-class respondents is almost twice as large as it is for higher-class respondents. The expected differences in turnout between two lower-class respondents with low and high internal efficacy amount to over 30 percentage points. These results also hold when using a reduced sample composed of individuals with full information on the relevant variables in waves 1 and 2 of the surveys, i.e., those who did not drop out (see Appendix 6, Figure A15 in the Supplementary File).

In additional models, we add several further variables to our main models to test whether our results are robust. Adding school type, political interest, duty to vote (in Schleswig-Holstein), eligibility in the EU election (in Brandenburg/Saxony), political discussion with parents and friends, and turnout among parents and friends sometimes decreases the coefficient on internal efficacy, but the general pattern remains the same—for details, please consult Appendix 3 (Figure A9) in the Supplementary File. This confirms that internal efficacy is a particularly important resource for turnout among individuals from lower social classes.

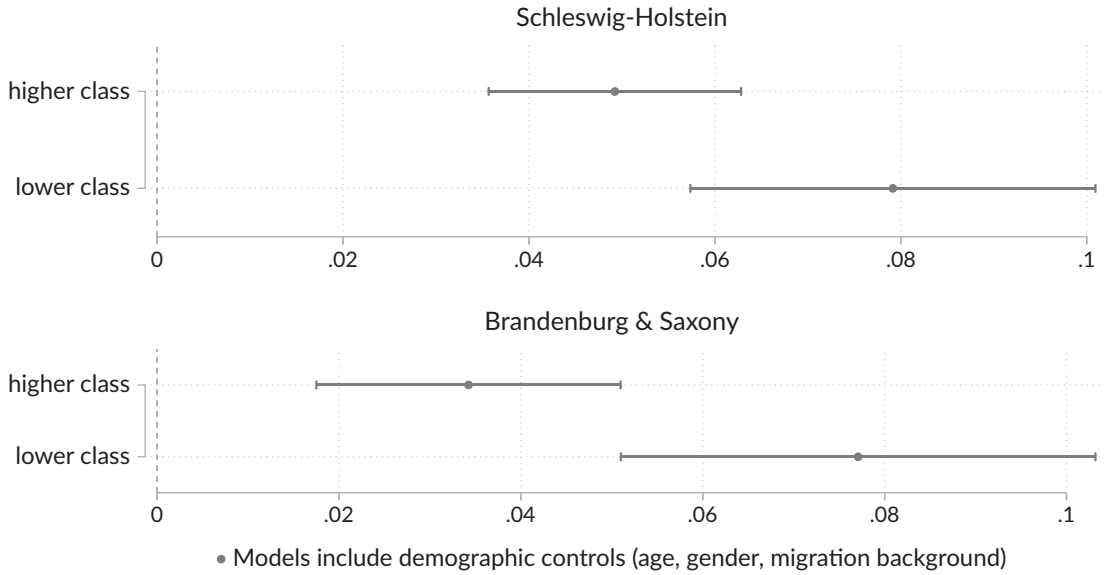

Figure 3. Evidence on H2: Average marginal effect of political efficacy on the first turnout by social class. Notes: Results of linear probability models; average marginal effect of internal efficacy on turnout by social class with 95% CIs; dependent variable = first turnout (all measured in waves 1 of the studies, full results in Appendix 4, Tables A5 and A6 in the Supplementary File).

Finally, we turn to our last hypothesis, which stated that first-time turnout would be a strong predictor of second turnout regardless of an individual's family background and irrespective of their internal efficacy. Figure 4 shows the results of our analyses by plotting the average marginal effect of the first turnout on the second turnout by social class.

The results confirm our final hypotheses: First turnout is a strong predictor of second turnout among individuals from both advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds. The point estimates are clearly larger for individuals with lower-class backgrounds but are seldom statistically significant, as evidenced by strongly overlapping confidence intervals. Overlapping confidence intervals notwithstanding, the coefficient on first-time turnout is significantly different between respondents with higher and those with lower-class backgrounds in Brandenburg/Saxony when controlling for internal efficacy, as evidenced by statistically significant coefficients in the interaction between first turnout and class in Table A8, Appendix 4 in the Supplementary File.

As hypothesized, including individuals' internal political efficacy after their first election (see model 2, marked in grey in Figure 4) does not significantly change that pattern. In line with our expectations based on the respective literature, once individuals from lower social classes have successfully turned out in their first election, they are as likely as their peers from higher social classes to turn out in their second election. Hence, we agree with Dinas (2012, p. 432) that "it seems that once prior turnout record is taken into account, few things seem to matter"—including internal efficacy. However, we underline that these results constitute a conservative test of the habituation effect, as the second election is a strongly mobilizing, so-called first-order national election, reducing the importance of habituation.

Again, we tested whether our results were robust to the inclusion of additional variables that might influence second turnout (see Appendix 3, Figure A10 in the Supplementary File). Adding political interest and duty to

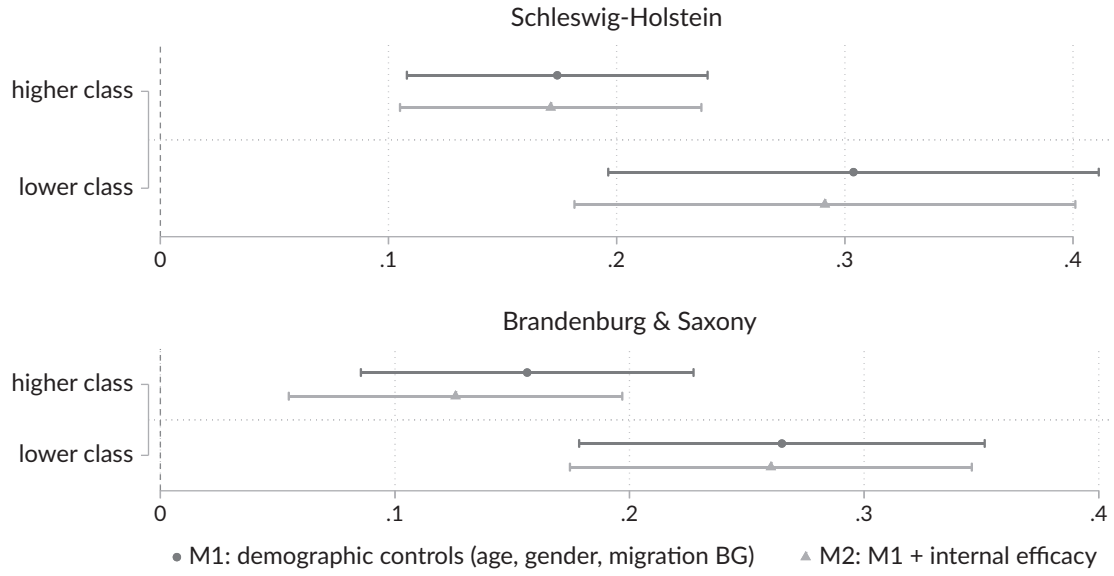

Figure 4. Evidence on H3: Average marginal effect of the first turnout on the second turnout by social class. Notes: Results of linear probability models; average marginal effect of first turnout on second turnout by social class; dependent variable = second turnout (full models in Appendix 4, Tables A7 and A8 in the Supplementary File).

vote does not change coefficients much; one reason might be that these aspects already shaped first turnouts and matter less for second elections, just like internal efficacy. In contrast, adding turnout among family and friends somewhat reduces the size of the coefficients of first turnout on second turnout among all groups, which suggests that mobilization by politically active social networks is important for the second election.

To summarize, based on two surveys among young voters from three German states, we find that individuals with lower-class backgrounds have lower internal efficacy and lower turnout rates than their peers from higher-class backgrounds. For both groups, internal efficacy is a strong predictor of their turnout. Yet, the lower levels of internal efficacy among more disadvantaged individuals do not seem to be the main reason for their lower turnout rates. Nevertheless, and in line with our second hypothesis, internal efficacy is more strongly associated with first turnouts among individuals from lower-class backgrounds and is less important for individuals from higher classes. Focusing on the association between first and second turnout, we find barely any differences between individuals from different social classes, which is in line with our third hypothesis. If anything, the first turnout is somewhat more important for the second turnout among individuals with lower-class backgrounds.

5. Conclusion

This article examined the interplay between young citizens' family backgrounds and their internal political efficacy. Based on original panel surveys in three federal states in Germany, we examined how class background and political efficacy relate to turnout for individuals' first election and how this experience predicts participation in the subsequent election. We focused on a sequence of elections that is becoming increasingly common in multilevel systems: a second-order (in our case: state-level) election being the first election for the newly enfranchised, and a first-order (national-level) election being the second.

In line with previous research, we showed that internal efficacy and having a higher-class background are positively associated with turnout in a newly enfranchised citizen's first election. Going beyond previous studies, we provided preliminary evidence that efficacy beliefs are more important for first turnout among younger citizens from lower-class backgrounds than for their more advantaged peers. Individuals from lower-class backgrounds have, on average, lower belief in their own capacity to navigate the political world, and at the same time, internal political efficacy is more important for their first-ever turnout than it is for newly enfranchised citizens from more advantaged family backgrounds. These results highlight the importance of strengthening the efficacy beliefs of children from lower-class families, for example through political education inside and outside schools to compensate for what their families cannot provide and to prevent long-term inequalities in political participation.

Once a young person has managed to overcome the hurdle of turnout for the first election, the likelihood of turnout in the second election is very high, independent of their social class and other predictors of turnout, including internal efficacy. At the same time, those who fail to vote in their first election will be harder to mobilize. Hence, our results highlight the importance of equal participation in young citizens' first-ever elections for the sake of greater political equality in later elections.

Despite using a large-scale, register-based panel survey of newly enfranchised young citizens, our study has some limitations. First, we have no baseline measure of individuals' internal political efficacy prior to their

first election. Thus, we cannot make any strong causal claims. For further research on young citizens' political behavior, researchers should consider surveying the newly enfranchised both before and after their first elections.

Second, in wave 2, conducted on the occasion of the national elections 2017 and 2021, there were very few non-voters left in the sample. We cannot disentangle to what extent this is due to generally higher participation rates in national elections (assessed in wave 2) and to what extent it is due to biased attrition by self-declared non-voters. Answering these questions is important, as the interplay between social class, internal efficacy beliefs, and turnout is crucial for shaping the long-term trajectory of turnout and political inequalities in established democracies. Therefore, we hope that future research will shed further light on these mechanisms, for instance by also studying the association between internal efficacy and turnout in other constellations of the elections, such as with an alternative sequence of the levels of the elections for the newly enfranchised.

Finally, in this contribution, we focused on internal efficacy beliefs as one of the most relevant prerequisites for young persons' turnout. Evidently, this is not to say that other preconditions, such as political interest, external efficacy beliefs, or sentiments of duty to vote, are irrelevant. Future research should use similar designs to test whether our arguments and findings also apply to other political predispositions.

Despite these limitations, our study provides important insights into how newly enfranchised citizens are socialized into voting by showing that internal political efficacy is a stronger predictor of turnout among the first-time enfranchised from lower-class backgrounds. This finding suggests that enhancing the internal political efficacy of these individuals has the potential to diminish the social gap in turnout. Young people from higher SES backgrounds, in contrast, are much less dependent on their internal efficacy because they are politically mobilized in diverse ways. For example, they attend higher educational tracks, show more consumption of (political) media, and have a higher likelihood of living in politicized and politically active families and peer groups.

Thus, to counter the increasing social inequality in political participation that emerges in individuals' first elections, it might be promising to offer adolescents from lower-class backgrounds more opportunities to strengthen their internal political efficacy. In this regard, schools, voluntary associations, or NGOs could support and encourage young people from less advantaged backgrounds on how to take control of their political lives, e.g., by informing them about politics more generally, by discussing elections and their importance, and by supporting the newly enfranchised in overcoming the costs of first-time voting.

Acknowledgments

We thank Sabrina Meyer, Nadja Wehl, and the participants of the In_Equality Conference 2024 as well as the anonymous reviewers for their incredibly valuable feedback and support.

Funding

This research was conducted as part of the research group *FOR 5173: Reconfiguration and Internalization of Social Structure*, which is funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation)—Projektnummer 439346934. The surveys in Brandenburg and Saxony were funded through grants by *Otto Brenner Foundation* (project numbers 2019-100 and 2021-101).

Conflict of Interests

In this article, editorial decisions were undertaken by Sabrina Mayer (University of Bamberg).

Data Availability

Replication files are available in the Harvard Dataverse (https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/WMYQ5D).

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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Politics and Governance
2025 • Volume 13 • Article 9179
https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.9179

ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

After the Storm: Comparing the Determinants of Young People's Protest Behaviour Across South European Contexts

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Submitted: 12 August 2024 **Accepted:** 8 October 2024 **Published:** 5 February 2025

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Unequal Participation Among Youth and Immigrants: Analyzing Political Attitudes and Behavior in Societal Subgroups" edited by Arndt Leininger (Chemnitz University of Technology) and Sabrina Mayer (University of Bamberg), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.i426

Abstract

Young people's mass mobilisation has been key for restructuring political competition in Southern Europe in the last decade. From a comparative standpoint, this article examines the drivers of protest in Greece, Italy, and Spain. The main results point towards a strong heterogeneity among the three cases: while women and people with left-libertarian attitudes form the basis of youth-driven contemporary street protest in Spain, these findings are partially confirmed for Italy and ruled out for Greece. We argue that protest legacies and trajectories need to go together with politicisation and issue salience to get individual-level correlates of protest activated—however, our mixed empirical evidence suggests that some context-specific conditions intervene in this relationship. Our results point towards a strong heterogeneity in the profile of protesters, inviting us to question the use of Southern Europe as a valid unit of analysis for the study of contemporary social movements and protests.

Keywords

deprivation; gender; left-right ideology; social movements; Southern Europe; youth politics

1. Introduction

Southern Europe was a hotspot for popular dissent as protesters contended with the austerity measures that governments advanced in response to the 2008 Great Recession. In these protests, young actors played a key role. While academic interest in generational aspects in Southern Europe is gaining momentum (e.g., García-Albacete & Lorente, 2021; Tsatsanis et al., 2021), there is little empirical and comparative evidence on the determinants of protest behaviour across young people in the region—with some

exceptions, e.g., Lima and Artiles (2013). Which factors lead young people to protest? Are these factors constant across different countries in contemporary (pre-Covid) Southern Europe? These questions are relevant because, beyond the depths of the Great Recession, young people continue to play a central role in organising dissent through contemporary mobilisations, such as initiatives in solidarity with migrants and refugees, feminist marches, struggles for women's rights, and climate justice initiatives testify (della Porta, 2019; Sloam et al., 2022).

Specifically, this article focuses on grievances, gender, and left–right ideological orientation as micro-drivers of protest among young Greeks, Italians, and Spaniards. From a comparative standpoint, we come to three key findings: (a) while young Greek women did not protest more than men, women are clearly overrepresented among Spanish young protesters; (b) in contrast, socio-economic grievances do not account for young people's protest participation in any of the three countries; and crucially, (c) while protest is primarily a cultural left-libertarian affair in Italy, young left-wing people (both in cultural and socio-economic terms) are more likely to protest in Spain—political values and issue position do not emerge as relevant predictors of young Greeks' protest behaviour. The empirical analyses draw on original survey data with booster samples for young people conducted in the framework of the EURYKA collaborative research project, which includes representative samples of young Greek, Italian, and Spanish citizens aged between 18 and 34 years (N = 6,801; see https://www.unige.ch/sciences-societe/euryka/home).

This piece of research adds value in two ways: First, it sheds light on the contextual conditions under which correlates of young people's protests get activated (or not). The political context in which protest occurs is socially constructed, subject to different interpretations, producing changes in the citizens' motivations to protest (Gómez-Román & Sabucedo, 2014). We argue that protest legacies and trajectories, on the one hand, and politicisation processes and issue salience, on the other hand, need to be coupled together for protest to ensue. Second, not only patterns and trajectories of protest have differed dramatically in Southern Europe over the last decade (della Porta et al., 2016; Kriesi et al., 2020a) but also the profile of young protesters changes dramatically from country to country, as shown throughout. The picture that emerges invites us to question the use of the region as a valid unit of analysis for the study of contemporary street protests.

2. Austerity, Feminism, and Migration: A Decade of Contention in Southern Europe

The 2007–2009 global financial meltdown was met with a set of austerity policies that several national governments and international institutions implemented. Specifically, Greece, Italy, and Spain share "significant features in their labour market policy and wage-setting institutions and were subject to comparably strong exogenous pressures for structural reforms, internal devaluation and growth model reorientation in the Great Recession context" (Bulfone & Tassinari, 2021, p. 515). In the shadow of austerity, standards of inequality increased, and life conditions worsened for many sectors of the population (Blyth, 2013). According to Eurostat (2020), people at risk of poverty or social exclusion increased dramatically between 2006 and 2014 among Greeks (29.3% in 2006 to 36% in 2014), Italians (24% in 2006 to 29.2% in 2014), and Spaniards (25.9% in 2006 to 28.3% in 2014).

The *indignados* ("outraged") campaign that started in May 2011 gave rise to Spain's largest mobilisation not organised by unions or political parties in the country's recent democratic history and formed part of a broader cycle of anti-austerity protests (Carvalho, 2022; Portos, 2021; Romanos & Sádaba, 2022).

Meanwhile, data from Greek police records reveal that over 20,200 protest events were staged between May 2010 and March 2014 (Diani & Kousis, 2014). In sharp contrast to Spain and Greece, Italian anti-austerity protests consisted of weak, fragmented, scattered events, with traditional trade unions playing a prominent role, challengers being unable to forge broad coalitions among social and political milieus, and no campaign comparable to the Spanish *15M/indignados* or the Greek *aganaktismenoi* (Andretta, 2018). Also, direct social actions and alternative solidarity-based organisations proliferated in Southern Europe in 2011–2015, such as barter networks, soup kitchens, cooperatives, food banks, consumer/producer networks, social economy enterprises, and free legal advice (Kalogeraki, 2018; Loukakis, 2018). Since 2014/2015, the processes of institutionalisation have come into play in the three countries, with the challengers progressively abandoning confrontational and non-institutional repertoires and resorting to more routinised formal channels of political influence. Parties that were linked to anti-austerity, anti-political status quo, and street protests (such as Syriza, Movimento 5 Stelle, and Podemos) gained momentum (della Porta et al., 2017; Mosca & Quaranta, 2017).

Besides austerity and inequality, other fronts of contention were feminist as well as migration and refugee solidarity, especially after 2015. On the one hand, authoritarian legacies and familial social protection mean that Southern European cases are often lumped as belonging to the conservative gender regimes, entrenching unequal gender relations, and restricting women's access to the public sphere—though they are increasingly transforming into political economies of generalised insecurity (Alonso et al., 2023). Italian feminist milieus gained momentum after the emergence of the Non Una Di Meno ("Not One [Woman] Less") trans-feminist meta-organisation in 2016, in which young women were clearly overrepresented (Chironi, 2019). With hundreds of thousands participating in events like the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women in November (2016–2018), the movement expanded at the local level through permanent monthly assemblies. Similarly, *El País* stated in March 2018:

> This year it was overwhelming, with hundreds of protests taking place across the country, a general 24-hour strike, partial walkouts by five million workers, and massive demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of people. Its success placed Spain at the cusp of a global movement. (Portos, 2019, p. 1463; see Campillo, 2019)

While the Greek situation was different, with no explicitly articulated feminist values and principles, social movements of the crisis promoted modes of feminist solidarity in their shift from claim-based street repertoires to locally embedded solidarity initiatives, which addressed social needs, e.g., food, shelter, health, and education (Kouki & Chatzidakis, 2021).

On the other hand, Greece, Italy, and Spain are part of the "soft underbelly" of the EU. These countries experienced a transition in the 1990s from migrant-sending to migrant-hosting countries, welcoming African and Asian migrants with no special historical, geopolitical, or cultural ties. Solidarity campaigns with refugees flourished following the "long summer of migration" in 2015, when more than 60 million people worldwide were forced to abandon their homes, from places of first arrival to places of passage, and, subsequently, to places of destination (della Porta & Steinhilper, 2021). For instance, Greece saw one million people passing through the country between 2015 and 2016. The small island of Lesvos, with a population of roughly 86,000 people, witnessed 504,000 people arrive on its shores in 2015 alone (Oikonomakis, 2018). Yet, Greek society reacted largely in solidarity towards refugees and up to 58% showed sympathy towards

moving populations. Organisations focused on meeting the pressing needs of incoming flows of people, combining solidarity initiatives with raising public awareness and advocacy as the "refugee crisis" unfolded (Oikonomakis, 2018). In Italy, a major march targeted the draft law on security policy prepared by the Minister of Internal Affairs Matteo Salvini in November 2018. The event gained prominence due to the presence of Domenico "Mimmo" Lucano, the Mayor of Riace, Calabria, for 15 years, who was known for his migrant-hosting and integration plans (Wallis, 2019). The rally became a major opportunity in which to publicly contest racism, anti-migration policies, and the criminalisation of minorities in Italy ("Roma, migliaia in piazza," 2018). In contrast with the Greek and Italian cases, Spain did not experience a massive inflow of refugees during the so-called "refugee crisis"—only 1% of asylum-seekers who filed an application in Europe during 2015 did it in Spain (Galarraga Cortázar, 2017). While direct solidarity actions were less frequent, a strong movement in solidarity with refugees emerged in the country, which involved initiatives at the local institutional level (e.g., the town halls of Barcelona and Madrid launched the "Cities of Welcome" and "safe cities" networks; see Bazurli, 2019) as well as street protests ("Barcelona protest to support," 2017; Piquer, 2015).

All in all, Greece, Italy, and Spain present a great fit for comparison. Following the logic of "most similar systems design," this study covers three countries with similarities in terms of labour market, welfare, gender, and migration policy frameworks, but also increased internal devaluation and levels of inequality in the aftermath of the Great Recession—these aspects particularly affecting younger cohorts. These shared characteristics among South European countries add on many others that social scientists have discussed in depth for decades, including sociodemographic features (e.g., late home leaving; all EU functional urban areas with four/five million inhabitants are in Southern Europe), dominant values about private life (the central role of the family and forms of primary solidarity), how laws are produced or welfare systems work (following a transfer model based on occupational status, with major institutional fragmentation, and national health systems aiming at universal coverage; see Ferrera, 1996; Martin, 1996).

Yet, when it comes to the dependent variable (i.e., youth-driven protest), we observe a great deal of variation. While Greece and Spain saw widely attended waves of protest at times of austerity (2009–2013), protests in Italy were smaller, loosely coordinated, and scattered across time and space. From 2014 onward, Italy and especially Spain saw large numbers of street protests (della Porta et al., 2016; Portos, 2021), with Greece becoming the shadow case. In this period, feminism and migrant/racism issues became more contentious and, together with economic issues, became central to protests. While there is scant available empirical evidence, protest event data from Kriesi et al. (2020b) already signalled a similar pattern for the 2013–2015 period (feminist and women's protest events are coded as "culturally liberal" or "other"; protests around migration can fall under the categories "culturally liberal," "other," or "xenophobic"). What we do not know is if, and to what extent, issues that structured political conflict and contestation over the last decade have translated into different patterns of individual-level protest participation for young people across the three Southern European countries.

3. Accounting for Young People's Protest Participation: Gender, Grievances, and Ideological Orientation

Young people deserve special attention as they have shown distinctive features in terms of political values, attitudes, and mobilisation (Grasso & Giugni, 2022). As della Porta (2019, p. 1408) notes, contemporary

youth suffers from "high levels of unemployment, precarisation, decrease in credit access, cuts in social services, changes in consumption patterns, and a grim outlook for their future…[however, they] are not in general apathetic, disengaged, antipolitical, or removed from political participation." Rather, a large part of contemporary youth has joined contentious politics, coming up with creative ideas for a more just and inclusive society (della Porta, 2019; Earl et al., 2017), a trend that is highly salient in Southern Europe. But what are the individual-level drivers of young people's protest behaviour?

First, women have higher barriers to political participation and they are supposedly less informed, less knowledgeable about politics, less socialised, and not as engaged in politics as men (McAdam, 1992; Schlozman et al., 1994). While the gender gap holds for traditional and conventional repertoires of action (Burns et al., 2001; Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010), evidence shows that (especially young) women prefer small-scale organisation and informal groups and are more prone towards less traditional, less conventional, and less visible forms of action and organisation (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010; Hooghe & Stolle, 2004). High levels of gendered economic and political discrimination, strong presence of women's organisations, and higher female population rates in the general population significantly increase women's nonviolent protests (Murdie & Peksen, 2015), with women being more likely than men to engage in a wide array of peaceful protest activities in egalitarian contexts (Dodson, 2015). In sum, in advanced democracies, men and women tend to have similar levels of protest activity, but (especially young) women engage more than men in nonconfrontational activities.

Gender regimes are key to account for cross-national differences in demonstration participation (Roth & Saunders, 2019). Austerity politics, which included deregulatory employment policies, budget cuts in gender equality policies, and restructuring of equality policies, changed Southern European gender regimes in more neoliberal and conservative directions (della Porta et al., 2022; Roth & Saunders, 2020). Not only austerity policies were met with citizens' contestation, but also feminist struggles unfolded. Indeed, young women's resistance towards anti-gender and anti-feminist campaigns might be associated with the insignificant gender gap in demonstrative-confrontational activities (Chironi, 2019). In recent times, gender has been a highly politicised issue in Italy and Spain, forging arenas for political socialisation of new cohorts of activists and the strong feminist movements being able to display high mobilisation capacity (Campillo, 2019; Chironi, 2019; Portos, 2019). In contrast, the Greek feminist movement remains weak and fragmented, with women's demands being mediated through other social representations (Gaitanou, 2017; Kouki & Chatzidakis, 2021), and women mostly engaging in small-scale less confrontational events (Kosyfologou, 2018). Importantly, low levels of street protesting among Greek feminist milieus went together with the low salience of the gender issue in the public debate, notwithstanding the very acute and lasting social impact of austerity measures—as public spending cuts and unemployment disproportionately impacted women's lives (Federici, 2012; Kosyfologou, 2018; "When the belt can't get any tighter," 2018). Accordingly, we should expect that:

> H1: Young females will be more likely to participate in protests than young men in Spain and Italy, but not in Greece.

Grievances and the feelings associated with them are troublesome matters or conditions (Snow et al., 1998). While economic strain tended to be regarded as a constant among the disadvantaged, increasing hardship during the Great Recession, inequality and discontent towards the political status quo led to a renewed interest in the sources of inequalities and their link to protest behaviour (e.g., della Porta, 2015; Grasso &

Giugni, 2016; Kern et al., 2015; Kurer et al., 2019). From a comparative vantage point, young and highly educated people with limited career perspectives on the labour market are overrepresented in anti-austerity protests (della Porta, 2015). With large *N* survey data, Kern et al. (2015) find support for a positive relationship between access to material resources and the level of political activity until 2008; but the direction of this association reverted from 2008 to 2010, with rises in unemployment leading to an increase in the level of non-institutionalised political participation. In their analysis of nine European countries—among them, Greece, Italy, and Spain—Grasso and Giugni (2016) argue that the impact of individual-level relative deprivation on protest is conditional upon opening macro-level political opportunities. Importantly, Kurer et al. (2019) introduce an important distinction between the level of grievances (i.e., structural economic disadvantage) and a change in grievances (i.e., the deterioration of economic prospects). While the latter increases political activity, the former unambiguously de-mobilises individuals. Moreover, the level of political mobilisation moderates this direct link between individual hardship and political activity: the presence of visible organised protest acts as a "signal" for political opportunities, hence, in a strongly mobilised environment, even structural economic disadvantage does not deter political participation (Kurer et al., 2019; see della Porta et al., 2022).

Focusing on Southern Europe, Rüdig and Karyotis (2014) find that relative deprivation is a relevant predictor of potential protest in Greece, but it does not predict who takes part in demonstrations or strikes. However, other pieces of evidence illustrate how anti-austerity protests were largely part of an integrated campaign and how "the roots of the campaign lay in the massive and sudden depletion of economic and social rights and well-being that Greek working—and middle-class citizens have suffered as a consequence of 'readjustment' policies" (Diani & Kousis, 2014, p. 401). While the most deprived sectors among Spanish youth do not protest more, some specific subgroups that were losers in relative terms during the recession, e.g., those who had a mortgage and depended on the income of a public employee or civil servant, were found to be more likely to join contentious activities (Portos, 2021). Also in Spain, both financial deprivation and grievances relating to the status and rights of workers/citizens were found to encourage mobilisation: crisis-related grievances triggered negative emotions and both anger and anxiety boosted individual protest likelihood (Galais & Lorenzini, 2017). However, the main socio-economic indicators that worsened dramatically in Italy between 2009 and 2014 (e.g., gross debt, unemployment rate, youth unemployment, and severe material deprivation) seem to have had a demobilising effect among the traditional constituency of progressive social movements, limiting (young) Italians' capacity to stage a coordinated response in the form of sustained mass mobilisations (Andretta, 2018, p. 101). While macroeconomics (monetary policy, inflation, and debt), economic activities (finance and banking), and labour and employment conditions kept being salient and highly politicised issues in public discourse during and in the aftermath of the Great Recession for our three countries (Zamponi & Bosi, 2016, p. 413), different trajectories of mobilisation of austerity anxieties—and the movements' capacity to politicise younger cohorts of activists around deprivation—lead to asymmetric cross-country expectations. Accordingly, we hypothesise that:

> H2: Direct experiences of material deprivation will increase the likelihood of protest participation among young Greek and Spanish citizens, but not among Italians.

While the thesis of the "normalisation" of protest suggests that political protest has become an integral part of contemporary life and is being adopted by ever more diverse constituencies (Meyer & Tarrow, 1998), contemporary street protest is still a foremost prerogative of the left: people with a progressive ideological

orientation are more mobilised in protest activities (Grasso & Giugni, 2016; Hutter & Kriesi, 2013; Torcal et al., 2016). Indeed, protesting is more common among culturally liberal individuals in the ideological camp that opposed the pre-democratic political order (Kostelka & Rovny, 2019). In the Southern Europe context, protest and unconventional politics have also been the main arenas for the left to express itself politically (Borbáth & Gessler, 2020, pp. 913–914). This may have to do with underlying values: Those with right-wing views subscribe to authoritarian values and favour orderly political action; left-leaning citizens share libertarian values and, hence, prefer unconventional and protest activities (Hutter & Kriesi, 2013, p. 293). As far as the emergence of new cleavages is concerned, the integration-demarcation argument sees conflict over cultural liberalism as one of the foundational elements that structures political competition in the age of globalisation (Kriesi et al., 2020a): While the empirical evidence points towards an increasing homogenisation of the structural basis of leftist movements, sociocultural specialists with libertarian and postmaterialist values remain the main protagonists of protests (Hutter & Kriesi, 2013). Considering specific issue positions, many of the South European challengers in 2017–2018 belonged to a generation that suffered from precarious job conditions, economic hardship, and dashed expectations, which in turn acted as key elements in their collective identification (Zamponi, 2019). While these "natives of the ruins" have been characterised as individualists, lacking the motivation to engage in collective action, their shared identity is framed and large by the precarious socio-economic context they have been struggling with (della Porta et al., 2022; Zamponi, 2019).

However, globalisation is also associated with decreasing national steering capacity over economic and social policy-making and the increased salience of cultural-immigration issues. Although "political mobilization around issues of immigration and ethnic relations…constitute since the early 1990s the most prominent and controversial fields of political contention in West European polities" (Koopmans et al., 2005, p. 3), they have been successfully mobilised by the populist radical right in the electoral arena. Instead, in a context of migratory crisis and high politicisation of the issue, street protests and solidarity initiatives with migrants and refugees are expected to encompass large sectors of the population, especially grassroots youth organizing groups (Terriquez & Milkman, 2021). In sum, young challengers will disproportionately hold left-libertarian values and progressive attitudes around highly politicised—and widely contentious—issues over the last decade in the South European region, such as socio-economic redistribution and migration (see Table 1). Specifically, we should expect that:

> H3: Holding authoritarian—as opposed to libertarian—values will decrease protest participation among young Greek, Italian, and Spanish citizens.
>
> H4: An opposition to socio-economic redistributive and egalitarian issues will decrease protest participation among young Greek, Italian, and Spanish citizens.
>
> H5: Negative attitudes towards migrants will decrease protest participation among young Greek, Italian, and Spanish citizens.

Table 1. Summary of the hypothesised direction of effects on protest participation for young people by Southern European country.

	Greece	Italy	Spain
H1: Sex (female)	o	+	+
H2: Deprivation	+	o	+
H3: Libertarian–authoritarian values	–	–	–
H4: Opposition to socio-economic redistribution	–	–	–
H5: Xenophobic attitudes	–	–	–

Notes: positive (+), negative (–), or null (o).

4. Data and Research Design

The EURYKA survey was fielded between 15 April and December 2018, covering Greece, Italy, and Spain. This database has a rare, unique structure, which makes it particularly fitting for this article. While the dataset is made up of at least 1,000 general population cases per country, it includes two booster samples of young people for each country. These consist of an oversample of 18–24-year-old people with at least 1,000 respondents per country, plus another subset of people aged 25–34 years (also with a minimum of 1,000 further cases for every country). As this research zooms in onto young people (defined as those aged between 18 and 34 years old), our representative sample of Internet users consists of 6,801 young individuals for the three countries (N_{GR} = 2,283; N_{IT} = 2,264; N_{ES} = 2,254). A specialised polling agency collected the data *ad hoc* through administered online panels using balanced country quotas in terms of sex, age, region, and education level to match national population statistics (for detailed sampling procedures, see EURYKA, 2018). To the best of my knowledge, there is no other available and reliable contemporary cross-sectional survey dataset that simultaneously (a) has a larger representative pool of young respondents than this; (b) covers the three countries under scrutiny (e.g., Greece is not covered in the European Social Survey between 2011–2019); and (c) includes information on protest participation and its correlates.

The dependent variable is a binary measurement of protest participation. Young respondents have participated in a protest if they have "attended [a] demonstration, march, or rally" in the last 12 months (see Supplementary File Appendix 2). Protest has distinct features as compared with other types of political action, being still nowadays the "modal" expression of social movement activism (Grasso & Giugni, 2016). While 15% of young Greek respondents and 12% of young Italians declared that they had joined a demonstration in the previous year, 29% of Spanish interviewees engaged in street protest.

Table 2 summarises the descriptive statistics of the predictors included in the main models—a correlation matrix is included in Table A1 in the Supplementary File. To measure sex, we use the question "What sex were you assigned at birth, on your birth certificate?" (0 = male; 1 = female). Grievances and the experience of economic strain are captured through resource deprivation that entails the disruption of quotidian everyday routines (Snow et al., 1998)—we include a binary indicator measuring whether the respondent acknowledges that they have "experienced real financial difficulties (e.g., could not afford food, rent, or electricity) in the past 12 months" or not. The left–right ideological self-placement scale is not a good indicator to assess protest participation from a comparative standpoint (Kostelka & Rovny, 2019). Instead, we measure libertarian–authoritarian values, socio-economic, and cultural-migration preferences. An index measures libertarian–authoritarian values that take the arithmetic average of the agreement with the

following three statements (5-point Likert scales: ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*): "A woman has to have children in order to be fulfilled"; "Abortion should not be allowed in any case"; "Homosexual couples should not be allowed to adopt children under any circumstances" ($Mean_{GR}$ = 2.59; SD_{GR} = 1.00; $Mean_{IT}$ = 2.25; SD_{IT} = 0.94; $Mean_{ES}$ = 1.65; SD_{ES} = 0.82). While opposition to redistribution is measured via agreement with the statement: "Government should decrease taxes a lot and spend much less on social benefits and services" (5-point Likert scale: 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*), an 11-point scale measures xenophobic attitudes through the statement: "[...country]'s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?"(with 0 = *enriched* and 10 = *undermined*).

Building on research that analyses the determinants of (young people's) protest behaviour, we also include control variables that measure *individual-level resources*; *political attitudes*; and *network exposure* (see Table 2; Schussman & Soule, 2005; Vráblíková, 2014).

First, we know that enhanced resources are linked to increased prospects for citizens' engagement in political action. As well as sex, certain socio-demographic features and personal conditions, such as age, education, and rural–urban domicile facilitate protest participation (Schussman & Soule, 2005). We measure the young respondent's age through a continuous indicator and use a 3-point interval-level variable that captures the highest level of education attained by them (primary, secondary, or tertiary education). In addition, a 5-point ordinal indicator provides a subjective description of how rural or urban the domicile of the respondent is, ranging from "a farm or home in the countryside" to "a big city" (see Supplementary File Appendix 2).

Second, besides political values and issue preferences, other political attitudes can predict protest activity (Beissinger, 2013). Using information on trust in 12 political institutions measured through 0–10 scales, we

Table 2. Summary statistics of variables included in the statistical analyses by country.

			Greece			Italy			Spain		
	Min.	*Max.*	*Mean*	*SD*	*N*	*Mean*	*SD*	*N*	*Mean*	*SD*	*N*
Protest	0	1	0.15	0.35	2,283	0.12	0.32	2264	0.29	0.45	2,254
Sex (female)	0	1	0.52	0.50	2,283	0.49	0.50	2264	0.48	0.50	2,254
Deprivation	0	1	0.53	0.50	2,283	0.29	0.45	2264	0.34	0.47	2,254
Opposition to socio-economic redistribution	1	5	3.11	1.11	2,283	3.08	1.14	2264	2.72	1.19	2,254
Xenophobic attitudes	0	10	5.38	2.85	2,283	4.75	2.71	2264	3.88	2.77	2,254
Libertarian–authoritarian scale	1	5	2.59	1.00	2,283	2.25	0.94	2264	1.65	0.82	2,254
Age	18	34	25.72	5.09	2,283	25.39	4.95	2264	25.50	5.01	2,254
Education	1	3	2.19	0.65	2,283	1.89	0.65	2264	2.00	0.86	2,254
Rural–urban	1	5	4.17	1.05	2,283	3.22	1.19	2264	3.81	1.06	2,254
Political trust	0	3.14	0.85	0.54	2,283	1.18	0.56	2264	1.16	0.59	2,254
Political interest	1	4	2.64	0.81	2,283	2.81	0.81	2264	2.82	0.84	2,254
Meeting friends	1	4	2.94	0.92	2,283	2.91	0.93	2264	2.71	0.91	2,254

ran a Principal Component Analysis and built a weighted summated index (Eigenvalue = 5.14, offering a one-component solution; see Supplementary File Appendix 2). This weighted index of political trust meets the minimum threshold of reliability (Cronbach's α = 0.90)—alternatively, we replace political trust with a 0–10 democratic satisfaction indicator (see Supplementary File Appendix 2; $Mean_{GR}$ = 3.51; SD_{GR} = 2.31; $Mean_{IT}$ = 4.23; SD_{IT} = 2.15; $Mean_{ES}$ = 4.16; SD_{ES} = 2.42). In addition, we account for the level of interest in politics, ranging from *not at all interested* (1) to *very interested* (4)—alternatively, we use internal political efficacy, which is measured through a 5-point Likert scale (see Supplementary File Appendix 2; $Mean_{GR}$ = 3.40; SD_{GR} = 0.98; $Mean_{IT}$ = 3.09; SD_{IT} = 1.07; $Mean_{ES}$ = 3.33; SD_{ES} = 1.07).

Third, network exposure and embeddedness are important predictors of protest participation (Beissinger, 2013; Schussman & Soule, 2005), especially among young college students (Munson, 2010). A 4-point ordinal variable captures how often during the past month the respondent has met socially with friends, ranging from *never* to *almost every day* (see Supplementary File Appendix 2).

5. Results and Discussion

Several regression models were fitted for each country, with young people's protest participation as the dependent variable. First, sex, deprivation, support for redistribution, and xenophobic attitudes predictors are included in models 1, 2, and 3, respectively. Then, controls measuring sociodemographic features were added (models 4, 5, and 6), also including political attitudes and network exposure covariates in models 7, 8, and 9 (Table 3). Table A2 in the Supplementary File replicates Table 3, keeping the country breakdown but (a) deleting support for redistribution and xenophobic attitudes and (b) replacing political trust and interest controls by satisfaction with democracy and internal political efficacy.

Overall, empirical evidence in support of the hypotheses is mixed. Young Spanish women are much more likely to protest than their male counterparts in the country: while the chances of having joined a lawful demonstration in the last 12 months are 19% on average for young male Spaniards, predicted probabilities rise to 32% for young Spanish women (Figures 1 and 2). In sharp contrast, there is no such gap for young Greeks, while for young Italians it is much smaller and not robust (predicted probabilities are 8% for Italian men and 11% for Italian women; see Figures 1 and 2). Hence, H1 is partially confirmed. At odds with the expectations, deprivation does not play a strong predicting role in young people's protest behaviour across South European countries: coefficients are never significant at the 5% level, thus H2 cannot be confirmed (Figures 1 and 3).

For the remaining hypotheses, empirical evidence is inconsistent across countries. While pro-redistribution attitudes are a key predictor of protesting among Spanish youth—*strongly disagreeing* with the statement "Government should decrease taxes a lot and spend much less on social benefits and services" relative to *strongly agreeing* increases the probability of protesting from 17% to 32%—they do not have an impact on the protest likelihood of young Italians and Greeks (Figures 1 and 4). However, xenophobic attitudes are negatively correlated with protesting among Italian youth: probabilities of protesting fluctuate between 5% and 15%, depending on whether the respondent believes migrants have come to "enrich" or "undermine" society and culture. Moreover, the probability of protesting decreased from 36% to 14% as young Spanish respondents embraced xenophobic positions, but these did not trigger young Greeks' protest behaviour (Figures 1 and 4). Similarly, young people with libertarian values are keener to protest than those with

Table 3. Logistic regressions for Greece (models 1, 2, and 3), Italy (models 4, 5, and 6) and Spain (models 7, 8, and 9).

	Greece						Italy						Spain					
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6		Model 7		Model 8		Model 9	
	Odds r.	SE	Odds r.	SE	Odds r.	SE	Odds r.	SE	Odds r.	SE	Odds r.	SE	Odds r.	SE	Odds r.	SE	Odds r.	SE
Sex (female)	1.00	0.12	0.93	0.20	1.05	0.13	1.10	0.14	1.13	0.15	1.36*	0.19	2.01***	0.20	1.97***	0.19	1.98***	0.21
Deprivation	1.25	0.15	1.31*	0.08	1.24	0.16	1.18	0.17	1.27	0.18	1.28	0.19	0.77*	0.08	0.82°	0.09	0.84	0.09
Opposition to socio-economic redistribution	0.92	0.05	0.93	0.03	0.95	0.05	0.92	0.05	0.95	0.06	1.00	0.06	0.73***	0.03	0.73***	0.03	0.82***	0.04
Xenophobic attitudes	1.00	0.02	1.00	0.02	0.98	0.02	0.86***	0.02	0.87***	0.02	0.89***	0.02	0.87***	0.02	0.88***	0.02	0.89***	0.02
Libertarian–authoritarian scale					1.12	0.08					.87	0.07					0.62***	0.05
Age			0.98	0.01	0.98	0.01			0.93***	0.01	0.93***	0.01			0.95***	0.01	0.96***	0.01
Education			1.22°	0.12	1.16	0.12			1.24°	0.14	1.01	0.12			1.08	0.07	0.99	0.06
Rural–urban			1.11°	0.07	1.08	0.07			1.07	0.06	1.03	0.06			1.03	0.05	1.03	0.05
Political trust					0.64***	0.08					.90	0.11					0.72***	0.07
Political interest					1.66***	0.13					2.06***	0.20					1.53***	0.10
Meeting friends					1.34***	0.10					1.44***	0.12					1.25***	0.07
Constant	0.20***	0.04	0.12***	0.05	0.02***	0.01	0.30***	0.06	0.80	0.35	0.05***	0.03	1.15	0.16	3.48***	1.20	1.03	0.47
N	2,283		2,283		2,283		2,264		2,264		2,264		2,254		2,254		2,254	
Pseudo R^2	0.0027		0.0071		0.0469		0.0264		0.0430		0.0964		0.0751		0.0863		0.1303	

Notes: DV = having participated in a lawful demonstration in the last 12 months; coefficients are odds ratios; °$p < 0.10$; *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

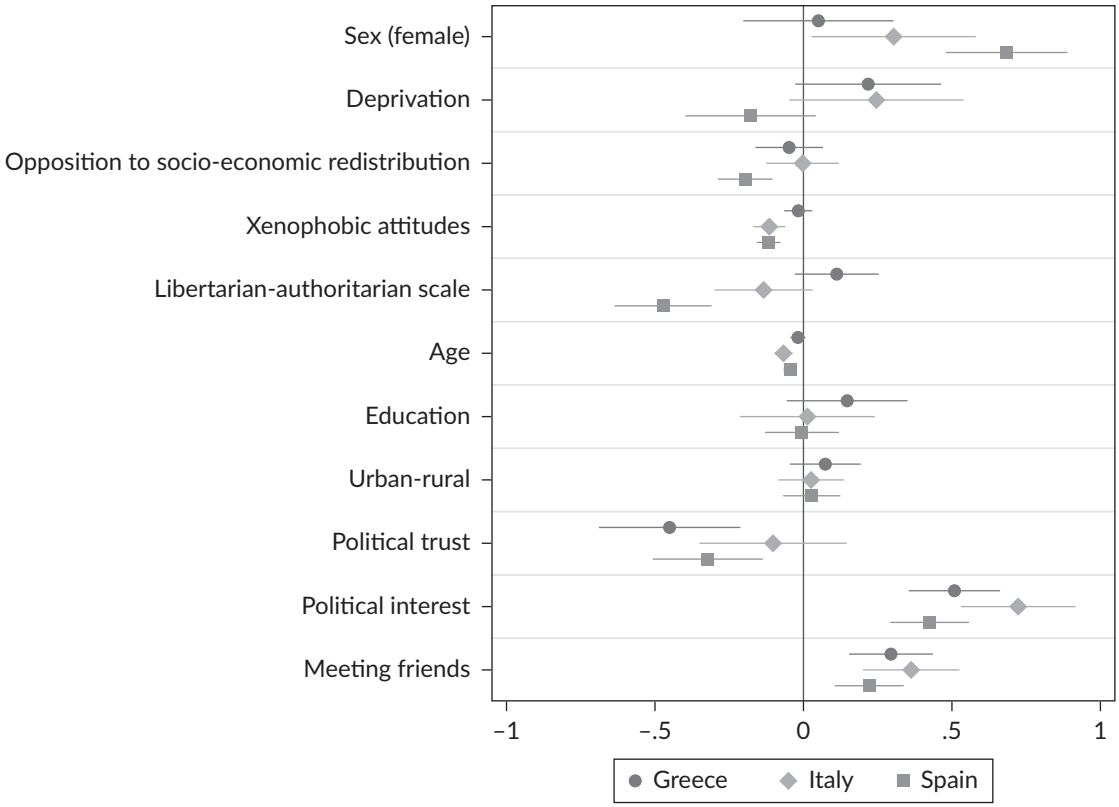

Figure 1. Plot of estimates for protesting (having participated in a lawful demonstration in the last 12 months) among Greek, Italian, and Spanish young people (models 3, 6, and 9). Notes: See Table 3; coefficients are log odds; 95% confidence intervals.

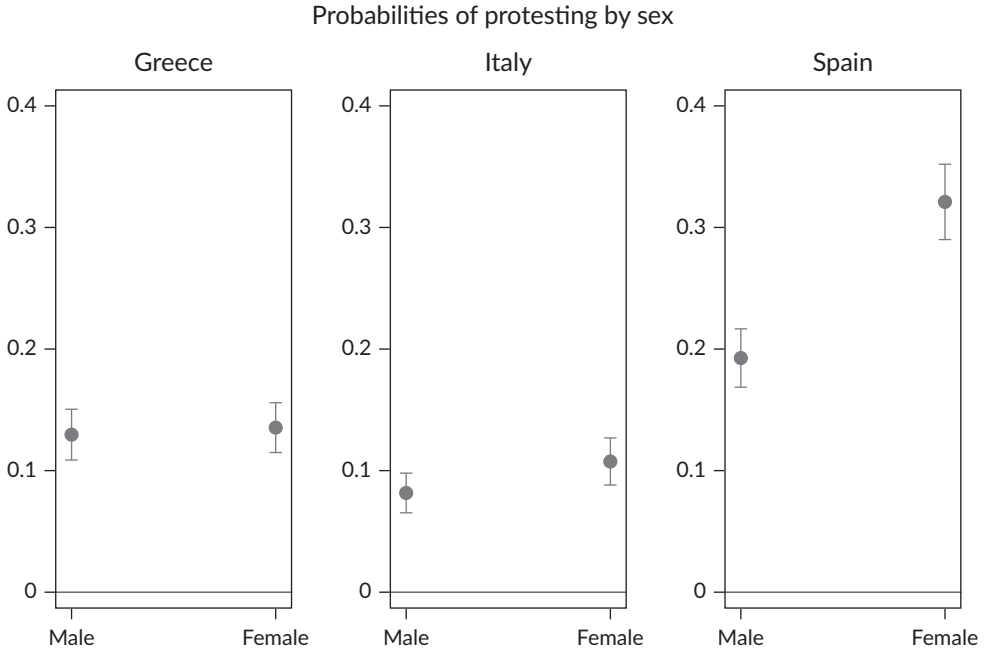

Figure 2. Predicted probabilities of protesting (having participated in a lawful demonstration in the last 12 months) by sex among Greek, Italian, and Spanish young people (models 3, 6, and 9; Table 3). Notes: See Table 3; 95% confidence intervals.

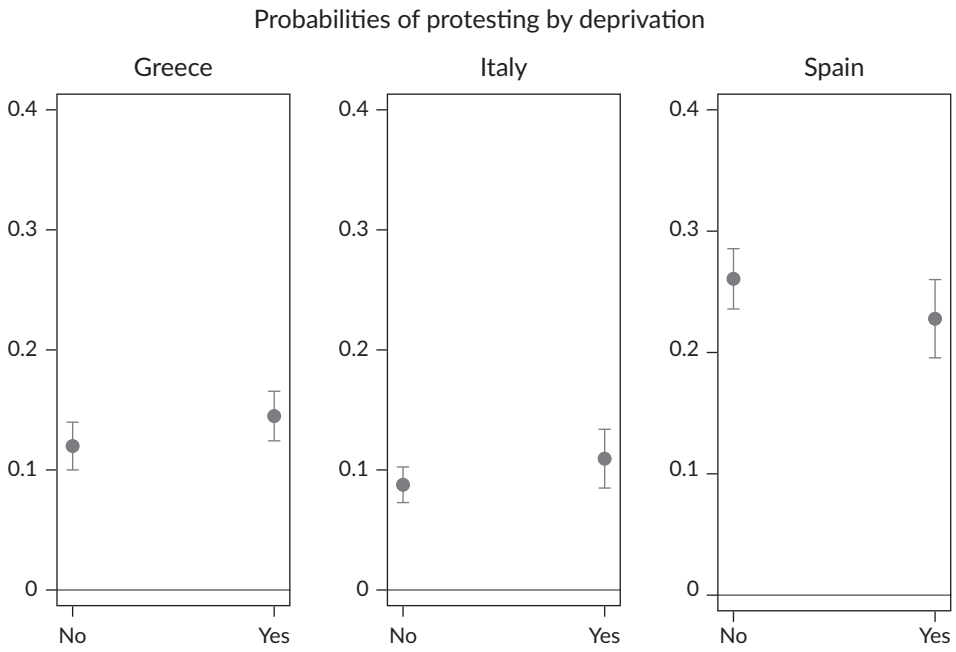

Figure 3. Predicted values of protesting (participated in a lawful demonstration in the last 12 months) by relative deprivation among Greek, Italian, and Spanish young people (models 3, 6, and 9). Notes: See Table 3; 95% confidence intervals.

authoritarian preferences in Italy and Spain. While young Spaniards and Italians endorsing authoritarian worldviews have (respectively) a 5% or 4% probability of protesting, the likelihood increases up to 34% or 14% respectively when young Spaniards or Italians embrace libertarian values (Figure 4; Table 3). We can confirm H3, H4, and H5 for Spain, disconfirm them for Greece, and verify H3 and H5—but not H4—for Italy.

In a nutshell, results show that young people who engage in street protest activities in Spain tend to have left-libertarian attitudes on all grounds—unlike young Italians, who display libertarian and progressive cultural (but not economic) values and preferences. In sharp contrast, our analyses do not let us conclude that young Greeks engaging in street protests are more left-leaning than the average under-35 adult population in the country—note these results are robust to a different measurement of the dependent variable. If we define protest as having participated in a lawful demonstration or having joined a strike in the last 12 months, the overall results remain unchanged (see Table A3 and Figures A3, A4, and A5 in the Supplementary File).

Our results relate to the contextual conditions under which protest potentials can(not) get activated. We expected that individual drivers of protest get activated when there is a simultaneously inviting structure of protest legacies and trajectories, on the one hand, as well as politicisation processes and salience of certain issues, on the other hand. Our results, however, allow us to nuance such expectations.

The large proportion of young Spanish—and, to a lesser extent, Italian—women protesters cannot be detached from the mobilisation capacity of the feminist movement in these two countries in the last few years and their ability to engage new cohorts of activists (Chironi, 2019; Portos, 2019). Similarly, the politicisation of the migration issue following the long summer of migration in 2015, together with the strengthening of the movement against racism and in solidarity with refugees, help to account for the negative impact of xenophobic attitudes on young people's protesting likelihood in Italy and Spain. This goes

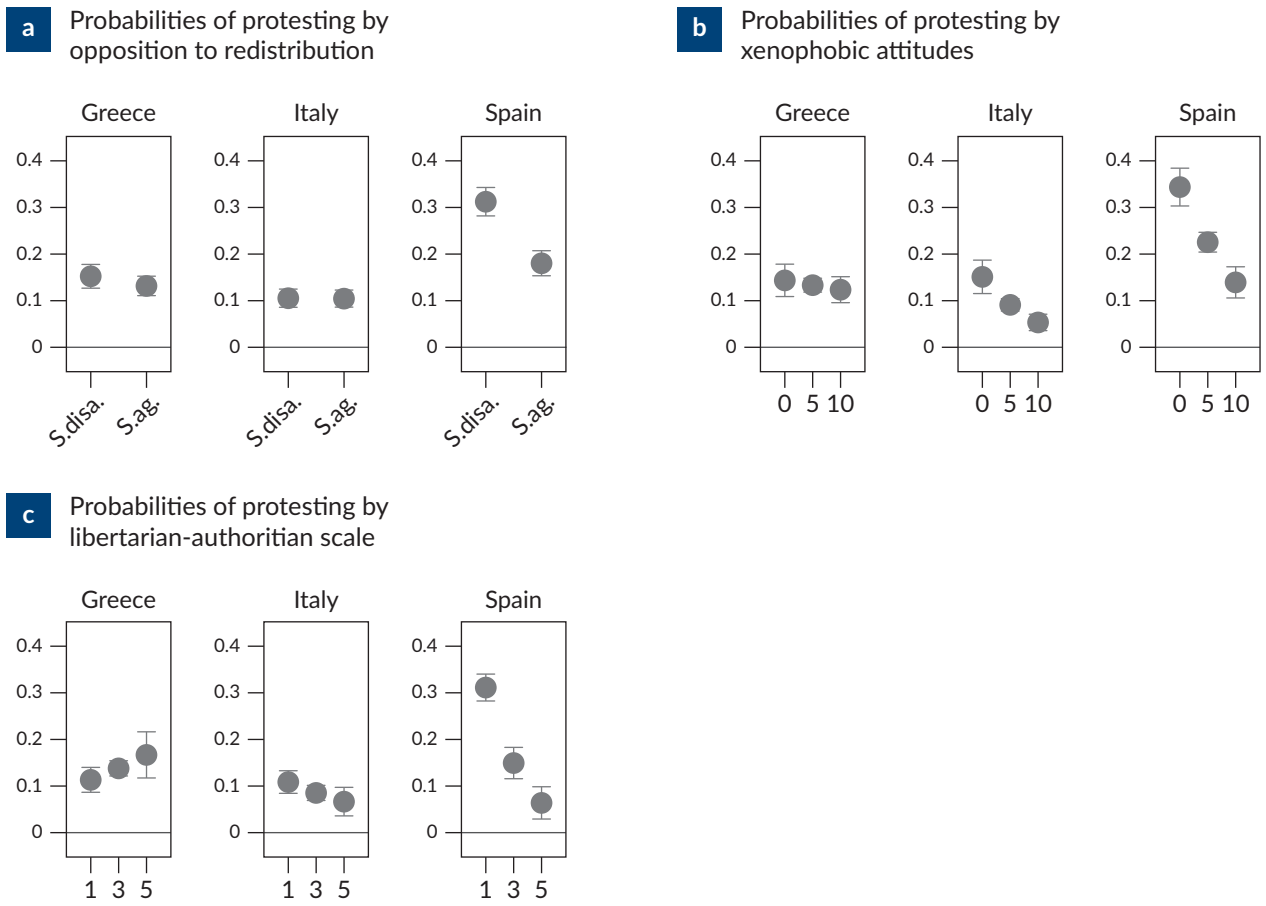

Figure 4. Predicted values of protesting (having participated in a lawful demonstration in the last 12 months) among Greek, Italian, and Spanish young people (models 3, 6, and 9) by (a) opposition to redistribution; (b) xenophobic attitudes; and (c) libertarian-authoritarian values. Notes: See Table 3; 95% confidence intervals.

in line with available empirical evidence that shows how social groups participate in demonstrations primarily when it comes to issues that address the core of their ideology (Kleiner, 2018). However, in the Greek case, grassroots mass movements were built around neither the gender nor the migration issue. While these issues awakened solidarity initiatives in the country, as empirical evidence illustrates (e.g., Malamidis, 2020; Kouki & Chatzidakis, 2021; Oikonomakis, 2018), they did not garner widespread support among milieus engaged in street protesting.

Following the depth of the Great Recession and the turmoil of anti-austerity mass mobilisations that politically socialised a whole new cohort of citizens, socio-economic grievances and deprivation do not seem to be determinants of protesting among South European youth (anymore). Other than the well-documented, longstanding problematic empirical record of strain and breakdown theories (della Porta, 2015; Kurer et al., 2019), this could have to do with the normalisation and internalisation of precarity and dashed social mobility prospects among younger cohorts (Zamponi, 2019) as well as the key mediating role of political opportunities and discontent in the material hardship/protest participation nexus (Grasso & Giugni, 2016; Kriesi et al., 2020a). Moreover, the left–wing ideology of the Syriza incumbent at the time the survey was fielded (see Altiparmakis & Lorenzini, 2018), the increasing mobilisation of far-right and conservative constituencies through non-institutional repertoires of action (Castelli Gattinara & Pirro, 2019; Pirro &

Portos, 2021), or the generalised apathy following the deep economic recession can help make sense of key predictors' null significance for the Greek context and the overall low levels of street protest in the country.

However, an important limitation hampers our results: with EURYKA survey data, we cannot distinguish protest participation by issue. One would expect the profile of participants (in terms of gender, deprivation, and left–right ideology) to be very different, e.g., pro- or anti-migrant protest events. Further, some of our results might be driven by the mobilisation capacity of specific movements—e.g., the strong effect of gender for Spain is likely to be accepted by the abovementioned mass feminist protests during that period, where young women are overrepresented.

Going beyond the key hypotheses, our results offer further insights into the drivers of young people's mobilisation in Southern Europe. First, some socio-demographic factors, such as living in a rural–urban area or educational level, do not really affect young people's participation in demonstrations. In Italy and Spain, the very youngest respondents are less likely to protest, suggesting that people in their late 20s and early 30s form the bulk of protest milieus. Second, political grievances including trust and satisfaction with how democracy works are negatively associated with protest participation in Spain and Greece, but not in Italy. Along the lines of previous mobilisation experiences in the shadow of the Great Recession, political grievances were collectively organised in the countries that experienced mass opposition to austerity and the political status quo (Kriesi et al., 2020a), possibly in a trend that persists until today. Third, in line with extant cross-sectional evidence (e.g., Earl et al., 2017; Schussman & Soule, 2005; Vráblíková, 2014), political attitudes (interest, internal efficacy) and network exposure (meeting with friends) are relevant drivers of young people's protest behaviour in the three countries under scrutiny.

6. Conclusion

The latest empirical evidence illustrates how a more active public is related to a better functioning government, with an assertive and elite-challenging public being "more of a boon than a curse for democratic politics" (Dalton, 2022, p. 533). In electoral democracies, protest does not only provide an essential voice for minority—and often marginalised—groups; it offers the opportunity to start debates, alter the agenda and ultimately trigger major political transformations. Southern European countries are landmarks in this respect, as they show how major protest campaigns with high levels of participation amongst younger cohorts have unfolded since 2011. These protests were organised first to contend with austerity policies and the political status quo, and then around issues such as feminism and solidarity with migrants and refugees. To what extent the increased participation in protest among young people in South European countries is transforming civic culture, acting as a catalyst for democratic deepening and far-reaching transformations in political institutions, that largely failed to deliver to the people, remains an empirical question—and an open-ended process.

From a comparative vantage point, this article has explored the determinants of young people's protest participation in three countries of Southern Europe. The main findings are three-fold: First, young women are much more likely to participate in Spain, less clearly so in Italy, and certainly not so in Greece, relative to young male nationals. Second, deprivation is not a determinant of protest among "the natives of the ruins": austerity policies and precarity, which have left a deep imprint upon younger cohorts as regards material and subjective economic prospects but also in terms of political socialisation, do not seem to trigger protest. In other words, socio-economic grievances are not organised collectively through extra-institutional political

repertoires of action. Third, we observe important differences in terms of the ideological profile of young protesters in the three countries under scrutiny. In line with authoritative literature on the topic (Grasso & Giugni, 2016; Hutter & Kriesi, 2013; Torcal et al., 2016), protest is first and foremost a left-libertarian affair in Spain, but our results add some nuance: young Italian challengers are not left-wing in economic terms and young street protesters in Greece are not more libertarian and left-leaning than the overall young Greek population.

How does this article help advance social movement theory? We expected that the concatenation of protest legacies and trajectories, on the one hand, and politicisation and issue salience, on the other, would activate individual-level determinants of protest. However, as we have discussed throughout the article, our results suggest that other context-specific traits can prevent protests from happening, thus limiting these conditions' explanatory power. Indeed, the mobilisation process coevolves with regimes and other actors in their environments, with "stochastic or random processes," being adaptation and competition key to understanding protest dynamics (Oliver & Myers, 2003, p. 1). Yet, the research design and evidence deployed are correlational: other types of evidence (e.g., experimental) could develop causal claims and shed further light on mechanisms triggering protest in Southern European countries and beyond. In addition, longitudinal data would let us test whether these results hold beyond the specific temporal setting where the survey was fielded and are robust in the mid- and long-term, possibly being conditional upon opening windows of political opportunity at the aggregate-institutional levels. Also, further research is needed to understand how Covid-19 spawned new forms of activism and how young activists modulated their tactics to changing circumstances, as physical street demonstrations, rallies, protests, and sit-ins largely ground to an abrupt halt in many places (Chenoweth et al., 2020), including Southern Europe.

This article tried to fill in a lacuna in the field: notwithstanding the huge importance of young people's protests for the reconfiguration of political structures in three (seemingly similar) South European democracies in the last decade, there is scant available systematic empirical evidence on their comparative drivers. The overall results are that socio-economic grievances do not lead young people to protest, but while women and people with left-libertarian attitudes compound the basis of contemporary street protests in Spain, these findings are only in part confirmed for the Italian context and clearly at odds with the Greek scenario. This suggests, on one hand, that there is a strong diversity in terms of young people's determinants of protest across the three countries. We should thus implement context-sensitive analyses, adding a word of caution against using Southern Europe as a unit of analysis in social movements and political sociology. On the other hand, different profiles of mobilised youth could foresee future developments. As Earl et al. (2017, p. 8) put it: "while youth will age into adulthood, they will only age out of some of the dispositions, habits, and routines they developed as young people, which could have significant consequences for the future of social movements and protest." Only time will tell whether and to what extent the cross-country asymmetries among the protesters discussed in this article will translate to the general population in the years to come.

Acknowledgments

Earlier versions of this work were presented in different seminars (InCite, Université de Genève, 2022; MOVICON, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2023; CBEES, Södertörn University, Stockholm, 2024) and conferences (ASA Philadelphia, 2023; ASA Montreal, 2024; SISP Trieste, 2024). The author is grateful to participants and discussants in these events, and especially to Massimiliano Andretta, Kerman Calvo, Caroline Close, Eva Fernández Guzmán, Sergiu Gherghina, Marco Giugni, Valentina Holecz, Hara Kouki,

Daniel López-Roche, Eduardo Romanos, Katia Pilati, Virginia Salaorni, and Lorenzo Zamponi. He also thanks Arndt Leininger, Sabrina Mayer, and the two anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions.

Funding

The EURYKA project was funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement No. 727025. Martín Portos also acknowledges support from the Conex-Plus Marie Curie framework (G.A. No. 801538) and the Ramón y Cajal grant (G.A. No. RYC2021–032179-I), which is funded by the MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and the European Union's 'NextGenerationEU'/PRTR.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

Replication material is available at the Harvard Dataverse (https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/T6OHSG)

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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Politics and Governance
2025 • Volume 13 • Article 9251
https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.9251

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The Influence of Age on Citizens' Preferences for Age-Related Descriptive Representation

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Submitted: 6 September 2024 **Accepted:** 14 November **Published:** 3 April 2025

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Unequal Participation Among Youth and Immigrants: Analyzing Political Attitudes and Behavior in Societal Subgroups" edited by Arndt Leininger (Chemnitz University of Technology) and Sabrina Mayer (University of Bamberg), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.i426

Abstract

While in most countries the age of candidacy is 18, young people are strongly underrepresented in legislatures around the world. This results in a notable age gap between the average parliamentarian and the electorate. So far, the majority of studies focus on structural and party-level factors contributing to age disparities in descriptive underrepresentation. And even though young candidates are perceived as less experienced, recent research shows varying effects of candidates' age on voters' willingness to elect them. What is mostly lacking, however, is an individual-level perspective on age-centred representation. How does a political representative's age matter for citizens and do citizens' preferences regarding representation differ between age groups? We base our theoretical arguments on the literature on candidate characteristics and ingroup-outgroup behaviour. Empirically, we provide evidence based on original data collected in Germany—that age matters for citizens on all levels of government, but especially for young people (below 31 years). Furthermore, we observe strong and significant ingroup preferences for both young and elderly citizens (60 years and above). Yet, with regard to outgroup discrimination, we find a notable asymmetry: Young adults exhibit aversion to being represented by individuals over 60 years, whilst seniors do not significantly discriminate against young representatives. These preference patterns speak to recent findings that enhanced descriptive youth representation leads to an increase in turnout among young people by providing additional insights into the mechanisms behind this relationship.

Keywords

age groups; candidates; descriptive representation; Germany; ingroup-outgroup; representation preferences; representatives; youth

1. Introduction

Worldwide, only 2.8 percent of parliamentarians are younger than 30 years old, and around 25 percent of single and lower chambers of parliament do not have a single MP aged 30 and under (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023, p. 7). The strong underrepresentation of young people in legislatures around the world presents both a democratic deficit as well as a deficit in generational equity (e.g., Bidadanure, 2015; Stockemer & Sundström, 2022b). The share of MPs over the age of 60, however, is much higher with around 20 percent worldwide (Stockemer & Sundström, 2022a). But although prominent examples, like the US Congress and the Japanese National Diet, feature a higher share of those over 60 than in the general population, in many political bodies seniors are, in fact, also often descriptively underrepresented.

So far, the majority of studies researching these disparities in descriptive age representation, especially youth's political underrepresentation, have focused on structural factors such as the electoral system or youth quotas (e.g., Belschner & Garcia De Paredes, 2021; Joshi, 2013; Krook & Nugent, 2018; Stockemer & Sundström, 2022b) and the supply side of politics, namely party-level explanations (Kurz & Ettensperger, 2023; Stockemer & Sundström, 2022b) and candidate selection procedures (Belschner, 2023; Deiss-Helbig, 2021). The demand side of politics has received far less attention, with a few recent experimental studies investigating voter evaluations of candidates' age (Eshima & Smith, 2022; McClean & Ono, 2024; Roberts & Wolak, 2023). The results are rather ambiguous, and the question of how important age actually is to citizens remains largely untouched as well as the question of how the relative importance and evaluation are influenced by individual-level characteristics.

In this article, we thus examine how important the age of political representatives is to citizens and how citizens' age-related preferences are influenced by their own age. Moreover, we investigate to what extent individuals prefer to be represented by a member of their own age group and whether they discriminate against members of other age groups (in-group and out-group behaviour).

Leveraging original survey data on citizens' preferences regarding age-centred representation in Germany, we demonstrate that age plays a significant role in citizens' representation preferences, especially for younger respondents. We observe strong and significant in-group favouritism for both young and elderly citizens (below 31 and above 60 years old, respectively). Interestingly, we find a notable asymmetry in out-group discrimination, as young adults exhibit a rather strong aversion to being represented by individuals over 60 years old while older demographics do not significantly discriminate against young representatives. These findings advance the growing literature on age-centred representation preferences by offering a foundation for future experimental studies, which will require more precise and detailed model specifications. The identified preference patterns also speak to recent findings that enhanced descriptive youth representation leads to an increase in turnout among young people (Angelucci et al., 2024; Castanho Silva, 2024; Pomante & Schraufnagel, 2015) by providing additional insights into the mechanisms behind this relationship. Therefore, our article contributes meaningfully to the understanding of intergenerational conflict in political behaviour.

2. Theoretical Considerations on Citizens' Age-Related Representation Preferences

In recent decades, political scientists have shown a growing interest in citizens' preferences regarding descriptive representation, often finding these preferences to be influenced by social identity. For example, Rosenthal (1995) demonstrated early on that women in the US prefer female politicians due to group interests and feminist attitudes. Experimental research from Sweden shows that citizens react positively to a representative if they share the same immigrant background (Agerberg, 2024). And, Vivyan et al. (2020) similarly argue that citizens in Germany and Britain evaluate politicians with working-class roots more positively based on class affinity. Although there is reason to believe that citizens may also value age as a category of descriptive representation and that age-centred preferences are influenced by belonging to specific age groups, age-centred preferences have so far not been the primary focus of research. We therefore begin by providing a concise overview of the existing literature on voter evaluations of candidate age. While the focus of this literature is somewhat different, we believe that some findings might also help in gaining an understanding of citizens' more general preference patterns that are not directly linked to vote choice.

The most comprehensive study, a meta-analysis of 16 conjoint experiments conducted in eight countries, reveals "that older hypothetical candidates are consistently less likely to be favoured by respondents—whether compared to the youngest alternative or the second-oldest alternative" (Eshima & Smith, 2022, p. 3). Their conjoint experiment in Japan showed that moving from 69 to 70 years leads to a significant penalty for the older candidate. The authors argue that this reflects a "mismatch between voters' preferences for younger politicians and the ostensible gerontocracy that governs much of the world" (Eshima & Smith, 2022, p. 3). This aligns with the findings of McClean and Ono (2024), who indicate that Japanese voters "strongly disliked older candidates but viewed younger and middle-aged candidates as equally favorable" (McClean & Ono, 2024, p. 1). The extent to which these findings are transferable to other contexts will be discussed later. Similarly, Sevi (2021, p. 1) tested whether a "leader is more popular among voters closer to them in age" and whether "such voters are more likely to vote for them," using cross-national data from 51 countries. While she found some support for both, the effect sizes are very small. Finally, Roberts and Wolak (2023) present results from a vignette experiment in the US, where they find no statistically significant penalty against either young (23 years) or old (77 years) candidates.

Results on voter evaluations of candidate age are thus quite ambiguous, ranging from findings that most voters do not use age as a heuristic cue (Dobbs, 2020) to voters preferring partisan candidates of their own age (Webster & Pierce, 2019), being biased against elderly candidates (Eshima & Smith, 2022; McClean & Ono, 2024) or null findings (Roberts & Wolak, 2023). While in political science, age is generally considered an important factor and is almost automatically included as a control variable in many works on political behaviour (Smets & Van Ham, 2013), it has seldomly featured conceptually or analytically on its own. The meta-analysis by Eshima and Smith (2022) is an important first step towards systematically examining how age influences voters' candidate perceptions. However, the question of how important age actually is to citizens remains largely unexplored.

Looking into studies that feature age as a control, it becomes apparent that the level of governance might matter as well. Contrary to the above-mentioned bias against elderly candidates, voters at the German local level seem less inclined to support both old and young candidates (Velimsky et al., 2024). Differences between government levels might also be due to citizens using age as a cue for (political) experience

(McClean & Ono, 2024). It is a well-established fact that political experience presents an electoral advantage for candidates (Lazarus, 2008; Put et al., 2021), "so much so that most research has considered political experience the 'ex ante indicator' of candidate quality" (Portmann, 2022, p. 2050). Therefore, the importance of a representative's age might differ between government levels. The local or regional level often serves as an entry point into politics, with many politicians starting their career in city councils or being state legislators before entering the national parliament as MPs. Experience, and therefore age, might matter less to citizens in legislatures on lower levels, which is why we include different levels in our analysis.

With regard to our hypotheses, we take a step back from the literature on candidate evaluation and focus on citizens' more general representation preferences using a social identity approach. We first expect the importance of a representative's age for citizens to differ between age groups. Age is linked to different stages in life, such as being in education or starting a family, and might play an important role in forming one's own identity, especially during times when people spend a lot of time with members of the same age group, such as at school or university. As age is a transient rather than static characteristic, it is more difficult to use for political mobilisation. However, despite its constant evolution, age remains immutable and beyond individual control and therefore holds potential for frustration, e.g., if someone is considered too old or too young to participate in certain events or to access specific places (adultism and ageism). In this sense, it is similar to other categories such as ethnicity, origin, gender, or sexual orientation, all of which are highly politicised. Research on women and minority descriptive representation has shown that members of these groups use identity markers as heuristic cues (Goodyear-Grant & Tolley, 2019; Martin, 2019; Stein et al., 2005). Descriptively underrepresented age groups, namely the young and the old, might be particularly sensitive about the age of politicians and perceive age as more important when evaluating a political representative.

For our analysis, we define a young representative as well as a young adult to be younger than 31 years. This threshold is in line with large parts of the literature on youth political representation (e.g., Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023; Stockemer & Sundström, 2022a) and is commonly associated with important lifecycle events such as getting married or becoming parents. We define an old representative and, accordingly, a senior citizen as someone aged 60 and older—a threshold that also features in the largest comparative age representation dataset (Stockemer & Sundström, 2022a), but—more importantly—corresponds to societal perceptions: When asked "At what age do you think people generally start being described as old?" the median answer in Germany has been 60 the last time this question featured in the European Social Survey (2023). Building upon the above-described theoretical considerations and these definitions, we put forward the following hypothesis:

H1: Age is more important for young adults and seniors than for those in between.

Apart from the question of how important age is to citizens and how this differs between groups, we need to better understand how individuals evaluate a politician's age and whether age-based preference patterns differ from other influential characteristics such as gender or class. To analyse potential ingroup–outgroup dynamics, we focus on the national level, where we expect that a representative's age is perceived as more important than at the local and regional levels.

Building upon social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004/1986), we understand age as part of one's social identity. Tajfel and Turner (2004/1986) argue that people get a sense of social belonging and self-worth from their memberships in social groups—such as age groups—so that they then draw favourable

comparisons between their own group and other groups. The theory thus predicts specific intergroup behaviour that can conceptually be differentiated into three forms of discrimination (Brewer, 1999, 2016). The first form is driven by ingroup favouritism: "wherein treatment of the ingroup is biased in a positive direction and treatment of the outgroup is indifferent" (Brewer, 2016, p. 92). The second type is driven by outgroup discrimination while treatment of the ingroup is indifferent/unbiased. Brewer (2016, p. 92) explains that "[d]iscrimination that is derived from outgroup antagonism (hate) is actively directed at harming or disadvantaging members of the outgroup, whether or not any personal or ingroup benefit is gained in the process." The third form of discrimination involves both mechanisms: "differential treatment in favor of the ingroup *and* against the outgroup" (Brewer, 2016, p. 92). This form of discrimination is often associated with situations that are perceived as zero-sum—when outgroup gains are thought to be at the expense of the ingroup. For Brewer (2016, p. 92), discrimination arising from "this form of prejudice is motivated more by ingroup protection (rather than enhancement) as well as antagonism toward the outgroup."

To analyse citizens' preferences and ingroup–outgroup dynamics regarding the evaluation of political representatives, we assume this third type of discrimination to occur among age groups, as elections can be understood as zero-sum situations due to the limited number of seats in parliament. Results from research on candidate characteristics point in this direction. Immigrant candidates in Switzerland are disadvantaged both through ingroup favouritism and outgroup discrimination by native voters (Portmann & Stojanović, 2022) and, when analysing the white population in the US, both effects have impacted candidate evaluations in past elections (Jardina, 2021).

We expect to observe the same ingroup–outgroup preference pattern for age groups. Ingroup favouritism in this context might either be identity-based (feeling closer to representatives of the same age groups) or based on instrumental motives, i.e., the belief that members of their own age groups represent age-specific interests better. This can be seen as analogous to voters preferring candidates who actually live in their own electoral districts due to them being "personally affected by policy choices, so voters can assume that candidates have a personal stake in representing the needs of their districts" (Velimsky et al., 2024, p. 1094). These instrumental motives can become relevant in policy fields where public spending disproportionately benefits certain age groups, such as pension systems, healthcare, or education. Based on these instrumental considerations we also expect to observe outgroup discrimination. Just like parliamentary seats, public spending is perceived as a zero-sum game, so that age groups can be understood as competing for a limited resource.

Additionally, one could argue that young people and old people might not react equally strongly to their underrepresentation—young people might be more used to politicians being older than them and thus discriminate less against older representatives. Alternatively, older people might show less aversion to being represented by someone young since they are descriptively better represented. Since these arguments remain quite speculative, we put forward the following two hypotheses without detailing differences between the age groups in expected effect size:

> H2: Citizens prefer to be represented by their own age group as compared to other age groups (ingroup favouritism).
>
> H3: Citizens dislike being represented by age groups that are the furthest away from their own age group as compared to other age groups (outgroup discrimination).

3. Research Design

3.1. Case Selection and Data

We consider Germany an intriguing and pivotal case, which, surprisingly, has not been thoroughly analysed in terms of age-based representational preferences. Germany's political landscape is characterised by a complex, federalised, and decentralised multi-level system, where political competition, legislative decision-making, and institutional features are intricately linked across federal, state, and local levels (Gross et al., 2023). Elections at different political levels rarely coincide. This staggered election schedule continuously reminds voters of political representatives' attributes. For example, recent research has shown that a candidate's migration background and social class matter to citizens and impact their voting decisions (Goerres et al., 2022; Matthews & Kerevel, 2021; Vivyan et al., 2020). Furthermore, public discussions on the age structure in parliaments in Germany are not only prevalent at the federal level but also at the state and local levels (e.g., media coverage by Erhardt-Maciejewski, 2018; Kohler & Pentz, 2023), leading us to expect the political representatives' attribute "age" to hold significance for citizens.

In our hypotheses, we expect especially the descriptively underrepresented age groups to be sensitive towards a representative's age—namely young adults and seniors. In this regard, Germany presents itself as a least-likely case. Despite having a relatively old and ageing population, at least Germany's federal parliament is comparatively young when contrasted with countries like France, Italy, Japan, or the US. Nevertheless, young adults are still severely underrepresented. After the 2021 Bundestag elections, for example, there were 0.29 parliamentarians aged 30 or under for every person in the corresponding age group in the population (Stockemer & Sundström, 2022a). Seniors in Germany not only hold considerable political power due to their large numbers but also have institutionalized ways of influencing party policies through the seniors' wings, which might prevent them from attributing much importance to the age of their representatives. For people who are 61 and over, the share of MPs relative to their share in the population amounted to a score of 0.84. While this indicates only a slight underrepresentation compared to young people, the difference with the overrepresented age group of those between 40 and 60 remains strong: their share relation amounts to a score of 1.82 (Stockemer & Sundström, 2022a). A similar pattern can also be observed for the various state parliaments (Kalisch, 2008; Koch et al., 2024).

Germany therefore presents itself as an ideal case to better understand when and how citizens use age as a heuristic to evaluate representatives on various levels of political governance. If we observe the above-hypothesized ingroup favouritism and outgroup discrimination in a least-like scenario like Germany, the results are very likely to be generalizable for countries with lower representation levels for the young and the old.

We rely on original survey data from Germany, making use of Bilendi's online access panel fielded from 6 to 15 November 2023. The survey was based on a sampling design that drew on parameters representative of the population, ensuring minimal socio-demographic distortions. The survey was specifically tailored to analyse citizens' preferences for representation and had 1,200 respondents. Since only respondents who provided a substantive answer to the relevant indicators were included in the analysis, a total of 949 respondents remained.

3.2. Dependent Variables

To assess our first hypothesis on the influence of respondent age on the importance assigned to representative age, we run individual models for each government level in Germany. Respondents were asked to indicate how important a representative's age is to them in local, state, and federal elections, respectively. From this, we generated three distinct variables: *Age (local level)*, *Age (state level)*, and *Age (federal level)*, each ranging from 1 (*not important at all*) to 5 (*very important*). For further details about the wording, see Table A1 in the Supplementary File.

To assess our second and third hypotheses, we use an indicator based on individuals' responses to how desirable they find being represented by individuals who are (a) 30 years or younger, and (b) 60 years or older. They were asked: "Generally speaking, how desirable do you think it would be to be politically represented by a person belonging to one of the following groups?" and rated this desirability on a scale from −5 (*not at all desirable*) to +5 (*completely desirable*). Figure 1 shows the distribution of answers. It shows that the mean values for respondents' desirability of being represented by politicians who are 60 years and older and politicians who are 30 years and younger only slightly differ. Yet, it immediately becomes clear that there is a large variation within the respective items that needs to be explained.

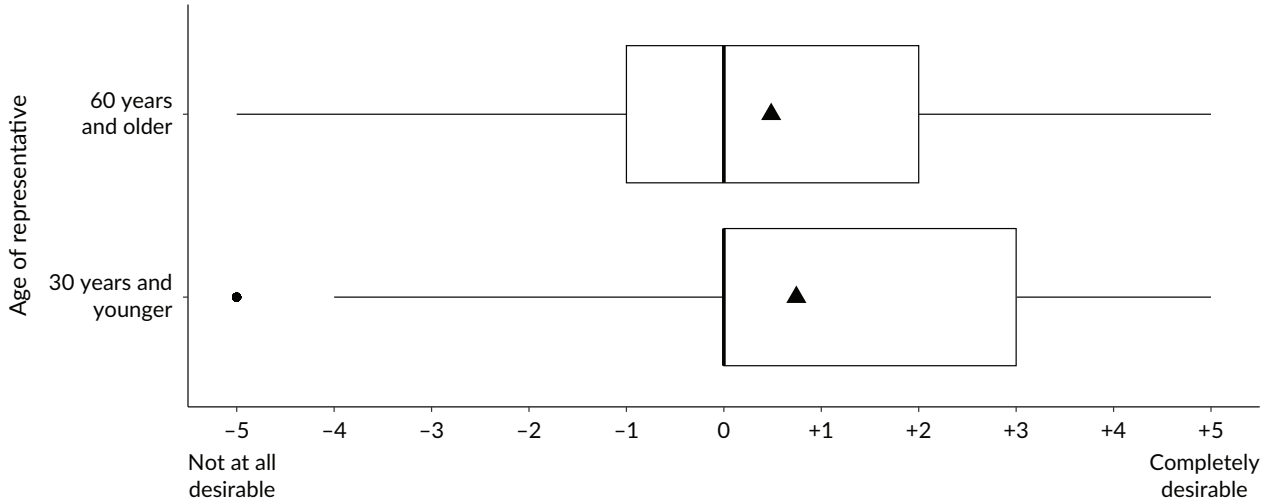

Figure 1. Distribution of answers for the desirability of being represented by someone old or someone young. Notes: The mean values are represented as a triangle; the dot in the graph indicates an outlier; N = 1,200. Source: Own presentation and calculation.

In an additional analysis in the Supplementary File, we compare the ingroup–outgroup desirability of age groups to other ingroup–outgroup patterns, namely self-identifying as a blue-collar worker (dependent variable: *Blue-Collar Rep.*) and the effect of gender (dependent variables: *Female Rep.* and *Male Rep.*). We generate two dummy variables, one for respondents identifying as a *Blue-Collar Worker* and one based on respondents' sex (*Sex*; 1 = *male*, 2 = *female*). All models feature the entirety of group-related respondent characteristics.

3.3. Independent and Control Variables

To analyse the importance assigned to age (H1) and age-based ingroup-outgroup patterns (H2 and H3), we use the same age brackets for the respondents as described above for representatives: young adults below 31 years and seniors over 60 years, with those in between as a reference category (31–59 years). By choosing age groups at the opposite sides of the age continuum, we make sure that group members are likely to perceive themselves as "different" from those in the other group. The age distribution of our respondents is as follows: 22.33 percent (N = 212) fall within the 18 to 30 age range, while 59.22 percent (N = 562) are between 31 and 59 years old. Additionally, 18.44 percent of respondents (N = 175) are 60 years or older. Although the younger age group is slightly overrepresented and the older cohorts are underrepresented, this is typical for an online access panel survey. However, both groups are sufficiently large, particularly in comparison to the reference category of 31–59-year-olds, allowing for reliable conclusions about the different age categories.

We control for several additional variables that have been identified in the literature to affect citizens' representational preferences. As education seems to impact representational preferences for other forms of descriptive representation—e.g., less-educated white individuals responding more negatively to representation by non-white legislators (Jones, 2016)—we firstly control for respondents' level of education (*Education*) based on their highest general school-leaving qualification. Secondly, we include a 6-point-scaled item on citizens' place of residence (*Urban–Rural*), ranging from 1 (*big city*) to 6 (*isolated farmstead or detached house in the countryside*), as it has been shown that the place of residence impacts political behaviour (Walsh, 2012).

Moreover, ideology affects voters' preferences regarding descriptive representation. While voters generally prefer candidates of their own race or gender, this preference is moderated by ideological alignment (Martin, 2019). Additionally, it can be argued that liberal/progressive voters are more likely to be used to and hence are more favourable towards young representatives. This might be because at least in proportional representation systems, such as Germany, progressive parties tend to have more young MPs (Kurz & Ettensperger, 2023) and some parties emphasise age more often. For illustration, the average age of party parliamentary groups after the 2021 Bundestag election ranged between 42.5 years for the youngest party parliament group (Alliance 90/The Greens) and 51.3 years for the oldest (Alternative for Germany; Deutscher Bundestag, 2021). Thirdly, we control for respondents' own assessment of their positions regarding the socio-cultural dimension (*Ideology: Liberal Urban–Rural Conservative*), ranging from 1 (*liberal*) to 11 (*conservative*).

Additionally, we control for several characteristics and perceptions that are known to influence political behaviour and might therefore also impact citizens' representational preferences. *Political Interest*, ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very strong*), might impact the importance assigned to representatives' characteristics. Furthermore, respondents' overall satisfaction with democracy—*Satisfaction: Democracy*, ranging from 1 (*very dissatisfied*) to 5 (*very satisfied*)—and with being politically represented—*Satisfaction: Representation*, ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*completely*)—might impact ingroup–outgroup behaviour, with rising satisfaction leading to less outgroup discrimination.

People often seek representation from individuals who share their identity, irrespective of party affiliation, as they feel their specific interests and experiences are not adequately addressed in politics. Descriptive representation encompasses identity traits such as gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation that can cut

across party lines. Research indicates that, regardless of party affiliation, representatives with a working-class background (e.g., Hemingway, 2022), women (e.g., Erzeel & Celis, 2016), or those who self-identify as LGB+ (Debus & Wurthmann, 2024) are more likely to represent individuals from the same social community. Therefore, we have chosen not to control for party affiliation, but instead to focus on sociocultural ideology as described in the previous paragraphs. Summary statistics for all variables can be found in Table A2 in the Supplementary File.

3.4. Analytical Strategy

In the following sections, we will first present a series of descriptive findings on the perceived importance of various individual characteristics, with a focus on differences across levels of government. Additionally, we will examine age-related variations regarding representation preferences. As we assume linear relationships between our variables, we will subsequently employ linear regression models to, first, explore which factors influence the importance of a political representative's age for citizens and, second, to analyse the specific factors that affect respondents' desirability of younger versus older representatives.

4. Results and Discussion

We start the presentation of the results by giving a descriptive overview of the importance of age for voters on different government levels by comparing it to the importance assigned to other characteristics (Figure 2). On all three government levels, age receives the highest average importance score, comparable to occupation and immigration status. Voters thus perceive age to be more important than highly politicised characteristics, such as gender or sexual orientation. Regarding the various levels of government, we do not observe significant differences between the average importance scores on the local, state, or federal levels. In the Supplementary File, we additionally present the distribution of answers over the three analysed

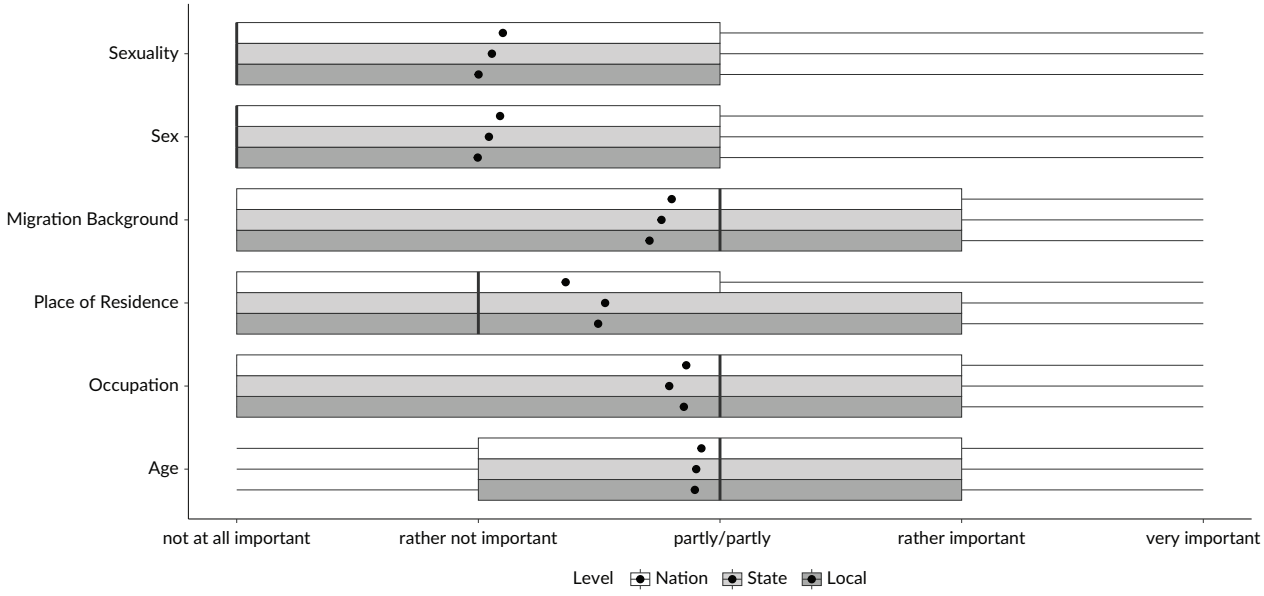

Figure 2. Distribution of importance ratings for several characteristics of political representatives. Notes: The mean values are represented as dots; *N* = 1,200. Source: Own presentation and calculation.

age groups on the different government levels (Figures A1, A2, and A3). Young people and, to a lesser degree, old people exhibit a left-skewed distribution—an observation we analyse more closely with our regression models.

Figure 3 presents the results from regression models for the different government levels (full results in the Supplementary File, Table A3). Regarding the government levels, we again observe no clear pattern over the different age groups (and neither for the control variables). In H1, we assumed that politician age would be more important both for young adults (18–30) and seniors (60+) than for those in between. But interestingly, we observe this only for young adults. Seniors do not differ significantly from the reference category. Hence, our first hypothesis only partially holds true. This might be due to differences in perceived political power and party responsiveness, as people above 60 years make up a large share of the electorate and have high turnout rates, especially compared to young adults. Seniors could thus be more likely to perceive parties as more responsive towards their needs and might care less about a representative's age. Most of the included control variables do not impact the importance assigned to a representative's age. We observe a small, but significant effect of ideology which could be linked to more liberal/progressive respondents generally assigning greater importance to descriptive representation of social groups. Furthermore, being more satisfied with the current state of democracy has a positive impact on the importance assigned to age—a relationship we will further discuss below with regard to the desirability of being represented by someone young or someone old.

In the second step, we analyse how citizens judge the desirability of being represented by either someone up to 30 years old or someone aged 60 or older. We again start by giving a descriptive overview. Figure 4 presents the distribution of desirability ratings for an old and a young representative by respondents' age groups. Overall, we observe the expected distribution: most older respondents rate an older representative positively, while half of them assign a young representative a negative score. Most young respondents, on the

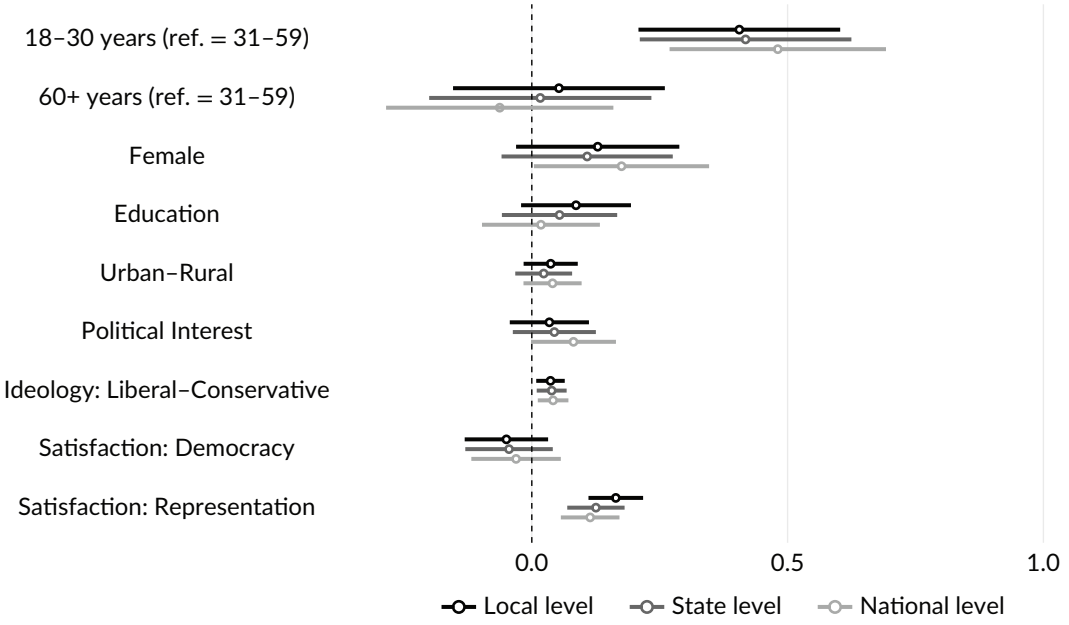

Figure 3. Importance of a political representative's age. Coefficients with 95 percent-Confidence Intervals for models on different government levels. Notes: *N* = 949; full model specification is presented in Table A3 in the Supplementary File. Source: Own presentation and calculation.

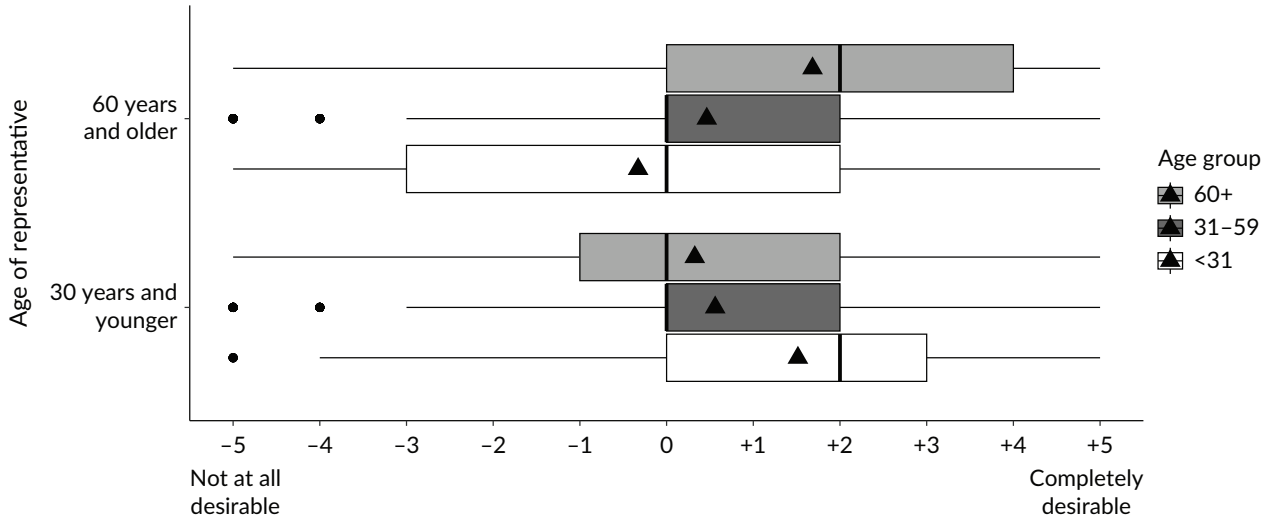

Figure 4. Distribution of desirability ratings for an old representative (60 years and older) and a young one (30 years and younger) by respondents' age groups. Notes: The mean values are represented as triangles; the dot in the graph indicates an outlier; $N = 1{,}200$. Source: Own presentation and calculation.

other hand, rate a young representative positively, while half of the age group assigns a negative score to the desirability of being represented by someone aged 60 or older. Interestingly, the distribution is much more concentrated around zero for the middle-aged group, leading to the extreme negative values being outliers. This difference in distribution might already indicate that respondents between 31–59 years old feel less strongly about old or young representatives. In addition to the boxplots, we present histograms for the overall distribution of answers in the Supplementary File (Figure A4).

Figure 5 presents the results of our regression analysis regarding the desirability of being represented by someone young and someone old on the federal level. For young people, we observe the expected ingroup favouritism and outgroup discrimination: compared to middle-aged people, young people prefer to be represented by someone young and dislike being represented by an old parliamentarian. Interestingly, for senior citizens, we only observe ingroup favouritism, but no significant outgroup discrimination towards young representatives. Our second hypothesis, that young people prefer to be represented by young people and seniors prefer to be represented by seniors, thus finds empirical support. Our third hypothesis must be partly rejected for seniors, as only young adults dislike being represented by seniors, but seniors do not perceive a young representative to be less desirable.

The behaviour of seniors can thus only be linked to positive attitudes towards one's own group, whilst the behaviour of young people fits with what has been described as a form of discrimination that is linked to zero-sum games, in "which gains for the outgroup are seen as being achieved at the expense of the ingroup" (Brewer, 2016, p. 92). Following Brewer (2016), the outgroup discrimination in this case is not motivated by ingroup enhancement but rather ingroup protection. This difference between the ingroup–outgroup-behaviour of seniors and young adults points towards differences in the perception of political processes and raises questions, such as: Do young people as a social group feel somehow "threatened" by seniors? The idea seems plausible with regard to recent developments. Societal ageing leads to a decrease in the share of young people in the voting population, which makes it harder to assert youth-specific interests through elections. The emergence of a variety of youth-led climate organizations

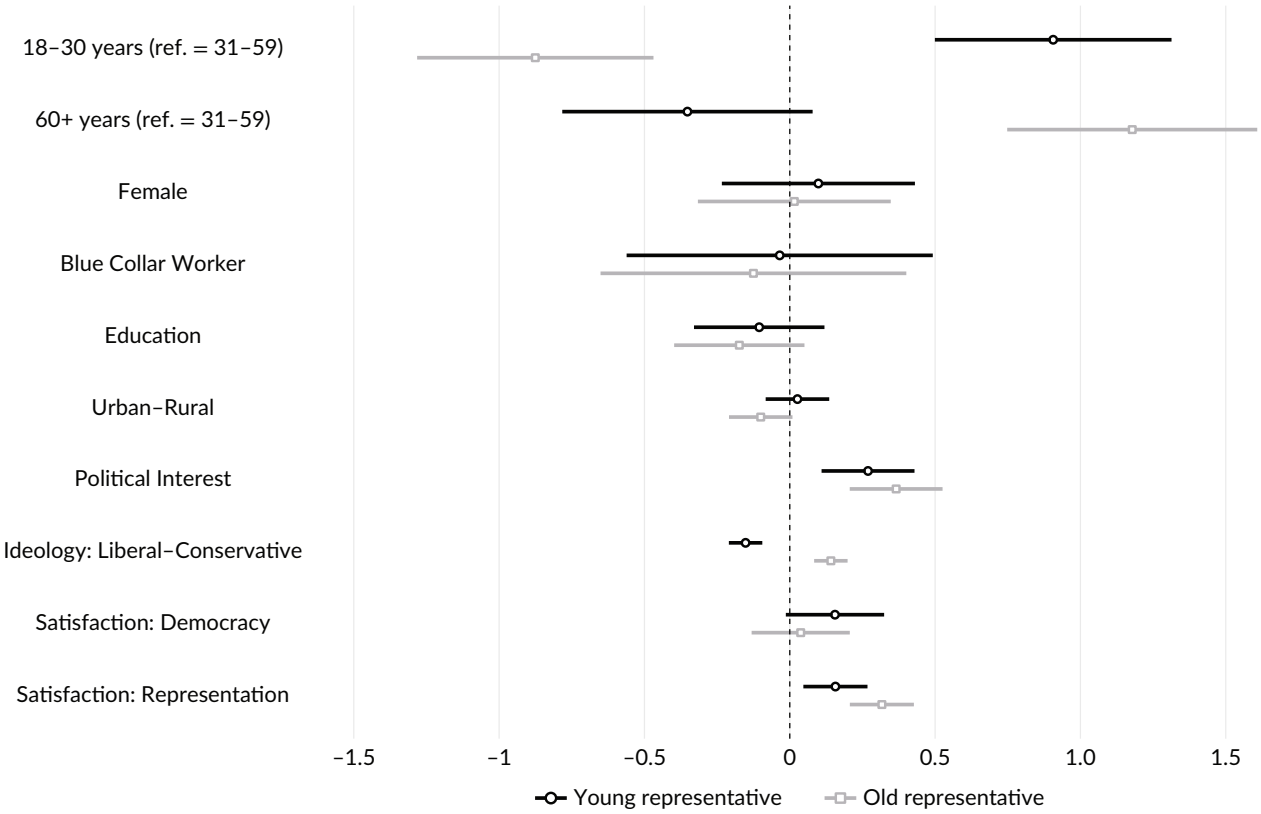

Figure 5. Desirability of being represented by someone young and someone old on the federal level. Coefficients with 95 percent-confidence intervals. Notes: $N = 949$; full model specification is presented in Table A5 in the Supplementary File. Source: Own presentation and calculation.

that organise mostly outside of political parties and other forms of institutionalised representative democracy could be understood as a reaction to this shift in political power. Societal ageing also leads to insecurities regarding the stability of welfare regimes, especially pension systems and the latest German pension reform has been described as a "gigantic redistribution program from young to old" (Jacobsen, 2024). These developments might lead to young people's feeling that their age groups need protection. Furthermore, party behaviour might also contribute to the difference in outgroup discrimination, if young people should perceive parties as less responsive than seniors do.

Additionally, our results provide deeper insights into how voters evaluate age when compared to results from the experimental studies on candidate choice. Whilst Eshima and Smith (2022) found evidence for an old-age penalty in their meta-analysis, they did not analyse individual-level characteristics such as respondent age. Our results suggest that the old-age penalty is driven especially by young voters and—to a lesser extent—by middle-aged voters. While this is still in line with existing research, the ingroup favouritism we observe among German seniors (statistically significant on the $p < 0.001$ level) challenges results from McClean and Ono (2024), who found no ingroup preference among the Japanese elderly, who are, "if anything, even more critical of elderly candidates than others" (McClean & Ono, 2024, p. 3). What seems to be a contradiction at first glance might be explained by differences in political and social contexts. The authors argue that results from Japan could translate quite well to other countries as it is "a country known for its predominantly older elected officials, strong norms of elder respect, and the world's highest proportion of elderly citizens" (McClean & Ono, 2024, p. 8). However, it might be exactly this context that leads to the absence of ingroup favouritism

among seniors. In Japan, the share of MPs aged 61 and older is already more than twice as high as the share of this age group in the population (Stockemer & Sundström, 2022a), so older citizens might not feel the need for increased descriptive representation. Additionally, the authors describe their results to be driven by age-related stereotypes, something that might be less present in Germany, where politicians tend to be significantly younger than in Japan, where elderly citizens are underrepresented in the parliament, and age is considered less important with regard to social hierarchies and respect than in Japan.

In the Supplementary File, we present a robustness check by comparing our results with those from a model that tests for a linear age effect (Table A4). Age remains a significant predictor for the desirability of being represented by someone young or someone old with the expected effect directions: the desirability of being represented by someone aged 30 or under decreases with age, while the desirability of being represented by someone aged 60 or older increases with age.

Additionally, we present models that compare age-based intergroup desirability to the desirability of being represented by a woman, a man, or a blue-collar worker (see Table A5 in the Supplementary File). For gender-based in-and outgroups, we observe that women perceive female representatives as more desirable than men do, but women do not express negative views towards a potential male representative (ingroup favouritism without outgroup discrimination). This confirms existing research on female affinity effects (e.g., Golder et al., 2017; Martin, 2019). The effect size of female ingroup favouritism (0.687) is smaller than the effect sizes observed for age-related ingroup favouritism (young: 0.906, old: 1.178). Interestingly, senior citizens also perceive a female representative as more desirable than those in the middle-aged group. For blue-collar workers, we do not observe significant in-group favouritism. This comparison with other characteristics underlines the importance of understanding age as a variable of analytical interest and not just as a control variable.

In addition to the absence of ingroup favouritism among blue-collar workers, higher education levels negatively impact the desirability of being represented by a blue-collar representative ($p < 0.05$). This could to some extent be the result of outgroup discrimination as social class partly results from education. In times of growing political marginalisation of the working class and a resulting need for descriptive representation (Elsässer & Schäfer, 2022), the described findings resonate with research by Matthews and Kerevel (2021) who show that working-class candidates in German state elections are less likely to win, even when controlling for party identity.

Regarding our control variables, education does not significantly impact age perceptions, but living in more urban areas leads to a slight aversion towards old representatives. This might be linked to differences in the age structure, as the share of elderly inhabitants in urban areas is lower than in rural ones (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2024). Political interest is positively associated with evaluating all the different tested characteristics as desirable. While the direction of the association is always the same, the effect size varies: especially older representatives and male representatives are perceived positively by politically interested people. Additionally, we observe effects of self-identifying as progressive or conservative. Being more liberal leads to a more positive evaluation of a young representative, which might be linked to the better descriptive representation of young people in progressive parties in proportional representation systems (Kurz & Ettensperger, 2023) and the general association of progressive ideology with valuing increases in descriptive group representation for politically marginalised groups and being open to change and new ideas

(traits often associated with youth). Therefore, it is not surprising that we observe a similar relationship regarding the desirability of a female representative and, to a lesser degree, a blue-collar worker representative. In contrast, self-identifying as more conservative is positively associated with perceiving an old representative as desirable ($p < 0.001$). Lastly, higher democratic satisfaction does not significantly impact the desirability of different characteristics. Satisfaction with representation is positively associated with the desirability of being represented by young, old, female, and male representatives, but not with a blue-collar representative.

5. Conclusion

For the average voter, age matters. In this article, we provide evidence that a political representative's age is an important factor in citizens' preferences for descriptive representation. Providing new empirical evidence for the case of Germany, we show that this is the case at all levels of government (local, state, and federal), especially for young adults. We observe strong and significant ingroup favouritism for both young and elderly citizens (below 31 and above 60 years old). Furthermore, we have described a notable asymmetry in outgroup discrimination, as young adults exhibit a significant aversion to being represented by individuals over 60 years old, while seniors do not significantly discriminate against young representatives.

This is relevant with regard to the participation gap between age groups. Young adults' turnout is lower than the turnout of older age groups. At the same time, a politician's age is especially important for young adults, and they express a preference for young representatives. Therefore, in line with McClean and Ono (2024, p. 1) we argue "that greater youth turnout could increase youth representation." But even more importantly, the results speak to recent findings that enhanced descriptive youth representation leads to an increase in turnout among young people (Angelucci et al., 2024; Castanho Silva, 2024; Pomante & Schraufnagel, 2015) by providing additional insights into the mechanisms behind this relationship. If young people find the representatives more attractive, this might lead to a rise in political interest and might also be a motivating factor to participate in elections.

While this article adds to the understanding of citizens' age-centred representational preferences, our research is not without its limitations. Firstly, we have limited knowledge about the stability of age preferences over time. Our cross-sectional data is insufficient to rule out potential cohort effects. Moreover, age and age group membership are factors that fluctuate over time. As a result, it is unclear whether our findings based on cross-sectional data will shift as group memberships change or if they remain stable. Secondly, our respondents were not limited when being asked about the importance and desirability of different representative characteristics, meaning that they could, for example, rate all of them as completely desirable/not at all desirable. Lastly, further data collection is needed to investigate different facets of desirable representation in a multilevel setting, which we were only able to capture here with a generalised indicator. Nevertheless, our analyses provide interesting insights on citizens' age-related representational preferences that might serve as a basis for further investigations, especially for experimental setups needing clear model specifications: One such avenue would be to investigate whether stricter or looser age thresholds lead to similar results. Another one would be to focus on the role age plays as a cue for (political) experience in citizens' evaluation of a representative's age and to analytically differentiate this mechanism from identity-based ones. And, as it is likely that young women face higher barriers to being perceived as competent, we hope that our article may also serve as the basis for investigating the interaction of age and

gender. As we are comparing the desirability of being represented by someone young and someone old, not including an interaction between age and gender (e.g., a young woman vs. a young man), we are not able to entirely cover potential gender biases.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the three anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback which led to significant improvement of the article and Patrick McSweeney for proofreading.

Funding

The authors wish to acknowledge the generous funding for the data collection provided by the Fritz Thyssen Foundation (Az. 20.23.0.007PO). Additionally, Kira Renée Kurz receives a scholarship by Heinrich-Böll-Foundation.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

Replication files are available in the Harvard Dataverse (https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/Q5F157).

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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Politics and Governance
2025 • Volume 13 • Article 9377
https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.9377

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ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Understanding the Electoral Participation Gap: A Study of Racialized Minorities in Canada

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Submitted: 7 October 2024 **Accepted:** 9 December 2024 **Published:** 12 February 2025

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Unequal Participation Among Youth and Immigrants: Analyzing Political Attitudes and Behavior in Societal Subgroups" edited by Arndt Leininger (Chemnitz University of Technology) and Sabrina Mayer (University of Bamberg), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.i426

Abstract

Racialized minorities constitute an increasingly substantial segment of modern electorates in Western democracies, in part driven by immigration. Analyzing data from the 2021 Canadian Election Study (N = 9,496) and yearly Democracy Checkup surveys between 2020 and 2023 (N = 26,908), we explore the significance of racial identity as a determinant of voter turnout. Our findings reveal stark disparities in electoral participation between the most racialized minority groups in Canada and the White majority. Except for Latino identifiers, Indigenous, Asian, Black, and Arab-identifying respondents all exhibit lower voting rates, with Black voters facing the most significant gap, nearly 16 percentage points below their White counterparts. The gap is particularly prominent among second-generation racialized Canadians, suggesting that newcomers to Canada exhibit relatively high levels of engagement compared to their children. Next, we explore three key individual factors that may contribute to the gap: differences in socioeconomics, psychological engagement, and mobilization and community embeddedness. We employ a linear decomposition technique to assess the contributions of these factors to the majority–minority participation gap. Our analysis underscores the potency of socio-economic and psychological models in explaining minority under-participation in the Canadian context. The mobilization and community embeddedness model, however, exhibits weak explanatory power. Despite these insights, a substantial portion of the participation differentials remains unexplained, suggesting the necessity for novel perspectives to understand gaps in the electoral participation of racialized electors.

Keywords

participation gap; psychological model; racialized minority; socio-economic model; voter turnout

1. Introduction

Electoral participation is a key mechanism in representative democracies. In addition to selecting representatives, they also create incentive structures that hold representatives accountable to their electors (Stimson et al., 1995). Despite their centrality, participation is far from universal in liberal democracies and, even more importantly, gaps exist across groups in participation across racial, ethnic, and socio-economic groups (Dalton, 2017; Leighley, 2001; Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba et al., 1995). Various models have been developed that focus both on differential resources across groups as well as group-specific factors that can counteract limited resources. In this article, we draw on a uniquely large series of surveys collected by the Consortium on Electoral Democracy (C-Dem) which allows for large samples of various ethno-racial groups in Canada.

The Canadian context is useful to explore the sources of electoral participation. Canada is a highly diverse country. Almost one in four people are immigrants (either now with citizenship or currently permanent residents) according to the most recent census (Statistics Canada, 2022a). One in four people in Canada are also racialized minorities (referred to as visible minorities in the Canadian context), with about 30% born in Canada. South Asians make up the largest racialized group in Canada (about 7%), followed by Chinese Canadians (5%), and Black Canadians (4%; Statistics Canada, 2022a). Of communities born in Canada, the largest groups are Japanese-origin Canadians and Black Canadians. In addition to these racialized communities, Canada's colonial past also means that there are significant Indigenous communities within Canada's current boundaries, reported at 1.8 million people in the previous census (Statistics Canada, 2022a).

Despite this diversity, there is a limited amount of research that explores the electoral participation of racialized minorities in Canada. Some estimates suggest that racialized minorities were about 6 percentage points less likely than White Canadians to vote in federal elections, though this varied by group (Statistics Canada, 2020). Yet, it is not clear what factors cause these gaps. In this article, we mobilize theories in the larger comparative literature to test the factors that may lead to differential participation levels of various ethnic and racial minorities in Canada.

To do so, we analyze data from the 2021 Canadian Election Study (N = 9,496) and yearly Democracy Checkup surveys between 2020 and 2023 (N = 26,908). Drawing on a more direct measure of racial identity than has traditionally been asked in Canadian election studies, we show stark disparities in electoral participation between most racialized minority groups in Canada and the White majority. Except for Latino identifiers, Indigenous, Asian, Black, and Arab-identifying respondents all exhibit lower voting rates, with Black voters facing the most significant gap, nearly 16 percentage points below their White counterparts. The gap is particularly prominent among second-generation racialized Canadians, suggesting that newcomers to Canada exhibit relatively high levels of engagement compared to their children. We show that these gaps are largely driven by differential resources and levels of psychological engagement across groups.

2. Literature Review

The electoral participation of racialized minorities has received the most scholarly attention in the US, where persistent turnout gaps have been documented between the White majority and Black, Latino, and Asian voters (see, for example, Fraga, 2018; Leighley & Nagler, 2013; Lien, 2004). These gaps have often been

attributed to lower levels of socio-economic resources among racialized communities. At the same time, models that focus on social resources and group identity, often developed specifically to explain the participation of minoritized communities, often point to a more nuanced explanation, where community-based resources like social networks or group consciousness can counteract a lack of more traditional resources. In this section, we review how socio-economic, psychological, and mobilization and community embeddedness models may contribute to—or counteract—inequalities in electoral participation.

In Canada, there are relatively few studies that examine these differences. In general, research documents lower levels of participation in elections among some racial and ethnic groups, especially for first-generation citizens and more recent immigration groups (Gidengil & Roy, 2016; Harell, 2017; Statistics Canada, 2022b; Tossutti, 2007). Previous studies tend to attribute inequalities in participation largely to differential socio-economic resources (Bevelander & Pendakur, 2009; Tossutti, 2007) as well as time in the country to learn about and integrate into political life (Soroka et al., 2006). At the same time, there is some limited evidence that the effect of economic factors is more muted for immigrants than their native-born counterparts (Tossutti, 2007; White et al., 2006). Finally, Indigenous electors in Canada also have shown a consistent gap in participation in federal elections (Ladner & McCrossan, 2007; see also Soroka et al., 2006). Previous research strongly suggests that economic inequality is a major source of this gap (Harell et al., 2010). Our challenge here is to explore what factors contribute the most to explaining the overall gaps.

Resources are often at the heart of political participation, and they can take many forms. In their now classic civic volunteerism model, Verba et al. (1995) point to three types of resources that can be mobilized to facilitate engagement with politics: time, money, and civic skills. They add to this that it also takes interest, a psychological resource that can motivate action. And finally, they suggest that being embedded within social networks where you are more likely to be asked to participate increases the chances that you will. Their answer as to why some people participate less is that they cannot, because they lack the resources to do it; they do not want to, because they do not care about politics; or because nobody asked them (Verba et al., 1995, pp. 269–270; see also Schlozman et al., 2018). These resources vary across socio-economic groups, but also across ethnic and racial groups. Importantly, as the literature on minority political participation suggests, these resource inequalities can be counteracted by group resources and group identities. In this section, we review these three types of factors, how they are related to gaps in participation across racial and ethnic groups, and then situate the Canadian case in relation to these factors.

2.1. Socio-Economic Factors

Those with time, money, and civic skills are more likely to participate in politics, but these skills are not distributed equally across different socio-economic groups (Brady et al., 1995; Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba et al., 1995). Education is a critical resource that provides individuals with the knowledge and cognitive skills necessary for effective political participation (Evans & Hepplewhite, 2022; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). Income, property, and employment status also influence political engagement, as they exert an effect on the availability of both time and money to participate (Burns et al., 1997; Xu, 2005; Yoder, 2020). In a meta-analysis of factors promoting turnout, Smets and van Ham (2013, p. 349) conclude that education is one of the factors most often included to explain turnout, and it has one of the most consistent and largest positive effects. Other socio-economic factors had mixed results in their meta-analysis, with income being consistently related to turnout, but occupational status and social class showing less consistent results.

The socio-economic model of voting suggests that racialized minorities often have lower levels of resources due to socio-economic inequalities, especially education and income (Schlozman et al., 2018, p. 92; see also Leighley & Nagler, 2013; Verba et al., 1995). Such differences help explain overall gaps in participation, for example, between Latinos and African Americans, on the one hand, compared to non-Hispanic Whites in the US, on the other hand. These differences largely disappear, however, among similarly resourced people (Schlozman et al., 2018, p. 92). When a racial or ethnic group has overall fewer socio-economic resources, it restricts a group's capacity and willingness to engage in the political process. Such differences are key components that contribute to a participation gap between racialized minority groups and the majority population.

While not a socio-economic resource directly, it is also important to mention that age is a significant factor correlated with voter turnout (Bhatti et al., 2012; Blais, 2000). Young citizens are often less likely to vote due to their vulnerable socio-economic situation as well as a relative lack of political experience during this transitional period of life (Carreras & Castañeda-Angarita, 2019; Pacheco & Plutzer, 2008). We expect, then, that lower voter turnout among racialized minorities compared to the White majority can be attributed to unfavorable socio-economic factors partly attributed to different age compositions of groups.

2.2. Psychological Model

While the socio-economic model focuses more on the ability to vote, the psychological model addresses the issue of motivation to vote. This model emphasizes the role of attitudes and psychological predispositions in explaining voter turnout (Smets & van Ham, 2013). Many studies have demonstrated that individuals who are psychologically engaged in politics are also more likely to participate than those who are less engaged (Mangum, 2003). Key factors such as political interest (Powell, 1986; Prior, 2005), political knowledge (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996), political efficacy (Karp & Banducci, 2008), partisanship (Abramson & Aldrich, 1982), and trust—both political and generalized (Bélanger & Nadeau, 2005; Cox, 2003)—have all been shown positively correlated with voter turnout.

While the Civic Voluntarism model focuses on interest and knowledge about politics, scholars of minority political participation tend to focus on how marginalized social identities structure psychological engagement with politics, as well as how the identities themselves can serve to either mobilize or demobilize. For example, social identity theory (SIT) sees identification with a group as a source of positive self-image. One tends to value those groups to which one belongs, and this can sometimes lead to thinking more negatively about those groups one does not belong, to maintain one's positive self-image (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). SIT has been mobilized by scholars of minority political participation to explain how and when such identities can be mobilized. While effects vary, the most compelling evidence suggests that context matters when identities become salient. For example, Pérez (2015) shows that when strong Latino identifiers in the US are threatened, they become more likely to register to vote. Kranendonk et al. (2018) similarly demonstrate that in contexts where marginalized groups, such as Muslim immigrants in Western Europe, share a sense of common grievances, there is a higher likelihood of voting. However, this effect did not extend to identification with the country of origin, indicating that these processes may differ depending on the group and the type of identity involved.

One possible mechanism is proposed by Pantoja and Segura (2003), who show how politicized racial contexts can promote higher levels of political knowledge among threatened communities. Other research suggests that such processes may lead to lower levels of psychological engagement with politics. Racialized minorities, due to historical and contemporary perceptions and experiences of discrimination and exclusion, may hold a reduced sense of belonging to the national community (Döring, 2007), which happens more often among second-generation racialized groups (Soroka et al., 2006). Potochnick and Stegmaier (2020), for example, find that second-generation Latinos' political participation is as low as non-citizen Latinos. This alienation from mainstream society may not only reduce a sense of self-efficacy (Crocker & Major, 1989) and trust levels (Schildkraut, 2005) but also contribute to political disengagement (Hobbs & Lajevardi, 2019). Moreover, this lack of engagement is further exacerbated by the fact that political issues and campaigns frequently fail to address the specific concerns of these communities, leading to a perception that politics is irrelevant to their lives (Barreto, 2018; Jackman & Spahn, 2021).

2.3. Mobilization and Community Embeddedness

If having the resources and interest to participate is important, so is being embedded within networks that can facilitate participation. The mobilization model of voter turnout views participation as a social behavior influenced by norms and social pressure (Smets & van Ham, 2013). Citizens are more likely to vote when they are part of social networks where voting is the norm or when they are directly encouraged to vote by campaigners (Coulombe, 2023; Gerber & Green, 2000). Research shows that individuals with more extensive social networks (Putnam, 2000), regular attendance at religious services (Campbell, 2013), and membership in organizations (Radcliff & Davis, 2000) are more likely to participate in politics.

This model provides a valuable framework for understanding the electoral under-participation of racialized minority groups. Social networks and organizational involvement are crucial components of the mobilization model. Among racialized minorities, these networks may be less politically active or engaged, especially if minority communities have historically faced barriers to participation or hold a deep-seated distrust of the political system (Evangelist, 2022). At the same time, social networks of those who share one's background can be important sources of mobilization, though again these effects can vary across groups and identities (Kranendonk & Vermeulen, 2019). Community organizations have been a key factor in explaining mobilization among racialized minority communities. Tate (1991), for example, argued that churches and Black political organizations served as an alternative resource for Black Americans, boosting their participation to levels we would not expect, given a comparatively limited number of socio-economic resources at their disposal. She called these "group-based" resources. The importance of Black community groups, especially churches, has been a mainstay in finding Black voter engagement (see, for example, Liu et al., 2009).

Shared group identities can also serve as a group-level resource. In their classic work, Verba and Nie (1972) documented the Black-White participation gap but argued that Black Americans actually participated more than would be expected based on their level of socio-economic resources. They argued this was due to higher levels of group consciousness that could serve as a community resource. Group consciousness develops in part out of perceptions of the discrimination one's group faces as well as involvement within politics for the group (Masuoka, 2006). Conversely, experiencing less discrimination tends to decrease the salience of minority group identities (Chong & Kim, 2006).

Furthermore, political participation is not solely the result of individual attitudes or resources but also depends on targeted mobilization efforts and the context in which racial and ethnic groups find themselves. Racial context can provide strength in numbers while also creating incentives for parties and other actors to mobilize in an area (Bobo & Gilliam, 1990; Dancygier, 2017; Leighley, 2001). However, research indicates that racialized citizens are often overlooked by mobilization campaigns during election periods (Ramírez et al., 2018). Due to strategic considerations, political parties and candidates often focus their resources on more reliable voters and larger voting blocs. This means that some racialized minority voters, who are often younger and have less voting history, receive less attention from campaign outreach efforts (Barreto, 2018).

2.4. Canadian Case

How do these three types of resources play out in the Canadian case? Evidence from Canada indicates that racialized minorities continue to experience social and economic marginalization at higher rates than the rest of the population (Reitz & Banerjee, 2007; Skuterud, 2010), though this varies importantly across groups. In addition, given that racial diversity in Canada is partly driven by the selective immigration system in Canada, on some measures (like educational attainment), racial minority communities outperform their white counterparts (Statistics Canada, 2022c).

The distribution of key resources (like educational attainment) is not only driven by racial inequalities but intersects with the points-based immigration system driven by entry requirements for first-generation Canadians who prioritize education and other skills. Differential birthrates as well as immigration also lead to a different age structure among racialized minority groups. In Canada, racialized minorities are, on average, about seven years younger than the rest of the population (Statistics Canada, 2019). This younger demographic profile may further contribute to the under-participation of racialized minority groups because socio-economic resources are structured importantly by age.

With respect to psychological engagement in Canada, the evidence is mixed. Levels of interest and engagement tend to vary more by immigration status (Gidengil & Roy, 2016; Tossutti, 2007). Both Bilodeau and Kanji (2006) and Gidengil and Roy (2016) show that immigrants as a group are actually *more* interested and attentive to politics in Canada. Interestingly, Bilodeau and Kanji (2006) show the gap is greatest for those from traditional large European countries but decreases for more recent waves of immigration from countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Gidengil and Roy (2016) similarly show that non-"visible minority" immigrants are the most interested in politics while visible minorities, regardless if they are foreign-born or not, have similar levels of interest as native-born Whites. Furthermore, Bilodeau et al. (2020) show that interest in politics as well as turnout increases as people feel more accepted and have a sense of belonging in their provinces and Canada. This points to the importance of understanding psychological variables in relationship to both racialized experiences but also immigration background. More diverse immigrant waves have spent less time in the country but also may face more systemic barriers that push down their psychological engagement with politics, while second-generation racialized minorities may be less engaged as they have grown up with more (unmet) expectations of equal treatment. We thus expect that the lower voter turnout among racialized minorities compared to the White majority can be attributed to lower levels of psychological engagement in politics.

Finally, in Canada, less is known about any differential effects of community involvement on turnout. Studies of organizational involvement suggest that those of non-European descent are not clearly more or less

engaged than European-descent Canadians, though this varies by gender and ethnic background (Harell, 2017). There is evidence, however, of targeted efforts to mobilize ethnic and racial communities by political parties. As Bird et al. (2011, p. 27) argued, this is especially the case at the beginning of the 21st century as key urban ridings have become more competitive, and the Conservative Party of Canada has made concerted efforts to court this vote. Limited research documents the impact of these campaigns on voter turnout. Recent studies suggest that fielding co-ethnic candidates has minimal effect on turnout (Ie et al., 2023), though it can influence vote choice (Besco, 2019). Our expectations with respect to the effect of mobilization on participation gaps are mixed. On the one hand, racialized minorities' lower overall levels of participation may result from lower levels of mobilization via social networks, or differential embeddedness within Canadian political life due to immigration status. On the other hand, their level of participation may be improved with the importance of racial or ethnic identification.

3. Data and Methods

3.1. Data

To investigate the role of racial identity in voter turnout, we draw on two primary data sources: the 2021 Canadian Election Study (Stephenson et al., 2022) and the yearly Democracy Checkup surveys (Harell et al., 2022a, 2022b, 2023, 2024) conducted from 2020 to 2023. The 2021 Canadian Election Study comprises two distinct online surveys: a campaign-period rolling cross-section and a post-election follow-up. Our analysis focuses on respondents who participated in both waves, as our dependent variable—voter turnout in the most recent federal election—is measured in the post-election wave. After cleaning the dataset, we retain responses from 9,496 individuals, all of whom are Canadian citizens aged 18 or older.

The Democracy Checkup surveys, initiated in 2019 and conducted annually under the administration of C-Dem, provide additional cross-sectional data. For our study, we use data from the 2020–2023 waves, which include a key variable on respondents' ethnic identity. The Democracy Checkup dataset contains 26,908 valid individual observations.

For the subsequent analysis, the Canadian Election Study and Democracy Checkup data are combined, providing a robust dataset for examining voter turnout across different racial and ethnic groups in Canada. As the surveys were executed by the same research network (C-Dem) with many identical survey questions across datasets, we append subsequent cross-sections of respondents into a single dataset. Such alignment is crucial for examining the participation patterns of ethnic minorities, who are frequently underrepresented in surveys. This also ensures an ample minority sample size for a robust statistical analysis. In addition, we also incorporate fixed effects for surveys to account for potential variations arising from different survey contexts and timings, thus focusing our analysis on within-survey variations.

The combined dataset comprises 36,404 respondents, with the White majority representing 86.59%. Among racialized minorities, Asians are the most numerous at 8.99%, followed by Blacks at 1.44%, Indigenous at 1.22%, Arabs at 0.92%, and Latinos at 0.84%.

3.2. Key Variables and Measurement

The dependent variable in our analysis is voter turnout, measured as a binary indicator which captures whether respondents reported having voted in the most recent federal election. The independent variable is ethnic identity, categorized into six groups: White, Indigenous, Asian, Black, Arab, and Latino. Our analysis focuses on respondents who identify with a single ethnic group. Those with multiple identities are excluded from this study.

Additional covariates include socio-economic variables (age, gender, education, marital status, employment status, income, and property ownership), psychological engagement (political interest, political knowledge, partisanship, internal efficacy, external efficacy, institutional trust, and generalized trust), and mobilization and community embeddedness (religiosity, civic engagement, immigration status, Canadian identity, and importance of ethnic identity).

The institutional trust measure represents the level of confidence respondents have in three institutions: the federal government, the provincial government, and the media, consistent across both data sources. This measure comprises three items with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.65, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. In addition, a principal component factor analysis reveals one single underlying factor. Consequently, we construct a summated rating scale for these items. Detailed information about the factor analysis can be found in Table C1 in the Supplementary File.

Religiosity is measured by combining two survey items: religious denomination and the importance of religion. The denomination question is dichotomous, asking respondents whether they adhere to any religion. For those identifying as religious, a follow-up question assesses the importance of religion in their lives. These responses are integrated to form a new *religiosity* variable, which encompasses five categories: *Non-believer*, *Not important at all*, *Not very important*, *Somewhat important*, and *Very important*. The latter four categories distinguish the varying degrees of religious importance among adherents.

All continuous variables are rescheduled from 0 to 1 to facilitate comparison of coefficients. Detailed wording of these variables is provided in Appendix A in the Supplementary File. Summary statistics for all variables can be found in Appendix B in the Supplementary File.

3.3. Methods

To better evaluate the contributions of the socio-economic, psychological, and mobilization and community embeddedness explanations to the voter turnout gap, we apply Gelbach's conditional decomposition method (Gelbach, 2016). This technique, based on the omitted variable bias formula, allows us to disentangle the contribution of each "omitted" variable to changes in the coefficient of the variable of interest.

We estimate a series of linear probability models to predict turnout while incorporating fixed effects for both the surveys and provinces. This approach accounts for potential variations due to different survey contexts and timings, as well as heterogeneity at the provincial level. There is ongoing debate about the optimal linking function for binary dependent variables. While nonlinear models like logit and probit are often used, recent methodological advances suggest they are not always necessary and optimal (Angrist & Pischke,

2009; Gomila, 2021; Hellevik, 2009; Woolridge, 2002). Key issues with linear models include heteroskedasticity, where the variance of error terms is not constant, which could potentially affect the reliability of standard error estimates and hypothesis testing. However, the use of heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors has become prevalent to address this issue (Woolridge, 2002, p. 56). In our study, we apply clustered robust standard errors accounting for both provincial and survey-specific variations. This should enhance the robustness of our findings. In addition, concerns about model fit, particularly predictions outside the [0,1] range, are often overstated (Gomila, 2021). These rare occurrences can still provide meaningful empirical insights. More importantly, in political science, the primary focus is on exploring variable relationships rather than on precise outcome predictions, and the impact of out-of-bound predictions on causal effect estimates is minimal. Given their straightforward estimation and the direct interpretability of coefficients, linear models are highly valuable. We therefore use linear probability models in the main analysis for their simplicity and clarity. However, for robustness considerations, we also include logit models in Table D2 in the Supplementary File. Comparisons between the linear and logit models show consistent results, with only minor discrepancies observed in the full models. Specifically, there is a small difference—approximately 2 percentage points—in the participation gap for Indigenous and Black groups. Such minor differences further validate the robustness and suitability of the linear model for our decomposition analysis.

Our baseline model is specified as:

$$\text{Turnout}_{ijk} = \beta_1^{\text{base}}\text{Asian}_{ijk} + \beta_2^{\text{base}}\text{Indigenous}_{ijk} + \beta_3^{\text{base}}\text{Black}_{ijk} + \beta_4^{\text{base}}\text{Arab}_{ijk} + \beta_5^{\text{base}}\text{Latino}_{ijk} + \alpha_j + \lambda_k + \varepsilon_{ijk}$$

Turnout_{ijk}, the probability that individual i in province j surveyed in survey k votes, is predicted by the six-category Group ID variable represented by five dummy variables. The coefficients β_1^{base} to β_5^{base} represent the baseline participation gap between each racialized minority group and the White majority.

Second, we estimate a full model by incorporating all potential explanations for the participation gap between Whites and racialized minorities. This includes socio-economic factors, psychological factors, and mobilization and community embeddedness factors, which are added to the baseline model:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Turnout}_{ijk} = {} & \beta_1^{\text{full}}\text{Asian}_{ijk} + \beta_2^{\text{full}}\text{Indigenous}_{ijk} + \beta_3^{\text{full}}\text{Black}_{ijk} + \beta_4^{\text{full}}\text{Arab}_{ijk} + \beta_5^{\text{full}}\text{Latino}_{ijk} \\ & + \beta_6^{\text{full}}\text{Socioeconomic}_{ijk} + \beta_7^{\text{full}}\text{Psych}_{ijk} + \beta_8^{\text{full}}\text{Mobilization}_{ijk} + \delta_j + \phi_k + \eta_{ijk}\end{aligned}$$

With this full model, we can observe changes in the estimated coefficients for the Group ID dummies to assess how much the explanatory factors account for the participation gap. For example, the difference between β_1^{base} and β_1^{full} indicates the extent to which all explicators included in the model explain the participation gap between Whites and Asians.

Finally, to better determine the contribution of each explanatory factor, auxiliary models are estimated by regressing each explanatory factor (denoted as A in the equation below) on the Group ID variable:

$$A_{ijk} = \beta_1^{\text{aux}}\text{Asian}_{ijk} + \beta_2^{\text{aux}}\text{Indigenous}_{ijk} + \beta_3^{\text{aux}}\text{Black}_{ijk} + \beta_4^{\text{aux}}\text{Arab}_{ijk} + \beta_5^{\text{aux}}\text{Latino}_{ijk} + \theta_j + \psi_k + \nu_{ijk}$$

The change in the β coefficients of our variable of interest from the baseline model to the full model attributable to factor A can be calculated as $\beta_A^{\text{full}}\beta^{\text{aux}}$. For instance, the change in the participation gap for the Asian minority group relative to the Whites ($\beta_1^{\text{base}} - \beta_1^{\text{full}}$) can be decomposed into contributions from the socioeconomic model ($\beta_6^{\text{full}}\beta_1^{\text{socioeconomic}}$), the psychological model ($\beta_7^{\text{full}}\beta_1^{\text{psych}}$), and the mobilization and

community embeddedness model ($\beta_8^{\text{full}}\beta_1^{\text{mobilization}}$):

$$\beta_1^{\text{base}} - \beta_1^{\text{full}} = \beta_6^{\text{full}}\beta_1^{\text{socioeconomic}} + \beta_7^{\text{full}}\beta_1^{\text{psych}} + \beta_8^{\text{full}}\beta_1^{\text{mobilization}}$$

This framework allows us to assess the contribution of each variable conditional on all covariates and compare their individual effects explicitly.

4. Results

Before turning to the formal analysis of factors explaining participation gaps, it is useful to first understand the general patterns of turnout in Canada. Table 1 presents the weighted mean turnout rates and reveals a notable gap between the White majority and various minority groups. First-generation Whites exhibit the highest turnout rate (92.3%), followed by second-generation Whites (91.0%) and non-immigrant Whites (89.8%). In contrast, all racialized groups show lower levels of participation. Particularly striking is the low turnout among second-generation Blacks at 68.7%. Even with a relatively small sample, this is clearly statistically below the estimates for White respondents of every generation. Similarly, non-immigrant Arab/Middle Eastern individuals have a significantly low turnout rate of 65.4%, although the large confidence intervals—due to a small sample size ($N = 13$)—make it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about their participation. The small sample size for non-immigrants also reflects the recent immigration waves from Arab/Middle Eastern regions.

When examining immigration status, a clear generational effect emerges within certain racialized groups. Second-generation Asian and Black respondents show a marked decline in turnout compared to their first-generation and non-immigrant counterparts. Among Asians, turnout decreases from 85.4% among first-generation immigrants to 82.5% in the second generation. Similarly, turnout among Blacks declines from 74.4% in the first generation to 68.7% in the second generation. This generational regression suggests that some racialized groups face systemic barriers to political engagement as they integrate into Canadian society. In contrast, turnout among Whites remains relatively stable across generations, with a slight increase from 89.8% among non-immigrants to 91.0% among second-generation Whites and 92.3% for

Table 1. Level of turnout by ethnic group and immigration status.

	White	Asian	Indigenous	Black	Arab/ Middle East	Latino
Non-Immigrant	0.898 [0.894,0.903] $N = 23{,}286$	0.845 [0.795,0.895] $N = 215$	0.792 [0.743,0.841] $N = 405$	0.798 [0.703,0.893] $N = 80$	0.654 [0.444,0.863] $N = 25$	0.736 [0.437,1.03] $N = 13$
2nd Generation	0.910 [0.901,0.919] $N = 5{,}695$	0.825 [0.802,0.848] $N = 1{,}315$	0.627 [0.400,0.855] $N = 34$	0.687 [0.607,0.766] $N = 196$	0.805 [0.716,0.895] $N = 88$	0.913 [0.857,0.970] $N = 100$
1st Generation	0.923 [0.911,0.934] $N = 2{,}516$	0.854 [0.836,0.871] $N = 1{,}744$	0.562 [−0.028,1.15] $N = 6$	0.744 [0.680,0.808] $N = 248$	0.851 [0.800,0.901] $N = 221$	0.870 [0.818,0.923] $N = 192$
Total	0.902 [0.899,0.906] $N = 31{,}497$	0.841 [0.827,0.854] $N = 3{,}274$	0.774 [0.725,0.824] $N = 445$	0.729 [0.684,0.774] $N = 524$	0.821 [0.777,0.866] $N = 334$	0.880 [0.841,0.919] $N = 305$

Notes: Entries are means; 95% confidence intervals in brackets; weights applied.

first-generation Whites. For the White population, generational status seems to have minimal impact on electoral participation.

To further explore the generation gaps within the Asian and Black communities, we run a series of linear regressions reported in Table E1 in the Supplementary File. The results show that the decline in participation among second-generation Asians is not statistically significant. However, second-generation Black individuals show a substantial reduction in participation rates—8.5 percentage points lower than first-generation Blacks. The gap widens to 10.7 percentage points when comparing second-generation Black individuals to non-immigrant Blacks, although this difference is not statistically significant due to the small number of non-immigrant respondents. To further investigate the factors contributing to the underparticipation of second-generation Black individuals, we also conduct a decomposition analysis (see Section 4.1 for more methodological details), the results of which are detailed in Table E2 in the Supplementary File. The analysis reveals that socioeconomic factors, particularly being younger, and psychological factors, such as lower political interest, reduced political knowledge, weakened party identification, and decreased external efficacy, account for the lower probability of voter turnout among second-generation Black respondents.

4.1. Decomposition Analysis

To gain a better understanding of the variables that contribute to the overall turnout gap between Whites and racialized minorities in Canada, a linear decomposition analysis is conducted. To begin with, Figure 1 presents results from the baseline and full models predicting voter turnout.

In the baseline model, ethnic identity is the sole predictor. Similar to what we found in Table 1, significant turnout gaps between racialized minorities and the White majority are detected. Black respondents exhibit the largest discrepancy, with their probability of turnout being 16.1 percentage points lower than that of White respondents. Indigenous, Arab, and Asian respondents also show significant, albeit smaller, gaps of 10.8, 7.5, and 6.6 percentage points, respectively. Latino respondents do not exhibit a statistically significant difference compared to White respondents. These findings underline substantial disparities in electoral participation among racialized minorities.

The full model incorporates socio-economic, psychological, and mobilization and community embeddedness factors. Younger age negatively impacts turnout, while factors such as education, employment, income, and property ownership correlate positively with higher electoral participation. Political interest, knowledge, and partisanship demonstrate strong positive effects, which highlights the significant role of psychological engagement in electoral participation. Mobilization and community embeddedness factors generally have minimal impact. The only exception is that a stronger sense of Canadian identity substantially contributes to a higher probability of turnout.

The inclusion of these variables reduces the turnout gaps for all racialized groups. The gap for Asian respondents narrows significantly from 6.6 to 2.4 percentage points. The disparity for Indigenous respondents reduces from 10.8 to 5.6 percentage points. The turnout gap for Black respondents decreases from 16.4 to 10.8 percentage points, and for Arab respondents, from 7.5 to 2.7 percentage points. Interestingly, Latino respondents move from a non-significant gap to a slight positive differential.

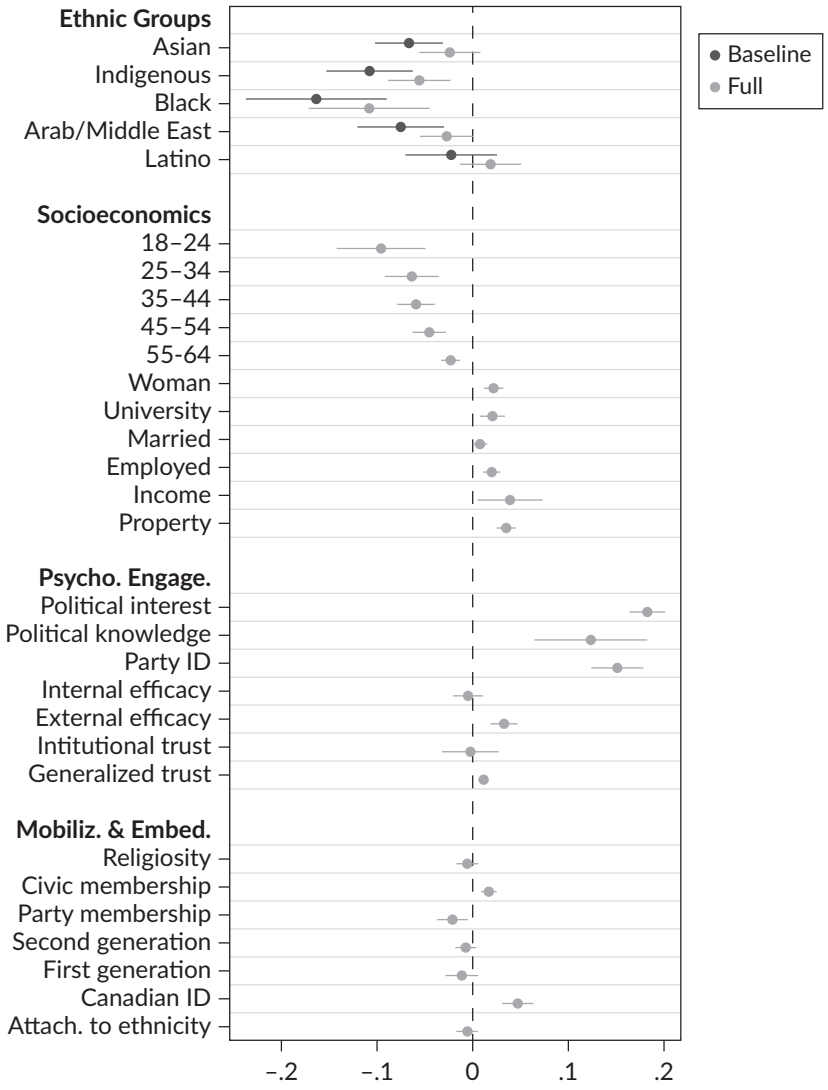

Figure 1. Determinants of turnout. Notes: The figure displays coefficients from the linear probability model along with 95% confidence intervals; the baseline and full models referenced are detailed in Table D1 in the Supplementary File; province and survey fixed effects included.

To better illustrate the origins of the observed differences in electoral participation between racialized minorities and the White majority, Table 2 provides detailed information on each factor's contribution. Socio-economic variables show a consistently negative influence on turnout for all minority groups compared to Whites. Among these groups, Asians are the least disadvantaged. Socio-economic factors contribute to only a 0.9 percentage point difference in their participation compared to Whites. Conversely, these factors alone account for a 2.4 percentage point gap for Black respondents and a 2.2 percentage point gap for Indigenous and Arab respondents.

Regarding individual covariates, age stands out as the most influential socio-economic factor across all groups. It explains a substantial portion of the under-participation: 2.1 percentage points for Asians, 1.1 percentage points for Indigenous, 2.1 percentage points for Blacks, 2.2 percentage points for Arabs, and 1.8 percentage points for Latinos. This suggests that the younger age profile of racialized minorities compared to the White majority is a significant factor in their lower electoral participation.

Table 2. Decomposition of the participation gap.

	Asian	Indigenous	Black	Arab	Latino
Socioeconomics	−0.009***	−0.022***	−0.024***	−0.022***	−0.015***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Age	−0.021***	−0.011***	−0.021***	−0.022***	−0.018***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Woman	0.000	−0.000	0.001	−0.001	−0.001
	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.001)
University	0.005***	−0.004***	0.001*	0.005***	0.003***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Married	−0.000*	−0.001*	−0.001*	−0.001*	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Employed	0.004***	0.001*	0.004***	0.004***	0.005***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Income	0.001***	−0.002***	−0.001*	−0.001	−0.000
	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Property	0.001***	−0.005***	−0.006***	−0.006***	−0.004***
	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Psychological engagement	−0.026***	−0.028***	−0.023***	−0.019***	−0.019***
	(0.002)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Political interest	−0.010***	−0.010***	−0.003	0.000	−0.006*
	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)
Political knowledge	−0.011***	−0.011***	−0.017***	−0.019***	−0.016***
	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Party ID	−0.004***	−0.004	−0.001	0.001	0.003
	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Internal efficacy	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
External efficacy	0.000	−0.001	0.001	−0.001	0.001*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Institutional trust	−0.000	0.000	−0.000	−0.000	−0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Generalized trust	−0.001***	−0.002**	−0.003***	−0.002**	−0.002**
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Mobilization and embeddedness	−0.008**	−0.003	−0.009**	−0.007*	−0.007*
	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Religiosity	−0.000	−0.000	−0.001	−0.001	−0.001
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Civic engagement	−0.001**	−0.000	0.001*	0.001*	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Party membership	0.002***	−0.000	0.000	0.001	0.002**
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)
Immigration status	−0.006*	0.002*	−0.005*	−0.007*	−0.007*
	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)

Table 2. (Cont.) Decomposition of the participation gap.

	Asian	Indigenous	Black	Arab	Latino
Total effect	−0.042*** (0.004)	−0.052*** (0.005)	−0.056*** (0.006)	−0.048*** (0.007)	−0.041*** (0.007)
Observations	36404	36404	36404	36404	36404

Notes: This table presents results from Gelbach's conditional decomposition analysis; entries are interpreted as the absolute contribution of each variable to the observed change in the estimated participation gap between each minority group and the White majority from the baseline model to the full model; estimates for *socioeconomics*, *psychological engagement*, and *mobilization and embeddedness* represent the combined contribution of the variables within each respective set of factors; the *total effect* estimates show the overall contribution of all covariates to the participation gap, calculated as the arithmetic difference between the Group ID coefficients in the baseline model and the full model; standard errors are in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

However, there is notable between-group heterogeneity in the contribution of other socio-economic variables. Asians, as the most socio-economically advantaged group, benefit from better education, higher employment rates, and higher income and property ownership than Whites on average. These advantages collectively contribute to a 1.1 percentage point increase in their participation, which partially offsets the overall turnout gap. In stark contrast, Indigenous are significantly disadvantaged by lower levels of income, education, and property ownership. For Blacks, Arabs, and Latinos, education and employment status tend to narrow the participation gap. Property ownership tends to exacerbate the gap. Income has a negligible effect on changing it.

Psychological variables also play a significant role in explaining the participation gap of racialized groups. The overall negative coefficients for psychological engagement suggest that these factors generally contribute to lower turnout among minorities compared to Whites. This is particularly evident for Asian, Indigenous, and Black respondents, where psychological engagement explains a notable portion of the turnout gap—2.6 percentage points for Asians, 2.8 percentage points for Indigenous, and 2.3 percentage points for Blacks.

Among the psychological variables, political knowledge and political interest are especially influential. Political knowledge alone accounts for 1.1—1.9 percentage points of the turnout gap, depending on the specific minority group. This indicates that racialized citizens are less politically informed than their White counterparts, which contributes to their lower levels of electoral participation. Furthermore, political interest significantly explains the gap in relation to Asians, Indigenous, and Latino groups. Interestingly, the contribution of partisanship is minimal across most groups, with the exception of Asian respondents. While party identification is an important predictor of turnout in general (see Figure 1), it does not significantly contribute to the racialized minority turnout gap in Canada. These results suggest that levels of party attachment are comparable between racialized minorities and the White majority. This implies that Canadian political parties may be making concerted efforts to represent and mobilize racialized minority electorates more effectively (Bird, 2005).

Mobilization and community embeddedness factors are not as influential as socio-economic or psychological models, but they still contribute to the participation gap for several groups, particularly Asians, Blacks, Arabs, and Latinos. The negative coefficients for immigration status and Canadian identity among these groups suggest that weaker ties to Canadian society and a lower sense of belonging reduce their likelihood of

voting. However, it is important to note that the effect size is relatively small, with the most substantial impact observed among Blacks, accounting for only about 0.9 percentage points of the turnout gap.

To enhance the robustness of our findings, we performed separate decomposition analyses on the Canadian Election Study and Democracy Checkup datasets. The results, detailed in Tables F1 (Canadian Election Study) and F2 (Democracy Checkup) in the Supplementary File, show that both datasets yield similar findings regarding the explanatory power of the psychological and mobilization and embeddedness models. Specifically, the psychological model significantly contributes to the underparticipation of minorities, while the mobilization and embeddedness model has minimal impact. A significant divergence is noted in the socioeconomic model: the Canadian Election Study analysis shows limited explanatory power, whereas the Democracy Checkup analysis indicates a substantial impact. Upon examining the individual variables within the socioeconomic framework, we find that the disparity primarily stems from age differences among minority respondents. Canadian Election Study minority respondents are similar in age to the White majority, whereas those in the Democracy Checkup dataset are considerably younger.

Canadian Census data show that racialized minorities are, on average, seven years younger than the general population (Statistics Canada, 2019). This demographic trend aligns more closely with the observations from the Democracy Checkup dataset, thereby bolstering our confidence in its results. The Canadian Election Study comprises 9,496 respondents, including 772 self-identified Asians, 142 Indigenous, 114 Blacks, 78 Arabs/Middle Eastern, and 69 Latinos. The relatively small number of minority respondents in the Canadian Election Study challenges the reliability of drawing definitive conclusions about their political behavior. This issue led us to combine all datasets in the main analysis to increase the effective sample size of minority participants.

In summary, while socio-economic and psychological engagement are key drivers of the turnout gap, their impact varies across different racialized groups. Mobilization and community embeddedness factors play a rather modest role. The total effect, which represents the combined contribution of all covariates, indicates that socio-economic, psychological, and mobilization and community embeddedness factors together account for about half of the turnout gap. However, significant gaps in electoral participation persist between racialized minorities and the White majority, especially among Black and Indigenous groups. Further research is needed to explore additional factors, such as structural barriers or experiences of discrimination, that may continue to hinder their voting rates.

5. Discussion

Gaps in electoral participation are important to document—both their relative size and their causes. Gaps in voting can lead to fewer incentives for political representatives to pay attention to the interests of communities that participate less in the electoral process. Using new data sources, we have documented important gaps in participation. By employing decomposition analysis to examine the participation gap between racialized minorities and the White majority in electoral contexts, we provide a novel methodological contribution to the literature. In conventional analyses, researchers typically use a step-by-step block recursive method to progressively add explanatory variables to the model. They then observe changes in the estimated coefficients for the grouping variable to assess the explanatory power of each set of factors. However, this approach can result in misleading interpretations, as the order in which covariates are introduced can influence the observed

effects. As Gelbach (2016) notes, simple comparisons across models may not accurately capture the true contributions of individual factors, as the sequence of inclusion may disproportionately affect the results.

The decomposition technique employed in this study addresses these methodological issues by directly quantifying the contribution of each variable to the participation gap conditional on all covariates, independent of the order of their inclusion. This allows for a more precise determination of how each factor influences the narrowing of the participation gap. Furthermore, decomposition analysis not only clarifies the extent to which factors included in the model account for the explained portion of the gap but also highlights the proportion that remains unexplained.

In our analysis, we observed that a substantial portion of the participation differentials remains unexplained, particularly among Black Canadians, where two-thirds of the gap is not accounted for. This highlights a limitation of our research. Although factors related to mobilization and community embeddedness demonstrate limited explanatory power in our results, this does not necessarily imply that these factors are irrelevant in explaining racialized minorities' turnout in Canada. A key limitation of our study is the availability and adequacy of measures to capture crucial concepts. Our major data sources, notably Democracy Checkup, lack measures that might reflect network complexity or mobilization efforts like campaign-period contact. For instance, variables like union membership, association membership, size of social network, and contact by political parties during campaigns would be highly relevant for a comprehensive analysis of this model in the Canadian context. Similarly, our data rely on an imperfect proxy for group consciousness—a single-item question asking respondents how much they agree that their ethnicity is a crucial part of their identity. This measure may not effectively capture the complexity of group consciousness, which could explain why it does not emerge as a strong predictor of minority political engagement, unlike findings from the US literature (Lien, 1994; Sanchez & Vargas, 2016).

In addition to collecting higher-quality individual-level data, future research could also explore contextual factors beyond individual resources. For instance, cultural barriers may deter political engagement among groups whose traditional values prioritize harmony over conflict (Choi et al., 2007). Moreover, it is useful to examine the political representation of ethnic minorities (Bird, 2005) and to assess how effectively policy discussions address the specific concerns of minority communities (Barreto, 2018). This approach can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to the under-participation of racialized groups in electoral processes.

Acknowledgments

We thank participants of the 2024 Toronto Montreal Political Behavior Workshop for their valuable feedback. The authors declare having used OpenAI's ChatGPT 4 to enhance the English language in some paragraphs. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed, taking full responsibility for the content of the publication. All opinions and analyses conducted in this article are the authors' own.

Funding

Social Science and Humanities Research Council (Grants #895–2019-1022 and #435–2018-1208).

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability

The Canadian Election Studies and Democracy Checkups are publicly accessible data sets. For comprehensive details on survey representativeness and technical specifications, we encourage readers to consult the technical reports and codebooks available online. These resources can be accessed freely on the C-Dem page at Harvard's Dataverse: https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/C-Dem

Replication files are available in the Harvard Dataverse (https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/JZYCOO).

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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Politics and Governance
2025 • Volume 13 • Article 9152
https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.9152

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ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Electoral Turnout of Non-Citizens Under Voluntary and Compulsory Voting: Evidence From Chile

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Submitted: 6 August 2024 **Accepted:** 7 January 2025 **Published:** 18 March 2025

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Unequal Participation Among Youth and Immigrants: Analyzing Political Attitudes and Behavior in Societal Subgroups" edited by Arndt Leininger (Chemnitz University of Technology) and Sabrina Mayer (University of Bamberg), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.i426

Abstract

It is often argued that non-citizens are less interested in the political processes of the host country and, therefore, vote less than citizens. We discuss this using Chile's administrative electoral census for the 2012–2023 elections. We choose Chile for three reasons. First, it is one of the few countries worldwide that allows non-citizens to vote in local and national elections. Second, Chile requires only five years of permanent residence for non-citizens to vote. Third, Chile implemented a voluntary voting system between 2012 and 2021 and a compulsory voting system in 2022. This latter particularity means that voting is compulsory for non-citizens registered on the electoral roll. How much and how did the electoral participation of citizens and non-citizens change with the introduction of compulsory voting? Four results stand out. First, citizen turnout averaged 44.7% under voluntary voting, while non-citizen turnout averaged 17.1%. Second, with the introduction of compulsory voting, the figures narrowed. Citizens averaged 86.3% and non-citizens 60.0%, tripling their turnout compared to elections organised under voluntary voting. Third, there is a gender gap in voter turnout in favour of women, both among citizens and non-citizens. Fourth, since 2020—when a constitutional referendum was held during the Covid-19 pandemic—there has been a higher turnout of young people in citizen and non-citizen groups. These results are beneficial for assessing the institutions that regulate the right and exercise of the vote for non-citizens, the impact of compulsory voting on electoral participation, and the re-boosting of youth participation.

Keywords

administrative censuses; Chile; compulsory vote; electoral turnout; non-citizens

1. Introduction

The increase in migration flows represents a substantial political challenge for democracies, especially regarding transferring citizenship rights to resident aliens (Altman et al., 2023; Benhabib, 2004; Earnest, 2008; Finn, 2020; Kayran & Erdilmen, 2021; Koopmans & Michalowski, 2017; Tonkiss & Bloom, 2015). The most discussed right in literature is the right to vote (Altman, 2022; Escobar, 2007, 2015; Ferris et al., 2020; Wegschaider, 2023), with some consensus that non-citizens tend to participate less than citizens (Arrighi & Bauböck, 2017; Herrera & Morales, 2023; Spies et al., 2020). However, most of these studies are based on opinion polls or aggregate data per country. The objective is often to perform cross-country comparisons, identifying the political predispositions of non-citizens and their interest in participating in elections. Chile represents an exceptional case study in the analysis of electoral behaviour, particularly regarding the turnout of the non-citizen population (Herrera & Morales, 2024). Globally, only a few countries allow non-citizens to vote in all local and national elections. This distinctive feature of the Chilean electoral system provides a unique opportunity to examine turnout dynamics under different electoral contexts, especially considering that only five years of permanent residency—and not nationality—are required for non-citizens to vote. This particularity allows for comparing how non-citizens and citizens respond to the specific characteristics of national and local elections.

Additionally, the Chilean case becomes even more relevant when considering a large-scale institutional change. Between 2012 and 2021, Chile implemented a system of automatic enrolment in the electoral registers and voluntary voting (see Contreras & Morales, 2014, 2017). Meanwhile, in 2022, a system of automatic registration and compulsory voting was implemented. The particularity of all this is that compulsory voting with effective sanctions also applies to non-citizens. Like nationals, non-citizens who did not vote were fined between US$32 and US$200. Consequently, a substantial increase in non-citizens' electoral participation is expected. Chile, then, has become an exception worldwide. Although there are other countries where non-citizens are allowed to vote in compulsory voting (Uruguay and Ecuador, for example), they must comply with an administrative procedure to register on the electoral roll. In Chile, conversely, non-citizens are automatically registered on reaching the age of 18 and are obliged to vote. In light of this, it is worth asking the following question: How does non-citizens' electoral turnout vary between voluntary and compulsory voting elections? Is there a gender gap in non-citizens' turnout? To what extent and in which direction does age influence electoral turnout? Classic and contemporary literature on electoral turnout has systematically addressed these questions (Frank & Martínez i Coma, 2023; Goerres, 2007; Niemi et al., 1984; Wolfinger et al., 1990). However, this exercise has not been done to emphasise the non-citizen population, with a few exceptions mentioned above.

Our central hypothesis is that compulsory voting generated the effect expected in theory regarding the increase in citizens' electoral participation (Birch, 2016; Frank & Martínez i Coma, 2023; Jackman, 1987; Lijphart, 1997), but also, and much more significantly, on the participation of non-citizens. In addition, we suggest, following Goerres et al. (2022), that variables such as gender and age have a similar effect on voter turnout for both citizens and non-citizens. The analysis of these hypotheses opens a space for a broader debate on citizenship rights, particularly on the power that non-citizens acquire in electoral outcomes. In the case of Chile, non-citizens represent around 5% of the electoral roll. However, in local elections where a simple majority electoral system elects mayors, non-citizens represent around 30% of the electoral roll in some municipalities (Pérez Cosgaya & Palomera Valenzuela, 2024). Non-citizens thus become an essential

electoral force, even more so in a context where voting is compulsory and, in the case of non-voting, voters risk sanctions (fines).

To answer these questions and test our hypotheses, we used an administrative electoral census that accumulated more than 145 million voters of Chile's local and national elections from 2012 to 2023. This electoral census includes the voters' sex, age, nationality, municipality of residence, and electoral participation—that is, whether the voter voted or not. Unlike other studies, the database is a census. The Electoral Service of Chile provides the complete electoral roll information for each election, along with voter data. Naturally, this information does not include personal details that would allow for the identification of voters. However, it provides a unique opportunity to study turnout without the overrepresentation issues often found in surveys.

In theoretical terms, this study mainly relies on the proposal of Spies et al. (2020) and Goerres et al. (2022) regarding the usefulness of traditional models of voting behaviour applied to the foreign population. The variables typically used, for example, to explain the electoral participation of national voters, work similarly in the foreign-born population. We refer specifically to gender and age. Consequently, although we should find differences in the volume of electoral participation comparing citizens and non-citizens, the distribution by gender and age should be similar between the two groups. However, we must assess whether this theory works efficiently for a case like Chile, especially given the transition from voluntary to compulsory voting, representing a significant institutional change (Renwick, 2010). Indeed, Chile is a unique case worldwide, as non-citizens are obliged to vote in all types of elections, be they local, national, or constitutional referendums.

This article is divided into four sections. First, we show the general theory of the electoral participation of non-citizens and point out our hypotheses. Second, we describe the case of Chile, emphasising institutional changes related to the electoral regime of voluntary and compulsory voting. Third, we analyse our data and test the hypotheses. Finally, we present our conclusions.

2. Theory and Hypotheses

An extensive array of literature focuses on the electoral turnout of non-citizens in Europe (Bevelander, 2015; Bhatti & Hansen, 2012; Borkowska & Luthra, 2024; Giugni & Grasso, 2020; Mügge et al., 2019; Wass et al., 2015), the United States (Barreto, 2005; Tuckel & Maisel, 1994; Wong, 2000), Canada (Black, 1987; White, 2017), and in some Latin American countries such as Chile (Herrera & Morales, 2023; Umpierrez de Reguero et al., 2023), Uruguay (Margheritis, 2022), Ecuador (Finn, 2021), and Colombia (Escobar et al., 2015). Most of these studies use survey data, although recently there has been an incorporation of administrative electoral census data (Herrera & Morales, 2024). In general, it is concluded that non-citizens vote to a lesser extent than citizens and that the political incorporation of non-citizens fundamentally depends on sociodemographic variables such as sex and age (Bevelander, 2015; Herrera & Morales, 2024), on the social capital that migrants have developed in the host country (Berger et al., 2004; Giugni & Grasso, 2020), on family ties derived from marriage or children born in the host country (Qian & Lichter, 2007), and on the institutional characteristics of the country of origin regarding the electoral regime—that is, whether voting in the country of origin is compulsory or voluntary (Umpierrez de Reguero & Dandoy, 2022).

More specifically, the electoral participation of non-citizens is a response to the social capital built in the receiving country, either through their incorporation into social organisations or the construction of contact networks (Giugni & Grasso, 2020), contributing to the generation of political engagement (Guarnizo et al., 2017). For others, non-citizen electoral participation is explained by the characteristics of the country of origin in terms of the electoral regime (compulsory vote/voluntary vote), level of democracy, and economic development (Herrera & Morales, 2024; White et al., 2008). For example, Ferwerda et al. (2020) find that non-citizens in Norway vote in more significant proportion when incorporated early in the electoral roll, especially those from weak democracies or dictatorships. Another group of authors estimates that the electoral participation of non-citizens will increase to the extent that more inclusive educational policies, especially for adolescents, and greater flexibility in granting citizenship are implemented (Kim & Seltzer, 2024). Finally, other authors argue that the classic models of voting behaviour used to measure the predisposition to vote or the political preferences of nationals—for example, the Michigan model—work efficiently for the case of the foreign population (Goerres et al., 2022; Spies et al., 2020). Therefore, it would not be necessary to construct new theoretical models of non-citizen electoral participation. Herrera and Morales (2023), for example, concluded that both the gender gap and age-biased electoral participation apply similarly for both nationals and non-citizens.

However, despite all these advances, there is limited understanding, for example, about the electoral turnout of non-citizens in contexts of institutional change. Specifically, this includes the transition from compulsory to voluntary voting, or vice versa, and focuses on two commonly studied variables in electoral turnout: gender and age. While other research has provided insights into these areas, it is noteworthy that, except for Herrera and Morales (2024), no other study in Latin America has utilised official administrative data on a scale that enables more broadly applicable conclusions.

There is broad consensus on the advantage of compulsory voting systems over voluntary voting systems in terms of increasing voter turnout (Blais, 2008; Blais & Aarts, 2005; Gallego, 2009; Jackman, 1987; Mackerras & McAllister, 1999). However, this result also depends on the mechanisms used for voter registration. On one hand, some systems rely on voluntary registration, while others implement mandatory registration. According to Powell (1986), registration mechanisms significantly impact voter participation, particularly when voters must complete bureaucratic registration procedures. In voluntary registration systems, those who do not register are effectively excluded from voting, which leads to higher abstention rates. These individuals differ from registered voters who actively choose not to participate in an election.

Implementing compulsory voting in Chile for the 2022 and 2023 elections represents a significant institutional shift expected to have distinct effects on voter turnout (Contreras & Morales, 2024). Before this change, Chile experienced persistently low electoral participation, exacerbated by the voluntary voting system (Morales, 2020). Compulsory voting, by removing the choice to abstain without consequences, is predicted to increase overall participation, especially among typically underrepresented groups, such as young voters and non-citizens (Lijphart, 1997).

Regarding non-citizens, while a vast body of literature investigates the effects of variables such as socialisation, assimilation, and exposure on voter turnout (Black, 1987; Wass et al., 2015; White, 2017; White et al., 2008), less attention has been given to the Latin American context. In the case of Chile, although some studies have examined migrant turnout—either as a right (Umpierrez de Reguero et al., 2023) or in terms of their electoral

behaviour (Herrera & Morales, 2023)—few have explored in depth the effects of institutional mechanisms and generational and gender differences on the voting behaviour of both citizens and non-citizens. Access to a more extensive database that allows studying these effects over time is a significant advantage.

Accordingly, our hypotheses are as follows:

> Hypothesis 1: Voter turnout of citizens and non-citizens is higher in elections organised under compulsory voting than in elections organised under voluntary voting.
>
> Hypothesis 2: The gender gap in voter turnout—in favour of women—applies to both citizens and non-citizens.
>
> Hypothesis 3: The age distribution of voter turnout is similar for both citizens and non-citizens.

3. Analysis

In this analysis, we incorporate several types of elections: municipal elections (for mayors and councillors), regional elections (for regional governors and regional councillors), and national elections (referendums, presidential, and congressional elections). What we call "local elections" include municipal and regional elections, which are held simultaneously. The election of regional governors was only introduced in 2021. Presidential and legislative elections are also held together but in a different year from the local elections.

In terms of the electoral system, various formulas are used. The D'Hondt proportional representation system is applied to councillors, regional councillors, deputies, and senators. Regional governors are elected through a qualified majority system with a 40% threshold. Mayors are elected by simple majority, while presidential elections require an absolute majority to secure a win. In this context, "councillors" refers to the individuals elected to draft the constitutional project, which was ultimately rejected. They were elected using the same electoral system as deputies, with a gender quota incorporated.

Regarding the electoral regime, as noted earlier, Chile transitioned from a system of automatic voter registration with voluntary voting to one of automatic registration with compulsory voting. Concerns about inequality in voter participation under the voluntary system partly drove this change. Contreras et al. (2015) argue that the combination of age and socioeconomic status is crucial in explaining electoral participation. Specifically, young people from wealthier backgrounds were significantly more likely to vote than their poorer peers, although this disparity tended to diminish with age.

Below, we show the evolution of citizen and non-citizen voter turnout in the 2012–2023 time frame. Our inferential analysis, in which we evaluate our three hypotheses, compares the two most similar elections held under a voluntary and compulsory voting system. We refer to the 2020 and 2022 constitutional referendums. After a violent "social outburst" in October 2019, the Chilean political class decided to open a process of constitutional change as a response to citizens' demands (Navarrete & Tricot, 2021; Sáez-Vergara et al., 2022). The first phase consisted of an "input" referendum in which voters were asked whether they wanted a constitutional change. In addition, they were asked about the type of representative body they preferred to draft the new constitution. The second phase, which took place in 2021, involved the election

of the representatives who would form part of the constituent body. These two electoral processes were organised under the voluntary voting system (see Belmar et al., 2023; Tagle et al., 2023). The third phase, meanwhile, was an "exit" referendum, in which voters were asked whether they approved or rejected the constitutional proposal drafted by the representative political body.

In Figure 1, we panoramically show the percentages of electoral participation of citizens and non-citizens from 2012 to 2023. Although there are significant differences in magnitude, the evolution of participation is very similar. Voter turnout for citizens remained relatively stable between 2012 and 2021, with a sharp increase after introducing compulsory voting in 2022, reaching around 86%. While consistently lower, non-citizen turnout also saw a significant rise after 2021, peaking at 61.3% in 2022 but showing a slight decline by 2023. Our time series begins in 2012, as it was in that year that Chile's Electoral Service made individual voter turnout data freely available. Before this date, we have no official and reliable information regarding the electoral participation of non-citizens.

As previously mentioned, the dataset used in this study comes from the Electoral Service of Chile and is an unprecedented electoral database that includes the complete voter registry. By compiling data from 10 official electoral censuses conducted by the Electoral Service of Chile between 2012 and 2023, we constructed an extensive dataset of 145,812,848 electors. Of that total, 141,952,609 (97.3%) are citizens and 3,860,239 (2.7%) are non-citizens. We reiterate, however, that the portion of non-citizens has increased steadily over time. If in 2012 they represented 1.67% of the electoral roll, in 2023 they increased to 3.91%. The use of electoral censuses offers a significant advantage over traditional opinion polls, as electoral censuses provide official and verifiable data on voter participation. Unlike surveys, where "over-reporting" or "under-reporting" of electoral behaviour can skew results (Cox & Morales, 2022), electoral censuses offer irrefutable evidence of turnout. This is particularly important during electoral regime change, as Cox and Morales (2022) note that such moments tend to show the most significant discrepancies between survey results and actual electoral data. The transition from voluntary to compulsory voting in Chile highlights the value of using electoral data, as surveys may fail to capture the full extent of shifts in voter behaviour during such changes. However, a limitation of using electoral census data is that it provides less detailed information than opinion polls, which

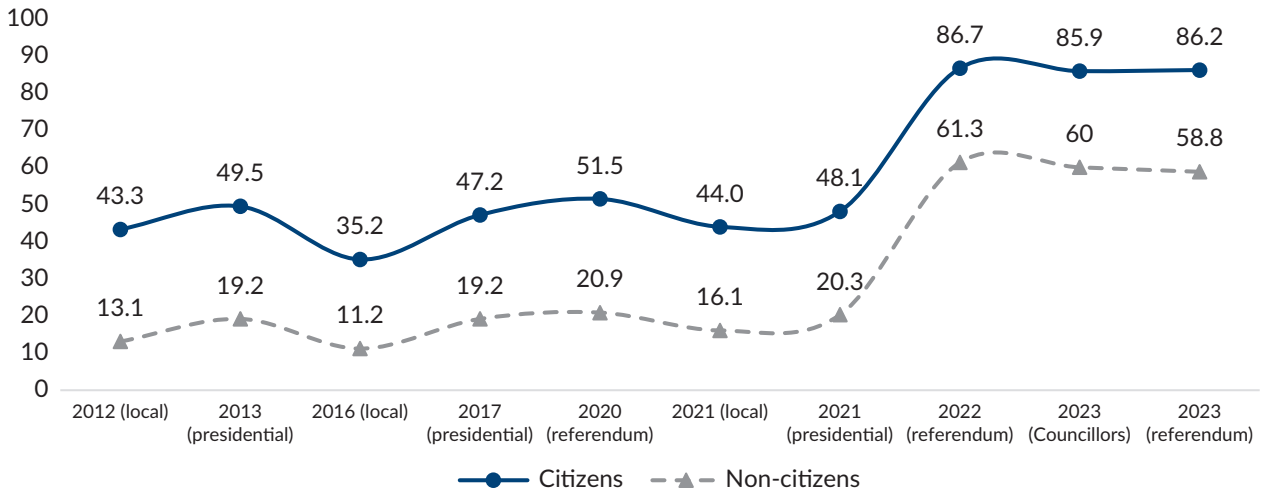

Figure 1. Electoral turnout of citizens and non-citizens, 2012–2023. Source: Own elaboration based on Servel (n.d.).

often include a broader range of variables. As a result, the number of hypotheses that can be tested with this type of data is somewhat constrained. Nevertheless, using electoral data remains crucial for this study, as it allows for robust and reliable analysis of voter turnout trends over time, offering insights that would be difficult to achieve with survey data alone.

4. Findings

We conducted our data analysis, testing the three hypotheses suggested above. We stress that, for this purpose, we have compared two elections: the 2020 constitutional referendum (voluntary vote) and the 2022 constitutional referendum (compulsory vote). The total number of voters is 30,029,648. Of these, 29,136,191 (97%) are citizens and 893,457 are non-citizens (3%). Table 1 reports the overall data for the 2020 and 2022 constitutional plebiscites. In October 2019, Chile experienced a social outburst characterised by widespread mobilisations and multiple acts of violence (Morales, 2021). Citizens took to the streets to protest the injustices of the neoliberal model, abuses by private companies, inequality, and the slow pace of lawmakers in producing better social legislation. Amidst this crisis, the political elite decided to initiate a constitutional change process to find a way out of the social upheaval the country was experiencing. This process began in October 2020 through a plebiscite—with voluntary voting—in which 78% of voters approved drafting a new Constitution. The electoral turnout was 51%. Subsequently, a Constitutional Convention was chosen, composed of 155 representatives elected in 28 electoral districts, with one year to write the new text. This proposal was voted on in a new plebiscite in September 2022, with compulsory voting. The participation was 86%, and the proposed text was rejected by 62%. Later, and although not analysed here, a second constitutional process was opened that concluded with the same result. A Constitutional Council composed of 50 elected representatives drafted a proposal that almost 56% of the voters rejected. As expected, voter turnout increased significantly in elections organised under compulsory voting, albeit with a very substantial increase in invalid voting (Contreras & Morales, 2024).

The results indicate the following trend when comparing the percentages of electoral turnout between citizens and non-citizens in the 2020 referendum (voluntary voting) and the 2022 referendum (compulsory voting). While citizens increased their participation from 51.6% to 86.7%, non-citizens almost tripled their participation

Table 1. Voter turnout in the 2020 and 2022 constitutional referenda.

2020 (Voluntary Vote)			
	Registered	Voters	Percentage
Citizens	14,417,368	7,431,911	51.6
Non-Citizens	378,829	79,212	20.9
Total	14,796,197	7,511,123	50.8

2022 (Compulsory Vote)			
	Registered	Voters	Percentage
Citizens	14,659,301	12,714,315	86.7
Non-Citizens	514,628	315,537	61.3
Total	15,173,929	13,029,852	85.9

Source: Own elaboration based on Servel (n.d.).

from 20.9% to 61.3%. This is not surprising despite the magnitude of the change in voter turnout between elections. The literature on voter turnout around the world notes the positive effect of compulsory voting on voter turnout (Blais, 2008; Fornos et al., 2004; Frank & Martínez i Coma, 2023; Mackerras & McAllister, 1999), but there is a dearth of academic work examining the effect of compulsory voting on non-citizen turnout. Following our first hypothesis, compulsory voting generates a significant increase in electoral turnout. This is not surprising at all. However, it is striking that in the case of non-citizens, voter turnout is almost three times higher than that recorded for elections organised with voluntary voting.

Following hypothesis 2, Table 2 shows voter turnout by gender. In 2020 and 2022, there is a substantial gender gap in favour of women, an issue analysed by Cox and Morales (2022, 2023). This finding challenges the "traditional gender gap" concept in the literature, which suggests men's higher political turnout compared to women due to their broader information and interest in politics (e.g., Almond & Verba, 1963; Dassonneville & Kostelka, 2021; Inglehart & Norris, 2003). However, recent literature shows this "traditional gender gap" has disappeared and even reversed in Latin America (Carreras & Castañeda-Angarita, 2014). Except for the work of Herrera and Morales (2024), the gender gap among non-citizen voters has not received much attention.

The gender gap in favour of women was more significant for citizen than non-citizen women in 2020 and almost identical by 2022. Women's greater interest in participating is due to different factors. Non-citizen women often engage more with Chilean state services in health and education for their children, besides developing stronger socialisation links (Herrera & Morales, 2024). On the other hand, women have become rapidly incorporated into the labour market (Cebula & Alexander, 2017), favouring a greater interest in public affairs, an issue that also applies to non-citizen women.

After the failed process of constitutional change in 2022, Chile's political elite insisted on a new process. This time, the timeframe for drafting the constitutional proposal was shorter, and the political-representative body was a Constitutional Council composed of 50 members. As in the previous process, a constitutional referendum was held in which voters were to indicate whether they were for or against the proposal. This referendum was held on 17 December 2023, and a compulsory vote was implemented. Again, the option against a new constitution won. Figure 2 compares the voter turnout of men and women in the three

Table 2. Voter turnout by gender, 2020–2022.

2020 (Voluntary Vote)				
	Men	Women	Total	Gender Gap
Citizens	49.8	53.2	51.6	3.4
Non-Citizens	19.5	22.1	20.9	2.6
Total	49.0	52.4	50.8	3.4
2022 (Compulsory Vote)				
	Men	Women	Total	Gender Gap
Citizens	85.1	88.3	86.7	3.2
Non-Citizens	59.7	62.8	61.3	3.1
Total	84.2	87.4	85.9	3.2

Source: Own elaboration based on Servel (n.d.).

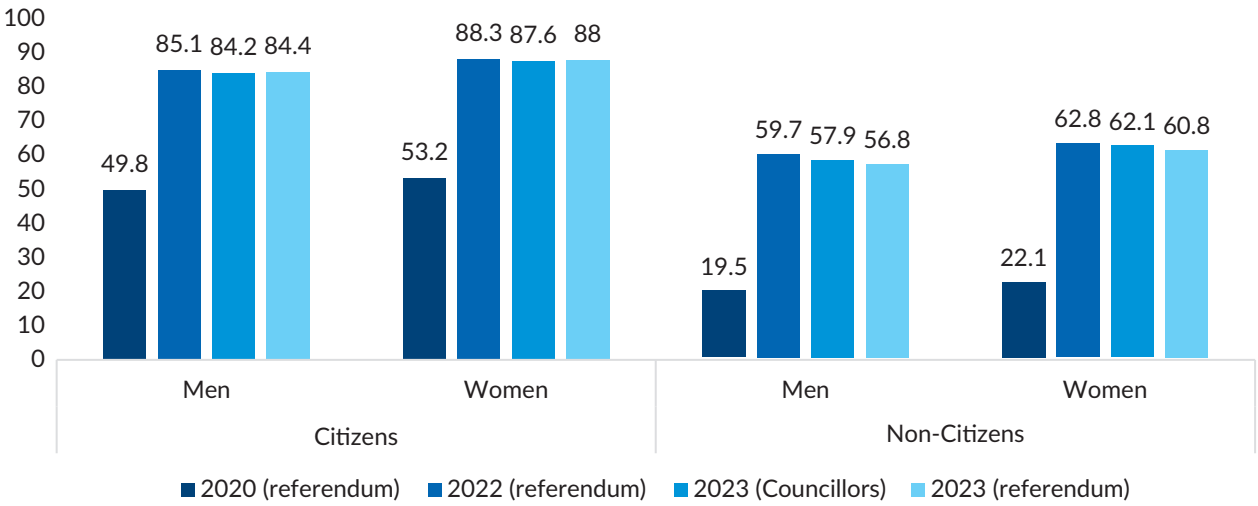

Figure 2. Voter turnout by gender, with voluntary (2020) and compulsory voting (2022 and 2023). Source: Own elaboration based on Servel (n.d.).

referendums: 2020 (voluntary vote), 2022 (compulsory vote), and 2023 (compulsory vote). The figure further segments between citizens and non-citizens. The results are in line with the previous analysis. The gender gaps in voter turnout favour women under both voluntary and compulsory voting, functioning similarly in the group of citizens and non-citizens.

Following hypothesis 2, Table 3 reports the distribution of turnout by age. Two striking issues emerge here. First, under both voluntary and compulsory voting, voter turnout is higher among voters under 40 than the rest. Second, among non-citizen voters, age groups vote similarly under voluntary voting but with higher turnout among voters under 40 under compulsory voting. These data may be surprising if we look at the classic literature on the lower voter turnout of younger voters (Blais, 2008; Franklin, 2004; van Biezen et al., 2012; Wass, 2007), but less so if we look at the literature questioning the age gap (Rubenson et al., 2004; Sturgis & Jennings, 2020). Young non-citizens' increased turnout may stem from their socialisation during Chile's highly politicised and polarised 2019 social crisis and the subsequent constitutional process initiated

Table 3. Voter turnout by age, 2020–2022.

	2020 (Voluntary Vote)			
	18–39	40–59	60 and over	Total
Citizens	55.4	52.7	43.9	51.6
Non-Citizens	19.8	22.8	18.4	20.9
Total	54.5	51.7	43.5	50.8

	2022 (Compulsory Vote)			
	18–39	40–59	60 and over	Total
Citizens	89.4	87.2	82.1	86.7
Non-Citizens	66.2	62.1	43.3	61.3
Total	88.6	86.2	81.4	85.9

Source: Own elaboration based on Servel (n.d.).

in the wake of that year's citizen mobilisations (Morales, 2021). This opens a new research space about non-citizens who acquire their right to vote during a particularly convulsed political environment.

We hypothesised that compulsory voting would have similar effects for all age groups; however, the evidence did not support this. For citizens, youth participation averaged 89% for the three elections, significantly higher than the 82.7% recorded for adults aged 60 and over. In the case of non-citizens, the differences were even more striking. While young people averaged 64.9%, adults aged 60 and over barely reached 44.3%, a difference of more than 20 percentage points (see Figure 3).

This result can be explained as follows. Chilean electoral law establishes fines for those who do not vote. However, the same law provides a series of excuses for those who cannot vote, allowing them to avoid this fine. These include being ill on election day or having physical problems travelling to the polling stations. This condition is most likely to affect older people, which could explain their lower levels of electoral participation compared to the rest of the population. In the case of the foreign population, we propose an alternative explanation. Electoral law includes another excuse to avoid the fine: if voters are more than 200 kilometres from their polling place. It could then be that first-generation non-citizens—mainly Peruvians, Bolivians, Ecuadorians, and Colombians—have entered the country through the Northern border, which is the border with Peru and Bolivia, and have declared electoral domicile in some municipalities in that geographical area, and then moved to the capital, Santiago, which is more than 2,000 kilometres away from the border. By not updating the new address before the Electoral Service, these voters can be excused for not voting because they are more than 200 km away from the place where they should vote.

We conclude with four statistical probit models—two for citizens and two for non-citizens—whose results are shown in Table 4. The dependent variable is dichotomous, assuming "0" if the person did not vote and "1" if they voted. The independent variables are the following: Gender (0 = Man; 1 = Woman), Age (categorised into 14 five-year intervals ranging from 18–19 to 80 and over), the quadratic of Age (to identify likely diminishing marginal returns), Electoral Regime (0 = 2020 with voluntary voting; 1 = 2022 with compulsory voting), and

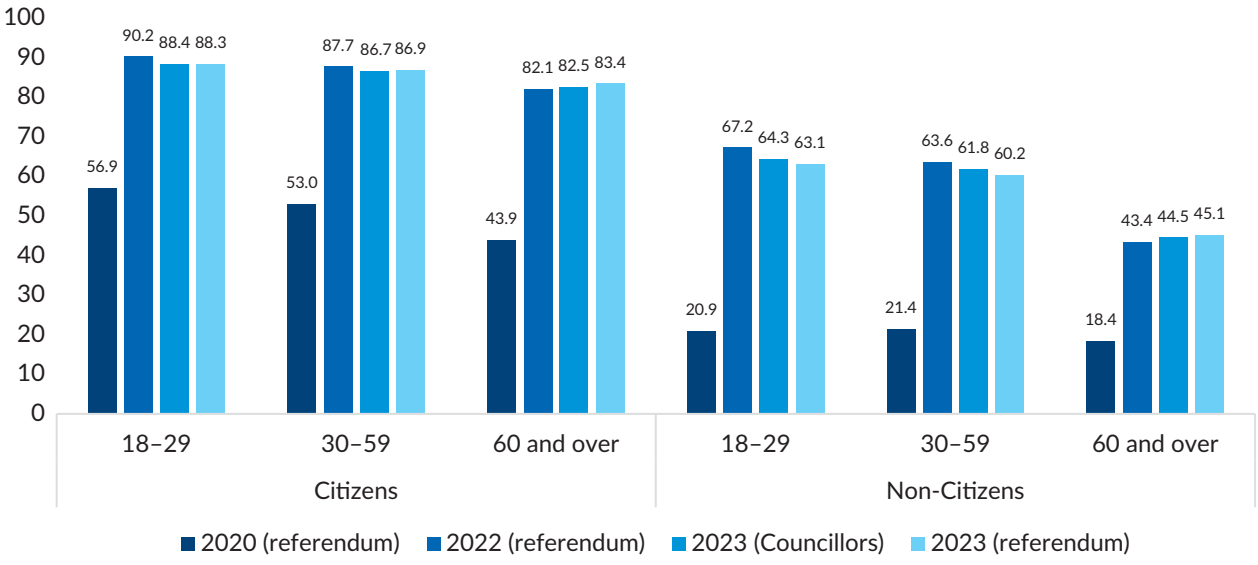

Figure 3. Voter turnout by age, in elections with voluntary (2020) and compulsory voting (2022 and 2023). Source: Own elaboration based on Servel (n.d.).

two interaction terms. Two comparisons are conducted: one between gender and electoral regime to assess changes in the gender gap across both elections, and another between age and electoral regime to analyse the impact of age on electoral turnout in both elections.

The probit statistical models have the following structure:

$$P(y = 1|x) = \phi\left(\beta_0 \text{Gender} + \beta_1 \text{Age} + \beta_2 \text{Age}^2 + \beta_3 \text{ElectoralRegime} + \beta_4 \text{Gender} \times \text{ElectoralRegime} + \beta_5 \text{Age} \times \text{ElectoralRegime}\right)$$

The results are in line with the descriptive analysis. First, a gender gap in favour of women is confirmed for both citizens and non-citizens. Second, age has a positive effect on turnout, but with particularly low coefficients, and according to the sign of the quadratic of age, it quickly finds diminishing marginal returns. Third, as expected, compulsory voting is associated with higher voter turnout. Fourth, the interaction variable's coefficient suggests a slightly more significant gender gap favouring women under compulsory voting among citizens. However, no variation is found for non-citizens. Fifth, voter turnout decreases among older voters, and this decrease is more accelerated among non-citizens. Figure 4 shows this result more clearly, indicating the predicted probability of electoral turnout for citizens and non-citizens under voluntary and compulsory voting. The increase in young non-citizens is evident when comparing electoral turnout with voluntary and compulsory voting. For example, the predicted probability of electoral turnout of an 18–19-years-old is less than 20% in 2020 and close to 65% in 2022. In contrast, a non-citizen between 60 and 64 years old registers a 21% probability of voter turnout in 2022, rising to almost 55% in 2022.

Table 4. Determinants of electoral turnout of citizens and non-citizens.

Variables	Citizens Model 1	Citizens Model 2	Non-citizens Model 3	Non-citizens Model 4
Hypothesis 1: Electoral Regime (0 = Voluntary; 1 = Compulsory)		0.000544*** (6.24e−07)		0.000746*** (3.94e−06)
Hypothesis 2: Gender (0 = Man; 1 = Woman)	0.114*** (0.000490)	0.105*** (0.000664)	0.0572*** (0.00268)	0.0843*** (0.00463)
Hypothesis 3: Age	0.0689*** (0.000287)	0.0783*** (0.000306)	0.0651*** (0.00199)	0.102*** (0.00219)
Age^2	−0.00700*** (1.87e−05)	−0.00802*** (2.00e−05)	−0.00768*** (0.000134)	−0.00741*** (0.000140)
Gender * Electoral Regime		3.83e−05*** (5.29e−07)		4.52e−06 (2.90e−06)
Age * Electoral Regime		−2.58e−06*** (7.24e−08)		−3.19e−05*** (5.18e−07)
Constant	0.398*** (0.000979)	−0.0722*** (0.00113)	−0.219*** (0.00683)	−1.146*** (0.00884)
Observations	29,136,191	29,136,191	893,457	893,457
Pseudo-*R*	0.0126	0.139	0.0106	0.136
Log-Likelihood	−1.780e+07	−1.550e+07	−606,708	−529,606
Chi-squared	452,045	5.011e+06	13,056	167,260
Prob Wald	0	0	0	0

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses; *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. Source: Own elaboration based on Servel (n.d.).

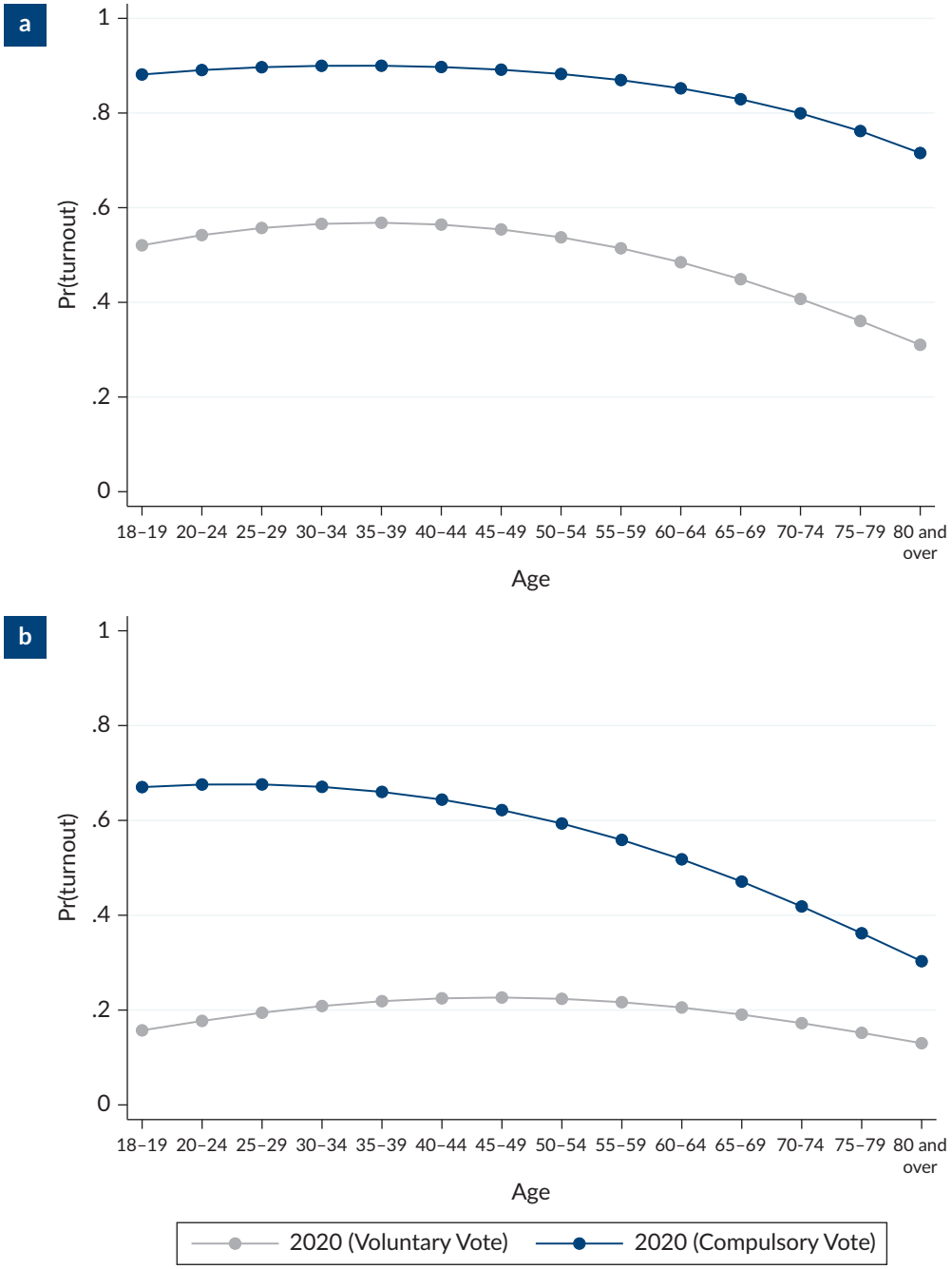

Figure 4. Predicted voter turnout values for (a) citizens and (b) non-citizens, 2020–2022. Source: Own elaboration based on Servel (n.d.).

5. Conclusions

This analysis leads to five key conclusions. First, the case of Chile, because of the institutional conditions that favour the incorporation of non-citizens, deserves more theoretical attention. As we have noted, Chile is one of the most permissive countries in the world regarding the acquisition of political and social rights for non-citizens. They are only required to have five years of residence to vote, and from that moment on, a non-citizen can also join a political party. Therefore, there is an easy process of institutional incorporation for

non-citizens in the host country. Although the electoral turnout of non-citizens has hovered around 20% since 2012, for the 2022 constitutional referendum, non-citizens tripled their electoral turnout. This is explained mainly by Chile's adoption of an automatic registration system in electoral rolls and compulsory voting, which involves financial sanctions for those who do not vote. This impact will be much more significant for the 2024 municipal elections. Although the total number of non-citizens eligible to vote represents 4.4% of the electoral roll—as measured for 2023—their distribution is not random. There are communes in the Metropolitan Region—including the capital, Santiago—where the percentage of non-citizens registered in the electoral roll approaches 30%. Therefore, while the impact of the non-citizens' vote is marginal at the national level, they constitute a decisive electorate at the communal level, potentially determining the winning mayoral candidate in certain municipalities.

Secondly, the case of Chile helps evaluate the factors that explain electoral turnout by comparing citizens and non-citizens under two electoral regimes: automatic registration and voluntary voting from 2012 to 2021 and automatic registration and compulsory voting from 2022. As noted, the literature in political science has been particularly prolific in identifying predictors of electoral turnout. However, the same is not valid for the electoral turnout of non-citizens, either due to the absence of reliable data or because they represent a minimal percentage of electoral rolls internationally. According to our evidence, and as expected, there was a substantial increase in electoral turnout in citizens and non-citizens upon the institution of compulsory voting. As noted, the voter turnout of non-citizens almost tripled in the first election with compulsory voting. Unlike other countries where voting is also compulsory, such as Ecuador or Uruguay, in Chile, non-citizens are automatically registered on the electoral roll after five years of permanent residence. They do not need to go to any Electoral Court or Electoral Service to register and vote. Therefore, it is a straightforward process. This has generated a debate in the political class. Some propose that voting should be voluntary for non-citizens, while others argue that voting should be compulsory for non-citizens but only in local elections. The substantial increase in migration to Chile in recent years, especially of Venezuelans fleeing Nicolás Maduro's dictatorship, has accelerated this debate.

Thirdly, and in line with the previous conclusion, we found that explanatory factors for voter turnout, such as gender and age, apply similarly to citizens and non-citizens. We conclude, among other things, that gender gaps in voter turnout favour women in both groups. Most strikingly, this gender gap in favour of women occurred under both elections organised with voluntary voting and elections organised with compulsory voting. Consequently, and as suggested by Spies et al. (2020) and Goerres et al. (2022), the classic models of electoral behaviour are equally efficient in explaining the electoral participation of citizens and non-citizens, compared to models specially designed to study non-citizens. To be sure, there may be different motivations or perceptions among both groups regarding the importance of elections and democracy, but if we analyse the sociodemographic variables most present in the literature, their effect is similar for citizens and non-citizens. Regarding the effect of age, we found significant changes. While in citizens, electoral turnout has similar variations in each age group, in non-citizens, the positive variation with compulsory voting is substantially more significant in young people than in older voters. Under voluntary voting, the likelihood of a 20-year-old voting is the same as that of a 75-year-old adult, but under compulsory voting, that 20-year-old's probability is double that of the 75-year-old. This can be explained, in principle, because older voters have greater possibilities of reducing or even avoiding the fine for not voting due to health-related issues. On the other hand, younger non-citizens seek to keep their records clean to obtain a permanent residency visa in the host country. Therefore, exposing themselves to a sanction for not voting can be

interpreted by these non-citizens as an obstacle to permanently settling in the host country. This argument also coexists with an additional issue. Since 2020, given the turbulent Chilean constitutional process that originated from a violent social outburst with a solid youth presence, young people have begun to vote in more significant proportion. Therefore, it is not dismissible that this recent process of political socialisation has also impacted the younger non-citizen population. In this sense, while institutional changes matter, alternative hypotheses are linked to political sociology and the impact of critical junctures like a solid and prolonged social explosion.

Our fourth conclusion is methodological and empirical. We conclude that the provision of administrative censuses favours a more precise analysis of non-citizens' electoral turnout and its political impact on public decision-making, compared with opinion polls. This represents a significant complement to analysing non-citizens' electoral turnout using opinion surveys. Administrative censuses have the advantage of covering the universe of voters. Of course, the number of independent variables is smaller than in a survey, but the data are official and indisputable. In our case, we cover over 145 million data points, and we know with certainty which groups are voting more according to gender and age and what the specific effect of establishing the automatic registration regime in electoral rolls with compulsory voting was. In Latin America, except for the recent work by Herrera and Morales (2024), studies on the electoral turnout of non-citizens are done with opinion surveys, whose sampling process is particularly complex. Generally, these are surveys with non-random samples and, therefore, with little certainty of representativeness. This is explained by the difficulties in defining the universe of non-citizens and in capturing a sufficiently reliable sample. Indeed, while these surveys provide valuable results, it is beneficial to complement these studies with data from administrative censuses.

The fifth conclusion pertains to the utility of this article for comparative politics. Why could a small country like Chile potentially guide international analysis of non-citizens' electoral turnout? Beyond the reasons we have pointed out, Chile constitutes an interesting case study to evaluate the impact of institutional designs on the political incorporation of non-citizens. Specifically, we refer to barriers to accessing citizenship, the mechanism enabling the right to vote, the rules regulating non-citizen electoral turnout in political parties, and even the possibility of being candidates in popular elections. At the same time, the transition from voluntary to compulsory voting with effective sanctions could be studied as a kind of "accelerator" of political incorporation for non-citizens, especially in younger groups. It would not be so surprising if, in future elections, the electoral turnout of non-citizens approaches the national average, and their membership in political parties increases substantially. All this could improve our understanding of migratory waves in the United States, Europe, and Latin America, optimising the classic models of resistance, assimilation, exposure, or transfer (White et al., 2008).

In summary, we might be looking at a case—Chile—where the political incorporation of non-citizens—at least taking electoral turnout as a reference—occurs institutionally, rapidly, and effectively, without necessarily mediating processes of inclusion derived from social capital. Instead, the institution of compulsory voting facilitates assimilation dynamics, weakening those of resistance. Of course, we know that electoral turnout is just one of the many dimensions linked to political participation, but at least theoretically, it is one of the most relevant.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful for the comments of the three anonymous referees who reviewed our article.

Funding

This research is sponsored by Conicyt's Fondecyt programme (project number 1220004), and the Millennium Nucleus Centre for the Study of Politics, Public Opinion and Media in Chile (MEPOP, NCS2024_007).

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

The database and syntax can be found at the following URL: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/8F1JN2

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Politics and Governance
2025 • Volume 13 • Article 9313
https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.9313

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ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Muslims' Vote Choice: Exclusion and Group Voting in Europe

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Submitted: 15 September 2024 **Accepted:** 4 February 2025 **Published:** 18 March 2025

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Unequal Participation Among Youth and Immigrants: Analyzing Political Attitudes and Behavior in Societal Subgroups" edited by Arndt Leininger (Chemnitz University of Technology) and Sabrina Mayer (University of Bamberg), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.i426

Abstract

A well-documented fact is that Muslim citizens tend to vote for the left in greater proportion than non-Muslim citizens. In Western Europe, this difference in the vote for left-wing parties exceeds 30%. Interestingly, the gap endures despite Muslims' integration into the host society, which is expected to militate against group voting. Why, then, do Muslims continue to vote as a group? And what factors account for their leaning towards the left? We argue that exclusion and discrimination, to which Muslims are regularly subjected as a group, work against the effect of integration on their vote choice, as it strengthens the saliency of group interests and "linked fate" in their voting calculus. Using public opinion survey data, we show that the more Muslims feel discriminated against by their host society, the more likely they are to engage in group voting and vote for the left. We also show that political exclusion, proxied by the electoral strength of radical-right parties, has a positive association with Muslims' support for left-wing parties. Finally, we delve into the British case and show that experiences of physical violence are also manifested in stronger group voting by non-Western immigrants. Our article sheds light on a phenomenon that has the potential to reshape the electoral landscape in Europe by rendering ethnic and religious identity a crucial dimension of party competition.

Keywords

exclusion; immigration; left-wing parties; Muslims; radical-right parties; voting behavior

1. Introduction

Immigration is central to European politics (Hooghe & Marks, 2018; Kriesi et al., 2008). By 2022, 13.7% of EU residents aged 15–74 were born outside the EU, with an additional 7.2% having at least one foreign-born parent (Eurostat, 2022). Postwar immigration, driven by labor migration, intra-European movement, and conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and sub-Saharan Africa, has significantly altered Europe's

demographics and politics (Dancygier & Margalit, 2020). Integration challenges and the rise of anti-immigration parties remain prominent in the public discourse (Adida et al., 2016; Golder, 2016). In numerous Western European nations, the most substantial segment of naturalized citizens originates from regions where Islam is the dominant religion, a pattern that is expected to be further accentuated by the recent influx of refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Consequently, Muslims are gradually becoming a significant part of domestic European electorates (Dancygier, 2017). Although many Muslims in Europe no longer fit the traditional definitions of having a migration background, they often remain a minority out-group facing inequality, discrimination, and exclusion. Nevertheless, research on their voting behavior remains significantly underexplored. Importantly, the vast majority of the research population of this study (95%) is comprised of Muslims with immigrant backgrounds.

Research on non-Western immigrants, a broader and more heterogeneous group that includes Muslim minorities, shows they consistently vote for left-wing parties more than native populations (Bergh & Bjørklund, 2011; Bird et al., 2010; Dancygier & Saunders, 2006). This voting pattern is so consistent that Saggar (2000) calls it an "iron law," and cross-national studies support this finding (Bergh & Bjørklund, 2011; Goerres et al., 2022). While it is evident—also from the data in this study (see Figure 1)—that Muslims tend to favor left-wing parties, there is surprisingly little research investigating the reasons behind this voting tendency.

We propose a framework to explain this phenomenon by considering not only integration but also social exclusion and discrimination as factors. We argue that Muslims facing exclusion are more likely to adhere to their group's voting norms, as these experiences heighten ethnic identity and a sense of "linked fates." Using public opinion data, we show that greater perceived discrimination correlates with increased support for left-wing parties among Muslims. Additionally, the rise of radical-right parties, known for their anti-immigration and anti-Muslim attitudes, also influences Muslims' voting behavior. Regional analysis in the UK, incorporating data on racial hate crimes, further supports that, among Muslims, increased hate crimes correlate with greater group-based voting for left-wing parties.

Our study underscores the importance of examining societal signals—political, social, and physical—in understanding Muslim voting patterns. Negative signals from host societies, such as the rise of radical-right parties or hate crimes, strengthen group-based voting, shaping Europe's electoral landscape and amplifying ethnic and religious identity in party competition.

2. Muslims in Europe and Their Voting Behavior

Many Muslims have immigration backgrounds either personally or within their family. Like other non-Western immigrants, they form a minority out-group distinct from the majority society. Moreover, like other non-Western immigrants, they also tend to vote for left-wing parties to a much greater extent than natives (Just, 2024). Drawing on research about non-Western immigrants and the limited studies on Muslims' electoral behavior, we develop the theoretical foundations for this phenomenon. However, we do not equate the two groups or imply that they are identical.

Despite the persistence of the immigrant-native gap in voting for left-wing parties, this phenomenon has received relatively little scholarly attention (e.g., Goerres et al., 2022). Two primary explanations have been

proposed to account for this pattern. The first explanation attributes immigrants' left-wing voting tendencies to their typical socio-economic characteristics. Immigrants often have lower socio-economic status, which aligns with the profile of traditional left-wing voters. According to this view, as immigrants integrate into their host societies and their socio-economic conditions improve, their political preferences are likely to shift, becoming more similar to those of the native population (Goerres et al., 2022; Reeskens & van Oorschot, 2015; Schmidt-Catran & Careja, 2017). This perspective emphasizes individual-level factors and the impact of economic and social integration on voting behavior. The second explanation, grounded in social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981), posits that group identity plays a more significant role than individual characteristics in shaping immigrants' political preferences. This approach argues that immigrants often identify strongly with their ethnic or minority group, particularly in contexts where they face discrimination, exclusion, or political hostility. Such group-based identification can lead immigrants to support left-wing parties, which are generally perceived as more inclusive and protective of minority rights. Ethnic identity thus becomes a critical driver of political behavior, reinforcing voting patterns that are distinct from those of the majority population (Dickson & Scheve, 2006).

The latter explanation is validated by studies showing that the policy preferences of immigrants tend to be relatively similar to those of natives but their voting behavior remains distinct (Dancygier & Saunders, 2006; Heath et al., 2013; Saggar, 2000). Bergh and Bjørklund (2011) confirmed that differences in voting persist even after controlling for social background, with group identity playing a role. Zingher and Thomas (2012) observed similar patterns in Australia, attributing them partly to discrimination.

2.1. In but Out: Political Consequences of Social Exclusion

Exclusion and discrimination can come in different shapes and forms. Concerning Muslim minorities, exclusion can be manifested in hate crimes (Frey, 2020), labor market discrimination (Adida et al., 2016), Islamophobic policies (Abdelgadir & Fouka, 2020), and the electoral power of radical-right parties that advocate against Islam and support restrictive immigration policies. While anti-immigrant sentiment and anti-Muslim prejudice are closely intertwined, it is anti-Muslim sentiment, rather than anti-immigrant views more broadly, that represents the most pressing and salient threat to Muslims in Europe (Weber et al., 2024). Thus, country of origin and religion are used to categorize—and subsequently problematize—citizens from predominantly Muslim countries.

Individuals can hold multiple identities, but when one becomes more situationally salient—often due to factors like discrimination or exclusion—it activates related preferences, including political ones (Huddy, 2013; Kuo et al., 2017). Situational factors such as discrimination, exclusion, or marginalization can increase one's attachment to a group. These factors render the social categories of minority and majority more visible, thereby increasing the saliency of the minority group and people's attachment to it (Pérez, 2015). Studies show that individuals who experience discrimination, exclusion, xenophobia, or violence due to their group membership are more likely to withdraw into their ethnic group; they come to identify with it more strongly and see the political conflict as essentially ethnic (Pantoja & Segura, 2003; Pérez, 2015; Zingher & Thomas, 2012). Studies on the political participation of religious groups who suffer from exclusion have yielded similar findings (see, for example, Bader, 2007; Just et al., 2014; Wald et al., 2005). The perception of shared grievances is likely to amplify the effect of religious identification on political participation by providing individuals with common interests, specifically addressing injustices against their group and thereby

motivating political engagement (Kranendonk et al., 2018). Nevertheless, a recent study by Just (2024) showed that first-generation Muslim immigrants are less likely to become partisans in strongly anti-immigrant societies.

Only a few studies have specifically addressed the connection between social exclusion and the voting behavior of immigrants, and the results are not uniform. Some found that group-based exclusion increases the probability of immigrants' voting for left-wing parties (Sanders et al., 2014; Zingher & Thomas, 2012). Others reported no direct effect of exclusion either on vote choice (Goerres et al., 2022) or on supporting co-ethnic or non-white candidates (Fisher et al., 2015). Nevertheless, to the best of our knowledge, no study has addressed the connection between discrimination and exclusion and the voting patterns of Muslims in Europe. Notable is the abovementioned research by Just (2024), which examined how an anti-immigrant climate affects party identification among first-generation Muslim immigrants in Europe. However, this study did not directly address actual voting behavior. In a relevant study on minority groups in the US, Chong and Kim (2006) showed that, compared to Latinos and Asian Americans, African Americans' support for the interests of their group is the least responsive to changes in individual economic circumstances. They attributed this pattern to higher levels of racial discrimination.

2.2. Radical-Right Parties as Mobilizers of Exclusion

Radical-right parties are among the most prominent mobilizers of anti-Muslim hostility in contemporary Europe (Mitts, 2019). A common theme in the platforms of such parties is support for exclusionary, "nativist" populism, aimed at ostracizing groups with certain religious or ethnic characteristics (Golder, 2016). These parties portray Muslim immigrants as a threat, whether economic or symbolic; they conjure up a moral divide between the "good" ordinary people and "bad" Muslim immigrants (Schmuck & Matthes, 2017). In their political campaigns, radical-right politicians frequently brandish negative slogans and images that stigmatize minority groups. Not only do radical-right parties target minorities and Muslims in their policies but the viable political force these parties present, in and of itself, may also sway other parties to change their positions, especially as concerns immigration and immigrant integration (Akkerman, 2015).

Several scholars have found a strong link between radical-right voting and anti-Muslim sentiment (Lajevardi, 2020; Rydgren, 2008). While the literature has addressed the effect of immigration on radical-right support, much less is known about the effect of the radical right's popularity on the political behavior of Muslims and immigrants. Mitts (2019) showed that geographical areas in which the radical right is electorally successful are likely to provide fertile ground for Muslim extremism. Sprague-Jones (2011) demonstrated that, in countries where the radical right is electorally successful, ethnic minorities are more likely to support multiculturalism. More to the point, in one of the few existing studies in the field, Martin (2021) established that minority groups in the UK were more likely to vote for the Labour Party in districts where the British National Party received more votes.

Our argument addresses the complex interplay between integration, exclusion, and the vote choices of Muslim minorities in Europe. We posit two hypotheses. First, we hypothesize that the more Muslims are integrated into the host society, measured in terms of socio-economic indices, the less likely they are to vote disproportionally for left-wing parties. We base this hypothesis on the assumption that the drivers of Muslims' party preferences are similar to those of non-Muslim individuals and are affected by party

identification, candidate evaluation, and positions on issues (Goerres et al., 2022). Thus, as Muslims become integrated into the host society, they are less likely to vote disproportionally for left-wing parties. The integration of Muslims into European societies is expected to influence their voting preferences by altering their socio-economic status, identity, and political priorities. As integration improves access to education, employment, and upward mobility, Muslims may shift their focus from minority-specific grievances to broader societal issues, aligning with mainstream parties. Integration also fosters dual identities, blending cultural heritage with host-society norms, and encouraging support for centrist platforms. Greater exposure to diverse political discourses broadens their interests and concerns. Reduced marginality dampens the appeal of protest voting, leading to greater participation in mainstream politics. Integration thus transforms political behavior as individuals navigate their evolving roles within society. Indeed, Reeskens and van Oorschot (2015) showed that, with more integration, immigrants' political preferences tend to change. Schmidt-Catran and Careja (2017) arrived at similar conclusions using the German Socio-Economic Panel: The longer the time immigrants spend integrating into the host culture, the greater the change in their political preferences.

We formulated our first hypothesis as follows:

> H1: As Muslims become more integrated into the host society, they are less likely to vote for left-wing parties, thus minimizing the gap between Muslim and non-Muslim citizens in voting for left-wing parties.

Next, we address the effect of exclusion on Muslims' vote choice. Given the persistent Muslim–non-Muslim vote gap, we submit that Muslims' vote choice is affected not only by their integration but also by societal exclusion, hostility, and discrimination directed against them. We hypothesize that Muslims' exclusion will lead them to identify more strongly with their ethnic or religious group and therefore increase their likelihood of engaging in group voting. In Western Europe, where the collective identity is rooted in Christian traditions, Muslims are particularly sensitive to hostile social environments. Research shows that members of stigmatized groups are more attuned to social cues, including nonverbal signs from dominant groups (Frable, 1997; Oyserman & Swim, 2001). When faced with hostility, Muslims are less likely to trust institutions, adopt national values, or feel attached to their host country (Adida et al., 2016; Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007). Additionally, anti-Muslim prejudice may foster a "reactive" religious identity. While this result might create further disengagement from society and reduce political participation (Connor, 2010; Just, 2024; Voas & Fleischmann, 2012), it might also politicize group identification, making it more salient and influential on Muslims' vote choice. Thus, the perception of shared grievances might amplify the effect of religious identification on political participation by providing individuals with common interests, specifically addressing injustices against their group and thereby motivating political engagement (Kranendonk et al., 2018).

We divided our second hypothesis into two parts to differentiate between subjective and objective indicators of exclusion:

> H2a: The stronger the country's measurable exclusionary tendencies vis-à-vis Muslims, the more likely they are to engage in group voting for left-wing parties, thus expanding the gap between Muslim and non-Muslim citizens in voting for left-wing parties.

H2b: The stronger the perceived discrimination against Muslims as a group, the more likely they are to engage in group voting for left-wing parties, thus expanding the gap between Muslim and non-Muslim citizens in voting for left-wing parties.

Subjective discrimination refers to personal perceptions or experiences of being treated unfairly based on one's identity, such as ethnicity, religion, or gender. It reflects an individual's emotional and cognitive response to perceived inequality, often influenced by personal encounters or societal narratives. This form of discrimination is inherently personal and varies based on individuals' awareness, experiences, and interpretations of bias. In contrast, objective measures of discrimination focus on tangible, quantifiable indicators of societal inequality. These measures often include political, legal, and social markers such as the electoral power of radical-right parties or the prevalence of hate crimes. While subjective discrimination captures the lived experiences of discrimination, objective measures provide a broader societal context of exclusion and marginalization. Both dimensions are critical in understanding the multifaceted nature of discrimination, though they differ in their focus—personal experiences versus structural inequalities.

3. Data and Methods

3.1. Data

To analyze the factors influencing Muslim voters, we used multiple data sources. For public opinion data, we utilized all 10 waves of the European Social Survey (ESS) between 2002 and 2020. Eighteen advanced industrialized democracies from Western Europe are included in the study with a total of 151 country/year samples (see sampling details in Supplementary File A). These countries are: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Great Britain, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. We followed others by excluding East European countries from our analysis due to distinctive party competition patterns: Left-wing parties are frequently linked to a communist legacy, and the far-right exhibits unique characteristics that differentiate it from its older West European counterparts (Kim & Hall, 2024). The ESS includes items that tap different dimensions of integration, such as the first and second most spoken languages at home as well as items assessing perceived in-group discrimination—and is thus suitable for testing our argument. We supplemented these data with macro-level variables tapping the changing electoral power of the radical right in each country and in the European Parliament, as a proxy of Muslims' political exclusion. Nevertheless, the ESS is not specifically designed to create representative samples of minority populations, such as Muslims, which may lead to potential biases. These samples are often under-representative of groups such as older adults or individuals with lower levels of education that are typically under-sampled in public opinion surveys. This issue is likely amplified when dealing with minority populations. Additionally, individuals from minority out-groups who feel less attachment to the host country or society might be less inclined to participate in such surveys, further contributing to sampling biases.

To deal with this issue we were able to gather information on social exclusion at the level of the region in the UK (NUTS1). Thus, following our cross-sectional and longitudinal analysis, we delve into the British case. For our analysis of the British case, we appended a macro-level indicator at the regional level of social exclusion—ethnic hate crimes—to the individual-level data. Due to limitations in the available data, this analysis focuses on non-Western immigrants rather than Muslim citizens specifically. While these two

categories are not interchangeable, and the non-Western immigrant group is more diverse and less homogeneous, we believe this analysis still provides valuable insights and remains worthwhile. Despite the inherent heterogeneity within this group, the findings offer an important perspective on patterns of exclusion and discrimination.

Our analysis unfolds in several stages. First, we descriptively establish the gap between Muslim and non-Muslim citizens in voting for left-wing parties and examine the socio-demographic gaps between the two groups that impact voter choice, focusing on integration factors. Next, we estimate vote-choice models that include socio-demographic and integration variables to assess the likelihood of supporting the left. We then test how social and political exclusion affects the voting decisions of Muslims. Based on the results of this analysis, we next conduct a counterfactual analysis to assess the effect of integration on the gap between the two groups. Finally, we present a British case study with a regional and micro-level analysis of social exclusion.

3.2. Operationalization of Dependent and Independent Variables

We define *Muslim citizens* according to individuals' self-reporting regarding their religion and their eligibility to vote. Our population of interest consists of Muslim citizens, specifically those who are eligible to vote. The analysis excludes those who did not vote for any party. The group of Muslim citizens encompasses Muslim immigrants, who have personally migrated to the host country (69% of our sample); Muslims with immigrant backgrounds, whose parents (at least one) migrated to the host country (26% of our sample); and Muslims with no identifiable immigrant background (5% of our sample). Given this segmentation, Muslims in our sample can be regarded as having an immigration background. Importantly, we do not differentiate between these sub-populations in our analysis because such differentiation is outside the scope of our research. Figure D1 in Supplementary File D presents the proportion of Muslim respondents in each country in our sample.

To evaluate the respondents' *vote choice*, we first grouped the political parties into families. The ESS data include a question asking: "Which party did you vote for in the last national election?" Respondents named specific parties, which we then classified based on party family data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Bakker et al., 2014). Focusing on the left-wing party family, which includes socialist and social democratic parties (see Supplementary File B for details), we used a dummy variable to code each respondent's vote for the left.

3.2.1. Social Integration Measures

Social integration involves various dimensions: psychological, economic, social, and linguistic (Harder et al., 2018). It measures the degree to which immigrants are effectively integrated into the host society, including language fluency, labor market participation, and access to resources. We assessed social integration using repeated items from the ESS 1–10 survey.

Proficiency in the official language is crucial for interaction with locals. The ESS item asked about the most common languages spoken at home. We measured for *linguistic integration* and coded respondents who spoke a non-official language at home as 1.

The impact of labor market disadvantages varies. Rueda (2005) defined disadvantaged workers as those unemployed or in low-wage jobs, while Häusermann and Schwander (2011) considered those in high-unemployment occupations as disadvantaged. We controlled for *labor market integration* and assessed occupational vulnerability using two measures: unemployment history and reliance on manual labor versus communication skills. Sectors were categorized based on D'Amuri and Peri (2014) and O*NET data, with communication skills linked to greater job stability and manual labor linked to greater vulnerability (see Supplementary File C for elaboration on this variable).

3.2.2. Social Exclusion and Discrimination Measures

Perceived in-group discrimination is a standard measure of discrimination in surveys. Positive scores indicate those who describe themselves as being a member of a group that is discriminated against in their country (Demireva & Kesler, 2011). Respondents were asked to indicate the factors responsible for this discrimination: ethnic origin, language, gender, disability, or religion. Those who named ethnic origin, language, and religion as reasons received a value of 1, and those who did not identify these factors received a value of 0.

We obtained data on the *radical right's vote and seat share* in national parliaments as well as in the European Parliament from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey database, focusing on the last national election before the survey. We added this information to the individual-level surveys.

For the British case study, we collected and operationalized an additional exclusion variable—*hate crimes*.

Following a FOI request, the British Home Office provided us with monthly racial or ethnic hate crime counts in England and Wales as recorded by the police for 2002–2018. A hate crime is defined by the police and the crown prosecution service as any criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice towards someone based on a personal characteristic (Metropolitan Police, n.d.). This common definition was agreed upon in 2007 by the police and other agencies that make up the criminal justice system. We requested the information by sub-code for racially or religiously aggravated offences. Overall, there were 779,443 hate crimes. We calculated the total number of racial or ethnic crimes for each region in every year preceding the survey and corrected the raw data for the size of each region, dividing the total number of hate crimes per region by population size.

We controlled for a set of socio-demographic and attitudinal variables including age, religiosity, gender, and education. We also controlled for the size and type of community in which the respondents lived (a farm in the countryside to a large city), which is a likely indicator of opportunities for contact with the non-Muslim population as well as cosmopolitanism (Haubert & Fussell, 2006). In addition, we controlled for individuals' ideological self-placement, measured on an 11-point self-placement ideology scale (0 = *left*, 10 = *right*). Finally, we controlled for trust in politicians and political interest. The item gauging trust in politicians was rated on a scale ranging from 0 (*no trust at all*) to 10 (*complete trust*; $M = 4$; $SD = 2.3$). Political interest was measured using the item "how would you assess your interest in politics?" rated on a 4-point scale (reverse-coded so that higher values denoted greater interest in politics; $M = 2.5$; $SD = .9$).

4. Descriptive Analysis

Figure 1 illustrates that Muslims support left-leaning parties 30% more than non-Muslim citizens. This gap persists even as Muslims integrate into host societies (see Figure D2 in Supplementary File D for information on individual countries).

Having established the substantial gap between Muslim and non-Muslim citizens in voting for the left, we next examined and compared the characteristics of left-wing voters among Muslims and non-Muslims. Table 1 provides the percentages of Muslims and non-Muslims who voted for the left by social background. As the table indicates, only 25% of the non-Muslim population voted for left-wing parties, while approximately 56% of Muslims did.

In Western democracies, women tend to vote for left-leaning parties more than men, a trend known as the "modern gender gap" (Dassonneville, 2021; Kedar et al., 2024). This trend holds true for non-Muslim voters in our data. However, among Muslims, men are more supportive of the left. Additionally, Muslim voters on average are younger than non-Muslim left voters. While older non-Muslim voters with progressive views lean toward the mainstream left, younger non-Muslim voters with similar views often support environmental or radical-left parties (Abou-Chadi & Wagner, 2020). In a way, the Muslim vote keeps the mainstream left more reliant on a younger constituency.

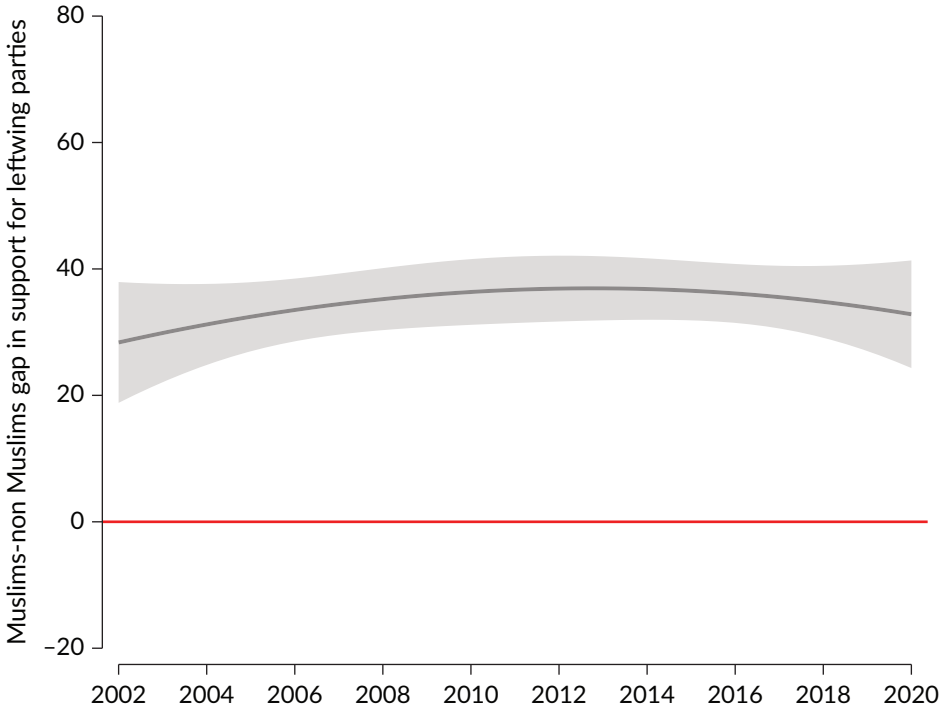

Figure 1. Gap between Muslims and non-Muslims in their vote for left-wing parties. Notes: Trendline is a polynomial regression of the Muslim-non-Muslim gap per year, weighted by country; analysis includes Muslim citizens who are eligible to vote in their respective countries—Muslim immigrants, Muslims with immigrant backgrounds, and Muslim citizens with no apparent immigrant background; parties included in the left-wing party family are social democratic and social parties; the categorization of parties relies on the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (see Bakker et al., 2014). Source: ESS (2020).

Table 1 also highlights that Muslims face greater occupational vulnerability than non-Muslims, with higher unemployment rates, more manual jobs, and a more left-tilted income distribution (see Figure 2). They are also more religious. This comparison suggests that Muslims in Western Europe are still not fully integrated into the host society in terms of socio-demographic traits, a fact that might somewhat explain the gap in left-wing voting. We will explore this possibility in the next section.

Table 1. Support for left-wing parties among non-Muslims and Muslim voters, by social background (average).

	Non-Muslim voters	Muslims
All	25%	55.9%
Men	47%	55%
Age	53 (16.8)	40.2 (13.3)
Jobs involving manual labor	46.5 (18.7)	50.8 (19.8)
Unemployment (0–1)	.27 (.44)	.45 (.49)
Religiosity	4.22 (2.9)	7.13 (2.43)
Political interest	2.35 (.87)	2.44 (.93)
Political trust	4.15 (2.26)	4.64 (2.35)
L-R scale	3.93 (1.75)	4.34 (2.38)
Population density	3.12 (1.16)	3.84 (1.07)
Education (yrs.)	12.49 (4.52)	12.69 (4.32)

Source: ESS (2020).

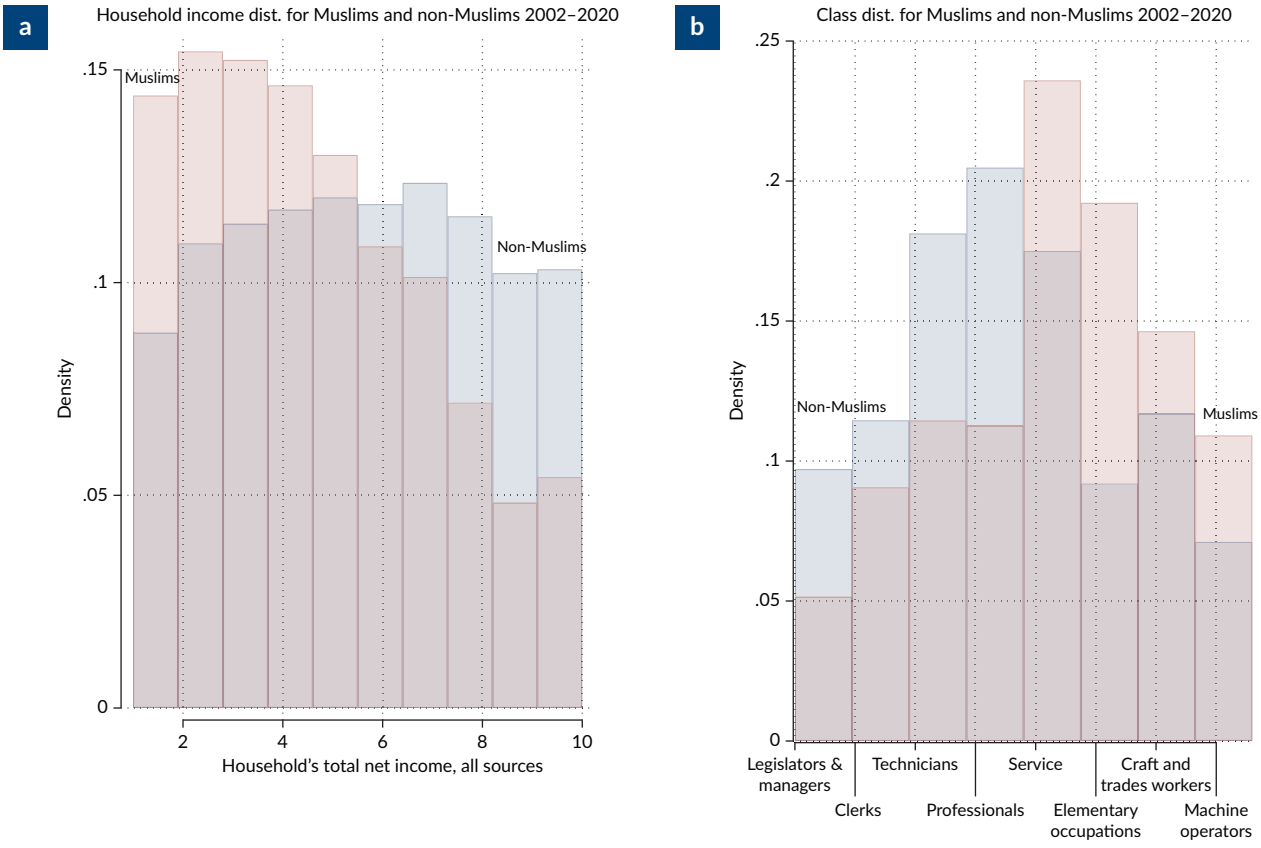

Figure 2. Household income (a) and class (b) distributions for Muslims and non-Muslim voters (2002–2020). Notes: Sectors in Figure 2b are organized in descending order of communication skills; Muslim voters are overrepresented in sectors involving manual labor, whereas non-Muslims are overrepresented in sectors requiring communication skills.

5. Persistent Group Voting: Multivariate Analyses

Following the descriptive comparison presented in Table 1, we tested our integration hypothesis (H1). To do so we estimated a vote-choice model using probit regressions. All models included country- and year-fixed effects. As explained above, our dependent variable was left-wing voting. We examined six models. The first model, a reference only, included only Muslims and non-Muslims on the right-hand side. Model 2 added the economic integration factors and the respondents' demographic background. Model 3 added the measure of linguistic integration.

Not surprisingly, our baseline model confirms the descriptive statistics reported above. Muslims are more likely than non-Muslim voters to support the left. The Muslim coefficient (0.84), converted to predicted probability of voting left, shows a gap of 32% between Muslims and non-Muslims. The economic integration and background variables incorporated into Models 2a and 2b (Table 2) are consistent with previous studies. Manual workers are more likely to vote for the left than those workers who rely less on manual skills. The positive interaction coefficient, plotted in Figure 3, indicates that Muslim manual workers are more likely to translate their labor market vulnerability into support for left-leaning parties. This finding at the micro level, combined with the fact that more Muslims than non-Muslims are employed in sectors that rely heavily on manual labor (Figure 2), results in stronger support for the left among Muslims compared to non-Muslims.

Table 2. Support for left-wing parties, ESS 2002–2020.

	(1)	(2a)	(2b)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Empty Model	Economic integration	Economic integration	Linguistic integration	Perceived discrimination	Radical right VS	Radical right SS
Muslims (ref: Non-Muslim voters)	0.84*** (0.03)	0.23** (0.08)	0.72*** (0.05)	0.30*** (0.03)	0.77*** (0.04)	0.68*** (0.05)	0.68*** (0.04)
Male		−0.02** (0.01)	−0.03*** (0.01)	−0.02*** (0.01)	−0.03*** (0.01)	−0.03*** (0.01)	−0.03*** (0.01)
Education		−0.02*** (0.00)	−0.02*** (0.00)	−0.02*** (0.00)	−0.02*** (0.00)	−0.02*** (0.00)	−0.02*** (0.00)
Population density		0.04*** (0.00)	0.04*** (0.00)	0.04*** (0.00)	0.04*** (0.00)	0.04*** (0.00)	0.04*** (0.00)
Age		0.01*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)
Age squared		−0.00*** (0.00)	−0.00*** (0.00)	−0.00*** (0.00)	−0.00*** (0.00)	−0.00*** (0.00)	−0.00*** (0.00)
L-R self-placement		−0.23*** (0.00)	−0.23*** (0.00)	−0.23*** (0.00)	−0.23*** (0.00)	−0.23*** (0.00)	−0.23*** (0.00)
Religiosity		−0.01*** (0.00)	−0.01*** (0.00)	−0.02*** (0.00)	−0.01*** (0.00)	−0.01*** (0.00)	−0.01*** (0.00)
Interest in politics		0.02*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)
Trust in politicians		0.05*** (0.00)	0.05*** (0.00)	0.05*** (0.00)	0.05*** (0.00)	0.05*** (0.00)	0.05*** (0.00)

Table 2. (Cont.) Support for left-wing parties, ESS 2002–2020.

	(1)	(2a)	(2b)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Empty Model	Economic integration	Economic integration	Linguistic integration	Perceived discrimination	Radical right VS	Radical right SS
Manual skill dexterity		0.29*** (0.02)	0.29*** (0.02)	0.30*** (0.02)	0.29*** (0.02)	0.29*** (0.02)	0.29*** (0.02)
Manual*Muslims		0.44** (0.15)					
Unemployed >3 months		−0.00 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.00 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.00 (0.01)	−0.00 (0.01)
Unemployed*Muslims			0.16* (0.07)				
Different language spoken at home				0.15*** (0.03)			
Muslim*Different language				0.34*** (0.07)			
Perceived in-group discrimination					−0.28*** (0.05)		
Muslims*Perceived discrimination					0.32** (0.09)		
RR vote share t-1						−0.59*** (0.08)	
Muslims * RR vote share t-1						1.25** (0.44)	
RR seat share t-1							−0.46*** (0.08)
Muslims * RR seat share t-1							1.52*** (0.40)
Country FEx	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FEx	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant	−0.51*** (0.02)	0.06 (0.04)	0.05 (0.04)	0.06 (0.04)	0.05 (0.04)	0.16*** (0.05)	0.14** (0.05)
Observations	199,575	180,809	180,809	180,809	180,809	180,809	180,809

Model 3 tests the effect of linguistic integration by interacting *different language* spoken at home with the Muslim variable. As Figure 3 indicates, Muslims who speak a different language at home are more likely to support left-wing parties (black line). This effect is weaker among non-Muslims (grey line). As predicted, linguistic integration reduces Muslims' likelihood of voting left. However, while economic and linguistic integration reduce group voting, Muslims still tend to vote left more than non-Muslims, even after controlling for social background.

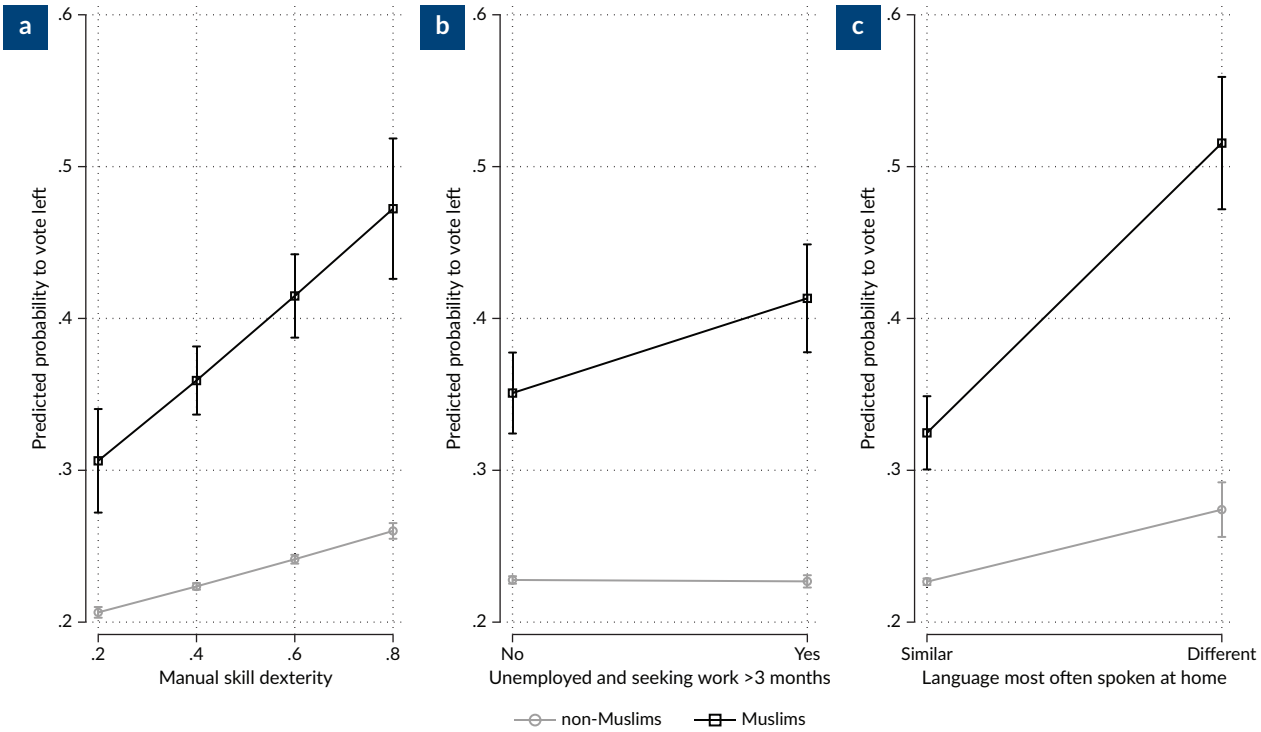

Figure 3. Predicted probability of supporting the left by economic and linguistic integration indices: across different levels of manual skill dexterity (a); unemployed and seeking work >3 months (b); language most often spoken at home (c). Notes: The more one's job relies on manual skills, the likelier s/he is to vote for the left, with Muslims exhibiting greater vote sensitivity to vulnerability in the labor market; Muslims who experienced unemployment for more than three months are more likely to vote left than those who did not—simply put, for Muslims, economic integration reduces the likelihood of voting for the left; Muslims who speak the host country's official languages at home are less likely to vote left than those who do not.

Models 4–6 in Table 2 show the effects of perceived in-group discrimination and political exclusion on how Muslims vote. Figure 4 displays the predicted probabilities of Muslims and non-Muslims voting for left-wing parties as a function of in-group perceived discrimination (4a) and the electoral power of the radical right (4b). In both panels the trends are similar. The slopes are different and even opposite for non-Muslims and Muslims. Whereas for Muslims the graphs' slopes are positive, for non-Muslims they are negative, indicating that discrimination and exclusion have a unique group-based effect on Muslims' vote choice. As Muslims feel more discriminated against, or as they see the radical right in their country garner more support, they are likelier to engage in group voting and vote for left-wing parties. These findings lend support to H2.

The latter finding regarding the radical right points to a "toxic" symbiosis between the political left and the radical right. Allegedly, the political left should suffer an electoral decline due to the integration of Muslims into the host society. Put differently, the more the left succeeds in integrating Muslims, the more likely they are to shift their support away from it. Ironically, however, our analysis suggests that when it comes to Muslims it is the radical right that keeps the left politically viable. When the radical right garners more support, Muslims are driven back into the arms of the political left.

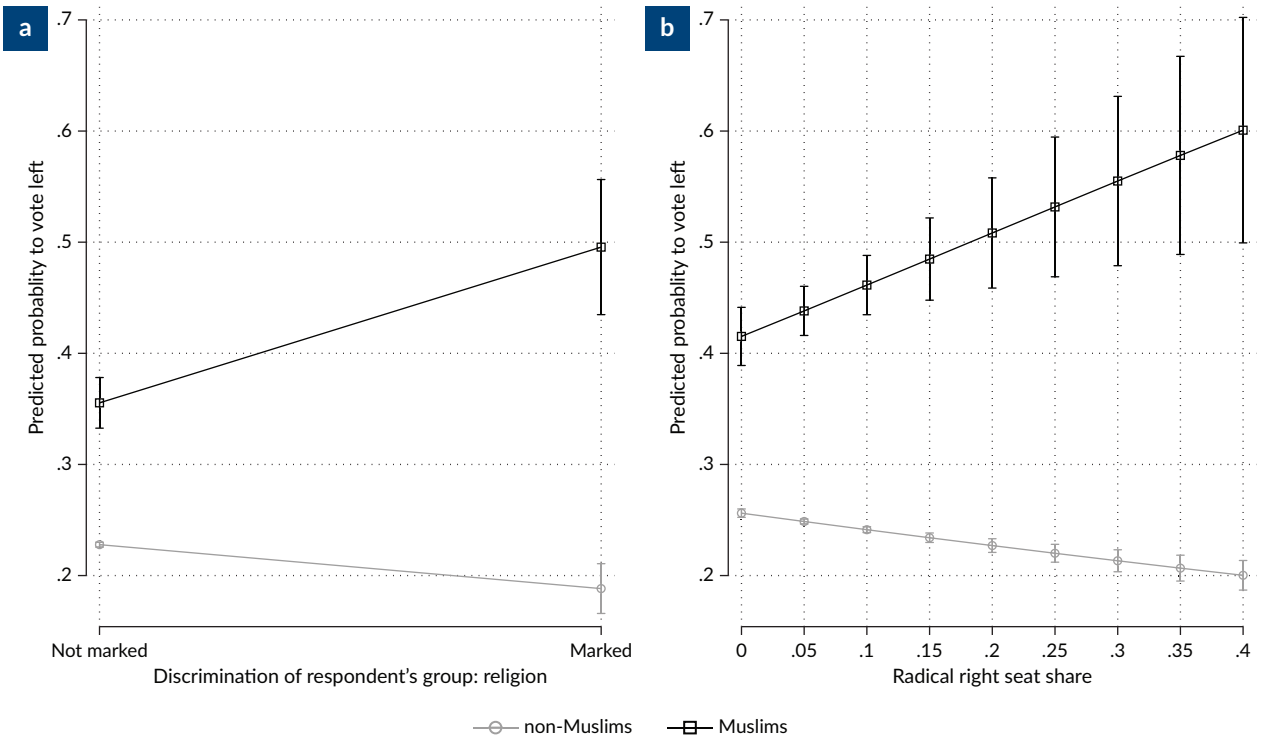

Figure 4. Predicted probability of supporting the left by perceived discrimination (a) and political exclusion (b). Notes: 4b shows the electoral power (measured as seat share in national parliaments) of radical right parties; we include an auxiliary analysis of radical-right delegation vote share in the European Parliament in Supplementary File D, Table D2.

6. Counterfactual Analysis

In order to gauge the effect of economic and linguistic integration as well as the socio-demographic factors on the vote of Muslims, we conducted a counterfactual analysis (Table 3). First, as a reference, we calculated the predicted probability of supporting left-wing parties for both Muslim and non-Muslim citizens, letting each group have its own average position. The predicted gap between the groups is large—35%—but similar to the gap we found in the vote in the raw data (see Table 1). To test the effect of the difference in the factors that are known to affect the vote for left-wing parties, we calculated the predicted probability of supporting the left for both non-Muslim and Muslim citizens, this time letting each group take on the average characteristics of the other group. Table 1 shows that there are considerable differences in the average characteristics of Muslims and non-Muslims. The question is whether the gap in the vote will narrow or even disappear altogether if we cancel out these differences between the groups. In other words, we ask whether differences in the electoral behavior between Muslims and non-Muslim citizens could shrink as a function of the Muslims' integration.

Not surprisingly, for Muslims, the likelihood of supporting the left declines when assigned the average characteristics of non-Muslims, and vice versa: When assigned the characteristics of Muslims, the likelihood of supporting the left among non-Muslims increases. At the same time, the gap between the probability of Muslims and non-Muslims supporting the left narrows by only 5–7%. It seems, therefore, that integration alone does not account entirely for the gap in voting, providing only partial support for H1.

Table 3. Counterfactual analysis of integration effects.

	Non-Muslims' Pr(vote = left-wing parties)	Muslims' Pr(vote = left-wing parties)	Gap
Observed	20	49	29
Predicted based on each group's true characteristics	23	58	35
Given non-Muslims' characteristics	23	51	28
Given Muslims' characteristics	28	58	30

Notes: The gap between Muslims and non-Muslims is the difference between the proportion of non-Muslims and the proportion of Muslims voting for left-wing parties, based on survey responses; the predicted gap is based on each group's mean characteristics; results are based on Model 2 in Table 2.

7. The British Case Study

We used the British case study for a more detailed regional analysis, matching ESS data on respondents' locations with regional racial or ethnic hate crime statistics. Due to data limitations, we shifted our unit of analysis from Muslim citizens to non-Western immigrants. Specifically, we focused on first-generation immigrants, meaning individuals who were born in non-Western countries. While this adjustment broadened the scope of cases we could analyze, it also introduced a more heterogeneous group. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the available UK hate crime data does not differentiate between crimes targeting Muslims and those against other racial, ethnic, or religious groups, making it unsuitable for an analysis involving only Muslims. While we acknowledge its limitations, adopting this approach provided an important additional layer of analysis. Nevertheless, we conducted the analysis using Muslim respondents as well. The results were similar in direction, although not statistically significant (see Supplementary File D, Table D3).

Our probit model examined how regional hate crimes impact non-Western immigrants' voting behavior, including year fixed effects. Our analysis shows a significant positive effect of regional hate crimes on the likelihood of first-generation non-Western immigrants voting for left-leaning parties. Figure 5 illustrates this interaction. It shows that, in regions with a lower rate of hate crimes, immigrants' likelihood of voting for the left is similar to that of natives. However, as hate crime rates increase, immigrants are more likely to vote for left-leaning parties. Specifically, in regions with few hate crimes, the probability of an immigrant supporting the left is around 0.3, while in high-crime areas, it exceeds 0.75. These results support H2, suggesting that experiences of exclusion lead immigrants to favor left-wing parties.

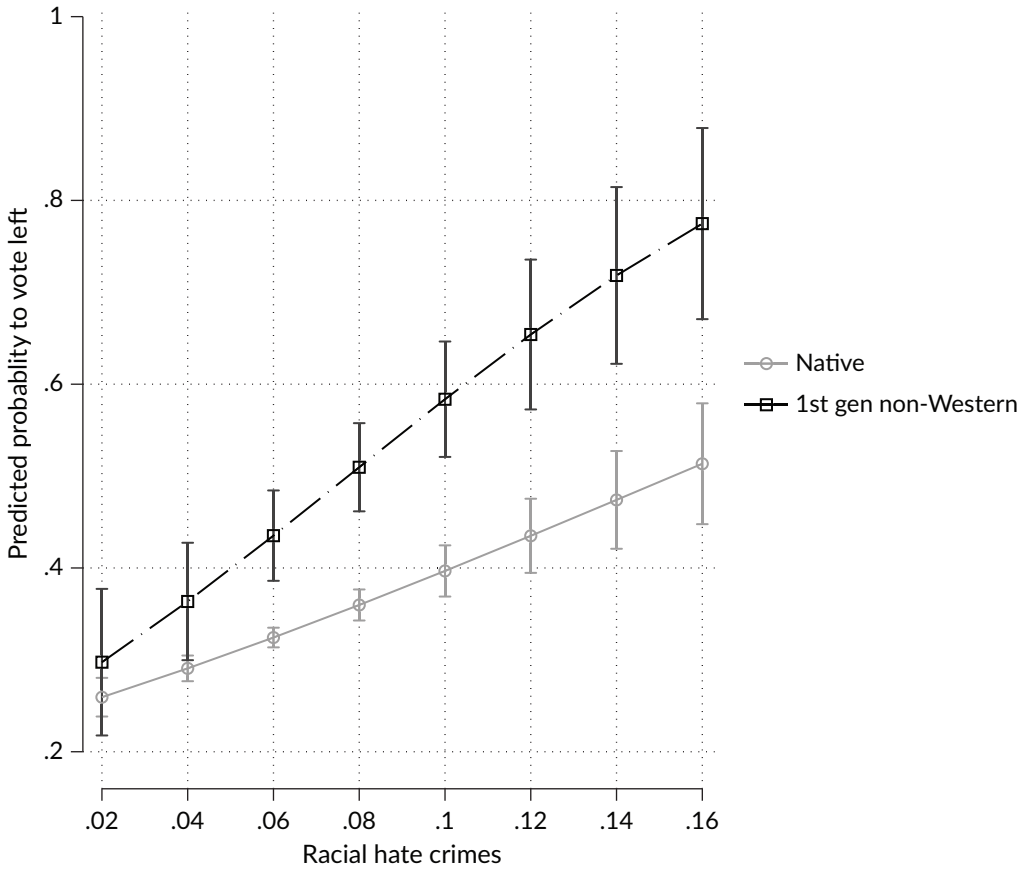

Figure 5. Predicted probability of supporting the left by immigrant/native and societal exclusion. Notes: Controls and year-fixed effects are included; the NUTS1 regions are: North East, North West, Yorkshire and The Humber, East Midlands, West Midlands, South West, East of England, London, South East, and Wales.

8. Conclusion

This study joins a group of studies demonstrating that Muslims engage in group voting; they vote for parties that they regard as promoting the interests of their group, even if an individual's beliefs and interests are not typical of that group. Nonetheless, research pertaining to Muslim and immigrants' voting behavior is still in its infancy and mostly descriptive. Studies suggesting the existence of group voting are even more limited and usually focus on a single case study. Using the ESS, we present a cross-sectional analysis of Muslims' voting patterns as a function of the well-known predictors of vote choice and indicators of their integration and societal exclusion. We show that socio-demographic factors have a limited impact on Muslims' vote choice, providing only partial support for H1.

What is clear from our analysis is that discrimination and exclusion—whether societal, political, economic, or even physical—matter for Muslims' vote choice. The less welcome they feel in their host society, the more likely they are to engage in group voting. The results of both our cross-sectional analysis using indicators of perceived discrimination or the electoral success of the radical right and our British case study using indicators of violent ethnic-based hate crimes support this contention. For Muslims, exclusionary acts boost feelings of shared identity, linked fates, brotherhood, or connectedness and make their minority identity more politically

salient. As a result, they tend to vote for left-wing parties that they regard as better representing their minority group interests.

Despite the saliency of these findings and their contribution to the field, some caveats are in order. This article explores an understudied issue using available data, which, while valuable, often have limitations and potential biases due to their lack of focus on minority populations. As such, the sample size may be insufficient, and the data do not allow for direct testing of the mechanisms at play. We argue that the activation and salience of group identity serve as the explanatory mechanism connecting exclusion to vote choice among Muslims. However, to test this mechanism directly, future studies should employ more robust methodologies, such as experimental designs, to better capture the causal processes involved. Thus, we still need additional systematic datasets that target Muslim populations. Such information would allow us to conduct quantitative empirical research to identify the role of their social and political experiences, their integration into the host country, and their inclusion or exclusionary acts in their vote choices and political engagement.

Acknowledgments

We thank Shaul Shehav, the participants of the "Actors Without Arena? Bringing the Political Behavior of Youths and Immigrants Into the Mainstream" workshop (Berlin, 2022), the annual meeting of the European Political Science Association (Prague, 2022), as well as the three reviewers and editors for their valuable feedback.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

Replication files are available in the Harvard Dataverse: https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/F7UBXX

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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Politics and Governance
2025 • Volume 13 • Article 9212
https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.9212

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ARTICLE

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Finding Space in Politics: Perceptions of Representation Among Dutch Citizens With an Immigration Background

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Submitted: 23 August 2024 **Accepted:** 6 February 2025 **Published:** 18 March 2025

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Unequal Participation Among Youth and Immigrants: Analyzing Political Attitudes and Behavior in Societal Subgroups" edited by Arndt Leininger (Chemnitz University of Technology) and Sabrina Mayer (University of Bamberg), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.i426

Abstract

Representative democracy functions optimally when all citizens can participate, are heard, and feel represented. We know, however, that those interested and satisfied in politics rarely reflect a cross-section of the population. What's more, the influence exercised by certain groups in a democracy is unevenly distributed, and citizens with an immigration background feel on average less represented politically than citizens without one. This article explores how processes of perceived inclusion and exclusion influence the sense of political representation experienced by Dutch citizens with an immigration background. Our study aims to offer greater insight into perceptions of political representation and gain an understanding of what leads to these experiences. We draw on data from six focus group discussions with people who share the categorical trait of being deemed "different" by the majority society along various dimensions, such as ethnic and religious background, race, postcolonial background, and migration motive (e.g., asylum-seeking). Prior to our analysis, we expected these potential grounds for exclusion to have differing influences on perceived representation and how members of the groups relate to the political institutions. Our results show that descriptive representation is a critical start though not enough for adequate substantive political representation of people with an immigration background. Our respondents felt substantive representation fails in the Netherlands due to a lack of perceived representation in the form of politicians with shared experiences who know what it feels like to be excluded, opposed, and dismissed as problematic.

Keywords

descriptive representation; exclusion; immigration; substantive representation; the Netherlands

1. Introduction

Representation is at the heart of our democratic system (Pitkin, 2004; Saward, 2008; Urbinati & Warren, 2008), which functions optimally when all citizens are heard and feel represented. We know, however, that those interested and satisfied in politics rarely reflect a cross-section of the population. What is more, inequality in political representation is not arbitrary; citizens who have more opportunities to participate feel more represented politically. How opportunities for political representation are organized thus affects the extent to which minorities are excluded, marginalized, unrecognized, and/or not taken seriously by the political system (Piven & Cloward, 1978). Many systems today favor citizens with higher income, greater wealth, better education, and no immigration background over citizens who lack these demographic characteristics (Lijphart, 1997; Verba et al., 1995). In turn, the underrepresentation of specific groups impacts their perceptions of fairness, voice, and influence, as well as jeopardizes the functioning of the representative democratic system.

Within this discussion, Phillips (1995) has argued that for democracy to function properly, there must be representation of and by marginalized groups. Because politicians with the same or similar demographic characteristics often share experiences, they can better articulate and represent the interests of the wider group to which they belong. This "politics of presence," as Phillips (1995) termed it, underscores the importance of group identity-based descriptive representation for addressing disadvantages, discrimination, and exclusion. However, a critical mass is needed—especially if they are members of majority groups—to successfully advance their views and convince others that the perspectives or insights are widely shared, genuinely felt, and deeply rooted within their own group (Mansbridge, 1999).

Representation is thus constituted by the actual presence of representatives originating from marginalized groups—in the form of descriptive representation—and the extent to which the political system is responsive to the interests of these groups—in the form of substantive representation (Pitkin, 1967). Scholars have often conceptualized the presence of minority representatives and the political responsiveness to minority interests as "objective" political representation (Wängnerud, 2009). However, in a well-functioning representative democracy, all citizens need to also *feel* that the political system represents their interests equally (De Mulder, 2023; Geurts et al., 2024; Holmberg, 2020; Rosset, 2023). This is why the *perceptions* of political representation among marginalized and underrepresented groups are just as crucial to consider as the seemingly objective metrics tracked by those who study or observe politics.

Explanatory factors of political representation have long been measured as degrees of descriptive representation (i.e., number of representatives with a minority background) and substantive representation (i.e., policy decisions serving marginalized groups' interests; see Pitkin, 1967) as well as the extent to which both forms of representation correlate positively (Wängnerud, 2009). Still, we know much less about how citizens perceive representation and how their perceptions develop (Akachar, 2018; De Mulder, 2023; Holmberg, 2020; Rosset, 2023; Van Oosten et al., 2023). For example, do citizens from marginalized groups feel more or better represented by political parties and individual politicians with similar demographic characteristics? If so, how might perceptions of political representation differ across groups, such as people with immigration backgrounds? Answers to these questions have real-life consequences for the political system, yet we need to analyze and work toward viable theories to better understand these phenomena before we can adequately answer these questions. In this article, we address that theoretical lacuna by

studying how Dutch citizens with an immigration background perceive political representation and how they perceive the link between descriptive and substantive representation.

In the Netherlands' current political context, having an immigration background is one of the main factors affecting the extent to which people feel politically represented. In short, those with an immigration background are less represented and feel that way (Dagevos et al., 2024; Mügge et al., 2021; Spierings & Vermeulen, 2024). It has been unclear, however, how and to what extent we can apply theories and explanatory factors found for "objective" political representation (Wängnerud, 2009) to subjective and perceived political representation (De Mulder, 2023; Geurts et al., 2024; Holmberg, 2020; Rosset, 2023). Recent research has found, for instance, that although descriptive and substantive representation is theorized as distinct, the distinction does not consistently apply when analyzing *perceptions* of political representation. In fact, perceptions of descriptive and substantive representation among members of marginalized groups are often strikingly similar (Geurts et al., 2024). Furthermore, identification with politicians on the basis of their demographic characteristics and appearance—indicative of descriptive representation—seems to directly influence expectations and perceptions around substantive representation. De Jong and Mügge (2023) have posited that people with an immigration background often experience the feeling of a "linked fate" (see also Dawson, 1995) with politicians who look like them because they share experiences of social and political exclusion and racism. But it remains a question if the presence of politicians with an immigration background automatically leads to the perception that the interests of such groups are also better represented substantially.

We posit in this article that an individual's perceptions of descriptive and substantive representation depend on the extent to which politicians with shared experiences are not heard or given space within the political system—a form of political discrimination, following Oskooii's (2020) distinction—and individual experiences with exclusion outside politics—a form of societal discrimination. Understanding these dynamics is critical for learning how members of marginalized groups evaluate the political system and feel represented by it as well as how this translates into actual participation. We analyze our findings in the context of epistemic injustice (Medina, 2013), whereby inadequately acknowledging marginalized groups' lived experiences and interests causes a conflation of descriptive and substantive representation. Throughout this article, we use terms such as "marginalized," "underrepresented," and "minority" to describe Dutch citizens who do not belong to the majority group, have no immigration background, and tend to be white.

In sum, this article answers the following research questions:

1. How do Dutch citizens with an immigration background in the Netherlands perceive the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation? Specifically, do they expect more descriptive representation to lead to more substantive representation?
2. How does social and political exclusion impact the perceptions of this relationship among members of these marginalized groups?

2. Perceived Descriptive and Substantive Representation in the Context of Discrimination and Exclusion

Political representation (Pitkin, 1967) can be defined as the extent to which the actions of politicians match the positions, wishes, and interests of those they represent and whether representatives can fulfill this effectively. Descriptive representation concerns the specific demographic characteristics of representatives deemed relevant by citizens (Wängnerud, 2009). People may identify a politician as sharing their background and feel represented in the sense that they recognize them as "someone like them" (De Mulder, 2023). Substantive representation concerns the actions and positioning of politicians and parties and the extent to which voters experience them as being responsive to their wishes as well as whether they represent policy views and interests of individual voters and people like them (De Mulder, 2023; Holmberg, 2020). For substantive representation to be perceived as such, it is necessary for individual representatives, parties, and the entire political system to be responsive—it is, thus, all-encompassing. To this end, we are concerned with to what extent people feel that politicians act according to their interests, values, positions, and aspirations as well as how descriptive representation, both actual and perceived, contributes to their experiences.

Hopkins et al. (2020) observed that discrimination and processes of social inclusion and exclusion are key to understanding minority political representation, trust, and participation. The literature has pointed to a strong correlation between perceived social inclusion and exclusion when it comes to (a) collective action and awareness (Schildkraut, 2011), (b) party choice (Oskooii, 2020), and (c) voter turnout (Barreto, 2010). Exclusionary practices in society, including in politics, reinforce marginalized groups' identities, consciousness, and the perception of shared grievances based on collective emotions, such as anger and frustration. The effect is particularly pronounced when members of marginalized groups experience exclusion from the majority group as a direct attack on their values, norms, and practices (Oskooii, 2016; Spierings & Vermeulen, 2024; Wald et al., 2005). This dynamic is primarily the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group (an "us") constructs out-groups ("them") by stigmatizing a difference—real or imagined—that is presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination (Staszak, 2008).

A major underlying mechanism at work here is described in social identity theory: people strive for a positive self-image, which is partly determined by a positive image of the group one feels part of (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Experienced discrimination threatens or outright damages this image, which can have various political consequences (Geurts & Van Klingeren, 2023). Several studies have shown how anti-immigrant rhetoric across social contexts leads to increased political action among marginalized groups wanting to compel change or prevent considerations or implementation of unfavorable policies (Oskooii, 2016; Vermeulen, 2018). Social exclusion causes people to feel they do not belong and, subsequently, to evaluate the political system and its processes less favorably (Leighley & Vedlitz, 1999; Spierings & Vermeulen, 2024). It also signals that they have inadequate political representation (Junn & Masuoka, 2008). Although the findings differ across groups, recent quantitative studies have shown that Dutch citizens with an immigration background feel less politically represented, both descriptively and substantively, with perceived social exclusion and discrimination being a crucial explanatory factor (Dagevos et al., 2024; Spierings & Vermeulen, 2024).

Studies have identified shared experiences as one of the core mechanisms enabling processes of both descriptive and substantive representation (De Jong, 2024; Mansbridge, 1999, 2020). Citizens from marginalized groups assume commonality with political parties or specific politicians if they share a

migration history (e.g., being a refugee or coming from the same origin country), historical and contemporary processes of exclusion (e.g., as a member of an ethnic, religious, or racial minority), and the experience of resistance against processes of exclusion (Sobolewska et al., 2018). To feel that the political system is fair and reasonable, people must at least perceive there to be politicians who have shared experiences (Celis & Childs, 2008). Political systems that lack this quality are perceived as unresponsive because issues important to underrepresented groups are less likely to be put on the agenda due to the underrepresentation (Celis, 2012). This leads us to our first expectation originating from many empirical studies on "objective" political representation of women and other marginalized groups: More descriptive representation leads, all other things being equal, to more substantive political representation (Wängnerud, 2009). We assume this positive correlation to apply equally when looking at *perceptions* of political representation (De Jong, 2024; Geurts et al., 2024).

Because perceived political representation among citizens with an immigration background appears strongly correlated to processes of experienced social and political exclusion (Dagevos et al., 2024; Hopkins et al., 2020; Spierings & Vermeulen, 2024), we expect that the stronger the group identity of in-group members, the more differences will be perceived between groups along several social dimensions. Group subordination, in particular, plays a significant role in developing what Dawson (1995) coined "linked fate." For some groups in specific contexts, exclusionary practices reinforce group identity, minority consciousness, and perception of shared grievances based on collective emotions. This effect is particularly visible when members of minority groups experience exclusion as a direct attack on values, norms, and practices that are important to the group. Such scenarios lead to lower levels of perceived political representation and a negative evaluation of the political system (Oskooii, 2016; Spierings & Vermeulen, 2024; Wald et al., 2005) as well as lower expectations of what politics can do for them. In other words, they perceive the system as dysfunctional for people like them (Dagevos et al., 2024). These observations lead us to our second expectation that high levels of perceived social and political exclusion and discrimination can jeopardize the prior presumed positive correlation between perceived descriptive and substantive political representation. Due to their overall more negative evaluation of the political system, if marginalized groups feel that they or their political representatives are socially or politically excluded, they will have lower expectations for descriptive political representation (manifested as the presence of minority politicians) to translate into substantive representation (Dagevos et al., 2024; Hopkins et al., 2020; Spierings & Vermeulen, 2024).

Our study compares groups with different immigration backgrounds who may perceive social exclusion on the basis of their differing and/or multiple demographic characteristics, including religion, race, and postcolonial or asylum-seeking background. This approach allows us to see whether our expectations play out differently across groups (Bloemraad, 2013). The groups included in our analysis shared the categorical trait of being deemed "different" by the majority group along various dimensions, such as ethnic and religious background, race, postcolonial background, and migration motive (e.g., asylum-seeking). We anticipated these potential grounds for exclusion to have differing influences on the perceived relationship between descriptive and substantive representation and thus how members of these groups relate to political institutions and their expectations thereof. For this study, we classify the immigration backgrounds of immigrants and their children according to origin, religion, race, and having a postcolonial or asylum-seeking background.

3. Context of the Netherlands

There are worthwhile reasons to research this issue in the Netherlands. First, the group of eligible voters with an immigration background in this country has risen sharply over the years. In national elections, approximately 18% of the Dutch electorate, almost 2.5 million people, have an immigration background (either being immigrants themselves or having at least one parent who is an immigrant; Lubbers, 2021). At a local level, that percentage is much higher, especially in the big cities, but nowadays increasingly also outside them (Vermeulen, 2018). However, because this entails a large, diverse group with an immigration background—whose members are not all or equally affected by the aforementioned possible grounds for exclusion—it is useful to determine to what extent different groups relate to politics in the first place.

A second reason to study the Dutch case is that there may be a relationship between the tone of the current political debate—with multiple parties circulating anti-Islam, anti-immigrant discourses—and how much people with an immigration background experience representation and feel confidence in government (Oskooii, 2016, 2020; Vermeulen, 2018). In fact, the formation of new political parties over the last decade that largely emerged from immigrant communities and made standing up for their interests part of their platform should be foremost understood as a response to perceived exclusion (Goksu & Leerkes, 2022; Loukili, 2019; Lubbers et al., 2024; Vermeulen, 2018). These parties include DENK (named for a word meaning "think" in Dutch and "equal" or "balanced" in Turkish), NIDA (named after a concept from the Koran meaning "call" and "voice"), and BIJ1 (its name is a numeronym for "together" in Dutch). It is worth noting that, since 9/11, Islam has been a catalyst for debate in public and political discourses on immigration and integration in the Netherlands. Since 2015, asylum has become an increasingly polarizing public and political issue. In the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement, racial divisions have also become a flashpoint in Dutch political and public debates.

Last but not least, the Netherlands is a compelling case because, compared to surrounding countries, there is a relatively high number of politicians with an immigration background in parliament—descriptive representation par excellence (Mügge et al., 2024). This is in part due to the Dutch electoral system of proportional representation and preferential voting as well as voting rights for non-Dutch nationals at the local level—all of which enables underrepresented groups to gain access relatively quickly. We see this at the national level for some groups, whereby parliamentarians with an immigration background constitute approximately the same percentage as people in the general population (Vermeulen, 2018).

4. Data and Methods

We conducted six focus group discussions with Dutch citizens and/or residents with an immigration background. The respondents we selected belonged to the largest immigrant communities in the Netherlands confronted with social and political exclusion. The groups differed in terms of their status in the Netherlands and their historical relationship with the country. Two focus groups consisted of people with Turkish or Moroccan backgrounds; another two were comprised of people with Surinamese or Dutch-Caribbean backgrounds, and two were made of people with a Syrian background. All respondents were Dutch citizens and possessed voting rights except in the groups with people with a Syrian background. Most respondents in these last two groups were not Dutch citizens and only some had voting rights at the local level. A research agency specialized in engaging immigrant communities recruited our respondents and

helped us organize and initiate our focus group discussions. We sought to achieve a balanced distribution with respect to gender, region, and education level—for every group, we conducted one focus group with mainly highly educated respondents and one with mainly lower educated. A total of 45 people were interviewed, with discussions held from the beginning of July to the end of September 2022. On average, the group discussions lasted 90 minutes, with a 15-minute break in between.

In service of our article's main aim, which is theory generation, we took a phenomenological approach in our focus group discussions. This means we situated the phenomena to be investigated in a context of perceived exclusion and analyzed the impact of that context using findings from our group conversations. From a phenomenological standpoint, we recognized that the distinction and relationship between subjective and objective aspects of reality were shaped by respondents' attitudes toward the world around them. Cultural and historical dimensions (e.g., migration history) played a significant role in shaping their values, ideals, and norms. As such, we sought to understand how, for example, growing up in an immigrant family shaped people's views of politics. We were not interested in reconstructing any particular reality, but rather understanding the perspectives and experiences of respondents and how the contexts in which they live influenced them. In concrete terms, this means we focused on the following topics that allow us to track effects in group conversations while also covering the aspects needed to answer our research questions (as formulated in the introduction): (a) how people in their daily lives perceive the phenomena of descriptive and substantive representation, as well as the link between the two forms of representation; (b) which contexts influence that perception (e.g., inclusion or exclusion, socioeconomic position); and (c) how this experience affects people's political behavior, institutional trust, and assessment of the political system.

In the focus groups, ample attention first went to perceived descriptive representation. Specifically, we examined whether respondents felt many people in politics were like them. And for that matter, how they would define or explain people like them. Afterward, we discussed perceived substantive representation. We asked to what extent respondents felt their interests and wishes were given attention in politics. And did they feel they were part of, or even allowed to be part of, the political system? The conversations probed how respondents viewed descriptive and substantive representation and which political issues they deemed important for representation. Finally, we discussed to what extent people were or wanted to be politically active and what their reasons were for participating or not.

Conversations were transcribed verbatim into conversation reports. These reports were analyzed both deductively and inductively; we used MAXQDA software for coding. Based on a first inductive reading of the reports, we drew up a scheme in which codes often followed the themes of the topic list, all intending to answer our research questions. A four-eyes principle was used, whereby a researcher first coded the transcript and then a second researcher viewed and completed this coding. After this phase, we used a deductive approach to analyze the codes and their interdependence (see Dagevos et al., 2024).

5. Results: Perceived Representation in the Context of Experienced Exclusion

In this first empirical part, we address our first research question: How do Dutch citizens with an immigration background in the Netherlands perceive the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation? Specifically, do they expect more descriptive representation to lead to more substantive representation?

Throughout our focus groups, respondents from different immigration backgrounds articulated the importance of substantive representation, seeing it as positively correlated with descriptive representation and referencing shared experiences with representatives. In the group of Syrians with a lower education level, for instance, some respondents cited the value of politicians having experienced for themselves what it is to be a refugee in the Netherlands and the problems this status can come with. Such politicians were deemed better able than politicians without such a background to raise issues relevant to their group and improve its position in society. In fact, the entire political system's perceived responsiveness increased through the presence of politicians who were like, looked like, and presumably shared significant experiences with our respondents:

> R8: [The presence of politicians with the same immigration background] can help refugees. If they have a certain background, they know the difficulties that refugees have in terms of language and integration. The most difficult thing [for refugees in the Netherlands] is the language. For example, if you want childcare or something else, it is always said that you must know the language. I stopped my education twice because of the language.

This respondent's logic was that descriptive representation could ensure that refugees' language challenges would appear higher on the political agenda and that subsequent policy be made, thereby revealing a positive correlation between descriptive and substantive representation. That said, respondents acknowledged that underrepresented groups are diverse and comprise individuals with many different characteristics—some of which have potentially political relevance, such as having a low income or being single:

> R3: I noticed that most politicians [in the Netherlands] do not represent the people [adequately]. They all have a higher level of education, and they often come from a higher social class. So in practice they do not represent the actual situation in the Netherlands….And there is no real support for women and—if I may say more about this—it is true that, for example, in the case of divorce, a woman is back to square one; she gets nothing from her husband or her partner and she returns to square one and, in doing so, she also loses, in the sense that she has not progressed in her career….Low-income Syrian women are poorly represented politically in the Netherlands [because few politicians from this group are active].

For most respondents, however, having a similar appearance to, or the same origin as, politicians symbolized the sharing of certain experiences in the form of descriptive representation; having a shared immigration background was central to this process. Ultimately, shared experiences were interpreted as a form of substantive representation, with emphasis on the experience of being marginalized as a group within Dutch society, as explained by a respondent from the same Surinamese and Dutch-Caribbean group:

> R9: I think it is important that a politician of color expresses the voice of many people with a migration background who experience racism in the Netherlands. So I recognize myself in her [a particular politician of color] in that respect.

A politician having an immigration background or belonging to a minority group seemed to be sufficient for a large group of voters to feel both descriptively and substantively represented. Several respondents responded affirmatively when asked whether they expected a politician with whom they shared

demographic characteristics to have similar experiences and therefore have the same norms and values. In the following conversation in a Turkish and Moroccan group, sharing an immigration background from a Muslim-majority country was an example of descriptive representation while shared norms and values illustrated substantive representation:

> R4: Yes, I expect that someone with a migration background has walked the same path as myself.
>
> R6: Been through the same struggles you've been through.
>
> R4: Yes.
>
> R7: I would say yes.

As to whether or not an individual politician was one they felt represented by, respondents cited the importance of having a shared immigration background—to help provide, as one put it, "a sense of belonging"—for processes of political representation. However, they specified that without substantive representation, there could be no real political representation; political platforms often went together with physical characteristics—a form of descriptive representation—though not always and certainly not by default:

> Moderator: What would you look for [to see] if that person resembles you or you resemble that person? What [criteria] should that person meet?
>
> R3: Attitude, style, and stuff like that—a bit, yes. Looks, not really. But more, yes, attitude.

Later in the conversation, this respondent in a Surinamese and Dutch-Caribbean group clarified that she was referring to certain political positions; "attitude" meant the way a politician conducts politics substantively (e.g., as an activist or being inclined to seek dialogue and compromise). She felt, moreover, that an individual politician would not be adequately representative of her if she could not identify with that politician's party.

In another discussion with a Surinamese and Dutch-Caribbean group, respondents indicated that the extent to which they identified with and felt connected to different communities was related to a feeling of solidarity first symbolized by appearance:

> R8: For example, I feel connected to everyone who is in this room right now. More generally, the Surinamese community. What is a typical Surinamese person? Look, here he is [pointing to the people in the focus group].
>
> Moderator, also with a Surinamese immigration background: I wouldn't know how to spot a typical Surinamese person.
>
> R6: We all are.

> R8: And look, that's it. So I feel very connected to a lot of different identities. I don't really care that much what it is exactly. It's just about, like, am I at that moment?...What's the vibe like? How are the people? And then I feel connected to that.

However, descriptive representation for our respondents was not always or automatically seen as equivalent to substantive representation. Respondents in another group described how substantive elements ultimately determined whether a politician could truly represent them:

> Moderator: On what basis do you identify the politician who "represents me"?
>
> R6: Based on their ideas, what they do for the country, what they do for refugees. It's not that I'm going to vote for him because of his religion. No. It's about their election manifesto.
>
> Moderator: So you, as a refugee, think that the more he does for refugees, the better he represents you?
>
> R6: Of course….I think it is important that there is someone who defends us, who gives us our rights. But it is not a condition that he must be Syrian. Our experience with politics is that we are not really successful in politics. We have no background in politics…just like [R4] said. In our country, we do not engage in politics.
>
> R2: It is possible for an Arab person or a Syrian to represent us, but I always see opinions on Facebook as soon as someone tries to organize something for us; it is said that there is no one to represent us, and even if there were someone to represent us, he would not represent the majority. Because everyone has their own personal opinion.

A politician's appearance and background—which most respondents used to assess descriptive representation in a political system that they overall deemed unrepresentative—therefore did not automatically lead to substantive representation:

> R5: The appearance of the politician doesn't really matter to me. It really doesn't matter to me at all; what matters is what the person says.
>
> Moderator: The political platform, the person's message?
>
> R5: Yes…because I also do not go to the polling station to see: "Oh yes, he does look a bit like me, he looks a bit brown." His name might have a certain ethnic connotation, but still, I don't know anything about them.
>
> R4: Yes, I think that's right. Because everyone also expects politicians of Surinamese descent to represent us. But I already know because of their [referring to a politician with a Surinamese background] character, that this is going to be a very difficult battle. So I think: "I don't care if you're brown or white or yellow or anything; you can represent someone else; you can represent immigrants or people who come here from abroad or are second-generation with the message and the goals that

> you like, equality of opportunity and things like that." But what I just see a lot in politics, just up close, is they often do things to shut us up.

This respondent indexed two recurring themes. First, a politician with the same immigration background as a voter did not necessarily represent the voter's interests adequately and that, in principle, it should not matter what a politician's background is. At the same time, people of color like this voter were politically excluded in the current political system by being silenced. This leads to a situation in which people with an immigration background do not feel substantially represented adequately and the descriptive presence of politicians like them does not lead to more confidence in the representative quality of the political system.

Religion was yet another significant dimension along which people identified and felt excluded from the political system because the politicians they identified with were not given the space to fully share their religious experience. This reinforced the idea that more descriptive representation in the current political climate does not automatically lead to more substantive political representation. One respondent in the highly educated Turkish and Moroccan group expressed this as follows:

> R1: I recognize myself in female Muslim politicians. I look at them with pride….As a child, I had the dream of entering politics, and I once visited the town hall with my primary school….At that time, it was a totally white environment, with only older people, no one who looked like me to talk to. So I thought: "I actually have no right at all to be here; I should just let that dream go." That's the importance of being represented; when you see someone who looks like you and who speaks your language, you start to believe that you can do that too. It enriches your horizon, and you otherwise impose limitations on yourself that are not there at all. But then I regret seeing those politicians being straitjacketed and not allowed to speak out on all kinds of issues related to diversity and inclusion.

This excerpt reiterates how descriptive and substantive representation issues are indeed intertwined though do not necessarily positively correlate. The respondent found it important for politicians to look like their constituents—a form of descriptive representation—and to speak their language and have shared experiences—a form of substantive representation; in this case, that meant being a female Muslim in the Netherlands. Ultimately, however, adequately representing the interests of people like them depends on the opportunities given to such politicians.

As expected, both overall and within groups with immigration backgrounds, we found a general perception that more descriptive representation is needed in the Netherlands to increase perceived substantive representation. However, perceived exclusion—in this case, feeling too "straitjacketed" to "speak out"—from the mainstream political parties, wherein politicians can be active and speak their minds, got in the way of people's full political participation and representation. As the next section elaborates, this perception of political exclusion and lack of political space was not only widespread but also often the dominant shared experience. It also had a negative impact on their expectation that more descriptive representation would lead to more substantive representation.

6. Results: No Perceived Space for Substantive Political Representation

In this second part of the empirical section, we address our other research question: How do perceived forms of social and political exclusion impact the perceived positive correlation between descriptive and substantive political representation?

Respondents in all groups were overall quite cynical when commenting on whether their experience and that of the group/s they identify with were—in a measurement of the perceived level of substantive political representation—given enough space in Dutch politics. They directly linked this to their perception of what it means to 'be listened to' by politicians (as discussed in De Mulder, 2023). If that space did exist, they found it had to do with politicians from the majority group needing something from their group. Politics, rather than the underrepresented groups themselves, instrumentally determined which issues were important. This was discussed extensively in one of the Surinamese and Dutch-Caribbean groups:

> R5: You won't be listened to until it's an issue they [the politicians] find interesting. As soon as it comes to the sensitive things in history [e.g., slavery] or the sensitive things that are happening now [e.g., institutional racism], people listen less carefully. Unless it is someone else, for example with a—what should I call it—a "native" [Dutch] background, who then says the same as you. Then I find that people listen to that person more quickly in politics.

Not only were underrepresented groups' claims ignored, according to this respondent, but politicians invoked these claims to further politically exclude members of these groups. This caused the respondent to either no longer participate or want to participate in Dutch politics:

> R5: And when you [or politicians like you] try to convey something, it is often seen as aggressive, even though that is not the intention. But because in many cases it is difficult to be heard, I think you will also put a little more passion into it, because you really want to achieve something. And the longer and the more you actually have to put force behind it, the more annoying it is to convince someone else of the issue. And then it can get annoying. But I actually have the feeling that people are not listening. And that as soon as you open your mouth about something, it actually gets trivialized and pushed aside, because there are more important things.

This respondent described the subtle yet hard-hitting way his experience was dismissed by labeling impassioned communication as "aggressive." Influential groups can indeed politically exclude members of underrepresented groups by explicitly calling their strategies and forms of participation "different" and therefore unacceptable (as discussed in Medina, 2013). Other respondents from the same group shared the feeling of being actively silenced by white Dutch citizens without an immigration background as soon as they raised politically important issues for themselves and people like them:

> R2: [In theory,] you are allowed to express yourself vocally. Here [in the Netherlands], we have freedom of expression on paper. But there are all these rules and procedures that keep people [like me] down: white suppression, I call it….People born here also experience this [not only first-generation migrants]. You immediately feel the pressure that is put on you as a person. No joke.

According to some respondents, the existing political system aimed to actively exclude underrepresented or claims-making groups. In the political debate, only the majority group could impose the positive value of their uniqueness—their identity—and devalue the uniqueness of others—their otherness—in order to exclude underrepresented groups in the political domain just as in other social domains (as mentioned by Staszak, 2008). The problem that many respondents experienced with Dutch politics was the lack of effective substantive representation, which led to a lack of space for them and people like them to meaningfully participate in substantively representative ways. Specifically, respondents felt that current Dutch politics actively counteracted the presence of politicians with whom they identified. Respondents indicated resistance among politicians to give substantive space to the experiences, needs, and wishes of underrepresented groups:

> R2: And I think [in the Netherlands] there is a fear among politicians to give that space [to underrepresented groups]. So [these politicians ask themselves]: "How much space is just enough [for us] to give them?" Do you understand? That's like a pardon from slavery. [The politicians also think:] "If we give them more space, then we give in." Do you understand what I mean?

This lack of perceived space—a combination of a lack of perceived descriptive and substantive representation—led to people not feeling politically represented, part of the system, and/or at home in Dutch society. Respondents expressed how in order to effect change, it was not always enough to have parties standing up for the interests of people with an immigration background—a form of substantive representation—or elect politicians with an immigration background—a form of descriptive representation. There was a general sentiment among respondents across all groups that for true societal transformation, Dutch politics needed to become more descriptively inclusive and provide more space for underrepresented groups to have their shared experiences substantively represented. Respondents were not only referring to the political domain but more broadly to how they (and people like them) perceived a world rife with discrimination and exclusion, as discussed in a Surinamese and Dutch-Caribbean group:

> R7: There are many politicians in the Netherlands who don't look like me, whom I don't feel represented by. That has to do with how you see the world, and that depends on what you've been through in life. And I think that's why it's important. Because people with a migration background…experience the world in a certain way. And I think it is important that such a perspective is also taken into account. So that it [politics in the Netherlands] will become more diverse. It doesn't have to be diverse just based on migration background, but simply more diverse.

Commenting on the political opportunities for people of color, practicing Muslims, and groups with certain immigration backgrounds, respondents felt that the current Dutch political system did not provide enough opportunities to address everyday experiences of discrimination and social exclusion. This influenced the extent to which they felt represented, creating the sense of a "linked fate" in which, as members of marginalized groups in society, they and people like them were not provided the space to be heard and experience substantive representation. This specifically concerned a desire for more and better access to politics and political decision-making. Respondents in one of the Surinamese and Dutch-Caribbean groups expressed this as follows:

> R9: The voice of underrepresented groups must be translated into politics, but the opportunity must also be there. Or at least it should be possible. It shouldn't be that it isn't possible at all.

> R7: I think it's a really good point she [R9] makes: getting the chance. I think it's harder for certain people to get an opportunity than for other people. You can get very far with a network. And certain types of people have more access to the network that you get given certain jobs. So I think that's a really nice and clear word you [R9] use.
>
> R4: Yes. I think campaigns indeed approach a lot of people with different backgrounds to participate in order to actually make their voices heard. I think that is not the biggest challenge for parties. The biggest challenge is inclusiveness; how are we going to increase it? I am talking about boards, about committees, to really become more inclusive there. I certainly have the feeling that in my case, it is taken seriously, that I really get that chance. But it is important to certainly show that, on such a [party] list, for example, to put people in an eligible position and not in position 30, 35, or even lower, purely to have the diversity factor in the campaign.

For different respondents in all groups except the Syrian ones, a dynamic and inclusive conception of political representation was expressed. In their eyes, this conception fits well in contemporary societies characterized by diversity; plus, they thought it could offer more political space for minorities (for a discussion on this see also Celis, 2012). They believed such space, in which topics relevant to them could be meaningfully discussed, would create opportunities to have their interests more adequately represented. That, in turn, could eventually lead to the aforementioned "sense of belonging." Such a view transcended whether a particular politician resembled them and adequately represented their interests. The view pertained to the entire political system—reflecting an expectation for descriptive representation—as well as the platform and actions of an individual politician—reflecting an expectation for substantive representation—and the opportunities given to underrepresented groups to express their experiences. Here we found differences between the groups in line with recent quantitative research. The Surinamese and Dutch-Caribbean as well as Turkish and Moroccan groups—all of whom are more established, larger, and visible groups with more political rights and with more experiences of different forms of social and political exclusion in the Netherlands—evaluated the Dutch political system more negatively (e.g., in terms of lower levels of perceived descriptive and substantive representation) than the Syrian groups with fewer political rights (Dagevos et al., 2024; Spierings & Vermeulen, 2024). As a relatively small, recently arrived refugee population, the Syrians tended to compare the Dutch political system more to the political system they left behind, which they found overtly oppressive.

7. Discussion and conclusion

Our results show that descriptive representation is a critical start though not enough for adequate substantive political representation of people with an immigration background. People need to feel that their experience matters and that their interests get equal space in politics rather than being excluded or not taken seriously. Respondents' political confidence quickly dropped when politicians who resembled them could not or did not want to adequately represent their interests. If that proved unfeasible because such politicians did not hold office and/or were not given enough space, confidence in the system, as a whole, became undermined. If a politician did not take up that role, confidence in that politician became undermined. Crucially, respondents noticed both how politicians with an immigration background were dealt with—not taken seriously, silenced, or ignored—and how other politicians conformed to the system yet did not stand up enough for the interests of people with an immigration background. As such, exclusion processes, both within and outside the political

arena, remained a major obstacle for members of marginalized groups in the Netherlands because they stood in the way of descriptive representation being translated into substantive representation. It is important to note that the Dutch electoral system of low-threshold proportional representation, considerable impact of preferential voting, and providing voting rights for non-Dutch nationals at the local level did not seem to have a significant effect on this result. This finding illustrates that a more diverse political system alone does not automatically lead to marginalized groups in society feeling more represented by that system, not even when a party largely comprising members from immigrant communities has been elected into parliament three times over eight years.

Going into this study, we expected potential grounds for exclusion to have differing influences on perceived descriptive and substantive representation and how members of the groups related to political institutions. However, we found surprisingly little difference across our focus groups and forms of political representation. We explain these results by accounting for the effects of perceived discrimination. Feeling excluded, regardless of on which ground, enhanced the perception of a "linked fate," whereby a shared experience with those representing an individual voter and people like them became most salient. In such contexts, perceived descriptive and substantive representation got conflated. Members of marginalized groups perceived the political system as exclusionary and therefore sought ways to change the status quo by having more politicians who resemble them—a form of descriptive representation for those who face exclusion—and finding more space to discuss processes of exclusion—a form of substantive representation.

Our findings are consistent with recent studies that emphasize the need to carefully translate what we understand about political representation to the perceived and actual experiences of marginalized groups (De Jong, 2024; De Mulder, 2023; Geurts et al., 2024; Holmberg, 2020). To this, we add our finding that the often presumed positive correlation between descriptive and substantive representation is indeed reflected in how minorities perceive political representation, albeit in a more layered, complicated, and highly context-dependent reality. We also offer insights into how the political context is largely defined by perceptions of social and political exclusion. The fact that political exclusion itself plays a major role in creating and informing perceptions of substantive representation is a limitation, though it also illustrates the need for conceptual clarity in future studies.

According to most of our respondents, substantive representation in the Netherlands is failing. The current political system lacks a strong link between, on the one hand, what politicians do and, on the other, what citizens want and need. Citizens also lack space in which they—or the politicians they feel substantively represent them—can share their experiences and be heard. Our respondents felt substantive representation has also failed due to a lack of descriptive representation in the form of politicians with shared experiences who know what it feels like to be excluded, opposed, and dismissed as problematic. They defined the responsiveness of the political system as being determined by the claims of elected representatives, the scope they are given to make those claims, and the acceptance that their claims are a serious, legitimate contribution to the political debate (Celis, 2012). This was in line with findings by Klarenbeek (2024), following Anderson (2010), who emphasized how relational equality emerges when power relations lead to the formation of superior and inferior positions, which generate and justify the unequal distribution of political freedoms, resources, and wealth. What our respondents said also highlighted the salience of the concept of epistemic injustice in this process: the subtle but impactful ways certain people's stories, experiences, and positions get ignored in the media, education, and politics. Socially and politically,

influential groups exclude members of underrepresented groups by explicitly labeling their strategies and forms of participation as "different," "threatening," and therefore unacceptable (Medina, 2013). To change this, knowledge and experiences specific to, and actually contributed by, certain groups must be given a place and opportunity in the political system.

Meanwhile, relational equality and the fight against epistemic injustice requires all members of society to align along multiple axes. These include: (a) recognizing each other's moral worth; (b) enjoying equal social status enjoying the same social status as moral agents; (c) having the right to an equal opportunity to participate in the political system; and (d) enabling all perspectives and interests to be equally weighted in decision-making processes. Many respondents in our focus groups seemed to be seeking relational equality in the political arena and saw descriptive and substantive representation as integral to that. In this vision, their shared experiences, religious beliefs, and immigration background would all be politically acceptable and consequential.

For our respondents, the lack of descriptive representation is highly correlated with multiple forms of exclusion processes in the Netherlands, both inside and outside of politics, for people with an immigration background. It led to a lack of politicians with shared experiences who would ensure a more responsive political system that people could trust and that was better able to solve the problems of people like themselves. And yet, it is precisely these politicians who continue to be given little space or are actively silenced by being dismissed as different, problematic, or both. This reality in turn prevents descriptive representation from being translated into the substantive representation of those who face marginalization in the first place.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Karina Hof for her valuable comments and editing of the text and the reviewers for their valuable comments on earlier versions of this article.

Funding

Funding for this research was provided by The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (project "Is de Politiek er voor iedereen?" https://www.scp.nl/publicaties/publicaties/2024/01/25/is-de-politiek-er-voor-iedereen) and the Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (Grant No.: VI.Vidi.191.023). Publication of this article in open access was made possible through the institutional membership agreement between the University of Amsterdam and Cogitatio Press.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

Anonymized transcripts are available in The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) repository upon request.

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Politics and Governance
2025 • Volume 13 • Article 9293
https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.9293

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ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Uneven Pathways to Local Power: The Political Incorporation of Immigrants' Descendants

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Submitted: 13 September 2024 **Accepted:** 4 December 2024 **Published:** 12 February 2025

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Unequal Participation Among Youth and Immigrants: Analyzing Political Attitudes and Behavior in Societal Subgroups" edited by Arndt Leininger (Chemnitz University of Technology) and Sabrina Mayer (University of Bamberg), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.i426

Abstract

Research focusing on the political incorporation of immigrants' descendants is rather scarce, in contrast to the high level of scholarly attention paid to the case of foreign-born immigrants. This exploratory study addresses this gap by adopting a sociological and neo-institutionalist approach to investigate the trajectories leading to political involvement of children of immigrants elected to local parliaments across a selection of Swiss cantons. The analysis of the factors shaping their mobilization in relation to the features of local policies for immigrants' integration and cantonal conceptions of citizenship sheds light on the variability of their political incorporation. The article thus makes a twofold contribution to the existing literature. First, it highlights the distinctive role played by local schools in the political socialization of immigrants' descendants, compared to that of their Swiss-origin counterparts. Second, it shows the decisive impact of cantonal institutional and discursive contexts in shaping the categories that are relevant for political action, influencing collective identities, claim-making, and political mobilization.

Keywords

political incorporation; political mobilization; second generation; subnational contexts; Switzerland

1. Introduction

Long considered merely as objects of economic policies, immigrants and their descendants have increasingly been recognized as active political agents since the 1990s in a European context marked by the acknowledgment of immigration as a lasting phenomenon, of the resulting cultural diversification of host societies, and of the rising politicization of ethnicity. The growing comparative literature on these issues (Alba & Foner, 2009; Bird, 2005; Bird et al., 2011; Bloemraad & Schönwälder, 2013; Dancygier, 2017; Garbaye, 2005; Givens & Maxwell, 2012; Ruedin, 2009, 2013a, 2013b) identifies representation in national

and local parliaments as a crucial aspect of their political incorporation. Moreover, it highlights the role of individual characteristics, group-specific features, and the institutional settings of host societies to explain variation in political incorporation across different contexts and immigrant groups.

While research on this topic commonly examines "immigrant minorities" without differentiating between generations, this article seeks to empirically assess the specific extent of generational status in this matter. Our exploratory study addresses this issue from a sociological perspective to analyze the factors shaping the political incorporation of descendants of immigrants who sit in local parliaments. We do so by investigating their political socialization and political agenda as members of parliament (MPs; Martiniello, 2005) within the context of Switzerland, which offers an ideal research setting due to two characteristics particularly relevant to our analysis.

First, Switzerland is a major immigration country: 32% of the permanent resident population was born abroad while 8% of residents are classified as "second generation" (Federal Statistical Office, 2023); and some 53% of children of immigrants acquired Swiss citizenship by way of naturalization (Federal Statistical Office, 2024b). In this study, we focus on the "new second generation" (Fibbi et al., 2015), who are now young adults who have recently started their working life and are making their way into mainstream society. They are the children of the second relevant immigration inflow after the Second World War, from Turkey and the Western Balkans, who arrived in Switzerland under labor, family reunification, and asylum provisions in the late 1980s and 1990s. In comparison to descendants of groups that immigrated in the 1950s and 1960s (Bolzman et al., 2003), they experience, on average, harder socioeconomic trajectories (Fibbi et al., 2015) and face significant discrimination in the labor market (Fibbi et al., 2022) and unfavorable public discourse. While much scholarly attention has focused on the difficult economic integration of these groups, little is known about their political incorporation.

Switzerland offers a second highly relevant feature for our analysis: its extreme federalism (Ireland, 2000; Lijphart, 1999) produces considerable variations in cantonal citizenship and integration policies. Systematic efforts to measure and compare their relative inclusiveness reveal a polarization that is especially salient regarding electoral rights granted to non-citizen residents. German-speaking cantons exhibit more restrictive policies than their French-speaking counterparts (Arrighi & Piccoli, 2018; Manatschal, 2011; Probst et al., 2019; Wichmann et al., 2011). A correlation has been observed between the inclusiveness of these policies and the degree, nature, and direction of foreign-born immigrants' political claims (Eggert & Murigande, 2004; Giugni & Passy, 2003; Ireland, 1994) as well as the strategic behaviors of political parties regarding minority representation (Nadler, 2022). It remains unclear, however, to what extent this institutional context affects the patterns of political incorporation of immigrants' descendants.

Focusing on the four largest urban areas situated in the two main Swiss linguistic regions (Geneva, Lausanne, Basel, and Zurich), the study uses a within-case comparative approach to investigate the factors shaping the political incorporation of descendants of immigrants. In-depth interviews were conducted with politicians of immigrant origin (PIOs) elected to local parliaments and a smaller number of Swiss-origin representatives to investigate their trajectories leading to political involvement and activity. The results reveal the distinctive features of the pathways to active local political engagement of descendants of immigrants compared with those of their Swiss-origin peers and document the impact of local institutional settings on the political mobilization of immigrants' descendants.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Our exploratory study builds on the concept of the political incorporation of immigrants, defined as "the process of becoming part of the political debates, practices and decision making, thus achieving full citizenship" (Bloemraad, 2006, p. 6). Political incorporation features three dimensions, namely the acquisition of formal citizenship status through naturalization, participation in the political system of the new country, and being elected to political office. Dealing by design with descendants of immigrants holding Swiss citizenship by way of naturalization and elected in local parliaments, the study examines the dimension of political participation, which Bloemraad defines as "community advocacy" (Bloemraad, 2006, p. 5). We concentrate on how descendants of immigrants engage in politics and which notion of "community" is pertinent for their political involvement. We investigate two crucial moments: how they first developed an interest in politics, and the issues they advocate for in their political activity as MPs.

We adopt a new institutionalist approach, which "emphasizes the interaction of actors, both individual and collective, with the institutional and the cultural context" (Bloemraad & Schönwälder, 2013, p. 567). This theoretical approach is particularly suitable for comparing the impact of institutional systems on political involvement, process, and outcomes in different political settings. This framework articulates three broad categories of factors: micro-level individual candidate characteristics, meso-level immigrant-group dynamics, and macro-level institutional and cultural contexts.

Political socialization, an essential precondition for political participation, is the micro-level process through which individuals internalize and develop their political values and ideas, build their social identity, and develop their political opinions and attitudes. These habits are often established in the formative years of early adulthood (Mannheim, 1928) and are exceptionally stable over the life cycle (Prior, 2010). The literature about immigrants' political incorporation tends to compound foreign-born immigrants with their descendants, as if they were indistinguishable within a homogeneous "origin" group. However, a considerable body of research highlights significant generational differences within immigrant families, pointing to a disrupted transmission of political orientations across various forms of formal political participation, including civic and political engagement (Bloemraad & Trost, 2008; Callahan & Muller, 2013; Kasinitz et al., 2008; Okamoto et al., 2013; Wong & Tseng, 2008) and voting behavior (Borkowska & Luthra, 2024). We therefore expect that the political socialization of children of immigrants may not primarily be driven by their parents or their origin community but from other sources, such as school education.

Another crucial site of socialization that leads to political participation is engagement at the meso level in civil society associations and social networks. There are different mechanisms linking associational involvement and political participation (Giugni & Grasso, 2020), but we concentrate on the two sociological ones, namely the social capital model and the group consciousness model. Being embedded in a social network through associational life fosters the accumulation of social capital and stimulates political participation. Building on Putnam's concept of social capital (1993, 2000), one influential approach argues that the strength and density of the "ethnic civic community" may explain differences in political participation and incorporation across immigrant groups and different cities (e.g., Fennema & Tillie, 1999, 2001; Giugni et al., 2014; Tillie, 2004; Vermeulen et al., 2014). Yet this literature refers mainly to foreign-born immigrants socialized in their home country; whether this applies to their descendants is still to be assessed. Other types of voluntary associations also bring together people with similar experiences and values along dimensions of their identity other than

origin. They foster group consciousness and solidarity among members and collectivize groups' interests, for instance to counter marginalization (McClain et al., 2009; Miller et al., 1981). We believe that these associative experiences of the descendants of immigrants may favor rearrangements of their various personal identities, encourage the emergence of collective actors, and eventually also have an impact on their political activity. Parental ethnic communities are expected to play quite a limited role in the case of immigrants' descendants compared to other local civil society communities. Furthermore, the collective claims articulated by the young MPs are expected to mirror which presentation of the self they want to stage and whose "community" interests they want to champion in the political arena.

The process of political learning and mobilization is embedded in the social organization of ethnic and mainstream communities; institutions and government policies provide the environment within which individuals organize themselves for activities relating to political participation (Bloemraad, 2006). At the macro level, the political opportunity structure—a set of institutional and discursive features specific to each context (Koopmans, 1999; Tarrow, 1998)—influences the extent and forms of minority organization, their access to the political arena, and the degree of responsiveness to claims made by minority groups (Martiniello, 2005). Bloemraad's structured mobilization model identifies significant features of immigrants' collective action: concepts of citizenship, naturalization laws and policies, political culture—in terms of acceptance of immigrants—and the presence of anti-immigrant parties and government policies (Bloemraad, 2006). The concept of citizenship we refer to is a comprehensive one, including naturalization as well as the interaction of rights and obligations toward the state (Manatschal, 2011). In Switzerland, cantons have significant autonomy to shape citizenship and integration policies. An emphasis can be put on equal accessibility to citizenship for individual immigrants or on group rights for immigrant-origin communities (Koopmans & Statham, 2000). We expect that the claims of second-generation MPs will vary according to the citizenship and integration policies characterizing the cantonal state they live in. We figure that cantons open to group rights are more likely to experience the emergence of minority claims than cantons focusing on individual rights. Our exploratory investigation aims to test the extent to which this relation can be transposed to the understudied case of second-generation political activation.

3. Research Design and Fieldwork

A small-N qualitative approach with three key steps was designed to address our research question. First, four urban areas with comparable characteristics, except for the variable under investigation, were carefully selected following a most similar research design to account for the greatest variation in citizenship and integration policies. In the second step, data were meticulously collected from municipal parliaments, media sources, and interviews to provide an estimation of the descriptive representation of immigrants and their descendants in the local parliaments under investigation. This data collection allowed us to identify members of municipal parliaments of immigrant descent and a small number of MPs of Swiss descent; they participated in in-depth interviews as the third and final step. The following sections provide a more detailed account of these steps.

3.1. Context Selection

We selected the four largest Swiss urban areas (Geneva, Lausanne, Basel, and Zurich), which offer the best approximation to a most similar cases setting. In the contexts of all four urban areas, the size of the "new

second generation" is significant, with communities from Turkey and the Western Balkans slightly more prevalent in Basel (especially Turks) and Zurich. Moreover, the institutional "rules of the game" shaping access to local parliaments in those urban areas are similar: a proportional electoral system, a party list system, and the possibility of casting preferential votes or removing names from the list. Municipal parliaments tend to lean left, and this tendency is more pronounced in the Lausanne urban area than in Zurich, with Basel and Geneva occupying intermediate positions.

The major difference—indeed our variable of interest—among these areas lies in their diverse conceptions of citizenship at cantonal level that crystallize in different integration policies for immigrants. Cantons enjoy considerable legislative leeway to craft their own citizenship and integration policies: They can modulate federal criteria for ordinary naturalization, give non-citizen residents the right to vote or even stand as a candidate in local and cantonal elections, or grant group rights to immigrant minorities. These variations are best captured by systematic efforts to conceptualize and measure the access of immigrants to civic, political, socio-structural, and cultural and religious rights (Arrighi & Piccoli, 2018; Manatschal, 2011, 2012).

The Index on Citizenship Law in Switzerland (Arrighi & Piccoli, 2018) reveals that there is relatively more inclusive legislation on ordinary naturalization in the cantons of Vaud (VD, capital city Lausanne) and Geneva (GE) than in Zurich (ZH), Basel-City (BS), and Basel-Country (BL). Crucially for our purposes, it shows major differences regarding access to electoral rights for foreign nationals. The canton of Vaud grants both active and passive suffrage at municipal level to foreigners holding a long-term permit and a 10-year residence record in Switzerland, whereas the canton of Geneva entitles foreigners with eight years' residence in Switzerland to vote at the municipal level but denies them passive suffrage rights. In contrast, foreign residents in Zurich and Basel have no local voting rights.

The picture is more nuanced as regards the second dimension of citizenship, the granting of group rights to immigrants. Weakly developed in the Swiss case, it can be captured by indicators such as cultural requirements set for naturalization, cultural rights granted in or outside public institutions, or legal recognition of religious minorities (Manatschal, 2011). The city-canton of Basel (BS) stands out in this regard for its openness to diversity (Wichmann & D'Amato, 2010); it has minimal cultural requirements for naturalization and today officially recognizes the Alevi religion. Basel's authorities endorsed the *Leitbild zur Integration* 25 years ago (Ehret, 1999), advocating a "careful approach to culture" (Ehret, 2009, p. 1), actively supporting the formation of immigrant associations (Cattacin & Kaya, 2005) and thereby promoting the collective expression of migrants' interests. In contrast, Zurich is the most assimilationist canton among those under investigation, as exemplified by its stringent cultural requirements for naturalization, minimal granting of cultural rights, and no legal recognition of religious minorities.

Identifying the factors shaping these distinct citizenship and integration models falls beyond the scope of this study, yet it is worth noting the relation between these models and the results of votes on citizenship and immigration issues (frequent and easily measured in Swiss direct democracy) and the relative electoral strength of the populist radical-right party (Schweizerische Volkspartei, SVP, Swiss People's Party). Unlike Zurich, Basel-City often aligns with the liberal voting tendencies of the two French-speaking cantons on immigration issues, as demonstrated by the 2015 results of the initiative against mass immigration, which was accepted by 47% of voters in Zurich but only 39% in Geneva, Vaud, and Basel-City. Likewise, the SVP has dominated the political scene in Zurich since the 1990s, but its electoral weight is significantly lower and similar across the three other cantons.

3.2. Descriptive Representation of Immigrants and Their Descendants

In each selected urban area, we gathered descriptive data on immigrant-origin MPs in local parliaments of two municipalities, the main city and a nearby medium-sized town with a high proportion of foreigners (around 40% or more), to maximize the likelihood of finding MPs with an immigrant background. In this second step we took into account all Swiss MPs of immigrant origin regardless of their generational position to provide the largest overview of immigrants' representation.

Our data collection relied on a triangulation of three main sources of information. First, we accessed publicly available data, such as information found on parliamentary and party websites and in newspaper articles, to gather names and biographical details that could help identify individuals with a visible and/or explicitly stated immigrant background. Second, where information was incomplete or unclear, we contacted parliamentary bodies and political parties to elucidate origin, which helped verify and expand our initial findings. Third, we directly approached party and parliament members, who were often willing to provide precise information about their colleagues' origin. Overall, we consider the dataset robust due to this triangulated methodology and the reinforcement effect across these three sources, with one notable limitation: We may have missed elected representatives from neighboring countries (France, Germany, and Austria), as indicated by their surprisingly low representation (see Table 2).

The mapping of the various local parliaments provided an insight into the country of origin, gender, and political affiliation of Swiss-origin and immigrant-origin MPs. Our data reveal a significant underrepresentation of immigrant-origin minorities in municipal parliaments as of April 2016 (Table 1). In major cities, the percentage of minority MPs ranges from 4% in Zurich to 12.5% in Geneva, both substantially below the proportion of foreign residents. Medium-sized towns exhibit more variability, with minority representation ranging from 2.5% in Pratteln (BL) to 32.5% in Renens (VD). The latter, with nearly a third of its MPs having immigrant origins, is a notable exception, contrasting sharply with the German-speaking towns of Schlieren (ZH) and Pratteln (BL).

Table 1. Population and parliament composition in selected municipalities (April 2016).

Municipalities (Canton)	Inhabitants (in 1,000s)	Resident aliens (%)	MPs (Total)	Immigrant-origin MPs* (*N*)	(%)
Zurich (ZH)	391.4	31.9	125	5	4.0
Schlieren (ZH)	18.4	45.9	36	2	5.5
Basel (BS)	168.6	36.2	100	6	6.0
Pratteln (BL)	15.6	39.7	40	1	2.5
Lausanne (VD)	133.9	42.3	100	5	5.0
Renens (VD)	18.9	51.3	80	26	32.5
Geneva (GE)	197.4	48.7	80	10	12.5
Vernier (GE)	35.3	45.8	40	6	16.6

Note: * The category immigrant-origin MPs includes both foreign-born immigrants and descendants of immigrants.

A closer look at the composition of the immigrant minority representation (Table 2) reveals some important variations among the different cities. In Basel-City, all minority MP seats are held by Turkish-origin representatives, while in other cities representation is more diverse, sometimes including MPs from smaller

immigrant groups. Second-generation MPs constitute less than half (44%) of immigrant-origin MPs in the selected municipalities, and their proportion is generally higher in medium-sized towns than in cities, except in Renens.

Table 2. Features of immigrant-origin MPs in 2016*.

Municipalities (Canton)	Generation		Political parties**	Countries of origin***
	First	Second		
Zurich (ZH)	1	4	PS/SP (3), VL (2)	BO, ES, GR, IN, TR
Schlieren (ZH)	0	2	PS/SP (2)	MK, TN
Basel (BS)	5	1	PS/SP (4), PES, PLR	TR (6)
Pratteln (BL)	0	1	PS/SP	TR
Lausanne (VD)	3	2	PS/SP (4), PES	VN (2), IT, KO, LK
Renens (VD)	17	9	PS/SP (13), POP (8), PLR (3), UDC/SVP (2)	IT (6), TR (5), CO (2), KO (2), ES (2), AF, BA, CD, HR, EC, UK, PT, SN, ZA
Geneva (GE)	7	3	PS/SP (4), PDC (3), PES, MCG, POP	KO (2), TN (2), DZ, GR, ES, IR, LB, SO
Vernier (GE)	1	5	PS/SP (4), PLR, MCG	KO (3), DZ (2), ES

Notes: * Immigrant-origin MPs includes both foreign-born immigrants and descendants of immigrants; ** Political parties: MCG: Mouvement citoyen genevois; PES: Parti écologiste suisse; PLR: Parti libéral radical; POP: Parti ouvrier populaire; PS/SP: Parti socialiste/Sozialdemokratische Partei; UDC/SVP: Union démocratique du centre/Schweizerische Volkspartei; VL: Vert'libéraux; parties with no number have one representative; *** Countries of origin: AF: Afghanistan; BA: Bosnia; BO: Bolivia; CD: Democratic Republic of Congo; CO: Colombia; DZ: Algeria; EC: Ecuador; ES: Spain; GR: Greece; HR: Croatia; IT: Italy; IR: Iran; IN: India; KO: Kosovo; LB: Lebanon; LK: Sri Lanka; MK: Macedonia; PT: Portugal; SN: Senegal; SO: Somalia; TN: Tunisia; TR: Turkey; UK: United Kingdom; VN: Vietnam; ZA: South Africa; countries with no number have one representative.

3.3. Overview of Our Interviewees

The collection of the descriptive representation data was used to identify potential interviewees and was extended to other municipalities in the same urban areas to compensate for the limited number of MPs in certain city parliaments who are immigrants' descendants. The notion of immigrants' descendants adopted for the fieldwork includes persons of immigrant origin who grew up and attended most of their compulsory school (five years) in Switzerland, regardless of their place of birth. This is the general understanding of "second generation" in Switzerland, where, in the absence of *jus soli*, place of birth has no bearing on citizenship. We specifically targeted the "new second generation" of individuals with Western Balkan and Turkish origins (Fibbi et al., 2015), as they reside in all cantons (albeit in varying proportions) and occupy similar positions in the social stratification. Moreover, we incorporated a small number of Swiss-origin peers of similar age, gender, and party affiliation. The information gathered from this sort of control group helped us better assess the specificities of immigrant-origin youth in relation to the factors influencing their political socialization. Table 3 provides an overview of the interviewed MPs and their main characteristics.

Between September and December 2016, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 34 MPs, 25 of whom were PIOs, and 9 PCHs. The interviews were conducted using a guide with three main series of questions on the following topics: the role of family and school in early political socialization, the influence of networks and associations on political mobilization, and the main issues they intended to promote as MPs.

Table 3. Overview and features of interviewed MPs.

Urban areas	Politicians of Swiss origin (PCHs)	PCHs: Gender* and party affiliation**	PIOs	PIOs: Gender*, party affiliation**, and parental country of origin
Zurich	2	F, PS/SP; M, PS/SP	8	F, PS, Kosovo; F, PS, Kosovo; F, PS, Macedonia; M, PS, Turkey; M, PS, Bolivia; M, VL, India; M, PLR, Macedonia; M, PS, Uganda
Basel	2	F, PS/SP; M, PS/SP	5	F, PS, Turkey; F, PS, Turkey; M, PS, Turkey; M, PS, Kosovo; M, PS, Ghana
Lausanne	3	F, PS/SP; F, PS/SP; M, PLR	6	F, PS, Vietnam; M, PES, Vietnam; F, PS, Kosovo; M, PS, Kosovo; M, PLR, Nigeria; F, PS, Somalia
Geneva	2	F, PS/SP; M, PS/SP	6	F, PS, Greece; F, PS, Turkey; M, PS, Algeria; M, PS, Kosovo; F, PS, Kosovo; M, PS, Spain
Total	9		25	

Notes: * F stands for female; M stands for male; ** Political parties: PES: Parti écologiste suisse; PLR: Parti libéral radical; PS/SP: Parti socialiste/Sozialdemokratische Partei; VL: Vert'libéraux.

To comply with ethical standards, we asked for and obtained consent to publish anonymized data; therefore, pseudonyms are used when attributing an excerpt from an interview, alongside the name of the canton the person resided in. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using MAXQDA, which is designed for theoretical coding. This method allowed us to deconstruct, conceptualize, and reassemble the data to relate it to our theoretical framework (Flick, 2014).

All PIOs are Swiss citizens by way of naturalization; their demographic, socioeconomic, and political characteristics offer enlightening insights. Almost 50% of PIOs are women. Such a high percentage mirrors our mapping of MPs in the selected cities yet exceeds by far the 35% average in Swiss local legislative bodies (Federal Statistical Office, 2024a). All respondents were aged between 20 and 30 at the time of the interviews. Twenty-two out of 25 PIOs and 8 out of 9 PCHs held or were pursuing tertiary education qualifications in 2016. Intergenerational upward social mobility has been experienced by 15 out of 22 tertiary-educated PIOs; they are the first in their families to reach this level of education, whereas the educational attainment of PCHs mirrors systematically their parents' level. PIOs are predominantly affiliated with left-wing parties (84%), which is consistent with our mapping of MPs in the selected cities (Table 2). Yet, as young politicians, PIOs and PCHs had similar difficulties accessing an MP position: They all entered the city parliament by replacing senior officials as "next-in-line" candidates from the same party list.

4. Results: The Political Incorporation of Second-Generation MPs From a Comparative Perspective

4.1. Political Socialization

PIO respondents trace their political socialization back to their late teens but do not attribute it to their family environment. Many do mention their families, especially parents who were active in homeland politics in countries experiencing political unrest such as Turkey or Kosovo during the 1990s. However, few PIOs received family support regarding getting acquainted with Swiss political culture because often their parents

lacked knowledge of and interest in Swiss politics. Poor language skills, demanding work schedules, and a perception that foreign residents should avoid public affairs often hindered their immigrant parents from being politically involved in Switzerland. This situation is exemplified by the case of Fatmire, an MP living in the Zurich area:

> My parents did not speak German well, so they could not deal with politics here. They were of course interested in Macedonian politics: They watched TV, read the newspaper, and discussed events there. In Switzerland, they heard about politics, but they were cautious, thinking, "If I behave correctly, then nothing happens to me, so I keep a low profile as much as I can." Because of this anxiety, they never talked about politics or meant: "I want to do something here." Moreover, they simply lacked time. My father worked 120%, had two jobs, and my mother, who spoke little German, was busy with four children. So, politics was almost never discussed in the family. (Fatmire_ZH)

Most respondents emphasize instead that at the time of the interview the practice of politics in their parents' home country differed sharply from that in Switzerland. They thus unanimously mention the crucial impact that their school education had not only on their social mobility but also specifically on their political socialization. Most of them identify an influential school or college teacher—usually teaching civic education, history, or law—who actively contributed to the development of their political knowledge and values. For instance, Bona, an MP living in the Lausanne region, reflects a common narrative of our PIO respondents in the following excerpt:

> I learned about the Swiss political system in school. I was lucky enough to have a high school history teacher who taught the Swiss political system in a rather ludic and interesting way. She is the one who showed how the federal, cantonal, or communal systems operate and encouraged us to talk about elections and votes. She opened our eyes to several realities and stimulated my curiosity. (Bona_VD)

Thanks to political knowledge and interest gained at school, many PIOs felt empowered to inform their parents about local politics and felt confident to discuss new issues within the family. Bottom-up processes of political socialization, referred to as "trickle-up" processes in the literature (Spierings, 2016; Terriquez & Kwon, 2015), often occur in immigrant families because of the first generation's poor knowledge of the Swiss political system and their children's acquisition of political skills at school. Although such trickle-up processes are most common among minimally politicized parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (McDevitt & Chaffee, 2002), our findings indicate that they also occur in families already politically engaged in their home country. Indeed, most PIO respondents use the political competencies acquired in school within their social networks or civic organizations to inform their parents about (local) political issues and encourage their participation. Thirteen respondents in our sample reported regularly supporting their enfranchised parents regarding how to vote, and some even gave them advice about what to vote for, which is useful in the Swiss direct democracy system, where voters are called to cast ballots three to four times a year on all kinds of issues. In these cases, the political skills acquired by young PIOs at school can introduce new topics, deeply transforming family relationships. Bekim, an MP in the Basel region, recalls:

> My political interest, developed at school, was the trigger for change within our family. Suddenly social issues were addressed at home that were never discussed before. Liberalism in marriage, tolerance for gays, no matter what skin color…are topics that were first addressed at home because of my political interests, and that changed family relations. (Bekim_BS)

In this regard, PIOs' experiences are sharply distinct from those of our Swiss-origin respondents, whose political knowledge and orientation were shaped through exposure to politically informed and politically active families. An iconic example of this form of political socialization is provided by Lucas, an MP in the Lausanne region whose family has a long-standing history of political involvement. Lucas emphasized that his family was the firm locus of his political socialization, notably by using the term "family virus." He rejects other potential influences, such as school, on his political trajectory:

> I have always been in an environment where we talk about politics, or we do politics. I had a grandfather who sat in the federal parliament, my two parents were successively on the communal executive….I have been interested in politics since I was a kid….I would dare to say that I learned as an autodidact or listening to family discussions. All I know is that citizenship classes did not help me. I was rather correcting the teacher when he was talking nonsense. (Lucas_VD)

The vertical transmission observed among PCHs often leads to the formation of political "dynasties" within local political institutions, as regularly reported in the media. The contrast with PIOs could not be sharper. PIOs differ from both their parents and their Swiss-origin peers because the "disruption" of family transmission dynamics makes them rely instead on local agents of socialization and other sources of political socialization and activation.

4.2. Social Networks

PIOs engage in civil society associations and social networks before investing in the political arena. The literature emphasizes the role of a rich ethnic associational life in fostering political participation of first-generation immigrants. Our findings suggest that, on the contrary, immigrants' descendants refrain from engaging in their parents' ethnic networks. Apart from one notable exception in Basel (see Section 4.3.2), most respondents are not involved in organizations representing their parents' countries of origin and did not accumulate social capital through an "ethnic civic community."

Although many interviewees participated as children in cultural or religious events organized by their parents' associations, most of them had abandoned these practices and contacts by adolescence and in 2016 only had sporadic involvement. They often mention feeling uncomfortable regarding being identified with their parents' national community because they are worried about being confined to the perceived cultural traits and political interests of that community. PIOs may instead engage in movements related to general immigration and/or integration issues that go far beyond the ethnic dimension alone. Shpresa illustrates this point:

> I always wanted to act in favor of the refugee cause, seeing the refugee as a human being, not differentiating by ethnicity. It does not matter if they are Albanian, Turk, or Syrian. I never wanted to represent and defend only one group….I have always been interested in the topic "foreigners," as a general topic, not just Albanians. (Shpresa_ZH)

However, the trickle-up processes described above can push some PIOs to instrumentally reactivate their parents' ethnic network during their political campaign. This pattern was observed among some MPs from the sizeable Albanian and Turkish communities in Swiss German municipalities, who sometimes successfully directed transnational political communications toward associations and media used by their parents' ethnic

communities. In other cases, such attempts were disappointing precisely because of the weakened connections with parents' ethnic networks, as illustrated by the experience of Alessandra, a politician of Vietnamese origin living in Lausanne:

> We [my party and I] thought we had to activate these networks and approached them. We took advantage of the Vietnamese New Year in January. I prepared a little speech that I read in Vietnamese, but it went very badly, because I don't know the language well. The feedback was mixed. Some people were happy, and others really looked away like "I don't want to talk about this." I don't know if I would do it again. (Alexandra_VD)

These findings suggest that it is necessary to distinguish between immigrants and their descendants when studying their political incorporation as they may have different relations to their "origin" communities.

4.3. Actors' Mobilization and Institutional Context

Next, we investigate the impact of different local opportunity structures on actors' political action by analyzing the discursive dimensions of their mobilization, such as their identity and political claims. In each canton being studied, PIOs put forward a peculiar declination of their identity and mobilize around partially different issues. The fieldwork revealed three different presentations of self among PIOs and related ways of political mobilization. In Zurich, PIOs built their political identity around their minority status as second-generation citizens and mobilized against the political exclusion of all non-citizens regardless of their ethnic background. In Basel, on the contrary, PIOs' identity is solidly rooted in their ethnic minority homeland experience but at the same time firmly engaged in local politics. In the French-speaking cities, PIOs emphasized their local identity as residents while broadly combating the social and political exclusion of migrants and underprivileged groups. We argue that these various identity constructs emerge from the interplay between, on the one hand, minority bonding and bridging social capital, and, on the other, the constraints and opportunities set by majority society.

4.3.1. Zurich: Pan-Ethnic Second-Generation Mobilization

In a political system closed to foreign residents, Zurich provides the clearest example of associational engagement that mobilizes an explicitly second-generation identity rather than ethnic community-based networks. The Second@s Plus association is a case in point. It was set up in the 2000s in response to a dominant discourse stigmatizing immigrants' descendants in general rather than a specific community. The term "Secondos," blending Italian and Spanish, denotes an emerging new group of mixed ethnic origin now established in the country of residence. It became a disparaging term used to label second-generation youth as troublemakers—particularly following incidents that occurred during Labor Day protests in the early 2000s. But the association turned this into a claimed identity, a positive marker. Daniel, a founding member, reports:

> At that time, this concept [Secondos] was quite unknown, yet it had a negative connotation. Suddenly [in public discourse after the troubles] second-generation youth were all supposed to be criminal people! I thought: "I am also a second-generation citizen, but I am not a criminal!" So, we set up a group and said, "If you introduce a term, Secondos, then you have to give it a positive connotation." (Daniel_ZH)

This normative inversion strategy (Lamont & Bail, 2005; Wimmer, 2008) was a necessary step toward affirming a collective identity as foreign residents and rejecting assigned identities that referred to parents' countries of origin. Political mobilization around this collective identity allowed immigrants' descendants to reclaim agency over discourse and decisions directly affecting them, as explained by Lindita:

> They cannot discuss topics of integration and immigration policy without us. We want to talk about these issues ourselves. It was such an empowerment, such a self-confident attitude. With Second@s Plus it was a matter of saying, "We are also here, these issues of naturalization and equal opportunities directly affect us, not all migrants, but very specifically the second generation." (Lindita_ZH)

The movement was explicitly formed to encourage political expression among immigrants' descendants, promoting local-level political engagement and challenging restrictive naturalization policies at both cantonal and national levels. The local dynamic became nationally relevant publicly in 2004 when the movement made its mark as a visible social actor via its punchy and colorful—yet unsuccessful—campaign supporting the introduction at federal level of birthright citizenship for the grandchildren of immigrants.

Zurich's institutional and discursive framework, based on restrictive integration policies and a stigmatizing discourse on second-generation citizens, has thus fostered a reactive form of political identification around the Secondos identity and mobilization for a political voice. The local party system responded strategically to these demands. Initially, the SP capitalized on them by establishing electoral lists under the "Second@s Plus" label and forming close interpersonal relationships with its members, who became a key "reservoir" for young PIOs. Since the 2010s, the association has extended its relations beyond the SP to include all political parties—except for the SVP. It advocates fair naturalization processes and voting rights at local and regional levels. Today, the movement remains a vital reference for immigrants' descendants in Zurich and many PIO respondents engage with it. However, it has not expanded in many other cantons.

4.3.2. Basel: Ethnic Intergenerational Mobilization

In Basel, the PIOs are strikingly homogeneous (Table 2); all have a Turkish background and are predominantly from the numerically important Alevi community. Alevis developed many different types of association (sports, culture, religion, integration-related issues) that bonded both first- and second-generation people. This is the only case among those studied where such close intergenerational connections have been maintained over time. These associations also have a bridging function, catering to transnational and institutional relationships between members of the Alevi community and the Turkish embassy in Switzerland as well as local authorities and left-wing political parties. This case aligns with the ethnic civic community argument, which suggests that the size of the community and the density of ethnic associational networks promote political participation.

The extensive literature on Turkish political participation in Germany and the Netherlands has somewhat overlooked the specificity of the Alevis' struggle for minority recognition in Europe (Massicard, 2012; Sökefeld, 2008) and the interdependent development of "identity politics" in both their homeland and their host country. Alevis, including the Basel PIO respondents, emphasize the differences between the cultural values and practices of the Sunni majority in Turkey and those of their community, which they consider a progressive and tolerant form of Islam more readily accepted in Europe. In the Swiss context, the Alevis'

successful identity claim follows the path previously taken by other religious minorities striving for public recognition.

Yet the political achievement of the Alevis' strategic emphasis on cultural distinctiveness was enabled by a combination of factors specific to the Basel region. Immigrant-group dynamics such as the concentration of the Turkish-origin population, a strong Alevi community, and a dense associative network coincided with a favorable local structure for political opportunity characterized by the responsiveness of left-wing parties and Basel's multicultural citizenship model facilitating collective migrant expression. Emre, president of the Alevitische Kulturzentrum founded by his father and MP in the Basel region, relates how left-wing parties began recruiting candidates from his organization in the early 2000s, leading to his election to the Basel-City parliament in 2004 alongside four other Alevi politicians:

> By the 2000s, the SP [Sozialdemokratische Partei] and the Greens noticed that the Alevi community had sympathy for them and today it is so, before elections to the legislative or the executive seats, we go on a tour with candidates in the migrant associations, mostly on Sundays. One of these associations is the Alevi cultural community. That is how I, together with four Alevi friends, became involved in the SP….All of us were successful, all from the Alevi community. (Emre_BS)

So, both first and second generations make use of the same channels to engage in politics and successfully run for office: The two generations converge in their pursuit of the same goal, contributing to the "Alevi revival" observed in Western Europe since the 1990s (Massicard, 2012). This political integration, combined with an institutional context favoring the collective expression of migrants' interests, led to the Alevi community's official recognition by the Basel-City parliament in 2012, granting them the same status as Christians and Jews. Such recognition has both a symbolic value (acknowledgment of the social value of the community) and a practical value (access to the rights and resources guaranteed by the cantonal Constitution to religious groups) that have yielded resources for a transnational politics of identity aimed at formal recognition of the Alevi in Turkey.

4.3.3. Geneva and Lausanne: Local Youth Mobilization

The French-speaking urban areas under investigation present a different picture. The Secondos movement developed in the German-speaking cantons never managed to take root in Western Switzerland, where ethnic associations with strong ties between first and second generations are largely absent. In the two French-speaking cantons, the granting of local voting rights to long-term foreign residents in the early 2000s set the dominant frame for integration, emphasizing individual and territorial entitlement over group membership.

PIO respondents in Geneva and Lausanne report that they established their social network within local, often self-organized associations, typically at the neighborhood level. The experience of Bilal, a PIO in the Geneva canton, is iconic:

> With a group of eight friends, we created the [neighborhood] Association, a non-profit organization, to foster better living through various activities….We were open to everyone, from 1 to 99 years old, and…wanted to destigmatize the youth of my neighborhood. (Bilal_GE)

As Bilal says, the aim of this group action was destigmatizing what he calls the "youth of my neighborhood." Whereas PIOs in Zurich were labeled "Secondos" and mobilized politically around this identity, most respondents in Geneva and Lausanne built their political engagement on an identification with their—usually deprived—neighborhood.

Besides neighborhood associations, youth parliaments are important sites of social capital acquisition and political recruitment. They promote political education, the participation of young adults, and the culture of democratic discussion that is essential in a direct democracy. In Geneva, municipal youth parliaments (accessible to people aged 15–25 regardless of their citizenship status) staged voting rights claims for non-citizen residents in the mid-1990s (Wegschaider, 2023). Guxim provides a telling example of this process:

> The first civic engagement was through the Geneva Youth Parliament which we co-founded with a large group of young people. The idea arose during a voting campaign. A law teacher explained the latest revision of unemployment insurance and we realized that young people were the most affected by the reform, yet nobody was addressing it. We decided to create a structure to clarify electoral and voting issues. We also noticed that young people lacked a partner to approach the state, particularly when navigating administrative procedures for various activities. We envisioned the Parliament as a catalyst: a place where ideas could be proposed, resources pooled, and collaborations formed. I chaired the Culture Committee for a year and then served as vice-president of the Parliament. (Guxim_GE)

PIOs in urban areas in Geneva and Lausanne mobilize around youth-related issues and engage in local community structures in a political environment that tends to see them not as immigrants or foreigners (because of their formal status or their origin) but as "citizens," i.e., as legitimate, active actors in the place where they reside. Their discourse does not feature ethnic references but instead defends socially disadvantaged groups in deprived neighborhoods. They address a constituency that comprises and yet goes beyond their parents' ethnic community and the foreign population. In their quest for social justice, PIO respondents often address social integration and discrimination issues. While they may understand that political parties show an interest in them because of their migrant background, they refrain from and sometimes even resent being considered community representatives.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Our contribution adds to existing literature on the political incorporation of immigrants' descendants by highlighting the specific socialization processes they experienced and the structuring influence of contextual dimensions on their mobilization.

The decisive drive of PIOs to engage in political action is provided, as expected, not mainly by their families—as is the case for PCHs—but by Swiss teachers and local, civic experiences. Even in politically active families, international migration appears to disrupt the intergenerational transmission of political engagement. When political incorporation is being studied, the cases of the first and second generation should not be systematically lumped together: The second generation undergoes a specific socialization process that enables them to master the codes and knowledge of their country of residence's political system. The vertical model conceiving young people's political commitment (or lack thereof) as a

unidirectional transmission of political skills and orientations from parents to their children is thus challenged, at least regarding the specific case of a politically active second generation. Effective political socialization at school creates a difference between the descendants of immigrants who actively engage in politics and those, the most numerous, who are reluctant to participate in local political life (Bevelander & Hutcheson, 2022; Fibbi et al., 2023).

Political socialization is a lifelong horizontal process characterized by peer-to-peer transmission of knowledge and political skills (Terriquez et al., 2020). Many studies identify ethnic networks, both for immigrants and for their descendants, as the crucial actor in this secondary socialization, as documented in the case of the Turkish Alevi community in Basel. The importance of bonding social capital appears to be context-dependent, particularly where the minority group can capitalize on ethnic concentration and organizational density and encounters a favorable structure for local political opportunities. Yet, in all other cases under scrutiny, peer-to-peer socialization develops through other politicizing agents, as expected. Such agents are for instance young people from different backgrounds and civic organizations with peers from non-immigrant families, leading to the acquisition of bridging social capital. Hence, the impact of ethnic horizontal socialization on political mobilization varies among ethnic groups and according to contextual determinants, shaping different types of reference "communities": ethnic, pan-ethnic, and territorial ones.

The significant contextual dissimilarities highlighted by our subnational comparative study are the result of the interplay between the internal dynamics of immigrant minority groups and the features of local policies toward immigrants. As postulated in the theoretical framework, the identities and communities around which the PIOs express their political claims are those that are discursively legitimized by the cultural frame of citizenship and integration policies specific to each institutional context. In an extreme federalist system, the establishment of representative and accountable government at cantonal level "provides new institutional resources for political leaders to adapt, blur, and re-define the meaning of citizenship for vulnerable [minority] subjects" (Piccoli, 2020, p. 21).

Our article grapples with the vast subject matter of political incorporation by entering through the "side door" of individual protagonists of immigrant descent, so our data were not suited to tackling the political parties' attitudes toward immigrant-origin candidates (Nadler, 2022). Indeed, in-depth research is needed on the role of gatekeepers, such as political parties, trade unions, and religious and humanitarian nonprofit associations, in fostering and controlling the access of immigrants and their descendants to political participation. Further research should test our exploratory findings and sharpen the analysis of local institutional and discursive citizenship constructs.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank our colleagues at the Swiss Forum for Migration and Population Studies, Jean-Thomas Arrighi, Anita Manatschal, and Didier Ruedin, for their insightful comments on previous drafts of this article, as well as Hoang-Mai Verdy and Christine Diacon for their invaluable assistance in preparing and compiling the bibliography. We also thank Arndt Leininger and Sabrina Mayer for their invitation to participate in the workshop "Actors Without Arena," as well as Laura Morales and Floris Vermeulen for their helpful feedback on earlier presentations of this article. Finally, we thank the journal's three anonymous referees for their helpful comments on a previous version of this article.

Funding

This study was funded by a research grant of Stiftung Mercator Schweiz, Pathways to Success, http://www.elitesproject.eu/pathways-to-success/switzerland

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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Politics and Governance
2025 • Volume 13 • Article 9253
https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.9253

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Open Access Journal

Political Participation of Young Immigrants: Do National Identification and Discrimination Moderate the Relationship?

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Submitted: 6 September 2024 **Accepted:** 9 December 2024 **Published:** 22 January 2025

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Unequal Participation Among Youth and Immigrants: Analyzing Political Attitudes and Behavior in Societal Subgroups" edited by Arndt Leininger (Chemnitz University of Technology) and Sabrina Mayer (University of Bamberg), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.i426

Abstract

With nearly a third of the German population having a migration background, immigrant political participation is crucial for democracy and immigrants' integration. Adults with a migration background tend to participate less than the majority population. The findings become less conclusive when focusing specifically on young adults. The socialization phase during youth and young adulthood lays the foundation for future political participation and thus holds significant importance. At the same time, established factors that explain political participation, such as socio-economic status, political interest, or political efficacy, may not yet be fully developed in young adults. The present study starts here and focuses on the conventional and unconventional political participation of young adults (ages 18–30) with and without a migration background in Germany. Specifically, we investigate the moderating effects of perceived discrimination and national identification, which play a key role in shaping immigrants' political integration. We use the civic voluntarism model as our baseline and explanatory framework. It provides a foundation for understanding differences in political participation more broadly. For our analyses, we rely on data from the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey in Four European Countries (CILS4EU-DE, wave 5; linear regressions). First, we find contrary effects of perceived discrimination on recruitment networks and unconventional participation: Positive for individuals with a migration background and negative for individuals without a migration background. Second, national identification weakens the positive impact of political interest among the majority population and of recruitment networks among immigrants. Lastly, we observe no moderating effects for resources and conventional political participation for either group.

Keywords

civic voluntarism model; immigrants; migration background; political participation; young adulthood

1. Introduction

Political participation, also known as engagement or involvement, refers to activities by private citizens intended to influence or interact with the political system and its decision-making processes (van Deth, 2014). It is essential for democracies, as it allows individuals to communicate their needs and preferences (Verba et al., 1993). Participation rates between societal groups differ and the civic voluntarism model (CVM) is frequently used to explain these differences (Brady et al., 1995; Milbrath & Goel, 1982; Verba et al., 1995). The model argues that individuals are more likely to participate if they have more resources, are involved in recruitment networks, and have higher levels of psychological engagement (Verba et al., 1995). In turn, it is argued that, on average, some social groups participate less because they systematically lack these three aspects. However, the described mechanisms overlook how possible moderating factors influence the relationship between the CVM's explanations and political engagement.

Our study analyses how discrimination and national identification moderate the effects proposed by the CVM, which serves as our baseline and explanatory framework. We focus on young adults both with (1.25/1.5/1.75-generation immigrants who arrive in their adolescent years, and second-generation immigrants) and without a migration background in Germany, selecting this sample for three reasons: First, young adults and individuals with a migration background generally show lower levels of political participation (de Rooij, 2012; Eckstein et al., 2013; Quintelier, 2007; Sloam, 2016; Spierings & Vermeulen, 2024). The overlap of these two groups—young adults with a migration background—is especially relevant as political participation is essential for immigrants to integrate into the host society (de Rooij, 2012; Heath et al., 2013). Second, factors that enhance political participation, such as perceived discrimination and national identification, may have different effects depending on a person's age and migration background (de Rooij, 2012; Heath et al., 2013; Quintelier, 2009; Sanders et al., 2014). This is due to differences in integration stages, participation in various social contexts (friends, workplace, or school), and generational differences in attitudes, values, and exposure to discrimination. Finally, for young adults, the explanations provided by the CVM may not yet be fully developed or solidified (Eckstein et al., 2013; Flanagan & Levine, 2010). The period of young adulthood is marked by profound change, encompassing education, starting the first job, leaving the parental home, and eventually entering marriage and parenthood (Arnett, 2000; García-Albacete, 2014; Niemi & Klingler, 2012). For most young citizens, the transition into adulthood represents the most volatile years, with significant changes in their political outlooks that influence political engagement (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011; Eckstein et al., 2013). Young immigrants may experience even greater volatility, because of different socialization paths (Heath et al., 2013; Humphries et al., 2013). They also have, on average, lower levels of resources and psychological engagement, impacting their political participation trajectories (Quintelier, 2009; Verba et al., 1993).

Overall, by examining young adults separately, we aim to identify the unique challenges and motivations that affect their political engagement, thereby highlighting the importance of moderating factors in understanding the overall dynamics of political participation. Additionally, Germany is an ideal case because of its unique composition of immigrant groups, a growing population with a migration background, and thus an increasing number of young individuals who are eligible to participate. In sum, our study combines and enhances two research areas: (a) We expand on the existing literature that explains differences in political participation between individuals with and without a migration background by specifically examining the moderating factors that affect this participation in our study; (b) we draw on existing literature that explains

the differences in political participation between young adults. Our analysis focuses on how national identification and experiences of discrimination act as moderating factors in this relationship. It thereby addresses the following research question: *Do discrimination and national identification moderate the effects proposed by the CVM among young adult immigrants compared to their majority peers?* We begin our study with an explanation of the CVM and a review of the literature on young adults' political participation. Section 3 presents our theoretical assumptions, followed by an analysis of data from Germany. The results are described in Section 5, and we end with a discussion and conclusion.

2. The CVM and Young Adults' Political Participation

Through political participation, people can voice their needs and concerns to the government (van Deth, 2014; Verba et al., 1995). We rely on a common definition of political participation as "…those legal acts by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions that they take" (Verba et al., 1978, p. 1). This broad definition indicates that political participation is multi-dimensional (Milbrath & Goel, 1982; van Deth, 2014). It can be categorized along at least two dimensions: First, (economically) low-cost activities, such as signing a petition, and (economically) high-cost activities, such as being actively involved in a political party. Second, conventional activities like voting and unconventional activities such as protesting (Barnes & Kaase, 1979; Verba et al., 1978). The terminology used to describe these activities has been debated over time. For clarity, we use conventional and unconventional activities, as this distinction particularly applies to young people who primarily engage in unconventional forms of political participation such as protests and demonstrations (Eckstein et al., 2013; Quintelier, 2007). However, it is important to note that "conventional" is sometimes used interchangeably with "institutionalized" or "traditional/formal," while "unconventional" is often synonymous with "non-institutionalized" or "alternative/informal" (Barnes & Kaase, 1979).

In general, the CVM explains both types of political participation through three factors: Individuals need (a) *resources* like time, money, and civic skills, which are often subsumed under the term socio-economic status (e.g., education level, language skills, income). These resources increase the likelihood of political participation; (b) *psychological engagement* like political interest, political efficacy, or group consciousness also fosters political involvement; finally, (c) *recruitment networks*—such as peers, acquaintances, and social clubs—that actively encourage individuals to participate play a vital role (Brady et al., 1995; Campbell, 2013; Eckstein et al., 2015; Verba et al., 1995).

The CVM can also explain differing participation rates between individuals with and without a migration background: Immigrants tend to have lower rates of political participation compared to the general population (e.g., Gatti et al., 2024; Heath et al., 2013; Rapp, 2020). These differences can be attributed to immigrants' systematic deficits in the three areas outlined by the CVM: resources, psychological engagement, and recruitment networks. Thereby, recruitment networks and collective action play a particularly important role in immigrants' political participation (de Rooij, 2012). Furthermore, all three aspects are shaped by the length of time immigrants have lived in the host country and their level of national attachment or identification with it (de Rooij, 2012; Rapp, 2020; Scuzzarello, 2015).

Although the CVM effectively explains differences in political participation between individuals with and without a migration background, it is important to specifically examine how age influences the CVM's ability

to provide these explanations—something that was already broached a bit by Rapp (2020) when focusing on immigrants' duration of stay: Some aspects of the CVM, such as civic skills, develop during early adolescence through socialization and tend to remain relatively stable. Other aspects, like time, money, and social networks, can change frequently throughout a person's life (Verba et al., 1995). This is particularly true during young adulthood. Milestones such as completing schooling, entering the labour force, and leaving the parental home mark a phase of individual change and exploration of various life directions (Arnett, 2000; Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011). New environments, roles, social contacts, and evolving civic values and identities shape political views and, in turn, influence political participation (García-Albacete, 2014; Niemi & Klingler, 2012).

Kirbiš et al. (2017) and Verba et al. (1995) have found that the CVM effectively predicts the political participation of young adults in Europe as well as the US. They did not specifically differentiate between young immigrant and non-immigrant adults. Given that our study focuses on Germany, we now focus solely on European countries. The findings are mixed regarding the general differences in political participation between young individuals with and without a migration background. For example, Quintelier (2009) found that young immigrant adults participate more than young non-immigrant adults in both conventional and unconventional political activities, while Riniolo and Ortensi (2021) observed the opposite. Contextual factors, the specific migration group being studied, and the family background can explain the differences, aside from institutional barriers like voting rights (Humphries et al., 2013). Immigrant-origin factors such as political views, previous engagement, intentions to stay, sense of belonging, and knowledge of the political system also affect immigrants' political participation (Heath et al., 2013).

The findings are also mixed regarding the effects of the three CVM factors on political participation among young adults with a migration background compared to their majority peers in European countries. In terms of *resources*, aside from the impact of family background, no significant effects were found on conventional or unconventional political participation (Eckstein et al., 2015). However, it has been indirectly revealed that young immigrant adults do not utilize their education as effectively as young non-immigrant adults. Highly educated young immigrant adults, on average, have lower levels of self-trust in their skills, which results in a lower likelihood of political participation (Reichert, 2017; Sime & Behrens, 2023).

Turning to the role of *recruitment networks*, its effect on conventional and unconventional participation is greater among young adult immigrants than their non-immigrant peers (Eckstein et al., 2015). The differences can be attributed to the fact that young immigrant adults' political participation often focuses on issues concerning the origin country and the own immigrant group, such as improving the rights and opportunities of their community (Riniolo & Ortensi, 2021). This is further supported by the findings of Ataman et al. (2017) and Quintelier (2009), who show that identification with their immigrant group boosts political participation.

Last, for *psychological engagement*, some research suggests that greater political interest among young individuals with a migration background increases their likelihood of conventional and unconventional political participation, while other studies have found this effect only among young non-immigrant adults (Eckstein et al., 2015; Sime & Behrens, 2023). Still, other research has highlighted the moderating role of education, arguing that highly educated young immigrant adults exhibit higher levels of distrust and dissatisfaction with the host government, influenced by their own experiences in the education system. This

leads to feelings of frustration, resignation, and consequently, lower levels of political participation (Reichert, 2017; Sime & Behrens, 2023).

Focusing specifically on the findings for Germany to understand the previous research related to our study, we find that *resources*, apart from family background, do not have a significant effect (Eckstein et al., 2015). However, when examining the role of education more closely, we find that highly educated young individuals with a migration background tend to have lower levels of self-confidence in their skills, which leads to a decreased likelihood of political participation (Reichert, 2017). The impact of *recruitment networks* is stronger for young adult immigrants compared to their non-immigrant peers in Germany (Eckstein et al., 2015). This is further supported by findings that show a strong identification with the immigrant group enhances political participation (Ataman et al., 2017). Finally, some research indicates that greater political interest (*psychological engagement*) among young immigrant adults increases their likelihood of political participation in Germany; in contrast, other studies have found that this effect is present only among young individuals without a migration background (Eckstein et al., 2015). Additionally, some research highlights the moderating role of education, suggesting that highly educated young immigrant adults often experience higher levels of distrust and dissatisfaction with the host government due to their experiences in the education system. This can lead to feelings of frustration and resignation, ultimately resulting in lower levels of political participation (Reichert, 2017).

In summary, young adulthood is a critical period for future political participation, but young adults often lack resources, education, and political exposure compared to older individuals (García-Albacete, 2014). Social ties and civic skills, which influence political engagement, also change during this time (Niemi & Klingler, 2012). As a result, young adults, especially immigrants with lower socio-economic status and political knowledge, may have weaker political engagement (de Rooij, 2012; Heath et al., 2013; Humphries et al., 2013). Our study helps to clarify these mixed findings by examining perceived discrimination and national identification as moderating factors.

3. The Moderating Impact of Discrimination and National Identification

We first concentrate on the moderating impact of *perceived discrimination*. To our knowledge, the only study examining a moderating impact found that, for people of colour, discrimination strengthens the connection between political interest and voting (da Rosa et al., 2023). Previous studies on the direct effect of discrimination on political participation have reached no clear conclusion (e.g., Bilodeau, 2017; Spierings & Vermeulen, 2024). While discrimination is not limited to individuals with a migration background, discrimination based on ethnicity, race, or immigrant status, particularly when linked with minority group membership, specifically affects immigrants (Oskooii, 2016, 2020; Schildkraut, 2005).

Discrimination involves "...drawing a distinction—by judgment or action—in favour or against a person or group based on various sociocultural or biological identifiers such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or sexuality" (Oskooii, 2016, p. 615). When immigrants perceive discrimination, they are treated as "second-class citizens," leading to feelings of rejection, frustration, inferiority, insecurity, and powerlessness (Oskooii, 2020; Spierings & Vermeulen, 2024). Especially feelings of being outsiders and unwelcome can lead minorities to detach from political engagement, as they internalize these negative evaluations and suffer from lower confidence and a diminished sense of belonging (Bilodeau, 2017; Oskooii, 2016).

We therefore hypothesize that discrimination has a negative moderating effect. The hypothesis is supported by four additional arguments: First, when immigrants perceive discrimination, unfair treatment, and a sense of being unwelcome, these factors are likely to be more influential on their political (dis)engagement than the CVM's explanations, especially for young adult immigrants (Oskooii, 2016, 2020; Schildkraut, 2005). Young adulthood is a formative period where individuals are developing their personal and social identities. Discrimination experiences during this stage can significantly impact their self-perception, sense of belonging, and overall identity. Unlike older immigrants who may have already established a stable sense of identity, young adults are more vulnerable to the effects of discrimination as it can shape their emerging self-concept and worldviews profoundly (Oskooii, 2020).

Second, even if members of minority groups gain more resources, they may still face barriers to participation due to discrimination. Alienation and disillusionment may prevent their (socio-economic) resources from effectively translating into political participation (Oskooii, 2016; Schildkraut, 2005). The early stages of a career and education are pivotal for young adults in establishing their political participation, but perceived discrimination can influence this negatively.

Third, discrimination can undermine a person's sense of psychological involvement—the belief in their ability to influence political processes—which could discourage participation (da Rosa et al., 2023; Oskooii, 2020). Young adults are generally more sensitive to social rejection and negative feedback, which can have a more pronounced psychological and emotional impact (Oskooii, 2016).

Last, discrimination can weaken the effectiveness of mobilization efforts by hindering collective action and reducing engagement (Schildkraut, 2005). Discrimination in these contexts can hamper their ability to form meaningful connections, participate fully in social activities, and integrate into mainstream society. Older immigrants, who may have already navigated these integration processes, might have established support systems and coping mechanisms that mitigate the impact of discrimination.

Yet, discrimination experiences are not exclusive to immigrants. Individuals from the majority population can also experience discrimination based on attributes like sex or disabilities, which then affects their political participation (Berry et al., 2022; Page, 2018). However, the intersectionality of various identities plays a crucial role for immigrants. In our context, this means that immigrants often encounter multiple layers of discrimination related to their ethnicity, nationality, language, and immigration status. This compounded discrimination can create vulnerability and feelings of disempowerment, which are less frequently experienced by non-immigrants. In other words, the intersectional experiences of discrimination uniquely affect immigrants and create specific challenges for them. This can impact their willingness or ability to engage politically, resulting in lower levels of political participation compared to non-immigrants. Discrimination may thus have a stronger impact on young immigrant adults, causing them to focus more on group-based attachments compared to their non-immigrant peers (Schildkraut, 2005). Therefore, we do not expect any moderating impact on non-young immigrant adults.

> H1a: *Discrimination moderates the positive impact of the CVM's explanations on political participation negatively for young adult immigrants.*

> H1b: *Discrimination has no moderating impact on young non-immigrant adults.*

Next, we explore the moderating impact of *national identification* against the backdrop that young immigrants often navigate national identification on a "continuum," encompassing identification with both the host and origin countries.

In general, national identification is defined as "…a deeply felt affective attachment to the nation" (Rapp, 2020, p. 2820). While this definition closely resembles the concept of patriotism, which involves love for one's country, we understand national identification as a sense of belonging to a specific nation. In this sense, while national identification can encompass feelings of pride and loyalty, it primarily relates to the social and cultural aspects of belonging to a nation, rather than the "love for a country" that defines patriotism. Our understanding of national identification is also reflected in how we measure it later in the study, which asks respondents how strongly they identify as Germans (see Section 4.2).

For individuals with a migration background, identifying with the host country is seen as a key step in their political integration and an important part of their social identity (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2012). National identification can serve as a proxy for political involvement because it reflects a shared origin and experiences within the host country (Masuoka, 2008). Indeed, national identification has been shown to have a direct positive impact on political participation (Rapp, 2020; Scuzzarello, 2015). Young immigrant adults' national identification with the host country can enhance the positive effects of resources, as it makes them feel more entitled and motivated to participate in the political process (Rapp, 2020; Scuzzarello, 2015). Again, young individuals are in a critical phase of identity formation, where they are actively developing their sense of self and belonging. National identification can significantly influence their emerging identity, providing a sense of stability, purpose, and belonging. Additionally, it enhances a person's sense of psychological engagement, making them more likely to participate (Masuoka, 2008). Last, national identification with the host country can facilitate immigrants' integration into social and professional networks, further enhancing their ability for political activities (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2012). Greater integration, along with increased contact outside of one's migrant group (diverse contact), enhances political participation among young adults with a migration background (Quintelier et al., 2012). Furthermore, peer influence is particularly strong during young ages. A shared national identity can foster more supportive social networks among young adults. This sense of belonging can mitigate feelings of alienation and foster positive social interactions, which should lead to more political participation.

National identification is also important for young non-immigrant adults. It serves as a social identity for the majority population, leading individuals to conform to the social norms of their group (Huddy & Khatib, 2007). It promotes political participation among the majority population as well (Huddy & Khatib, 2007; Rupar et al., 2021). Therefore, we assume the same moderating impact for both groups.

> H2: *National identification with Germany strengthens the positive impact of the CVM's explanations on political participation for both groups.*

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Data

We use the German sample from the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey in Four European Countries–CILS4EU-DE (Kalter et al., 2024)–to test our hypotheses. Germany is an ideal testing ground

because of the distinctive composition of its immigrant groups, including ethnic Germans (*Spätaussiedler*) who migrated predominantly in the 1990s, alongside former guest workers from Turkey who arrived primarily in the 1960s. Furthermore, the population with a migration background is growing in Germany. Thus, a significant proportion of (young) individuals with a migration background are increasingly eligible to participate unconventional and conventionally (Wüst, 2004). Our study focuses on data from wave 5, conducted in 2015 using web, postal, and telephone interviews. This wave is ideal because it includes children of migrants (1.25/1.5/1.75-generation immigrants, defined as the children of 1st-generation immigrants who arrived in their adolescence or 2nd-generation immigrants who were born in the host country) which are oversampled in the sample selection, and young adults without a migration background. In addition, we rely on wave 5 of the CILS4EU because only this wave contains the political and social variables relevant to our research question. Furthermore, and in addition to the previous argument why Germany serves as an ideal testing ground, all waves after wave 3 of the CILS4EU have been conducted only in Germany. For both reasons, we can only rely on Germany. We further complement our data with sociodemographic characteristics from earlier waves (described below).

Our final sample consists of 1,371 valid responses, including 675 (49.23%) participants with a migration background and 696 (50.77%) without a migration background (majority population). The age of our young adult participants ranges from 18 to 30 years, with an average age of 19.64 for the majority population and 19.78 for those with a migration background. We do not restrict the sample by age because this range covers the transition to adulthood, first-time voters, and the legal voting age in Germany. Furthermore, this age period is when significant milestones (educational/occupational achievements) are solidified, leading to greater stability and the establishment of lasting patterns. It also has the advantage of maintaining a degree of homogeneity within this cohort. The 12-year span represents less than one generation, which reduces generational differences in our analyses. For descriptive statistics, please refer to Table 3 in the Supplementary File.

4.2. Dependent Variables

Political participation is a latent multidimensional concept that is not directly observable. The multi-dimensionality is particularly evident among young adults: They vote less frequently but are more engaged in unconventional activities, such as participating in demonstrations (Ataman et al., 2017; Kirbiš et al., 2017; Quintelier, 2007; Sanders et al., 2014). We thus use the definition provided and the distinction between conventional and unconventional forms of political participation to determine appropriate measurements. For *unconventional political participation*, respondents were asked whether they had participated in a demonstration, petition/signature collection, or political party campaign in the past 12 months. Respondents could answer "yes" or "no" to these questions. For our main empirical analyses, we create a count index (missings: 4.5%) that ranges from 0 (*no participation at all*) to 3 (*participation in all three aspects*). Respondents with at least one valid value are included and the index is validated by a factor analysis (see Table 4 in the Supplementary File). The results do not significantly differ if we look at each item separately (see Tables 7–9 in the Supplementary File). For the measure of *conventional political participation*, we focus on the most common form and measurement in the literature: whether individuals plan to vote in the next federal election (0 = *no*; 1 = *yes*; missings: 13.4%).

For each dependent variable, we run linear regression models (OLS); although the latter is a binary variable, for which logistic regression models would generally be more appropriate. Linear regression models are

preferred for better comparability of our results. Hellevik (2009) affirms that OLS are still a valid method for these types of dependent variables. He disputed common concerns about the appropriateness of significance tests, the risk of obtaining meaningless results, and the violation of the homoscedasticity assumption. Yet, recent literature highlights the limitations of treating ordinal outcomes as metrics (Bürkner & Vuorre, 2019; Liddell & Kruschke, 2018). Complementary analyses show that the effects are nearly identical when we treat conventional political participation as a binary variable and use a logistic regression model (see Table 6 in the Supplementary File).

4.3. Explanatory Variables

The CVM offers three key factors that serve as our main explanatory variables. For *resources*, we use the educational background, which is measured by the type of German school track attended during wave 1. This is categorized as lower vocational secondary school (reference), higher vocational secondary school, comprehensive school, or upper secondary school (missings: 1.5%). Additionally, we measure income using parental monthly household net income, encompassing respondents between the first and 10th decile (missings: 3.1%). This variable is derived from wave 1, the only wave that includes the parents of the respondents. While income levels can fluctuate over time, prior research suggests that such changes do not affect political participation (Jungkunz & Marx, 2022). However, relying on parental resources rather than the respondents' actual income limits the variable's explanatory power, as it may not accurately capture the financial circumstances of the young respondents. We measure political interest, assessed in wave 3 on a scale from 1 to 5 (*very little or not at all—very much*; missings: 0.04%), to map *psychological engagement*. As Prior (2010, 2018) shows, political interest is very stable over the life course, which is why we are convinced that it is reasonable to rely on the earlier wave for political interest. Last, for *recruitment networks*, we first use an index that includes whether individuals are involved in clubs or groups during their free time (yes/no) and ranges from 0 to 5 (missings: 0.13%). This variable is validated by a factor analysis and respondents with at least one valid value are included. Besides, we include the number of German friends (missings: 1.04%) from 1 (*none or very few*) to 5 (*almost all or all*).

Perceived discrimination and *national identification* with Germany constitute our moderating factors. The former is available from wave 3, where individuals were asked whether they felt discriminated against or treated unfairly in the following situations: (a) at school; (b) on trains, buses, trams, or subways; (c) in shops, stores, cafés, restaurants, or nightclubs; and (d) by the police or security guards. The answer options were *always*, *often*, *sometimes*, and *never* and were combined in an index (1–4; missings: 0.13%). Respondents with at least one valid value are included. The index is again validated by a factor analysis. To assess national identification, citizens were asked to rate how strongly they feel as Germans on a scale from 1 to 4 (*not at all strongly—very strongly*; missings: 2.3%). Overall, we believe that these measures are validated and widely used to describe the CVM, perceived discrimination, and national identification (see, e.g., da Rosa et al., 2023; de Rooij, 2012; Rapp, 2020).

4.4. Control Variables

To rule out alternative factors that might influence the relationship between the CVM's explanations and political participation, we include the following covariates: A *language test* that indicates how well individuals can speak, write, and understand the German language. Knowledge of the (host country) language can be

seen as a resource that leads to political participation (de Rooij, 2012; Gatti et al., 2024). Additionally, we control for *gender* (reference: females), *left–right self-identification*, and the *importance of religion*. First, there is a well-documented gender gap in political participation, with women less likely to participate than men. In addition, political attitudes, which the left–right self-identification refers to, can increase political participation. Religion can be viewed as another recruiting network that positively influences political participation, especially for people with a migration background. Last, we incorporate the respondents' *age*, as conventional political participation in particular increases with age (e.g., Gatti et al., 2024; Spierings & Vermeulen, 2024). Including the latter is not without controversy, as our sample is limited to respondents aged 18–30, with an unequal distribution (around 87% are aged 19/20). Therefore, we reran the analyses excluding age: the effects of the main explanatory variables remained consistent in size and direction. We have re-coded all quasi-metric independent and control variables to 0–1 to better compare their effects.

5. Results

We begin by examining the effects of the key components of the CVM on conventional and unconventional political participation without the moderating factors (see Table 5 in the Supplementary File). Among resources, education positively influences conventional political participation for individuals with a migration background. Specifically, a stronger educational background, compared to a lower vocational secondary education, increases the likelihood of voting in national elections. Regarding parental income, the only significant effect is observed for individuals without a migration background, and it is limited to conventional political activities. Overall, resources play only a minor role in explaining political participation among young adults. This finding aligns with prior research, which suggests that resources have a limited impact on participation for both population groups in this age cohort (Eckstein et al., 2015).

Turning to psychological engagement, political interest emerges as a consistent predictor of both unconventional and conventional political participation among young individuals, regardless of migration background. Of all the three aspects of the CVM (*resources*, *psychological engagement*, and *recruitment networks*), political interest stands out as a uniform influence on political participation, unaffected by distinctions between population groups or types of participation. Again, this confirms previous research on young adults (Eckstein et al., 2015; Kirbiš et al., 2017; Verba et al., 1995), but extends beyond some studies, which have observed this effect only among young non-immigrant adults (Reichert, 2017; Sime & Behrens, 2023).

Last, for recruitment networks, previous research has shown that their influence on both conventional and unconventional participation is generally greater among young adults with a migration background than among their non-immigrant peers (Ataman et al., 2017; Eckstein et al., 2015; Riniolo & Ortensi, 2021). Our findings partially support this, as having a higher number of German friends predicts voting in Germany exclusively for individuals with a migration background. Conversely, stronger involvement in clubs or groups positively influences unconventional political participation for immigrant-origin individuals, while it fosters conventional participation among young non-immigrant individuals. These results suggest that recruitment networks may hold greater significance for young people with a migration background. In sum, our analysis demonstrates that the components of the CVM do not consistently predict political participation across both population groups. This aligns with prior studies on young adults, underscoring the importance of distinguishing between population groups and types of participation to capture the impact of the CVM on young individuals.

Yet, one explanation for why some aspects of the CVM do not explain political participation of young adults might be that—especially for individuals with a migration background—previous research did not investigate possible moderating influences. Table 1 illustrates the outcomes with *perceived discrimination* as the moderating factor. We find that perceived discrimination reduces the positive impact of having German friends (*recruitment networks*) on unconventional political participation for the majority population. For immigrant-origin individuals, discrimination reduces the negative influence, meaning the number of German friends has a more positive effect. Hence, discrimination experiences influence recruitment networks and participation differently in both population groups. In contrast, we find no significant interaction effects for resources and political interest (*psychological engagement*). Regarding conventional political participation, we observe no significant interaction effects across both population groups.

Turning to *national identification*, we again see only a few significant moderating effects (see Table 2). National identification with Germany weakens the positive influence of political interest (*psychological engagement*) for the majority population on unconventional political participation. For individuals with a migration background, the positive effect of club/group involvement (*recruitment networks*; *unconventional political participation*) gets weaker. Concerning conventional political participation, national identification with Germany reduces the positive impact of attending a comprehensive school (*resources*) among the majority population. No other interaction effects prove significant.

In sum, discrimination and national identification play a significant role in how recruitment networks impact immigrants' unconventional political participation, with discrimination enhancing and national identification diminishing this effect. Among young non-immigrant adults and unconventional political participation, discrimination weakens the influence of recruitment networks and national identification with Germany reduces the positive impact of political interest. However, neither factor substantially alters the CVM's relationship with conventional political participation for both groups and resources in general, partially confirming H1b but not the other two hypotheses.

We next plot the average marginal effects for the statistically significant interaction terms to provide more detailed insights (Figures 1–3). Figure 1 shows that as discrimination increases, the positive effect of having more German friends on immigrants' participation in unconventional activities becomes stronger, while individuals from the majority population tend to participate less. Again, this underlines the opposite moderation effect of discrimination on recruitment networks and unconventional political participation. Figure 2 illustrates that as national identification with Germany increases, the positive effect of political interest decreases slightly for the majority population, making them less likely to participate unconventionally. Almost no differences exist for immigrant-origin individuals. Figure 3 demonstrates that as immigrants' identification with the host country increases, the positive impact of greater involvement in clubs/groups on unconventional political participation decreases, though it remains positive overall. For the majority population, this effect is weaker and not significant.

Our initial assumption that discrimination would have a negative moderating effect among individuals with a migration background is thus not supported (H1a); instead, discrimination enhances the negative impact of having German friends on unconventional political participation. We also observe that discrimination weakens the relationship between the number of German friends and unconventional political participation among the majority population. Therefore, we can only partially confirm H1b. We also hypothesized that national

identification would have a positive moderating effect (H2), but we cannot confirm this since the significant interaction effects are negative.

Table 1. Moderating the impact of discrimination on unconventional and conventional political participation.

	Unconventional political participation		Conventional political participation	
	Majority population	Migration background	Majority population	Migration background
Education (Ref.: Lower vocational secondary school)				
Higher vocational secondary school	0.16 (0.32)	0.06 (0.30)	0.07 (0.17)	−0.00 (0.17)
Comprehensive school	0.06 (0.38)	−0.32 (0.33)	0.20 (0.20)	0.08 (0.19)
Upper secondary school	−0.11 (0.34)	−0.13 (0.30)	0.08 (0.18)	0.18 (0.17)
Parental monthly household income	0.00 (0.06)	0.00 (0.06)	−0.03 (0.03)	−0.01 (0.03)
Political interest: Germany	−0.04 (0.09)	0.13 (0.08)	0.03 (0.05)	0.06 (0.04)
Number of involvement clubs/groups (index)	−0.06 (0.14)	0.09 (0.17)	0.05 (0.07)	−0.04 (0.10)
Number German friends	0.28* (0.13)	−0.18* (0.09)	0.01 (0.07)	0.06 (0.05)
Discrimination index	0.60 (0.56)	−0.51 (0.29)	−0.23 (0.30)	−0.16 (0.16)
Higher vocational secondary school*Discrimination index	−0.09 (0.26)	0.01 (0.24)	0.00 (0.14)	0.15 (0.13)
Comprehensive school*Discrimination index	−0.09 (0.31)	0.34 (0.27)	−0.20 (0.16)	−0.02 (0.15)
Upper secondary school*Discrimination index	0.10 (0.28)	0.20 (0.23)	−0.02 (0.15)	0.02 (0.13)
Parental monthly household income*Discrimination index	0.00 (0.05)	−0.00 (0.04)	0.05 (0.03)	0.01 (0.02)
Political interest: Germany*Discrimination index	0.13 (0.07)	−0.01 (0.06)	0.01 (0.04)	−0.00 (0.03)
Number of involvement clubs/groups (index) *Discrimination index	0.08 (0.11)	0.08 (0.14)	−0.01 (0.06)	0.04 (0.08)
Number of German friends*Discrimination index	−0.25* (0.11)	0.15* (0.07)	−0.00 (0.06)	0.01 (0.04)
Language test	0.02** (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)	−0.01 (0.00)
Male (Ref.: female)	−0.15** (0.05)	−0.09 (0.06)	0.03 (0.03)	0.07* (0.03)
Left–right self-placement	−0.04** (0.01)	−0.04** (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.02** (0.01)
Religion: Importance	−0.02 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)	0.02 (0.02)	0.04** (0.02)

Table 1. (Cont.) Moderating the impact of discrimination on unconventional and conventional political participation.

	Unconventional political participation		Conventional political participation	
	Majority population	Migration background	Majority population	Migration background
Age	−0.01 (0.04)	0.02 (0.04)	−0.03 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)
Constant	−0.29 (1.04)	0.19 (0.85)	1.32* (0.56)	−0.16 (0.48)
Observations	696	675	696	675
R^2	0.11	0.14	0.10	0.16

Notes: Linear regressions; standard errors in parentheses; level of significance: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.
Sources: Own results; data source: CILS4EU-DE (Kalter et al., 2024).

Table 2. Moderating the impact of national identification on unconventional and conventional political participation.

	Unconventional political participation		Conventional political participation	
	Majority population	Migration background	Majority population	Migration background
Education (Ref.: Lower vocational secondary school)				
Higher vocational secondary school	0.65 (0.41)	0.42 (0.25)	0.24 (0.22)	0.02 (0.15)
Comprehensive school	0.51 (0.47)	−0.12 (0.25)	0.52* (0.25)	−0.03 (0.15)
Upper secondary school	0.25 (0.43)	−0.16 (0.27)	0.12 (0.23)	0.05 (0.15)
Parental monthly household income	0.01 (0.07)	−0.08 (0.05)	0.04 (0.04)	0.03 (0.03)
Political interest: Germany	0.35*** (0.10)	0.18* (0.07)	0.02 (0.06)	0.07 (0.04)
Number of involvement clubs/groups (index)	0.17 (0.16)	0.61*** (0.14)	0.04 (0.09)	−0.03 (0.08)
Number German friends	−0.15 (0.14)	0.04 (0.08)	0.14 (0.07)	0.07 (0.04)
National identification: Germany	0.04 (0.21)	−0.09 (0.13)	0.23* (0.11)	−0.02 (0.07)
Higher vocational secondary school*National identification: Germany	−0.17 (0.11)	−0.10 (0.08)	−0.05 (0.06)	0.05 (0.05)
Comprehensive school*National identification: Germany	−0.16 (0.13)	0.06 (0.09)	−0.16* (0.07)	0.03 (0.05)
Upper secondary school*National identification: Germany	−0.07 (0.12)	0.09 (0.09)	−0.02 (0.06)	0.05 (0.05)
Parental monthly household income*National identification: Germany	−0.00 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)
Political interest: Germany*National identification: Germany	−0.07* (0.03)	−0.02 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	−0.00 (0.01)

Table 2. (Cont.) Moderating the impact of national identification on unconventional and conventional political participation.

	Unconventional political participation		Conventional political participation	
	Majority population	Migration background	Majority population	Migration background
Number of involvement clubs/groups (index)*National identification: Germany	−0.04 (0.05)	−0.13** (0.04)	0.00 (0.02)	0.02 (0.03)
Number of German friends*National identification: Germany	0.04 (0.04)	−0.01 (0.03)	−0.04 (0.02)	0.00 (0.01)
Language test	0.02* (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)	−0.01 (0.00)
Male (Ref.: female)	−0.14* (0.05)	−0.10 (0.06)	0.03 (0.03)	0.07* (0.03)
Left–right self-placement	−0.03* (0.01)	−0.04*** (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.02** (0.01)
Religion: Importance	−0.00 (0.03)	−0.01 (0.03)	0.02 (0.02)	0.04* (0.02)
Age	−0.02 (0.04)	0.03 (0.04)	−0.03 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)
Constant	0.29 (1.06)	−0.42 (0.85)	0.33 (0.57)	−0.33 (0.49)
Observations	696	675	696	675
R^2	0.12	0.17	0.10	0.16

Notes: Linear regressions; standard errors in parentheses; level of significance: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.
Source: Own results; data source: CILS4EU-DE (Kalter et al., 2024).

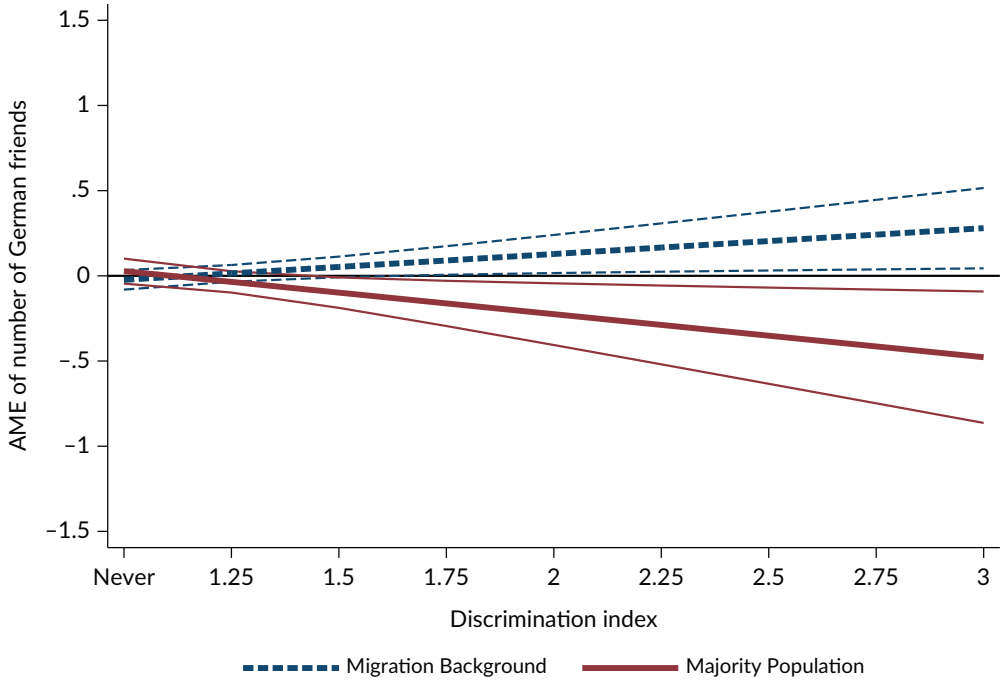

Figure 1. Average marginal effects for interaction discrimination experiences and number of German friends on unconventional political participation.

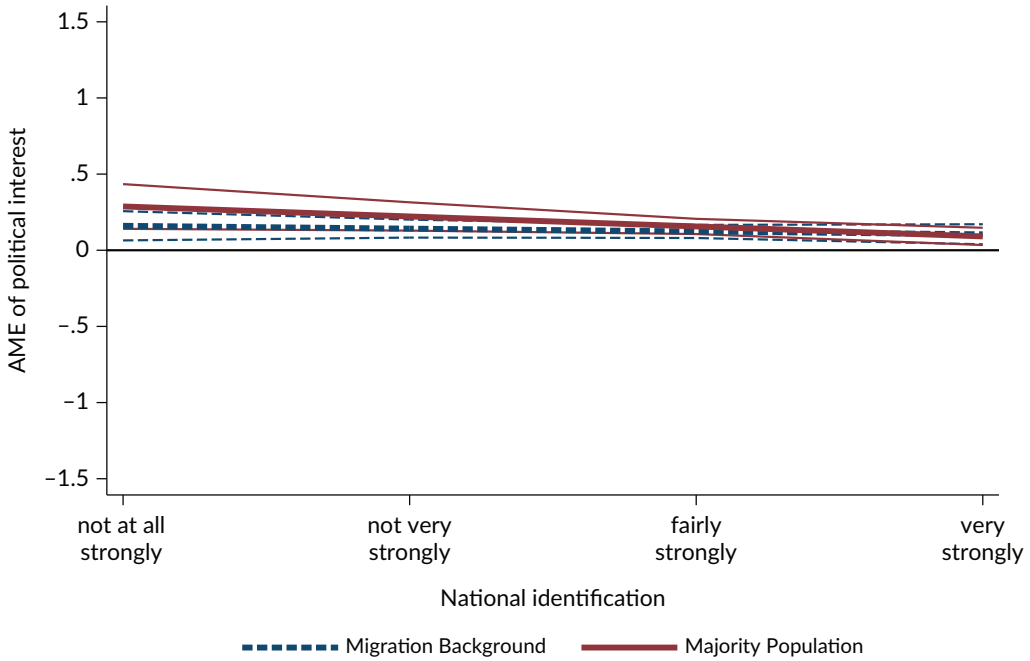

Figure 2. Average marginal effects for interaction national identification Germany and political interest on unconventional political participation.

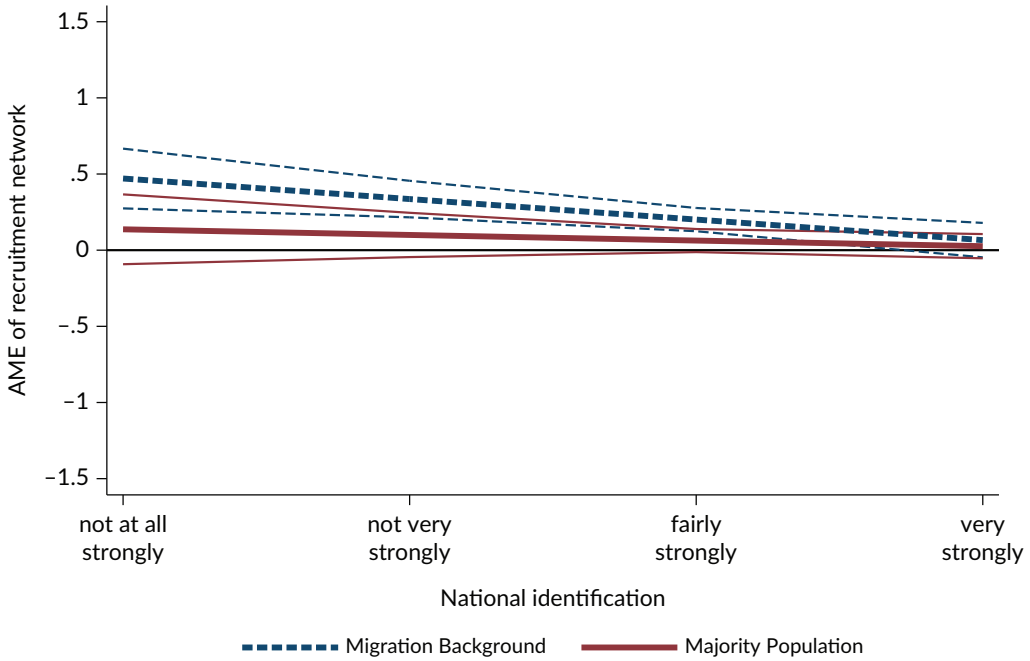

Figure 3. Average marginal effects for interaction national identification Germany and number involvement clubs/groups on unconventional political participation.

In conclusion, our analyses reveal three main findings: First, perceived discrimination and national identification do not universally influence the relationship between the CVM's explanations and political participation for young adults in either group. Second, both factors significantly influence how recruitment networks affect immigrants' unconventional political participation. This highlights the importance of these

aspects in immigrant-origin political engagement (Eckstein et al., 2015), particularly because young immigrants are more likely to engage in unconventional political activities. Last, the influence of the CVM's explanations on conventional political participation is largely unaffected by discrimination and national identification, leading to null effects for both groups. In sum, we offer a more nuanced perspective on the relationship between the aspects of the CVM and political participation among young adults by investigating two key moderating factors. First, the existing literature does not compare the political participation of (young) individuals with and without a migration background. Second, there is limited exploration of potential moderating influences in this context. To our knowledge, the only exception is the study by da Rosa et al. (2023), which demonstrates that experiences of discrimination positively moderate the relationship between political interest and voting. By extending current research, we provide novel insights and emphasize the importance of distinguishing between individuals with and without a migration background when examining how moderating effects shape the link between the CVM and political participation among young adults.

6. Conclusion

Political participation allows individuals to influence political decisions by voicing their needs and preferences, making it a crucial component of democracies. While we know that individuals with a migration background participate less than Germans without a migration background, we know little about the political engagement of young adults with a migration background. In contrast to young adults without a migration background, who are more likely to engage in unconventional political activities, young immigrant adults face greater obstacles, such as lower socio-economic status and less psychological engagement. Additionally, perceived discrimination and identification with the host country may significantly impact their political participation.

Using data from CILS4EU-DE (wave 5), we examined whether perceived discrimination and national identification influence the relationship between the CVM's explanations and political participation among young immigrant adults and their non-immigrant peers. Contrary to our expectations, the results show no consistent moderating effects, particularly concerning conventional political participation. However, both factors significantly affect how recruitment networks influence unconventional political participation among immigrants: discrimination enhances the negative effect of recruitment networks, while strong national identification diminishes the positive impact on unconventional political engagement.

Our study comes with some limitations. We rely on a single cross-sectional wave of CILS4EU-DE, which limits our ability to draw causal conclusions. Additionally, using socio-demographic variables from previous waves may not accurately reflect current conditions (e.g., education) and some variables could not adequately capture what we want, e.g., the absolute number of German friends is missing. Additionally, we focus solely on national identification with Germany. However, studies show that Germans with a migration background tend to identify more with their country of origin than with their host country, often because of perceived discrimination. Moreover, while being born in Germany and living there for a very long time, many (still) have strong ties to their country of origin and feel a strong emotional attachment to it. As a result, they strongly differentiate between their country of origin and Germany (e.g., Rapp, 2020; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2012). Unfortunately, due to data limitations, we were unable to include measures of ethnic identity. We also use an index of unconventional political participation, though it is reasonable to assume that the effects may vary

across different dimensions of such participation. Therefore, as an additional robustness check, we use each item separately as a dependent variable but find that the overall effects remain consistent (see Tables 8–13 in the Supplementary File).

Furthermore, it has several implications that we focus on the children of immigrants who do not have direct migration experiences: they are born and raised in the host society, so their experiences and backgrounds differ from those of their ancestors. This can lead to different political behaviours and identifications, potentially leading to weaker effects. The sample is limited to young adults, so we cannot determine if our results apply to other age groups. Future research should include comparisons with older individuals from both groups to identify specific mechanisms. Lastly, our study does not differentiate between immigrant-origin groups. Since political integration pathways and experiences, including perceived discrimination, can vary widely, future research should distinguish between different origin countries. The heterogeneity among these groups could lead to varying results.

In summary, unconventional political participation among immigrants is mainly influenced by recruitment networks, combined with perceived discrimination and national identification. These factors are key to explaining political engagement among young adults with a migration background, in contrast to their native peers. Our study also highlights the importance of differentiating between unconventional and conventional political participation to better understand the motivations behind engagement. Focusing on political participation in general limits our understanding of why (young adult) individuals with different backgrounds choose to participate or not.

Acknowledgments

The authors very much appreciate the valuable feedback provided by the anonymous reviewers and the editors on earlier versions of this article. We would like to thank Valentin Berger, Lara Holzmann, Cornelia Kristen, and Madeleine Siegel for their valuable comments. An earlier version was presented at the Bamberg Graduate School of Social Sciences (BAGSS). Open access funding for this publication was enabled and supported by the Open Access Publication Fund of the University of Bamberg.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

Replication files are available in the Harvard Dataverse (https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/JZHC3C).

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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Politics and Governance
2025 • Volume 13 • Article 9309
https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.9309

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Open Access Journal

Voices in the Margins: Exploring the Link Between Discrimination and Adolescents' Political Involvement

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Submitted: 14 September 2024 **Accepted:** 26 December 2024 **Published:** 3 April 2025

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Unequal Participation Among Youth and Immigrants: Analyzing Political Attitudes and Behavior in Societal Subgroups" edited by Arndt Leininger (Chemnitz University of Technology) and Sabrina Mayer (University of Bamberg), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.i426

Abstract

Political interest is one of the main determinants of political participation. Understanding the development and the mechanisms involved in forming this crucial cognitive orientation is necessary for an enhanced understanding and a successful political integration of young people. We know that political interest starts forming at an early age and that this process depends on several social characteristics, i.e., socioeconomic and immigration background have proven to be a significant element. However, the direction of the differences in the political interest of adolescents with an immigrant background compared to native adolescents is disputed. At the same time, some studies present lower political interest levels for immigrant youth, and others found higher political interest levels. Our article explores whether these inconsistent findings are related to (a) different discrimination experiences and (b) the moderation effects of these discrimination experiences on one important correlate of political interest—social participation. We expect that experiences of discrimination represent an important determinant of political interest. Despite its importance, little attention has been paid to the mechanisms by which discrimination fosters political interest. We rely on data from the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey in Four European Countries (CILS4EU), allowing us to account for a wide range of discrimination experiences of youth. We use linear regression models to examine the effect of discrimination experience on political interest. From our results, both discrimination experience and social participation positively affect youth's political interest, but neither amplifies the other effect through suggested moderation.

Keywords

discrimination; immigration background; political interest; political involvement; youth

1. Introduction

From a normative democratic point of view, political involvement is crucial for successful democratic citizenship (van Deth et al., 2011; Verba et al., 1995). Galston (2001, p. 217) emphasized that "good citizens are made, not born," highlighting the significant role of political socialization. Political socialization experiences within different contexts are responsible for developing individual political orientations during childhood and youth. Some of these orientations are understood to have a lasting effect on the political personality (Easton & Dennis, 1969; Greenstein, 1965; Hess & Torney, 1967; Moore et al., 1985). Family background plays a vital role in framing political socialization. Studies repeatedly have shown lower levels of political involvement among low socioeconomic status youth, youth of immigration backgrounds, or youth of marginalized racial groups (Alozie et al., 2003; Wray-Lake et al., 2020).

It is also well known that certain attitudes such as political interest positively impact political participation (Galston, 2001; Milbrath, 1965; Verba et al., 1995). While some studies have explored the role of positive and negative experiences with society and the political system during adolescence, this area still needs to be explored within political socialization research. It is plausible to assume that positive experiences raise political and democratic support and, in general, have positive effects on citizens' political belief systems. Negative experiences within different institutions or contexts such as discrimination can have the opposite effect regarding political support; however, they could also motivate people to try to make a political change (Spierings & Vermeulen, 2024).

While schools, families, and societal groups can provide positive socialization environments, youth can also encounter negative experiences. The chances for this are not equally distributed; negative experiences within sociopolitical institutions might especially affect youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and/or immigration history. Research on minority groups among youth has shown lower levels of political interest in race and socioeconomic status (Alozie et al., 2003; Wray-Lake et al., 2020), which discriminatory experiences might cause. Discrimination against minority groups represents a major source of early experiences, potentially affecting youth's attitudes, involvement, and dedication toward the societal and political system. Early experiences of non-acceptance or maltreatment from institutions, actors within institutions, or fellow citizens might profoundly affect youth's political attitudes and civic engagement (see Flanagan et al., 2007; Jungkunz & Weiß, 2024; Weiß & Parth, 2022) and could even result in political apathy. The negative experiences of discrimination faced by marginalized youth could be a drawback in nurturing their political involvement (Arikan & Turkoglu, 2023; Just & Anderson, 2014).

Against this backdrop, we investigate to what extent perceived discrimination experiences impact young people's political involvement. We focus on political interest as the dependent variable because, first, it has been shown that it is crucial for other political orientations and behavior and, second, the relationship between social marginalization and political interest could either be a negative one (as described above) or a positive one in motivating people to get politically involved and work towards political change. Third, there is a research lacuna in political opinion studies that consider the formation of political interest. Although this develops during the formative years and remains relatively stable throughout the lifetime (Neundorf et al., 2013), research has yet to examine some essential determinants for developing political interest during the political socialization process. We argue that discrimination experiences and social participation in adolescence have a share in interest formation.

Therefore, this article assesses how discrimination experiences influence young citizens' political involvement. We propose one potential mechanism by which experiencing discrimination can result in increased levels of political interest: through social participation. Our main research questions for this article are as follows: To what extent and how do discrimination experiences affect the political interest of young citizens? Does social participation moderate the relationship between experiences of discrimination and political interest? By investigating these questions, we contribute to research focusing on the development and socialization of political interest at a young age.

2. The Relationship Between Discrimination Experiences, Social Participation, and Political Interest in Adolescence

"Good" democratic citizens are not only supposed to support democracy but also to care about politics and take an active interest in it. This normative claim lies at the core of discussions about civic virtues. However, political interest is not only a democratic virtue. It is a well-known fact in political behavior research that political interest fosters political participation by delivering an informed background to political decisions and facilitating people to express their political preferences (Delli Carpini et al., 1996; Milbrath, 1965, p. 44; Milner, 2002; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Verba et al., 1995, pp. 356–363). Therefore, it must be learned early on. Political socialization studies showed that exposure to political issues in childhood and adolescence can augment levels of political interest (Easton & Dennis, 1969; Greenstein, 1965; Hess & Torney, 1967). Russo and Stattin (2017) demonstrated that the level of political interest persists over time, rendering it relatively stable in late adolescence (see also Prior, 2010; Sheata & Amna, 2019). Therefore, to understand the mechanisms fostering political interest, it is necessary to understand what influences its development at a young age since from late adolescence, political interest remains stable (Neundorf et al., 2013; Prior, 2010).

Our dependent variable, political interest, is considered a form of cognitive political involvement and defined as "the degree to which politics arouses a citizen's curiosity" (van Deth, 1990, p. 278), or, to recall Lupia and Philpot (2005, p. 1122), it reflects a "citizen's willingness to pay attention to political phenomena at the possible expense of other topics." This degree of curiosity is considered a comprehensive orientation toward politics in general, also for adolescents (Abendschön & Tausendpfund, 2017; Haug, 2017; van Deth et al., 2011).

So far, several precursors of youth's political interest have been identified. First, sociocultural characteristics such as parents' socioeconomic and educational status have been found to be influential. Higher resources and education positively impact children's political interest. Gender and migration background are negatively connected with political interest levels (for an overview see Ferrín et al., 2020; Fraile & Sánchez-Vítores, 2020; Kleer et al., 2023), although migration background and gender might imply a positive intersectional effect (García-Albacete et al., 2025). Second, whereas in political behavior research, political interest is usually studied as a predecessor of forms of political participation, Quintelier and van Deth (2014) showed in a panel study that political behavior indeed positively influenced the levels of political interest among adolescents—stronger than political behavior was influenced by political attitudes such as political interest.

Concerning adolescents and this finding of behavioral effects, the interest-generating role of activities can be stressed: Taking part in voluntary activities, associations, and clubs inside and outside of schools can serve as a "school of democracy" and raise youth's political interest (Cicognani et al., 2012; Dahl & Abdelzadeh, 2017). In the same way, participating in political discussions in families, schools, or with friends

can nurture political interest as several studies show (García-Albacete, 2013; Hochman & García-Albacete, 2019; Hoskins & Janmaat, 2019; Jennings et al., 2009; Quintelier, 2015; Roßteutscher et al., 2022; Sheata & Amna, 2019). This argument especially makes sense from a political socialization perspective. In adolescence, a specific formative phase in the individual biography, political interest is not yet fully stabilized, and, therefore, activities within socialization institutions can further nurture political interest. Hence, detecting possible links between political involvement, behavior, and other factors in developing and stabilizing political interest is imperative.

Whereas interactions within socialization contexts have been studied regularly in socialization research, the role of experiences within the "public sphere," or the sociopolitical institutional structure, has only been looked at more recently. Experiencing discrimination has been shown to affect political involvement since it represents a direct interaction with fellow citizens or societal and political institutions. While schools, families, and societal groups can provide positive experiences, the reality of discrimination faced by (minority) youth presents a significant obstacle in nurturing political involvement (Arikan & Turkoglu, 2023; Jungkunz & Weiß, 2024; Just & Anderson, 2014; Weiß & Parth, 2022). Discrimination can include harmful treatment, and the outcome of discrimination is often oppression (Thompson, 2003). Furthermore, it affects how young adolescents perceive society and politics (see Flanagan et al., 2007). This effect is especially important in the phase of political socialization during adolescence, when young citizens build and maintain this political involvement later. Interactions within society could affect political involvement in this crucial phase more severely than after establishing political involvement.

In this sense, encounters with bias and prejudice from institutions, authority figures, or peers can foster feelings of non-acceptance and marginalization related to the political sphere. These negative experiences during formative years can lead to disillusionment and decreased political involvement, as affected youth may feel alienated from a system they perceive as unjust or unresponsive to their needs. Contrarily, one could also expect a positive effect of discrimination experiences on selected political orientations and behavior. For example, members of marginalized groups might follow politics closely and engage in political discussions or use forms of political participation to change policies related to their status (Dawson, 1995; Spierings & Vermeulen, 2024). Participation of Black Americans in the Black Lives Matter movement could be a more recent and prominent example.

Studies (with adults) regarding the relationship between discrimination experiences and political participation and cognitive political attitudes such as political interest found positive effects. Takyar (2019), for instance, shows that the discrimination experiences of Muslims in the US slightly increased their interest in politics. Positive effects have also been found regarding the impact of discrimination experiences on actual political participation (Fleischmann et al., 2011; Oskooii, 2016, 2020; Pilati, 2017). Furthermore, Besco et al. (2022) found that racist attacks from political candidates did not decrease intended voting among Latinos in the US. Instead, among respondents with a strong Latino identity, these attacks increased the probability of participation in the elections. Fischer-Neumann (2014) reported that among German immigrants (Turks, ex-Yugoslavs, and Southern Europeans), discrimination experience positively affects general political interest, especially for immigrants with a dual identity. Although these studies looked at adult populations in Western democracies, we expect this relationship to work for adolescents, perhaps even more when we account for the socialization perspective. Jungkunz and Weiß (2024) showed that negative experiences in schools affected political orientations among Austrian, German, and Swiss youth by increasing the probability of

holding higher levels of populist attitudes if they think teachers treated them unfairly. For German youth, Dollmann (2022) found a mobilizing effect of perceived discrimination on political participation.

We therefore expect the following:

H1: Discrimination experience leads to higher levels of political interest among youth.

Social participation, such as voluntary work or formal and non-formal participation in social or school organizations, positively influences not only political participation (Verba et al., 1995) but also political interest (Cicognani et al., 2012; Quintelier & van Deth, 2014). In a longitudinal analysis of Swedish students in 13 junior high schools, Dahl and Abdelzadeh (2017) showed that volunteering *per se* has no socialization effect on political interest; being a member of an association increased students' political interest over time (Dahl & Abdelzadeh, 2017). In a qualitative study, Balcazar et al. (2024) found that among less politically interested students, civic engagement training increased understanding of societal and political topics and political interest. Social participation such as voluntary work in organizations provides learning opportunities and practical experiences and raises civic skills that can deepen interest and understanding as Balcazar et al. (2024) suggested. Therefore, we expect a positive effect of social participation on political interest:

H2: Frequency of social participation is positively associated with political interest.

Next to these expected direct effects of perceived discrimination experiences and social participation on the political interest of youth, there could also be a moderation effect of discrimination experiences on political interest. Regarding social participation, studies showed that discrimination experience led to practices in which respondents challenged the status quo of discrimination or engaged in civic organization to combat discrimination (Ballard, 2015; Christophe et al., 2022). In a study among Latinos in the US, Schildkraut (2005) showed that perceived discrimination is negatively correlated with the perception that politicians care about the discriminated group (see also Chan & Latzman, 2015). This perception might lead to more involvement in fighting for the group's interest.

In a comprehensive study of adult Native Americans, Dai et al. (2023) showed that perceived discrimination led to higher social participation. Furthermore, they showed that respondents with higher Native identification perceived more discrimination and that the indirect effect from identification to social participation via perceived discrimination is positive and complementary to the main effect (Dai et al., 2023). Similarly, Riley et al. (2021) showed that racial discrimination among African American students led to increased social participation. In a study on discrimination experience during the Covid-19 pandemic, Tran et al. (2024) furthermore indicated that discrimination during the pandemic and discrimination before the pandemic significantly and positively affected engagement in political and community organizations among US adults (including Native, Asian, Black, Hispanic, and White Americans). Finally, it has been shown that political and social participation are positively connected to political interest (Cicognani et al., 2012; Quintelier & van Deth, 2014). Regarding these results, we expect that the experience of discrimination activates youth's social participation since voluntary organizations may provide a supportive environment for individuals who experience discrimination. This effect might be more substantial among adolescents in the formative years of political involvement than for adults who have already stabilized their political involvement:

H3: The positive association between discrimination experience and political interest is stronger for individuals who frequently participate in social organizations.

Since the levels of political interest also vary according to sex/gender and socioeconomic and cultural background, we control for these factors in our models. Children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds typically show less interest than their more privileged contemporaries (Fraile & Sánchez-Vítores, 2020; Jennings et al., 2009; Quaranta & Dotti Sani, 2018; Sheata & Amna, 2019; van Deth, 2000). Additionally, female adolescents often express lower political interest than males (e.g., Fernández et al., 2021; Fraile & Gomez, 2017; Fraile & Sánchez-Vítores, 2020; García-Albacete, 2013; Quaranta & Dotti Sani, 2018). Studies have found mixed effects regarding race or immigration background, with some showing lower political interest among minority groups (Alozie et al., 2003; Wray-Lake et al., 2020) and others indicating higher interest (Hochman & García-Albacete, 2019; Wolak, 2020).

3. Data and Methods

To analyze discrimination effects on youth with and without immigrant backgrounds, we utilize data from the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey in Four European Countries (CILS4EU; Kalter et al., 2017). This dataset, collected from 2010 to 2013 in Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, and England, is unique in its focus on youth, particularly children of immigrants. Given the link between minority status and marginalized socioeconomic background, this dataset is ideal for modeling the effects of discrimination on the political interest of young people. When the panel study started, respondents were about 15 years old; in wave 3, they were around 17.

Since not all measurements were repeated across the three waves, we could not use the panel structure. Instead, we used information from prior waves to complement our waves of analysis. Respondents reported their levels of political interest in waves 2 and 3. However, we opted to use wave 3 since this is the only one that included a measurement of social participation.

3.1. Measurement and Descriptives

Table A1 in the Supplementary File shows the descriptive statistics for all continuous variables. Before the linear regressions, all continuous variables were scaled by 1 standard deviation (*SD*) and centered. Political interest, the dependent variable, is measured on a 5-point scale. The average level of political interest is 1.532 (see Table A1 in the Supplementary File).

Our primary independent variable is discrimination experience. In most observational studies, respondents refer to perceived discrimination, indicating their assumption that they or their group are treated unfairly (Oskooii, 2020). This assumption is subjective and might not mean verifiable discriminatory encounters, but it shows the respondents' evaluation of different experiences as discriminatory (Santana, 2018). Furthermore, measurements of discrimination experience should capture different areas of public life to make the measurement more concrete instead of relying on a diffuse (general) feeling of being discriminated against. In the CILS4EU data, discrimination experience was measured in wave 1 with four items on a 5-point Likert scale: "How often do you feel discriminated against or treated unfairly…1)…in school?, 2)…in trains, buses, trams, or the subway?, 3)…in shops, stores, cafés, restaurants, or nightclubs?, and 4)…by police

or security guards?" It is important to note here that, concerning the item on possible discrimination in schools, it is not clear who is responsible for creating this experience. Either teachers and principals or fellow classmates and peers could be the source of discrimination in schools.

Regarding Oskooii (2016, p. 616), items 1 and 4 might refer to political discrimination (assuming teachers/principals are responsible for discrimination). Items 2 and 3 can be seen as societal discrimination in this sense. Table A1 in the Supplementary File presents the descriptive statistics of the respective items on the original scale. We can see that discrimination is perceived as highest in schools. Overall levels of discrimination experience were 0.494/0.486 for schools, 0.147/0.144 for public transportation, 0.155/0.153 for public areas, and 0.220/0.195 for police and security. Furthermore, Table A3 in the Supplementary File shows that experiencing discrimination is higher among immigrant youth or children of immigrants and youth with lower socioeconomic backgrounds or lower educational aims.

We follow the recommendation to run an EFA before CFA (Hurley et al., 1997) because even if researchers believe items already achieved sufficient empirical evidence of the theorized latent variables, controlling these latent variables in an EFA is worthy (Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). In the exploratory (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), we could establish a 1-factor solution (see Supplementary File, Tables A8–10 and Figure A7). The final distribution on the built mean index of discrimination experience for the regression models is highly right-skewed (Skewness 2.330, Kurtosis 8.416, see Table A1 in the Supplementary File). Therefore, we decided to build a dummy on discrimination experience, indicating "experienced discrimination at least once" against "never experienced discrimination" (for frequencies see Table A2 in the Supplementary File).

To measure social participation, we use the variable of how often respondents do voluntary or community work. Adolescents showed an average engagement in community organizations of 0.756, between responses *never* and *less often* (see Table A1 in the Supplementary File).

We added several control variables to the model that in the past have consistently been shown to be determinants of political interest: political discussions at home, socioeconomic background, immigration background, gender, education aim, and survey country's language proficiency. For political discussions, we include the variable on how often respondents discuss political or social issues with their parents. As discussed above, political interest and political discussions have a reciprocal relationship. Furthermore, there was no measurement of political discussions in wave 3; therefore, we needed to include the item from wave 2. As a result of this, it precedes the occurrence of political interest in wave 3. On average, adolescents showed a low frequency of political discussions of 1.899 on a 5-point scale (see Table A1 in the Supplementary File).

The socioeconomic background provided in wave 1 measures parents' socioeconomic status based on the job title (conversion by International Socioeconomic Index of occupational status; see Ganzeboom et al., 1992). If respondents had answers for both parents, we calculated the average value; if only one answer was available (mother or father), we used the single response, and if there was no answer, we set it as missing. We transferred this variable to wave 3; regarding the stability of these variables, this does not present a measurement problem; however, respondents not participating in wave 1 were excluded from the analyses. Higher values indicate a higher socioeconomic background.

We included a variable to differentiate respondents according to their specific immigration background. The generational variable of immigration divides respondents into, on one side, first- and second-generation (immigrants), and, on the other, older generations (up to the fourth generation) or natives (see Table A2 in the Supplementary File).

Since we used measurements across countries, we included dummy variables for the countries involved in the study. Approximately a quarter of the respondents come from each of the four countries, indicating an equal distribution of respondents across the four countries (see Table A2 in the Supplementary File). Since gender differences in political involvement are well documented, we included a variable indicating gender in a binary way (boy/man or girl/woman). Table A2 shows that nearly 50% of respondents are self-described men or women in both waves.

Furthermore, educational background matters in terms of levels of political interest. Since respondents were first asked in their formative years, we included a variable indicating their educational aim. The answers on this item were already harmonized by the conductors of the survey (Kalter et al., 2017) into *no degree*, *degree below upper secondary school*, *degree from upper secondary school*, and *university degree*. There was no sufficient group size for the first category (*no degree*); hence, we merged the first two categories (*no degree* and *degree below upper secondary school*) into a joint category. Overwhelmingly, students responded to educational aspirations with *a university degree* (70%), as seen in Table A2 in the Supplementary File. Only 20% indicated upper secondary school, and only 8% indicated a degree below upper secondary school.

It is necessary to consider the respondents' ability to communicate in the survey country's language since most political involvement relies on skills in the respective country's language. We included a variable representing the mean language proficiency in the survey country's language in speaking and writing. Most respondents indicated at least a high ability of speaking and writing in the survey country's language (mean at 4.26 on a 5-point scale; see Table A1 in the Supplementary File). Furthermore, the middle 50% are in between *very well* (4) and *excellent* (5).

3.2. Analytical Approach

We used linear regression models with interaction terms for our analysis. Moderation is a "variable that alters the direction or strength of the relation between a predictor and an outcome" (Frazier et al., 2004, p. 116; see Judd, 2001). For the possible moderation effect between discrimination experiences and social participation, we plotted the effect relying on post-estimation techniques. Therefore, we can test whether the effect of discrimination experience alters the effect of social participation or whether the effect of social participation mutates the effect of discrimination experience. At this moment, we do not inherently declare causal directions; instead, we test each moderation. This approach underscores that, in formative years during political socialization processes, attitudes not only shape behavior as is highlighted in general political behavior research, but behavior also shapes political orientations. Hence, we show and discuss both possible moderation effects.

In addition to the linear regression, to check the robustness of our results, we calculated a logit regression with a binary constructed political interest indicating very much and a lot of interest against the other three categories. Results indicate no relevant differentiation to the linear models (see Table A4 in the Supplementary

File); therefore, we discuss the results of the linear model. We checked for multicollinearity in the models, but there was no severe violation (see Figures A1–A6 in the Supplementary File).

4. Analyses and Results

In this analysis, we assess the effect of discrimination experience on political interest in the third wave of the CILS4EU data (Kalter et al., 2017). We focus on the effects of discrimination experiences on political interest with a possible moderation via social participation. With this step, we test possible moderation effects of discrimination experience via social participation and the interplay towards political interest.

Table 1 shows the results of our pooled linear regressions in three models. First, we calculated a model that only includes discrimination experience and social participation. Second, we included the interaction terms of discrimination experience and social participation. Third and lastly, we included control variables in the model. The effects in our robustness tests (logistic regression, Table A4 in the Supplementary File) do not differ in direction or significance. Furthermore, we ran the linear regressions by country (Tables A5–A7 in the Supplementary File).

Table 1. Results of pooled linear regressions on political interest.

	Base model (M1)	Interaction model (M2)	Controls model (M3)
Discrimination experience (ref: no)	0.067 (0.026)** [0.016, 0.118]	0.067 (0.026)** [0.016, 0.118]	0.040 (0.025)$^{+}$ [−0.008, 0.088]
Social participation (centered)	0.139 (0.013)*** [0.114, 0.165]	0.142 (0.019)*** [0.105, 0.179]	0.115 (0.018)*** [0.081, 0.149]
Discrimination experience × social participation		−0.005 (0.026) [−0.055, 0.046]	−0.013 (0.023) [−0.059, 0.032]
Female (ref: male)			−0.313 (0.024)*** [−0.359, −0.266]
Migration up to 2nd gen. (ref: native)			0.024 (0.026) [−0.026, 0.074]
Age (centered)			0.023 (0.013)$^{+}$ [−0.004, 0.049]
From upper secondary (ref: below upper secondary)			0.188 (0.048)*** [0.093, 0.283]
University degree (ref: below upper secondary)			0.513 (0.047)*** [0.421, 0.606]
Language proficiency (centered)			0.101 (0.014)*** [0.072, 0.129]
Poitical discussions at home (centered)			0.340 (0.012)*** [0.316, 0.364]
Socioeconomic status (centered)			0.023 (0.013)$^{+}$ [−0.003, 0.049]

Table 1. (Cont.) Results of pooled linear regressions on political interest.

	Base model (M1)	Interaction model (M2)	Controls model (M3)
Germany (ref: England)			0.923 (0.038)*** [0.848, 0.997]
Netherlands (ref: England)			0.467 (0.040)*** [0.389, 0.544]
Sweden (ref: England)			0.285 (0.037)*** [0.212, 0.359]
(Intercept)	1.516 (0.018)*** [1.480, 1.552]	1.516 (0.018)*** [1.480, 1.552]	0.794 (0.054)*** [0.688, 0.900]
Num. Obs.	8,431	8,431	8,431
R^2	0.015	0.015	0.196
R^2 Adj.	0.015	0.015	0.194
AIC	26,809.5	26,811.4	25,123.0
BIC	26,837.6	26,846.6	25,235.7
RMSE	1.19	1.19	1.07

Notes: $^{+}$ $p = 0.1$; * $p = 0.05$; ** $p = 0.01$; *** $p = 0.001$.

We find support for H1. We can see a direct and positive effect of discrimination experience among youth on political interest in models 1 and 2. By adding the interaction effect in model 3, the effect remains only significant at $p = 0.1$; however, it only measures the effect of discrimination experience when social participation is 0 (mean). This result indicates, as suggested by others (Dollmann, 2022; Fischer-Neumann, 2014; Takyar, 2019), that the negative experience of discrimination leads to an increase in political interest rather than political alienation among young people in the formative years.

Furthermore, we can see through all models an apparent positive effect of social participation. Youth frequently engaging in voluntary and community work display higher political interest levels. In these formative years of political socialization, positive learning within voluntary or community work can especially be seen as "schools of democracy" that nurture the political interest of young citizens. It might seem counterintuitive that behavior shapes cognitive orientations; however, socialization research has stressed this possibility among adolescents (Cicognani et al., 2012; Dahl & Abdelzadeh, 2017; Quintelier & van Deth, 2014). In summary, we find support for H2.

However, our third hypothesis, the possible interaction of discrimination experience and social participation, is not supported. As Table 1 shows, the interaction effect is not statistically significant. To get a fuller picture, we look at the marginal plots for the possible moderation of discrimination experience by social participation and social participation by discrimination experience (see Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1 illustrates the possible moderation effect of social participation on the relation between experiences of discrimination and political interest. While there is a higher political interest among youth participating in social organizations across discriminated and non-discriminated youth, it is evident that the change in levels of social participation for the effect of discrimination relies only on the main effect (moderation effect close to 0). There is no evidence that social participation significantly alters the impact of discrimination experiences on

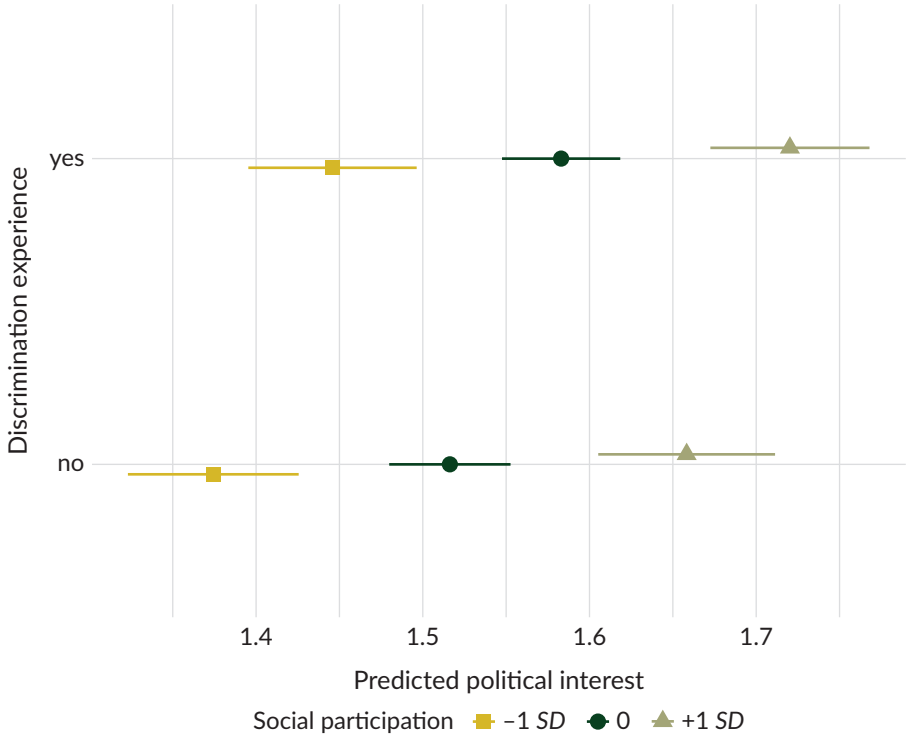

Figure 1. Marginal effects of being discriminated against among social participation. Note: Estimates are based on model 2. Source: CILS4EU (Kalter et al., 2017).

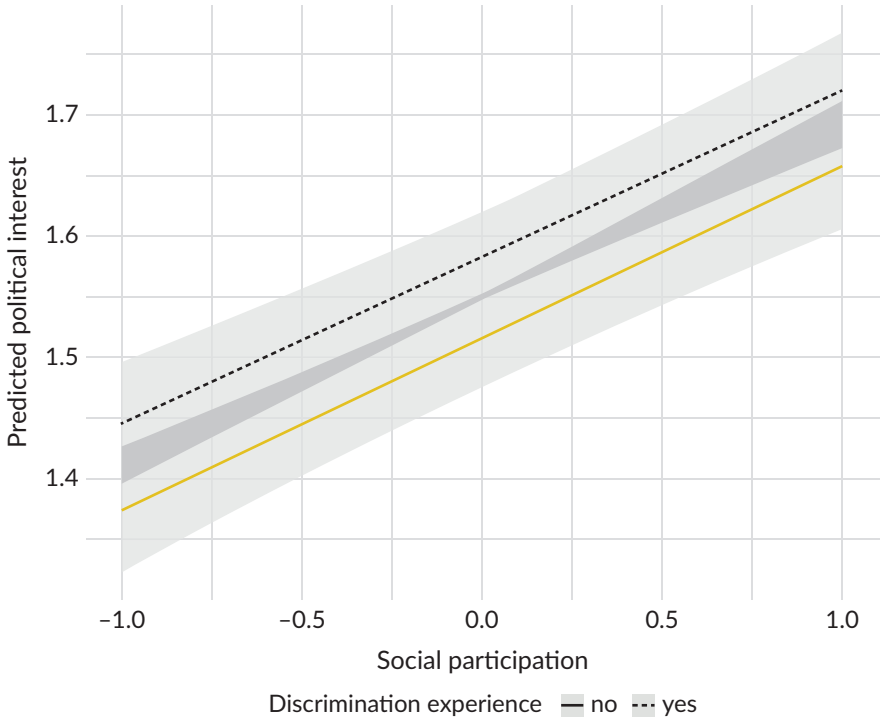

Figure 2. Marginal plots of social participation among discrimination experiences. Note: Estimates are based on model 2. Source: CILS4EU (Kalter et al., 2017).

political interest. Therefore, we cannot confirm H3 since no additional moderation exists. The figure indicates that youth who have experienced discrimination tend to report higher levels of political interest than those who have not, as evident by the higher position of the same-colored points on the y-axis.

Moreover, Figure 1 illustrates the effect of social participation. Between youth who engage more frequently in voluntary organizations and youth who less frequently engage in voluntary organizations, the predicted level of political interest differs by 0.28 scale points. Our finding suggests that active participation in voluntary activities enhances political interest across the board but is not accelerated by discrimination experiences.

Figure 2 illustrates the potential reversed moderation effect of discrimination experience on the relationship between social participation and political interest. It shows the relationship between social participation and political interest, depending on whether young people experienced discrimination. Since the lines are parallel, there is no moderation effect of discrimination experience, and the relationship between voluntary social participation and political interest is consistent across both groups.

5. Discussion

This study explored the relationship between discrimination experience and political involvement among European adolescents using data from the innovative CILS4EU study that enables a comprehensive empirical analysis of discrimination among youth. Our findings reveal that the discrimination experienced by adolescents has a direct and positive effect on political interest. This result suggests that those youngsters who face discrimination are more likely to become politically interested than alienated in order to better understand and address the injustices they encounter. This finding aligns with prior research indicating that marginalized groups often engage more politically to advocate for their rights (Oskooii, 2016, 2020; Takyar, 2019). Though discrimination experiences are not a good encounter from a normative perspective, the good news is that they at least do not harm young people's political involvement.

Next to discrimination experiences, we also investigated the possible learning effect of social participation. As shown in prior studies, behavior such as social participation positively affects the levels of youth's political interest (Cicognani et al., 2012; Dahl & Abdelzadeh, 2017; Quintelier & van Deth, 2014). Social participation in the broader context of engaging with fellow citizens and society might not be explicitly political. However, it is positively connected to political interest in the formative years.

Regarding our hypothesized possible moderation effect between discrimination experience and social participation, we see no evidence to support this hypothesis in our analysis. Contrary to our assumption, based on studies among youth in the US (see Dai et al., 2023; Riley et al., 2021; Tran et al., 2024), we do not see a further amplifying effect in the interaction of discrimination experience and social participation. Although social participation may provide a supportive environment for individuals who experienced discrimination, besides the main effects, there is no further boosting between discrimination experience and social participation in political interest. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to notice that among youth discriminated against and not discriminated against, those engaging in voluntary activities expressed higher levels of political interest. This result might suggest that interventions to increase social participation such as voluntary work or service-learning activities could be equally effective in fostering political interest for both discriminated and non-discriminated youth.

Looking at our control characteristics, we also find some interesting results. The assumed (adverse) effects of low socioeconomic status, migration background, and female gender are confirmed for the studied age group. Educational aspirations and language proficiency in the survey country are also vital to developing adolescent political interest. Regarding social characteristics, engaging in political discussions is considered healthy for political participation and involvement in general and an essential correlate of political interest. The analyses showed that youth who discuss politics are also more politically interested, which is in line with prior research (García-Albacete, 2013; Hochman & García-Albacete, 2019; Hoskins & Janmaat, 2019; Jennings et al., 2009; Quintelier, 2015; Roßteutscher et al., 2022; Sheata & Amna, 2019).

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, some of the measurements were collected at different time points, which may influence the stability and comparability of the regression coefficients. Specifically, the primary independent variable, discrimination experience, was collected in wave 1 (school year 2010/2011), while the dependent variable, political interest, was measured in wave 3 (school year 2012/2013). This temporal gap could introduce biases related to changes in context or individual circumstances between waves.

Second, the overall distribution of discrimination experience was right-skewed, with most respondents reporting low levels of discrimination or no discrimination. To address this skewness, the variable was dichotomized for analytical purposes, potentially oversimplifying the variation within the data.

These findings have important implications for policy and education aimed at fostering political interest. The positive effects of both discrimination experience and social participation on political interest suggest that personal experience of marginalization and active participation in civic activities can motivate individuals to engage with political issues. This finding highlights the need for policies that address discrimination and promote inclusivity, as reducing systematic barriers may encourage broader political engagement. Additionally, fostering social participation through educational programs and community initiatives could serve as a vital tool to enhance political interest, particularly among marginalized groups. However, the non-significant interaction effect indicates that the benefits of social participation are not further accelerated by a prior experience of discrimination. Together, these insights underscore the value of combating discrimination and actively promoting civic engagement to strengthen democratic participation. Overall, this study highlights the significant impact of discrimination on political interest among adolescents, indicating the need for interventions to foster a politically active and informed youth population.

Acknowledgments

We extend our sincere gratitude to the two anonymous reviewers and the editors for their valuable comments and insightful suggestions during the review process. Their constructive feedback has significantly contributed to the improvement of this manuscript.

Funding

This work was done under the project Gender Empowerment Through Politics in Classrooms, which received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation program under grant agreement no. 101095000.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

Data Availability

Replication files are available on OSF (https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/PUQT7). The replication material does not include the data set since a request is necessary to access the data set.

We used the data from the CILS4EU project, https://www.cils4.eu. We used a combined data set of all three waves (version 3.3.0). The data set has restricted access and is available at the GESIS repository under the identifier ZA5656: https://doi.org/10.4232/cils4eu.5656.3.3.0

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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Politics and Governance
2025 • Volume 13 • Article 9282
https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.9282

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Open Access Journal

Addressing Migrant Inequality in Youth Political Engagement: The Role of Parental Influences

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Submitted: 13 September 2024 **Accepted:** 31 December 2024 **Published:** 27 February 2025

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Unequal Participation Among Youth and Immigrants: Analyzing Political Attitudes and Behavior in Societal Subgroups" edited by Arndt Leininger (Chemnitz University of Technology) and Sabrina Mayer (University of Bamberg), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.i426

Abstract

While citizenship acquisition varies across the EU, children of immigrants are expected to comprise a growing share of the voting-age population in the coming years. Consequently, understanding the factors influencing their political integration has garnered increasing attention from researchers and policymakers. Existing studies highlight the complex and context-dependent interplay of structural, cultural, and policy-related factors that shape immigrant political engagement. Additionally, some scholars have noted that the standard model of youth political socialisation—where political learning is transmitted from parent to child—may be "disrupted" in immigrant families. Against this backdrop, this article investigates the critical role of family political discussions and parent–child political alignment in (re)producing ethnic inequalities in political engagement among late adolescents, using Lombardy (Italy) as a case study. The project MAYBE—Moving into Adulthood in uncertain times: Youth Beliefs, future Expectations, and life choices (University of Milan) collected survey data from 2,756 final-year high school students (aged 18–19) between February 2023 and March 2024, including 620 students with migrant backgrounds. The study applied a multilevel regression model—spanning 81 schools, 165 classes—to investigate individual and contextual factors, such as the classroom political climate and municipal electoral competitiveness. Migrant parents navigate the host country's political environment with varying levels of familiarity, shaped by their connections to the political culture of their country of origin. Findings suggest that these dynamics create unique pathways for the political socialisation of their children, in which the influence of socioeconomic status and intergenerational social learning on political engagement differs significantly from the patterns observed among native-born youth.

Keywords

family political discussions; Italy; parent–child political alignment; political socialisation; second-generation migrants; youth political engagement

1. Introduction

While the regulations on the acquisition of citizenship by children of immigrants vary across the EU (Goodman, 2023; Weil, 2010), it is reasonable to anticipate that this group will constitute an increasingly significant proportion of the voting-age population in the forthcoming years. According to Eurostat, between January 2014 and January 2023, the population of non-national children grew by 52.6%, almost offsetting the 4.4% decline in national children. Fostering the active participation of all young individuals, regardless of ethnic origin, is an ongoing challenge of the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 (Council of the European Union, 2018) that is closely linked to an additional, related concern: the declining participation of young people in institutional politics, such as voter turnout and party membership (Tsatsanis et al., 2021), or signing petitions, participating in legal demonstrations, and joining unofficial strikes (Deželan, 2023; Kitanova, 2020).

Levels and modes of youth political involvement are significantly shaped by social stratification (Giugni & Grasso, 2021; Hooghe & Boonen, 2015; Lello & Bazzoli, 2023). Young people of migrant origin face the dual challenge of being young and having a foreign background. These disadvantages, which intersect with other factors such as gender and socioeconomic status (SES), can negatively impact their active participation in democratic life (Collins, 2021; Gatti et al., 2024; Harris & Roose, 2014). In addition, the lower levels of political engagement among immigrant parents (Ortensi & Riniolo, 2020; Terriquez & Kwon, 2015) and their adherence to the political culture of the country of origin (Borkowska & Luthra, 2024; Dinesen & Andersen, 2022) can have a detrimental effect on the political involvement of their children. Accordingly, researchers and policymakers have shown increasing interest in understanding the factors influencing the social and political integration in the EU of immigrants and their descendants (e.g., De Rooij, 2012; Gabrielli & Impicciatore, 2022; Monforte & Morales, 2018; Vintila & Martiniello, 2021). Although methodological challenges remain, data collection is increasing to enable quantitative analyses of life outcomes for children of immigrants, in terms of health, education, social exclusion, labour market participation, and family transitions (Lessard-Phillips et al., 2017).

Despite this growing interest, relatively few studies have specifically explored the political engagement of children of immigrants and the extent to which it differs from that of their native-born peers in European democracies. Existing research on the political engagement of children of immigrants often draws on the extensive American literature on assimilation and youth political socialisation and employs both comparative (e.g., Hochman & García-Albacete, 2019) and country-specific approaches (e.g., Jungkunz & Marx, 2024; Riniolo & Ortensi, 2021). Research findings reveal a complex and mixed pattern that is highly context-dependent and shaped by a complex interplay of structural, cultural, and policy-related factors. Furthermore, some studies seem to downplay the social relevance of the topic, suggesting that differences in political engagement and participation between children of immigrants and native-born peers could disappear as a result of intergenerational assimilation (Alba & Nee, 2003; Finseraas et al., 2022; Hochman & García-Albacete, 2019; Li & Jones, 2020; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). While immigrant parents often face structural challenges such as limited legal rights, language barriers, and lower familiarity with the host country's political system, their children typically have greater access to these resources. Born or raised in the host country, the second generation often holds citizenship and benefits from education systems that facilitate political socialisation and exposure to the political norms of the "receiving" country (Heath & Brinbaum, 2014; Quintelier, 2009, 2015). Although the gap in political involvement between second-generation immigrants and natives is generally narrower compared to the gap between natives and

first-generation migrants, several studies highlight that the political integration of children of immigrants is shaped by distinct challenges (Elodie, 2022). These include negotiating dual identities (Fischer-Neumann, 2014; Hochman & García-Albacete, 2019; Rapp, 2020) and experiencing discrimination (Quintelier, 2009), often compounded by the disadvantages inherited from their families' immigrant backgrounds (Alba & Foner, 2015; Bevelander & Hutcheson, 2022).

Against this backdrop, this article sets out to study the political incorporation of children of immigrants in European democracies. Specifically, it examines whether the influence of family factors—such as SES and political socialisation—on political engagement varies between children of immigrants and their native-born peers. We adopt the concept of migrant political incorporation (Bueker, 2005; Laubenthal, 2023; Martiniello & Rath, 2014) to describe the process through which immigrants and their descendants engage with and integrate into the political systems of their host countries. This process includes both formal aspects, such as obtaining citizenship and voting rights, and informal dimensions like political participation, representation, and influence. A crucial aspect of this process consists of comprehending and navigating the foundational coordinates of the political space in Western democracies. These include party identification, the meaningfulness of ideological self-placement, and political interest. In this article, we focus on differences between children of immigrants in alignment with these traditional, party-related anchors of political systems. We will refer to this as "political engagement" to stress the cognitive and motivational dimensions necessary to foster meaningful participation in structured political contexts (Carreras, 2016; Pontes et al., 2018). Political engagement and political participation are often treated as synonymous, but they should be analytically distinguished. Carreras (2016) differentiates between active and cognitive engagement, while others (Barrett, 2012; Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014) view engagement as a psychological condition and a prerequisite for participation, encompassing interest, attention, knowledge, and emotions vis-à-vis politics without necessarily involving action. Emler (2011) describes political engagement as a developmental process driven by motivation, with political interest being key to attentiveness and knowledge, which in turn shape opinions and political identities or ideologies necessary for active participation. Pontes et al. (2018) echo this distinction, emphasising that for young people, "engagement" means having an interest in, being attentive to, or having awareness, opinions, or emotions regarding political matters or objects, while "participation" involves actions or behaviours related to political and civic involvement.

The central thesis of this article is that while family political socialisation plays a crucial role in shaping youth political engagement, the processes within migrant families are often distinct and segmented. These dynamics create unique pathways for the children's political socialisation, in which the influence of SES and intergenerational social learning on political engagement differs significantly from the patterns observed among native-born youth. This argument aligns with recent studies pointing out that the parent-to-child influences described in the standard model of youth political socialisation (Jennings et al., 2009) are thus likely to be "disrupted" in most immigrant families (Borkowska & Luthra, 2024) and impacted by the political culture of the country of origin (Chaudhary, 2018; Dinesen & Andersen, 2022).

Empirically, the study employs data from a survey carried out between February 2023 and March 2024 on 2,756 students in the final year of high school in the region of Lombardy (Italy), using a probabilistic multistage sampling design (165 classes from 81 schools located in 55 municipalities). Lombardy serves as a significant, strategic case study within Europe, as it is the second most populous region in the EU and ranks high in nominal GDP. There are two key reasons it is particularly relevant to our research. First, it has a significant

foreign population, with 1,176,169 foreign residents (11.8% of the region's total) and 231,819 foreign pupils (17.1% of the student population) in the 2022/2023 school year. Lombardy hosts 24% of all students with migrant backgrounds in Italy. Second, the right-leaning political tradition in the region has greatly politicised the immigration and citizenship issue, ever since the establishment of the Northern League in the 1990s.

More in general, Italy provides a compelling case study, having undergone a transformation in the 1980s and 1990s from a country characterised by emigration to a major destination for immigration. Based on Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) data (Buonomo et al., 2023), in the 2001 census there were fewer than 365,000 residents under the age of 20 who were either foreign nationals or Italians by acquisition. Of this number, approximately 140,000 were born in Italy. As of the beginning of 2020, the number of those born in Italy had risen to nearly 1.1 million individuals (73% of the total). Until recent years, this demographic shift caused a gap in comprehensive data on second-generation immigrants, limiting the scope of research on their political integration (Gabrielli & Impicciatore, 2022; Gabrielli et al., 2013; Riniolo & Ortensi, 2021). Nevertheless, it is crucial to address this gap as Italy, alongside Germany, France, and Spain, host nearly 75% of the EU's non-national minors, with Italy alone accounting for 13.9% of this population (Eurostat, 2023).

To the best of our knowledge, while numerous studies have examined educational inequalities among young migrants in Italy, this is the first to investigate the role of parental influences among children of immigrants and their native-born peers, using a large probabilistic sample of late adolescents. Previous noteworthy research has primarily examined individuals aged 14–35 who were still living with their family of origin, comparing the political activism of Italian natives with that of first- and second-generation migrant peers. These analyses relied on two national household surveys conducted by ISTAT in 2011–2012 (Riniolo & Ortensi, 2021). In contrast, ISTAT surveys conducted in school contexts—such as Identity and Pathways of Integration of Second Generations in Italy (ISTAT, 2016), or the survey targeting boys and girls aged 11 to 19 living in Italy in 2021 and 2023—did not include questions related to political engagement (ISTAT, 2024).

The article begins by outlining the theoretical framework that underpins its central arguments and hypotheses. The methods section provides a detailed account of the dataset, the operationalisation of key variables, and the analytical strategy employed in the study. The results section then presents findings derived from multilevel models, offering insights into the research questions. Finally, the article concludes by discussing the main findings, highlighting the study's contributions, reflecting on its limitations, and suggesting avenues for future research.

2. The Political Engagement of Children of Immigrants: How Family Matters

Since the influential studies of Jennings and Niemi (1968), the literature has consistently shown that the roots of political inequalities go back a long way: People tend to form predispositions towards politics during adolescence and early adulthood. These formative years, often called the "impressionable years" (Dinas, 2010), are characterised by increased cognitive openness and receptiveness to social influences, making it a crucial period for developing long-lasting political attitudes and inequalities. Social class, gender, and migratory background still impact youth political socialisation, despite it becoming more individualised and influenced by a broader range of agents beyond family and schools, including peers, media, and digital platforms (Dalton, 2021). Parental SES and family political socialisation remain key factors in explaining inequalities in youth political engagement (Jennings et al., 2009), although the process of intergenerational

political transmission is complex and dynamic (Boonen, 2017; Durmuşoğlu et al., 2023; Mayer et al., 2024; van Ditmars, 2023).

Parents influence children's political engagement in both direct and indirect ways (Jennings et al., 2009). As regards indirect influence, families shape political engagement by creating an environment that fosters or hinders civic awareness. This is mediated through SES (Verba & Nie, 1972). Young people from higher socioeconomic backgrounds typically benefit from greater access to socialisation agents, such as high-quality educational institutions, extracurricular activities, and digital resources, all of which significantly impact civic and political development (Giugni & Grasso, 2021; Janmaat & Hoskins, 2022; Jungkunz & Marx, 2024). As far as direct influences are concerned, consistently with social learning theory, parents act as primary role models, transmitting political values, beliefs, and behaviours through mechanisms such as family discussions, participation in political activities, and explicit encouragement. Extensive evidence highlights the relevance of two key microprocesses: family political discussions and parent–child political ideology similarity. Studies have shown that adolescents who engage in political discussions with their parents are more likely to be involved in politics (e.g., Andolina et al., 2003; Cornejo et al., 2021; Jennings et al., 2009; McIntosh et al., 2007). Additionally, research indicates that children raised by politically engaged parents are more likely to adopt their family's political views or party preferences (Macfarlane, 2022; Ojeda & Hatemi, 2015), at least in the short term (for opposite effects, in the long run, see Dinas, 2014). This direct influence helps explain disparities in key dimensions of political engagement, including gender differences in social and civic participation (Cicognani et al., 2012), political ideology (van Ditmars, 2023), political interest (Pensiero & Janmaat, 2024), and political ambition (Fox & Lawless, 2014). Direct and indirect parental influences reinforce each other. While much of the research has focused on the US, similar patterns emerge in the few studies examining these forms of intergenerational reproduction in European countries (e.g., Janmaat & Hoskins, 2022; Kroh & Selb, 2009; Lahtinen et al., 2019; Neundorf & Niemi, 2014).

2.1. Hypotheses

Given these insights, how does family matter in shaping the differences in political engagement between children of immigrants and their native-born peers?

Research on the political socialisation of adolescent children of immigrants, particularly in Europe, remains scarce. Nevertheless, existing studies suggest that traditional models of parental influence may be less applicable to this group, particularly concerning the effects of SES and intergenerational learning (Borkowska & Luthra, 2024; Humphries et al., 2013). As outlined in the introduction, we argue that the political socialisation process within migrant families differs due to parents' limited familiarity with the host country's political system and their "bicultural" experiences (Berry, 1997). These differences in parental political socialisation may hinder children's ability to comprehend and engage with the political environment in the receiving country. Moreover, migrants are more likely to face labour and social discrimination, which can exacerbate the challenges in translating available resources into political opportunities.

Accordingly, we expect that even in a country like Italy, where migrants face systemic social and economic disadvantages (Panichella et al., 2021), the negative effect of a migrant background on youth political engagement is only partially attributable to parental socioeconomic resources while it is highly mediated by political socialisation. Therefore, our first general hypothesis is:

> H1: Political socialisation variables have a greater influence on youth political engagement than structural variables, including migratory background.

However, within this broader framework, we anticipate that certain family resources will exert a distinct influence on the political engagement of children of immigrants compared to their native-born counterparts. Specifically, we propose a hypothesis regarding the role of parental education in the political engagement of youth from a migrant background. We contend that, unlike in native families, education in migrant families may not be a reliable indicator of SES, particularly in contexts where social mobility opportunities are frequently limited for migrants. Humphries et al. (2013), for example, using longitudinal data from the US, found that while higher levels of parental education strongly correlated with voter registration and party identification among third-generation and white individuals, this relationship did not hold for Latino and Asian children of immigrants. They argued that, unlike native-born adults, parental education levels among immigrant families may not be a reliable reflection of SES. While for native-born adults, higher education levels often signified familiarity with and acceptance of the US political and civic culture, in their argument, immigrant parents with comparable educational attainment—often acquired abroad—may not demonstrate similar patterns of political engagement, such as voter registration or party identification. A similar argument was proposed more recently by Borkowska and Luthra (2024) who examined the political socialisation process in immigrant families based on the UK Household Longitudinal Study. Their findings suggested that parental education did not affect the political engagement of second-generation individuals in the same way it did for those with UK-born parents. However, the direct transmission of political engagement remained consistent across both groups.

Accordingly, our second hypothesis is as follows:

> H2: The effect of parents' education on political engagement is weaker for students with a foreign background compared to their native counterparts.

Given the unique characteristics of migrant families, we anticipate that another common predictor of youth political engagement—gender—may have a diminished influence among children of immigrants. Scholars have increasingly highlighted the need to move beyond examining women's disadvantages in politics and instead focus on the advantages that men enjoy, particularly how norms of masculinity shape gendered patterns of political participation (Bjarnegård & Murray, 2018). Both families and schools play pivotal roles in reinforcing these gendered socialisation processes (Cicognani et al., 2012; Fox & Lawless, 2014; Hoskins et al., 2017; Pensiero & Janmaat, 2024). In addition, in the Italian context, many children of migrants, male and female, face additional barriers to formal political participation due to their lack of citizenship. This exclusion often fosters feelings of underrepresentation (Farini, 2019; Riniolo, 2023). Given these circumstances, we hypothesise that:

> H3: The "male advantage" in political engagement is likely to be significantly reduced among children of immigrants.

Shifting the focus to the two primary microprocesses involved in family political socialisation—political discussions at home and the similarity of political views between parents and children—we expect that only the former will have a consistent effect on young people's political engagement, irrespective of their family background.

The literature on political socialisation suggests that political discussions at home are one of the most significant socialising agents (Jennings et al., 2009) influencing young people's political engagement. Although family background may influence the content of discussions, it is plausible that the mere presence of political discussions at home, regardless of migratory context, acts as a factor stimulating political engagement, as supported by studies suggesting that the quality and frequency of political discussions is positively correlated with youth political engagement (McIntosh et al., 2007; Riniolo & Ortensi, 2021). Therefore, we propose that open dialogue and discussions on political issues within the family can have a uniform impact, regardless of migratory background:

> H4a: "Homogeneous effect"—Political discussion at home has an impact on political engagement regardless of migratory background, with similar effects for both children of immigrants and native-born individuals.

In contrast, the effect of political similarity between parents and children may be more pronounced for natives compared to children of immigrants. This could be due to differences in the political socialisation processes between the two groups. Among children of native families, political opinion alignment between parents and children may be stronger. Specifically, the perception of political child–parent similarity in native families may be more fluid and direct, based on a shared understanding of the national political system and its dynamics (Dinas, 2014; McIntosh et al., 2007). For children of immigrants, political views may be more influenced by intercultural experiences, reducing the direct effect of political similarity between parents and children. Accordingly, we hypothesise:

> H4b: "Heterogeneous effect"—Parent–child political similarity is particularly relevant for native-born youth, with a weaker or absent effect for children of immigrants.

Additionally, we anticipate an interaction effect between these two parental socialisation variables and migratory background: When the frequency of political discussions is high, disagreeing with parents should have the same positive effect as having similar opinions, particularly for Italian youth. For native Italian youth, who are more integrated into the national political system, both agreement and disagreement with parents could stimulate critical thinking and the adoption of an independent political stance and, consequently, higher political engagement (Dinas, 2014; Graham et al., 2020). For children of immigrants, however, the effect may be less evident, as experiences of political disagreement might be mediated by the difficulty of negotiating between different political and cultural norms. This hypothesis resonates with studies indicating that young people are less likely to engage in political discussions with parents or friends whom they feel hold distant political views from themselves (e.g., Levinsen & Yndigegn, 2015) and those stressing the key role of social learning mechanisms in explaining differences in parent–child similarity (e.g., Meeusen & Boonen, 2022). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

> H4c: "Interaction effect"—When the frequency of political discussion is high, disagreeing with parents should have the same positive effect on political engagement as sharing similar political views, but only among native-born individuals.

To further investigate this issue, we argue that the larger the gap between a family's cultural/political background and Italian political culture—defined by democratic values and a Catholic tradition—the more

likely it is that family political discussions, parent–child political alignment, and political engagement will be disconnected. Therefore, our final hypothesis is:

> H5: The effect of a "foreign background" on political engagement is likely to weaken once we control for the religious affiliation and political regime of the parents' country of origin.

3. Data

The empirical investigation is based on survey data from the project MAYBE—Moving into Adulthood in uncertain times: Youth Beliefs, future Expectations, and life choices (University of Milan). This study interviewed 2,756 students in the final year of high school in Lombardy (Italy), between February 2023 and March 2024, employing a probabilistic multistage sampling design (81 schools, 165 classes). The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Milan.

3.1. Sample

The sample was selected using a multistage probability sampling approach. First, 81 schools were drawn from the population of all public secondary schools in Lombardy (n = 710) using systematic sampling with stratification by school type (lyceum, vocational, technical) and province. The original list of schools was obtained from the Ministry of Education and Merit's School Data Portal. School principals were contacted via email and telephone to invite them to participate. If a school declined, a replacement school was randomly selected from the same stratum of school type and/or province. Next, in each school, one to three final-year classes were chosen based on school size (and the school's effective ability to participate in the requested number of classes). The survey was administered during school hours. Computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI) was conducted in computer labs whenever possible. Where computer labs were unavailable, paper-and-pencil interviews (PAPI) were used (352 students). All students within a selected class completed the survey simultaneously. The average number of respondents per class was 20.3. Given the notable difficulties in obtaining availability from schools, the data collection took place between March 2023 and March 2024: During the 2022/2023 academic year, 39 schools were interviewed, and 42 schools were interviewed in the following academic year.

In terms of ethnic origin, 2,135 students had both parents with an Italian background (77.4%), 401 were children of immigrants (14.5%), and 208 were of mixed origin (7.5%). Among the latter, a small group included students with at least one parent from a Western country, the largest subgroup being those with a Swiss mother (23) or father (22). Among the students with mixed backgrounds, 92.3% were born in Italy, and 90.4% held Italian citizenship. In contrast, among those with both parents of foreign origin, 67.6% were born in Italy, and 70.3% were Italian citizens. The data were consistent with official statistics (Buonomo et al., 2023). The sample included 1,510 male and 1,226 female students (30 respondents who identified as "other" were excluded from the analysis). The respondents' average age was 18.6: 44% were 18, 45% were 19, and the remaining respondents, primarily from vocational schools, were over 19 due to irregular educational trajectories (see Table A9 in the Supplementary File for more details).

3.2. Concepts and Measures

The operationalisation process was carried out as described below.

Regarding the dependent variable, students' political engagement (as discussed in the introduction), we created an additive index based on key items that are commonly used in the literature. The index included three components: interest in politics (1–4 scale), awareness of key political ideologies (0 = not self-placed on the left–right scale; 1 = self-placed on the scale), and party closeness (0 = not close to any party; 1 = close to a party). These items are widely employed in political science to capture general political interest and attachment to the partisan and ideological aspects of the political system, specifically concerning traditional, party-related politics. They address the cognitive, ideational, and emotional dimensions of engagement (Barrett, 2012; Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014; Emler, 2011; Pontes et al., 2018). Furthermore, to ensure that this measure was reliable and that the three items measured a single latent dimension, we conducted a hybrid item response theory (IRT) analysis combining a two-parameter logistic model for binary variables (left–right awareness and party closeness) and a graded response model for an ordinal variable (political interest). The results confirmed that these variables were related to the latent (see Section 1 in the Supplementary File). For robustness checks, we also ran a factor analysis with both a principal factor method and a principal component factor method with an orthogonal oblimin rotation after rescaling the political interest item through min-max normalisation. Again, the results confirmed that the items belonged to a single factor (see Section 2 in the Supplementary File).

To test the hypotheses, a multilevel regression model was employed. The model included parental SES, family political socialisation variables, and a range of control variables, drawing on literature on youth political engagement that highlights the broad spectrum of socialisation agents and contextual facilitators (school and municipality level). Peer/classroom climate can influence political attitudes through shared discussions, habits, and practices (Hoskins & Janmaat, 2019). Schools provide civic education (Campbell, 2008, 2013), offering a "compensation effect" (Deimel et al., 2021; Hoskins & Janmaat, 2019; Neundorf et al., 2016) for missing or poor parental political socialisation. Additionally, research from political geography has pointed out the importance of considering the role of places where social/political action and interactions occur in influencing how youth approach politics (Adolfsson & Coe, 2024), in line with the "political context matters" argument (Kitanova, 2020; Vráblíková, 2014).

Accordingly, Table 1 provides the list and operationalisation of the independent and conditioning/control variables, along with their measurement. The original wording of the items in the questionnaire is presented in Table A8 in the Supplementary File.

Beyond what is presented in Table 1, some additional clarification is needed regarding the political regime and right–left margin variables. To define the political regime of the parent's country of birth, we relied on the classification by Lührmann et al. (2018) and the V-Dem's expert estimates for 2023 (Coppedge et al., 2024). Our final variable also considered the geopolitical area of the parent's country of birth. By "West" we meant Western Europe, North America (US and Canada), and Oceania (Australia and New Zealand). To be classified in a category, both parents (or just one if the response for the other was missing) had to come from a specific regime/area. The only exceptions were the "Western + other democracies" category (the regime had to be democratic for both parents, but one could come from a non-Western area) and the "Mixed

Table 1. Independent and conditioning/control variables.

Label	Concept	Measure
	Independent variables	
Migratory Background	Respondent's family migratory background	Italian = 0 (both parents are Italian) Mixed = 1 (one of the two parents was born in Italy) Foreign = 2 (both parents of foreign birth)
Family Political Discussion	Frequency with which political topics are discussed within the family setting	Measured on a scale from 0 to 10 (0 = *There are never arguments/discussions about political issues*; 10 = *We very often have arguments/discussions about political issues*)
Perceived Parent–Child Political Similarity	Degree of alignment or difference between the individual's political opinions and those of their parents	Different = 0 (political opinions different from those of the parents) Partially/totally similar = 1 (political opinions similar to those of both or at least one parent) DK = 2 (don't know)
	Individual-level conditioning/control variables	
Gender	Binary gender	Male = 0 Female = 1
Parents' Education	Parents' level of education	Low = 0 (both parents have a low level of education, or one has a low level and the other completed upper secondary education) Medium = 1 (both parents completed upper secondary education) High = 2 (both parents completed tertiary education, or one completed tertiary education and the other upper secondary education) *Note*: A low level of education corresponds to lower secondary school at most. For the original six educational attainment levels, see Table A8 in the Supplementary File
Family's Economic Well-being	Subjective evaluation of the economic situation of the family	Difficult situation = 0 (it is very difficult or difficult for the family to make ends meet at the end of the month) Not difficult = 1 (it is easy for the family…) Wealthy = 2 (it is very easy for the family…) DK = 3 (don't know)
Religion	Respondent's religious denomination	Atheist = 0 Christian = 1 Muslim = 2 Other = 3
Regime in Parents' Countries	Political regime of the parents' reported countries	Western democracies = 0 Eastern European democracies = 1 Non-Western/European democracies = 2 Western + other democracies = 3 Mixed regimes = 4 Electoral/closed autocracies = 5

Table 1. (Cont.) Independent and conditioning/control variables.

Label	Concept	Measure
	Contextual control variables	
Classroom Political Involvement	Political climate and involvement in the classroom	Mean of non-electoral political participation in protests/demonstrations (see Table A8 in the Supplementary File) and political engagement index (excluding the respondent) in the respondent's class
School	Type of school	Lyceum = 0 Technical = 1 Vocational = 2
Turnout	Turnout in the 2022 general election	Turnout in percentages (municipality)
Right–Left Margin	Degree of centre-right political predominance at the school municipal level	Difference in percentage points between votes for the centre-right and centre-left coalitions in the 2022 general election

regimes" category (one parent's country was a democracy and the other's an autocracy). The right–left margin could also be considered as a proxy for the degree of electoral competitiveness of each municipality, given the traditional and long-lasting predominance of centre-right parties in Lombardy. Franklin (2004) empirically demonstrated that the closeness of an electoral race, measured by the margin of victory, along with turnout in previous elections, were strong predictors of electoral participation. Given that these variables could also impact political engagement, we included them in our model to control for the effects of the political context.

Before running the multivariate multilevel regression analysis, all municipal-level variables were centred to obtain a zero sample mean. Then, all the non-categorical variables were normalised by adjusting those values measured on different scales to a common scale between 0 and 1 according to the formula: $X' = (X - X_{min})/(X_{max} - X_{min})$. All categorical non-binary variables were transformed into sets of dummies. In this way, all variables could be analysed on a comparable basis.

4. Findings

Before examining whether political socialisation processes differed for children of immigrants, we first analysed the variations in political engagement, parental political socialisation, and main conditioning/control variables by family migration background (Table A9, Supplementary File). Children of immigrants showed lower political engagement (mean = 0.37) compared to native-born Italians (mean = 0.46) and mixed-background youth (mean = 0.44). They also faced significant socioeconomic and educational disadvantages. Their political involvement in the classroom was also lower (mean = 0.41 vs. 0.50 for native-born Italians), and they reported fewer family political discussions (mean = 0.18 vs. 0.26). Only 31.0% of children of immigrants aligned with their parents' political views, compared to 51.8% of native-born Italians and 50.0% of mixed-background youth. Additionally, 49.9% of children of immigrants were unsure about their political alignment with their parents, a significantly higher proportion than native-born Italians (30.3%).

Beyond this overview, to test our hypotheses, we conducted a multilevel mixed-effects regression analysis with robust standard errors at the highest level. There were three levels: students, schools, and municipalities. Random intercepts were specified at both the municipal and school levels, ensuring that our analysis accurately reflected the hierarchical structure of the data. We followed a multistage analytical strategy to test the first hypothesis on the greater relevance of variables measuring political socialisation compared to structural ones, including migration background. Specifically, we first ran the model with only socio-demographic variables and variables related to individual resources (Model A). Then, we introduced interactions between migration background and, respectively, parental education level (to test H2) and gender (to test H3). We also interacted migration background with family economic well-being to control for an additional resource that could be transmitted by parents, although in this instance we did not hypothesise a differentiated effect based on migratory background. Subsequently, we introduced variables related to family political socialisation (Model C). Finally, we included variables measuring the influence of the political context, both electoral turnout/competitiveness at the municipal level and peer groups in classes (Model D). The results of these four models are reported in Table 2.

Before proceeding with the analysis, it is important to note that the likelihood ratio test of the null model with only random intercepts for level 2 (school) and level 3 (municipality) indicated that the multilevel structure was appropriate (see Section 3 in the Supplementary File), whereas the residual intraclass correlation (ICC) analysis for both the null model (Table A4 in the Supplementary File) and the initial resources model (Table A5 in the Supplementary File) showed that the majority of the residual variance appeared to be at the individual level, as the ICCs for the higher levels (municipalities and schools) were relatively small, with schools contributing more to the variance than municipalities. Furthermore, it is worth reporting that we re-ran the analyses including the missing party closeness values ($N = 214$), which were recoded as 0 in the political engagement index, to assess the robustness of the results. The results remained largely consistent. Ultimately, we chose to retain the models excluding the missing values, as they provided a more conservative and reliable estimate.

The predictive models of political engagement in Table 2 indicate that our H1 was not falsified: As the variables were progressively included in the models, family-transmitted individual resources—including migrant background—became less relevant compared to the political socialisation variables. Concerning the goodness-of-fit statistics, the AIC and BIC values improved significantly from the resources model (AIC = 344.76, BIC = 424.41) to the full model (AIC = −295.92, BIC = −182.16), indicating a better model fit. The log pseudolikelihood also improved notably, confirming that adding socialisation and contextual variables enhanced the explanatory power.

In the resources model (A), higher parental education was a significant predictor ($p < 0.01$) with a positive coefficient (0.037). However, as more variables were added, this effect weakened, becoming not significant in the full model. Being in a "wealthy" family was significant across all models but showed decreasing coefficients (from 0.080 in the resources model to 0.058 in the full model D). As expected, foreign background showed a significant negative impact on political engagement across all models, but the coefficient weakened (from −0.077 in the resources model to −0.029 in the full model) and the statistical significance also decreased from $p < 0.001$ to $p < 0.05$. This indicates that the inclusion of variables related to political socialisation and contextual factors partially mediated the influence of family-transmitted individual resources on political engagement. Nevertheless, these variables do not fully explain the disparities in political engagement between children of immigrants and their native-born peers. Conversely, the negative effect of being female remained

Table 2. Different predictive models of political engagement.

	Resources model (A)	Resources + interactions (B)	Parental political socialisation model (C)	Full model—political socialisation + political context (D)
Fixed effects				
Background (reference: Italian)				
mixed	−0.012 (0.018)	−0.066 (0.049)	0.003 (0.017)	0.005 (0.018)
foreign	−0.077 *** (0.015)	−0.062 (0.041)	−0.034 * (0.014)	−0.029 * (0.013)
Gender (female)	−0.104 *** (0.014)	−0.111 *** (0.015)	−0.106 *** (0.012)	−0.093 *** (0.010)
Parents' education (reference: low)				
medium	0.018 (0.013)	0.025 (0.014)	0.014 (0.014)	0.010 (0.013)
high	0.037 ** (0.012)	0.044 ** (0.014)	0.022 (0.012)	0.011 (0.013)
Family well-being (reference: difficult situation)				
not difficult	0.012 (0.018)	0.009 (0.025)	0.007 (0.017)	0.002 (0.017)
wealthy	0.080 *** (0.022)	0.071 * (0.028)	0.064 ** (0.021)	0.058 ** (0.021)
DK	−0.057 * (0.022)	−0.052 (0.027)	−0.029 (0.022)	−0.028 (0.021)
Type of school (reference: lyceum)				
technical	−0.039 (0.022)	−0.038 (0.022)	−0.025 (0.015)	−0.010 (0.010)
vocational	−0.056 * (0.022)	−0.054 * (0.022)	−0.042 * (0.018)	0.009 (0.015)
Background * gender				
mixed * female		0.013 (0.036)		
foreign * female		0.045 (0.033)		
Background * parents' education				
mixed * medium		0.017 (0.051)		
mixed * high		−0.014 (0.059)		
foreign * medium		−0.056 (0.030)		
foreign * high		−0.042 (0.035)		

Table 2. (Cont.) Different predictive models of political engagement.

	Resources model (A)	Resources + interactions (B)	Parental political socialisation model (C)	Full model—political socialisation + political context (D)
Fixed effects				
Background * family well-being				
mixed * not difficult		0.061 (0.056)		
mixed * wealthy		0.114 (0.092)		
mixed * DK		−0.008 (0.073)		
foreign * not difficult		−0.013 (0.042)		
foreign * wealthy		0.005 (0.061)		
foreign * DK		−0.034 (0.064)		
Political discussion at home			0.212 *** (0.019)	0.201 *** (0.019)
Parent–child similarity (reference: different)				
partially/totally similar			0.057 *** (0.015)	0.054 *** (0.014)
DK			−0.174 *** (0.018)	−0.162 *** (0.017)
Classroom political involvement				0.252 *** (0.022)
Turnout 2022				0.008 (0.030)
Right–left margin				−0.018 (0.022)
Intercept	0.504 *** (0.026)	0.505 *** (0.032)	0.474 *** (0.023)	0.344 *** (0.033)
Random effects				
Municipality: *SD* (intercept)	0.038 (0.016)	0.038 (0.017)	0.019 (0.018)	0.000 (0.000)
School: *SD* (intercept)	0.043 (0.012)	0.044 (0.012)	0.026 (0.014)	0.000 (0.000)
SD (residual)	0.256 (0.003)	0.256 (0.003)	0.228 (0.003)	0.224 (0.003)
Number of observations	2,184	2,184	2,182	2,182
AIC	344.76	360.71	−193.60	−295.92
BIC	424.41	508.63	−96.90	−182.16
Log pseudolikelihood	−158.38	−154.36	113.80	167.96

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses; significant at *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

significant and relatively stable across models, although the coefficient slightly decreased in magnitude (from −0.104 in the resources model to −0.093 in the full model D). Among the control variables, the type of school attended, specifically vocational schools, showed a diminishing negative effect on political engagement, and in the full model, the coefficient became not significant (and even changed sign).

Political discussion at home and classroom political involvement were the most significant drivers of political engagement in the full model, with a strong positive coefficient (0.201 and 0.252, respectively, with $p < 0.001$). Additionally, having partially or totally similar political views to parents significantly increased political engagement ($p < 0.001$). Respondents who were unable to identify whether their views aligned with their parents' exhibited significantly lower levels of political engagement compared to those who reported "different" views. The large magnitude (−0.162) compared to the "partially/totally similar" coefficient suggests a stronger disengagement effect, potentially due to uncertainty, ambiguity, or lack of family discussion about political issues.

By contrast, contextual factors like turnout rates and right–left political margins in the municipalities were not significant.

To assess whether the impact of parental SES on political engagement differed for children of immigrants (H2 and H3), we examined the interaction terms between family background and, respectively, parental education, family economic well-being, and gender (Model B). As regards the interactions of background with parental resources (parents' education and family well-being) and gender, we did not detect any significant interaction terms. Nonetheless, the statistical significance of the coefficient of a multiplicative interaction term is considered neither necessary nor sufficient to determine whether X has an important or statistically distinguishable relationship with Y dependent on the values of a third variable Z (Brambor et al., 2006). Therefore, we plotted the adjusted predictions of student political engagement based on migratory background and parents' education level (Figure 1, upper panel). The chart shows that the positive effect of medium and high parental educational levels was significantly higher among native-born Italians than among children of immigrants. This supports H2, suggesting that while parental education positively influences political engagement for both groups, its effect is attenuated among second-generation youth. This divergence may reflect systemic or cultural barriers limiting the translation of parental resources into political engagement for children of immigrants. Conversely, there are no significant differences in terms of background regarding the effect of a wealthy family condition (see Figure A4 in the Supplementary File).

To test H3, we plotted the adjusted predictions of political engagement based on gender and migratory background (Figure 1, lower panel). As anticipated, the gender gap in political engagement was only evident among natives and disappeared for individuals with a foreign origin. Specifically, males with foreign-born parents demonstrated the most pronounced decline in political engagement, with their predicted engagement levels significantly lower than those of males with Italian origins. This finding suggests that the gender gap observed in the overall models (Table 2) was primarily driven by differences among natives. For individuals with a foreign origin, the disadvantage associated with their migratory background offset the typical advantage associated with being male in traditional political engagement in the Italian context. This pattern was further confirmed by interactions between gender and parental origin categories in the full model D (results not shown here, available on request).

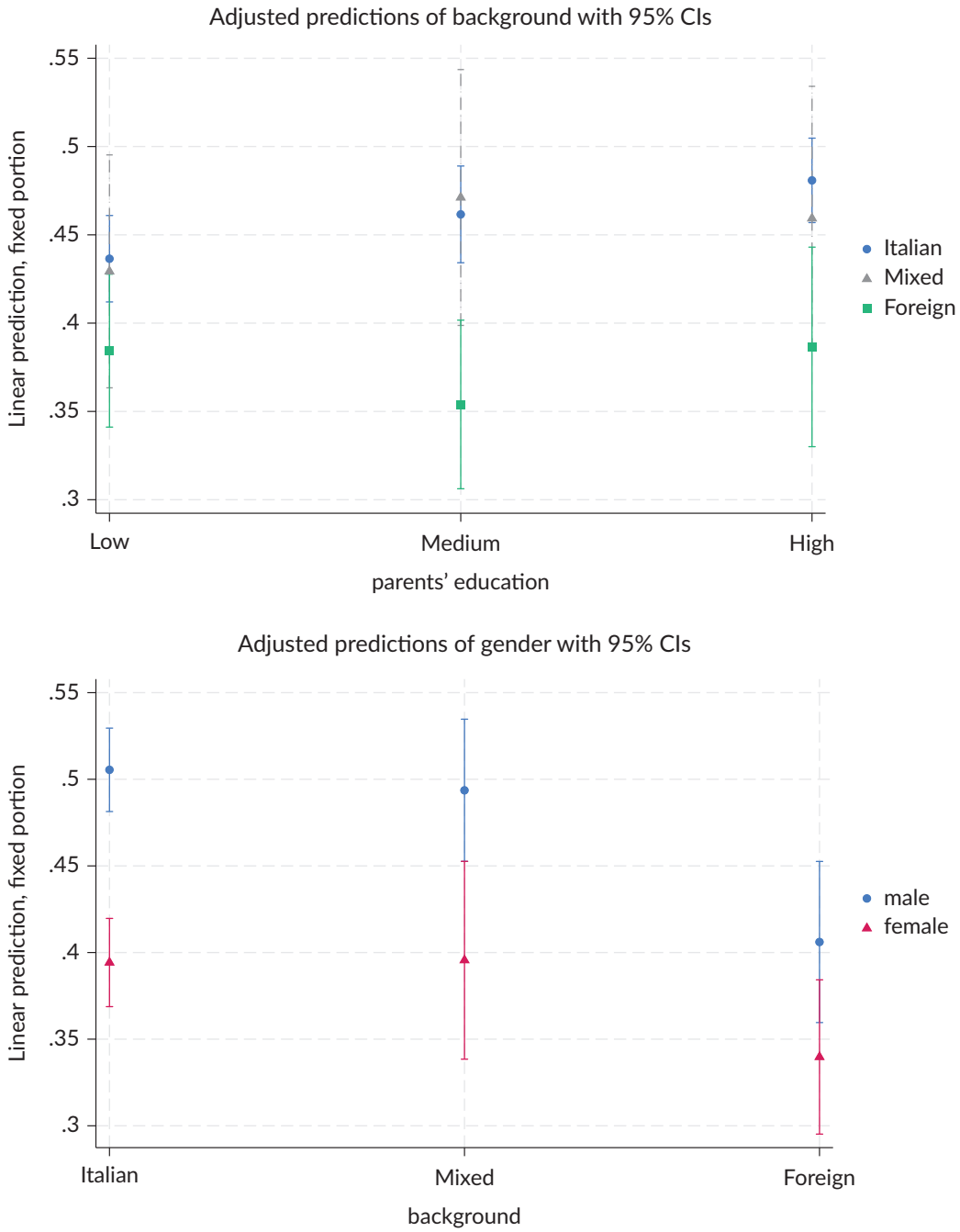

Figure 1. Adjusted predictions of student political engagement based on migratory background by parents' education (upper panel) and gender by migratory background (lower panel).

The following hypotheses concern the role played by parental political socialisation and how it unfolds across groups. We hypothesised a homogenous positive effect across all background categories as regards the frequency of political discussions at home (H4a), whereas we postulated a differentiated effect concerning the influence of the political content and cues transmitted by parents, with parent–child political agreement being relevant only among Italians (H4b). Furthermore, we hypothesised an interaction effect between the frequency of political discussions at home and parent–child political similarity by background (H4c). Table A6 in the Supplementary File shows the results of the full model with interactions between

parental political socialisation and background. Figure 2 shows the adjusted predictions of political engagement based on migratory background by frequency of political discussions at home (upper panel) and by parent–child political similarity (lower panel).

Consistently with H4a, political discussion at home had a positive effect on political engagement, regardless of the migratory background. Conversely, in line with H4b, sharing political views with their parents only significantly boosted political engagement among students with Italian parents, whereas among children of immigrants, the effect of having partially/totally similar opinions was significantly lower, being practically the same as having different opinions. Of course, the lowest effect was recorded among those who did not know their parents' political opinions, regardless of their background.

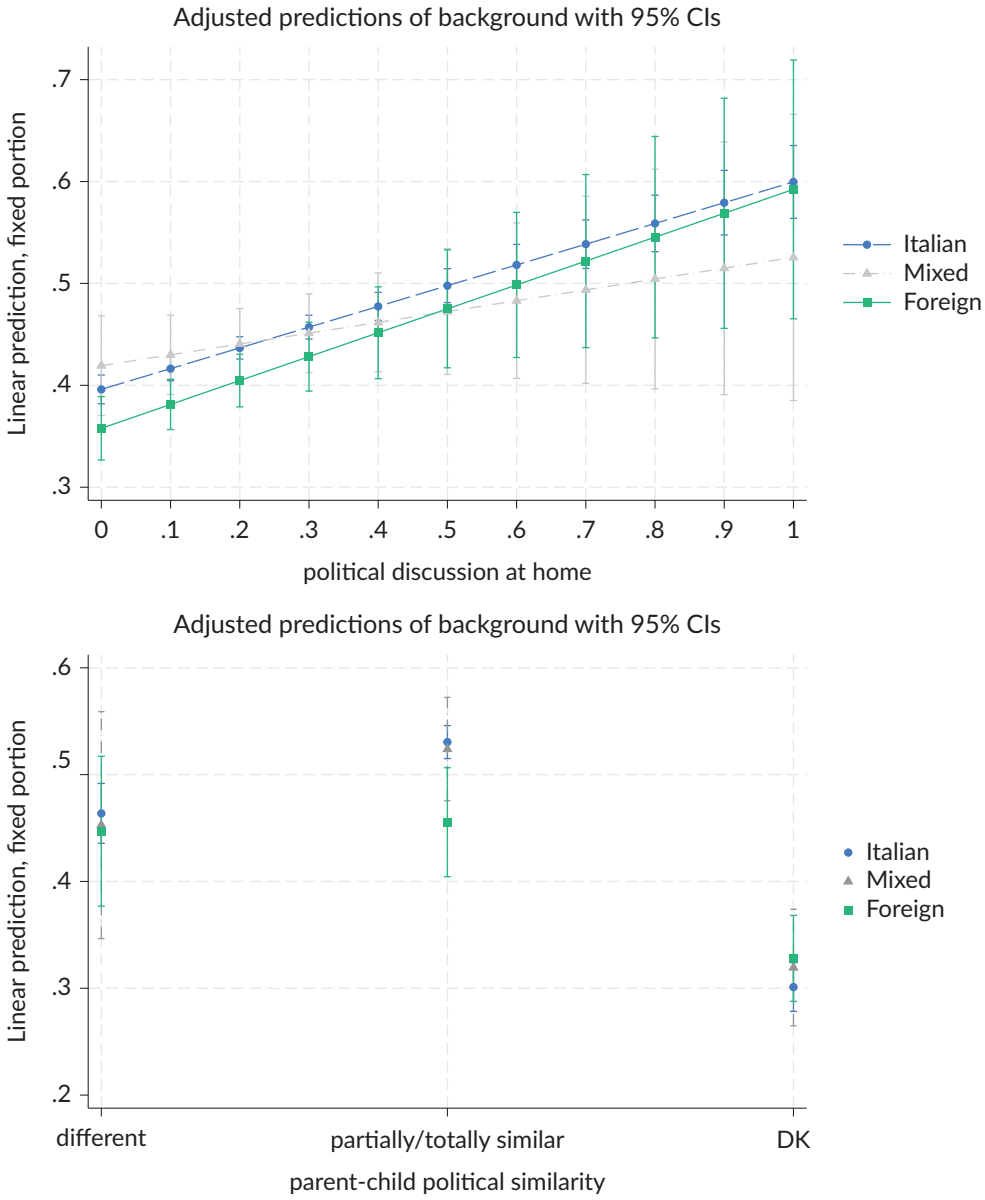

Figure 2. Adjusted predictions of student political engagement based on migratory background by frequency of political discussions at home (upper panel) and by parent–child political similarity (lower panel). Note: DK = "don't know."

To explore how parental socialisation interacts with background, we plotted the adjusted predictions of parent–child political similarity against both background and the frequency of political discussions at home (Figure 3). The findings supported our hypothesis (H4c): The frequency of political discussions at home moderated the effect of parent–child political similarity, but only among children with two Italian-born parents. In this group, as the frequency of political discussions increased, the positive impact of sharing political views with parents no longer significantly exceeded the effect of having differing views. This shift occurred starting from the midpoint of the political discussion scale, suggesting that in families where politics is frequently discussed, even divergent political opinions can still promote political engagement. However, this dynamic did not apply to children of foreign-born parents. These children engaged in fewer political discussions at home (as evidenced by the larger confidence intervals for higher levels of political discussion) and often struggled to fully understand or communicate the political views of their parents. In these families, the frequency of political discussions only slightly affected those who were unaware of their parents' opinions, helping to close the gap with those who were aware of them. Among children of Italian parents, however, this gap persisted, despite showing a similar trend. For a robustness check, we re-ran the analysis using a different operationalisation of parent–child political similarity, categorising responses into four groups: "different opinions," "opinions similar to those of one parent," "opinions similar to those of both parents," and "don't know." The results were very similar to those from the initial analysis.

Our interpretation, as outlined in the theoretical section, was that children of immigrants face significant challenges in developing an interest in Italian politics and in forming attachments to its partisan and ideological frameworks due to the parents' socialisation in a foreign political context. This issue is particularly pronounced for those whose parents come from political and cultural backgrounds that differ significantly from the Italian context. Based on this reasoning, our final hypothesis (H5) suggests that when

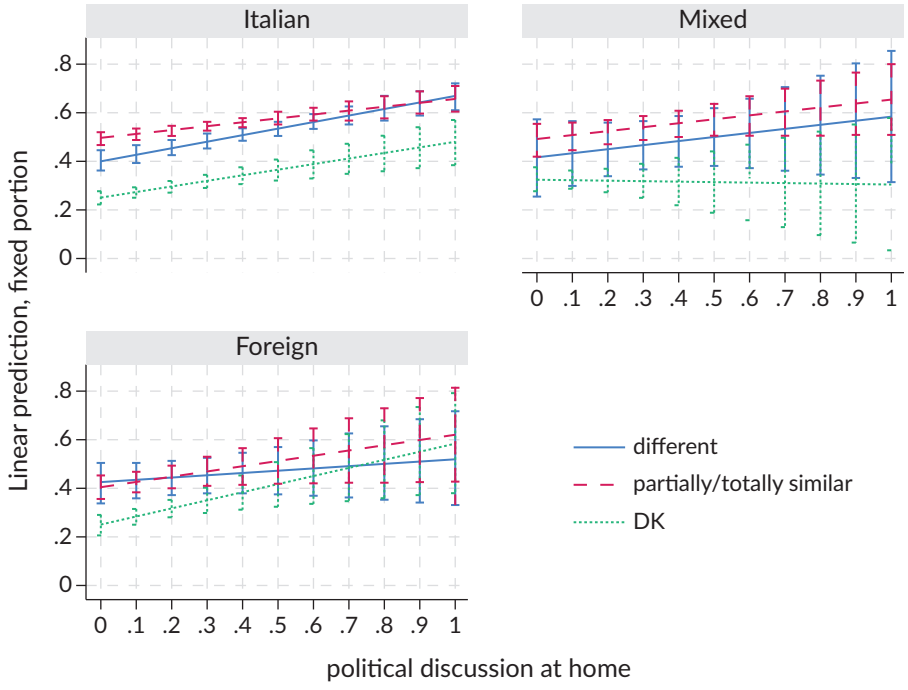

Figure 3. Political engagement: adjusted predictions of difference/similarity to parents' political opinions by background and frequency of political discussions at home (95% CIs). Note: DK = "don't know."

controlling for certain proxies of the political-cultural context of the parents' country of origin—such as religion and political regime—alongside other previously identified predictors, the effect of the broader "foreign background" category should diminish or disappear. The findings (Table A7 in the Supplementary File) supported this hypothesis: In both models, one including the respondent's religion and the other incorporating the political regime of the parents' country of origin, the variable for migratory background—although still negatively correlated—lost its statistical significance as a predictor.

Hence, we replicated the interactions shown in Figure 3 by replacing migratory background first with religion and then with the political regime of the parents' country. The results confirmed that these variables, despite their limitations, were valid proxies for the political-cultural context of the parents. The (non) pattern previously observed in Figure 3 for children of immigrants was very similar to that observed for students of Muslim faith (see Figure A5 in the Supplementary File), who are predominantly children of immigrants from very different political-cultural contexts from the Italian one. This finding was further confirmed when religion was replaced with the political regime of the parents' country (Figure 4). It is worth noting that the Western democracies category is composed mainly of students with an Italian background (95.4% of the total in this category). In contrast, those with a mixed background showed a more varied distribution, falling particularly under the Western + other democracies (30.8%) and mixed regimes (22.1%) categories, suggesting broader engagement across different political systems. Individuals with a foreign background were predominantly found in electoral/closed autocracies (50.1%) and Eastern European democracies (28.2%), reflecting a distinct alignment with non-Western regimes. Focusing on the most populated

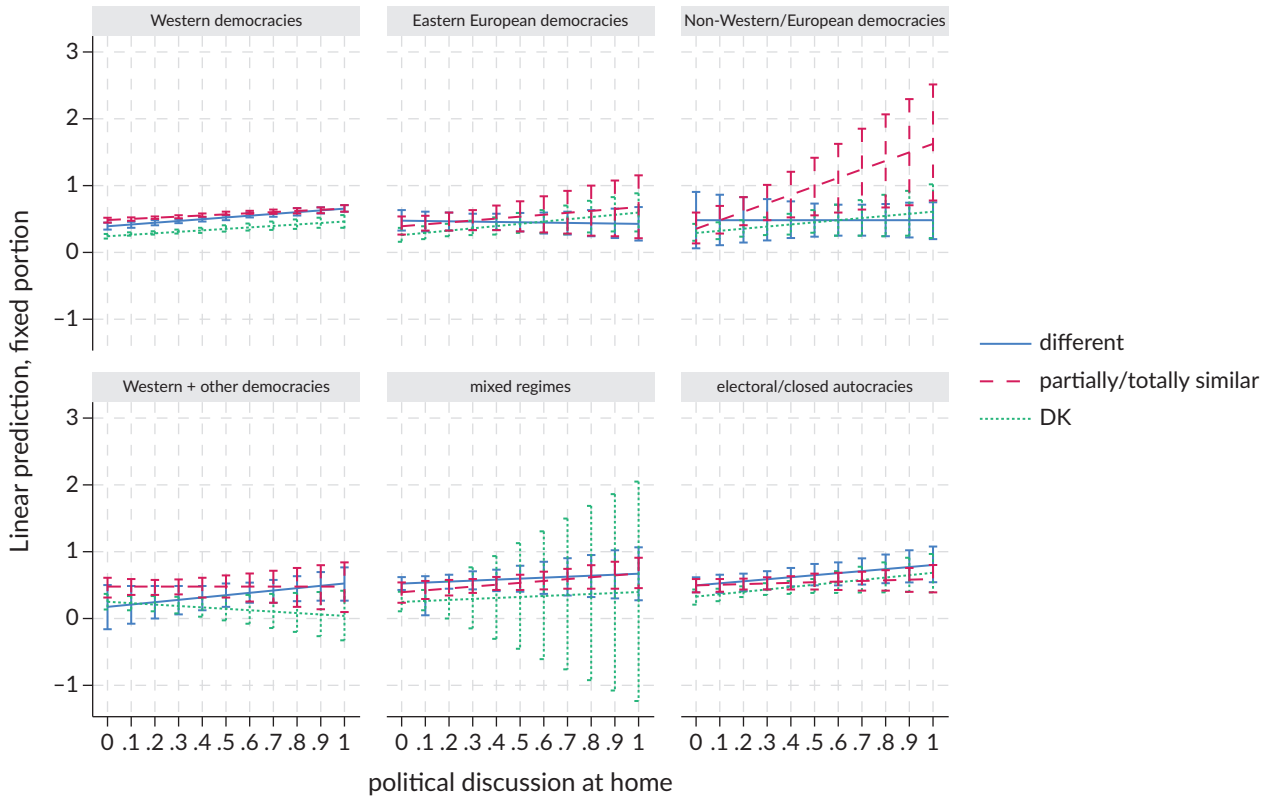

Figure 4. Political engagement: adjusted predictions of difference/similarity to parents' political opinions by political regime in parents' country and frequency of political discussions at home (95% CIs). Note: DK = "don't know."

categories—Western democracies (n = 2,238), Eastern European democracies (n = 114), and closed/electoral autocracies (n = 203)—it becomes evident that the moderating effect of political discussion on the parent–child variable was only significant for those with parents from Western democracies (including Italy, of course). In contrast, it was not significant when the parents' country was non-democratic, or an Eastern European democracy. The political regime variable proved more discriminating than religion, with some interaction terms also showing significance (see Table A7 in the Supplementary File). We recognise that regime classification depends on the data source. However, the V-Dem project classification, favoured by many scholars (e.g., Boese, 2019), is generally considered reliable and has been used to assess the impact of country of origin on immigrants' political participation (Lazarova et al., 2024). To test the robustness of our results, we re-ran the analysis using the 2023 Democracy Index from the Economist Intelligence Unit (2024), and the main findings remained consistent.

5. Conclusion

While much of the rhetoric around youth political disengagement tends to treat young people as a homogenous group, in actual fact they make up a fragmented population. These divisions, and in particular the intersection of various inequalities that amplify disadvantages, contribute to shaping youth participation in democratic life. In this context, this article has sought to explore the critical role of parental influences in (re)producing ethnic inequalities in political engagement among late adolescents, using Lombardy (Italy) as a case study.

This article makes several contributions to the literature. First, it helps to address the knowledge gap on the experiences of immigrant descendants in Italy, a key EU host country for non-national children. While research on the ethnic penalty in areas like education, labour, and health has mainly focused on North and Western Europe, studies on Southern European countries, including Italy, remain limited. This is due to the relatively recent influx of immigrant families, with their descendants still young, having arrived mainly in the past three decades (Gabrielli & Impicciatore, 2022).

Second, it provides original probabilistic survey data on the political incorporation of children of immigrants in Italy, a topic that remains underresearched, especially using quantitative methods (Riniolo & Ortensi, 2021). Despite the growing activism among the second generation in Italy (Daher & Nicolosi, 2023; Milan, 2022; Riniolo, 2023), there is a significant lack of reliable statistical data, particularly on late adolescence and early adulthood, critical periods for the emergence of political engagement inequalities (Janmaat & Hoskins, 2022). By using multistage sampling (classes, schools), we were able to consider parental influences alongside contextual factors such as the political climate in the classroom and municipal electoral competitiveness. This approach addresses a key challenge in political socialisation research, especially in the absence of longitudinal or experimental designs, by isolating the family effect from other influences (Koskimaa & Rapeli, 2015; Quintelier, 2015; Riniolo & Ortensi, 2021).

Third, this article points out how measures of SES, especially parents' education level, are associated with political engagement in specific ways for children of immigrants. Several studies on youth political engagement have highlighted the key role of social stratification (Grasso & Giugni, 2022). Based on these general patterns, it could be argued that the lower level of political engagement among children of immigrants is primarily due to the multiple SES disadvantages they face, which indirectly affect the political

socialisation process. However, the data presented here indicate that the positive relationship between parental education and political engagement only holds for native-born Italians. This may be because many highly qualified immigrants in Italy, particularly from non-EU countries, are employed in low-skilled sectors such as agriculture, family caregiving, or maintenance (Panichella et al., 2021). This phenomenon of "overqualification" or "underemployment" is driven by factors such as the non-recognition of foreign qualifications, labour market discrimination, and language barriers. As a result, education does not serve as a status booster for immigrants. Moreover, many immigrants obtain their educational qualifications in countries other than Italy, which means they often lack exposure to the civic education component of the Italian curriculum. This finding aligns with similar results in the US where parental education seems to be unrelated to political interest and voting for Latino and Asian children of immigrants (Humphries et al., 2013). Similarly, parental education has no association with second-generation voting and political interest in the UK (Borkowska & Luthra, 2024). Further research, using larger samples of children of immigrants in Italy, is needed to determine whether the lack of an effect of parental education on children's political engagement is consistent across the main immigrant groups in Italy, such as those of Romanian, Albanian, Moroccan, and Chinese origin.

Finally, our study has confirmed the key role of family political discussions for both native-born Italians and children of immigrants, even though parental SES influences political engagement differently across these groups. This finding aligns with extensive literature highlighting family discussions as a vital socialising factor that fosters political interest and participation, regardless of the family's migration background. However, the study has also shown a difference in the impact of parent–child political alignment. While the political agreement between parents and children strongly influences the political engagement of native-born Italian youth, it has a weaker effect on children of immigrants.

To further explore this issue, we categorised migrant families based on both religion and the political regime of their country of origin. The analysis revealed that the political regime variable, more than religion, plays a significant role in shaping the relationship between child–parent political alignment, political discussion at home, and children's political engagement. The gap between native-born children and children of immigrants was found to be larger when parents come from countries with political systems that differ markedly from Italy's. This pattern, however, is not necessarily linked to the non-democratic nature of the regime but rather to differences in party systems and ideological frameworks. For instance, the political meanings of terms like "left" and "right" can differ substantially between Eastern and Western European contexts. These findings align with existing research suggesting that the transmission of political knowledge from parents to children, as outlined in the traditional model of youth political socialisation (Jennings et al., 2009), is often "disrupted" in immigrant families due to international influences (Borkowska & Luthra, 2024) and may be shaped by the political culture of the parents' country of origin (Dinesen & Andersen, 2022; Lazarova et al., 2024).

While the results are consistent with our hypotheses, further research is required to explore these dynamics in greater depth. A key limitation of this study is that the parental information was gathered indirectly through their children. Consequently, the religion reflected in the analysis corresponds to that of the child, and we lack important information (Li & Jones, 2020) on when the parents migrated to Italy. A more detailed classification of political regimes would benefit from considering the regime type in place in the country of origin before emigration.

In conclusion, this study offers valuable insights into political transmission in Italy, highlighting differences between native-born and immigrant children, while acknowledging the limitations of cross-sectional data. While we proposed a unidirectional influence from parents to children, in which family discussions promote political engagement, a converse interpretation is possible. The politically active children of immigrants, whose schools may compensate for limited family socialisation (Riniolo, 2023; Terriquez & Lin, 2020), might initiate political discussions at home and influence their parents' political engagement (McDevitt & Chaffee, 2002; Pedraza & Perry, 2020). These alternative findings emphasise the need for further research, particularly through longitudinal and experimental studies, to better understand the complex interactions between family, school, and individual agency in shaping political engagement across different backgrounds.

Acknowledgments

We sincerely thank the three anonymous reviewers and the editors for their constructive and insightful comments on earlier versions of this manuscript. We are also deeply grateful to all members of the MAYBE project, particularly Alice Sanarico and Giuliana Parente, for their contributions throughout all project stages. Special thanks go to Gabriella Scarcella (IPSOS) for her exceptional effort in supervising the school survey fieldwork and ensuring the successful completion of data collection.

Funding

Data collection was funded by Fondazione Cariplo (Italy)—MAYBE project, ref. 2021-1157 (Call Human and Social Sciences in a Changing Society—Granting Schemes 2021. Scientific Research).

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

The dataset used is available at the UNIMI Dataverse for replication purposes: https://doi.org/10.13130/RD_UNIMI/2UN0UZ

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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Politics and Governance
2025 • Volume 13 • Article 9286
https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.9286

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Open Access Journal

Beyond Gender: Exploring the Intersectional Dynamics in Political Interest Among Youth

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Submitted: 12 September 2024 **Accepted:** 11 December 2024 **Published:** 29 January 2025

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Unequal Participation Among Youth and Immigrants: Analyzing Political Attitudes and Behavior in Societal Subgroups" edited by Arndt Leininger (Chemnitz University of Technology) and Sabrina Mayer (University of Bamberg), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.i426

Abstract

One of the most persistent and puzzling inequalities across Western democracies is that women are less interested in politics than men. We know that political interest is developed—or not—at an early age, and that it becomes a key determinant of political involvement during adulthood. Due to its early development, recent research suggests focusing on gendered political socialization patterns to understand why women display lower levels of political interest than men. A recent systematic literature review on political interest confirms that the gap is already present at an early age. In addition, the review shows that research and evidence on the potential intersectionality of inequalities on young people's political interest is surprisingly scarce. In this article we present novel evidence on the interaction of gender with an additional source of political inequality: immigration background. In doing so we use the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey in Four European Countries (CILS4EU) dataset, a longitudinal survey that follows a sample of adolescents with foreign-born parents that can be compared to natives in four countries. The analyses follow the latest recommendations regarding the use of interactions to evaluate claims of intersectionality. The results of our preliminary tests indicate that girls with an immigrant background are more interested in politics than girls without personal or family immigration background. Furthermore, the results are compatible with an intersectional approach by which being both a girl and having an immigration background has an independent positive relationship with political interest. Finally, we do not find significant differences between first- and second-generation immigrant girls.

Keywords

gender gap; immigration background; intersectionality; political attitudes; political interest; youth

1. Introduction

Political interest is often depicted as the number one precursor of political participation (Deth & Elff, 2004; Milbrath, 1965, p. 40; Verba et al., 1995, p. 334), also for young people (García-Albacete, 2014). Citizens require a sense of curiosity in political affairs to spend their limited time catching up with political news or monitoring what the government does. Similarly, the motivation required to devote resources to political donations or participate in costly political actions, such as attending a demonstration or strike, is high. Keeping up to date with political events is, simultaneously, a key requirement to make representative institutions accountable, and therefore for a healthy functioning of democracy (Adserà et al., 2003). As a precursor of an active citizenry, researchers have approached the origins and development of political interest from perspectives as diverse as political socialization (e.g., Neundorf et al., 2013), education (e.g., Hoskins & Janmaat, 2019), political psychology (e.g., van Deth et al., 2011), and even genetic studies (e.g., Hatemi & McDermott, 2012).

From a political behavior perspective, political interest is particularly important to explore among young people. Extant research has shown that political interest develops—or not—at an early age (Kinder & Sears, 1985; Verba et al., 1995) and tends to be a stable political orientation over a person's lifespan (Neundorf et al., 2013; Prior, 2010). Among the key factors correlating with political interest is political socialization at home, as the family has direct effects by, for instance, talking politics, but also indirect effects by providing a concrete socioeconomic status and a specific context to grow up in (Jennings et al., 2009; Neundorf et al., 2013). Also important are tools deliberately developed in school, such as citizenship education (García-Albacete, 2013; Hoskins & Janmaat, 2019; Neundorf et al., 2016), as well as overall levels of education achieved. Researchers have pointed to other influences, such as peers, during adolescence (Dostie-Goulet, 2009; Quintelier, 2015), or the context in which young adults grow up, such as exceptionally mobilized periods (García-Albacete & Lorente, 2021). There are influences that are more difficult to capture such as the media and, nowadays, social media (Boulianne, 2011). Furthermore, previous studies show that these influences vary for the two social categories explored here: gender and immigration background. Similarly to adults, significant gaps in favor of boys have been found at an early age (Bos et al., 2021). Scholars have also found gaps between citizens with immigration backgrounds in comparison to those born in the country of residence, but research is inconclusive regarding potential gaps among youth with and without an immigration background.

Understanding the political interest of young people with an immigration personal/family background is equally, if not more, important. To start with, political participation is costlier for immigrants as they are likely to have comparatively less resources than non-migrants (de Rooij, 2012; Verba et al., 1995). In some cases, political rights are not even available to immigrants (Bauböck, 1994). Even when political rights are available, the use of these rights among immigrants is substantially below the level of natives (Council of Europe, 1999; Ramakrishnan & Espenshade, 2001; Verba et al., 1995). Furthermore, for young people, political interest can be useful to form one's identity as a citizen and to fight alienation from the political system. Finally, immigrants, like any other societal group, may have specific demands or areas of interest that would not be represented if lower levels of political interest result in lack of political engagement.

When it comes to gender, research has shown over time and across countries that women are systematically less interested in politics than men (Bennett & Bennett, 1989; Burns et al., 2001; Fraile & Gomez, 2017), despite the incorporation of women into political, economic, and social public spheres. To understand the

persistence of the gap we need to disentangle dynamics that take place in the continuing gendered political socialization of children (Bos et al., 2021).

Considering previous knowledge regarding inequalities in political interest due to immigration background and gender, and following research on intersectionality in political involvement, it is easy to expect that inequality accumulates, or interacts, among girls/women with an immigrant background. In the words of Crenshaw, who coined the term decades ago, intersectionality is described as follows:

> Basically a lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other. We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality or immigrant status. What's often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts (Steinmetz, 2020; see also Crenshaw, 1991).

Despite its relevance and previous studies, a recent systematic literature review (Kleer et al., 2023) found a paucity of quantitative empirical evidence available to corroborate the expectation.

Our study makes the following contributions. First, we explore the differences in political interest of girls and boys with and without immigrant background, as well as the potential interactive effect of this background and gender in four different European countries. Secondly, most quantitative research looking at the potential intersection of gender and immigration focuses on adults, while we look at adolescents and young adults. Finally, we focus on political interest, a key determinant of young people's future political involvement since, due to their age, participation may not be accessible to them yet.

We use the unique data provided by the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey in Four European Countries (CILS4EU) project that included a political interest question in a study of young people, and incorporated an oversample of adolescents with foreign-born parents, thus providing enough statistical power for a preliminary test. As discussed below, and given the complex nature of intersectionality, our contribution is necessarily exploratory. However, identifying the extent to which the two broad elements analyzed here interact, and in which direction, is key to further exploring the trajectories and constraints found by young people to develop a curiosity in politics. The results indicate that, while girls are always less interested in politics, girls with an immigrant background are more engaged than girls without that background. Furthermore, the results are compatible with an intersectional approach by which being both a girl and having an immigrant background has an independent positive relationship with political interest. Finally, we do not find significant differences between first- and second-generation immigrant girls.

2. Gender-Based Inequalities in Political Interest

Women's relatively low interest in politics, compared to men's, is a well-known finding in political behavior research. A systematic literature review (Kleer et al., 2023) found that, out of 28 studies exploring differences between men and women in political interest, 21 reported a statistically significant gap in favor of men. Another group of six studies reported either non-significant effects or a gender gap in particular countries only.

What is it about being a woman that results in less interest in politics? Traditional explanations for these differences in political engagement can be categorized into three major groups. The first group centers on the social division of labor between men and women, which can be seen as an additional consequence of the socialization process. If women identify more strongly with, or are relegated to, the private and familial sphere, they may be less politically involved. Alternatively, they may find the costs of catching up with politics higher. In fact, evidence shows that women assume greater responsibility for household chores than men, even among youth (Hochschild & Machung, 1989; Milkie et al., 2009; Negraia et al., 2018; Sieppi & Pehkonen, 2019). As a result, the amount of time available for activities outside work or domestic responsibilities is significantly less for women. Previous studies have shown that women with children tend to be less interested in and knowledgeable about politics, and participate less politically (Ferrín, Fraile, & García-Albacete, 2019; Parry et al., 1992; Quaranta, 2016).

The second group of explanations refers to the socio-structural disadvantages faced by women. Despite recent progress, women continue to experience evident economic disadvantages, such as lower wages, less representation in high corporate hierarchies (e.g., boards of directors), and, in general, more limited access to the labor market than men (European Commission, 2024). Previous studies have attributed the unequal political engagement between men and women to the historical disadvantages women have faced in terms of education, salaries, and, more broadly, their material and cognitive resources (Burns et al., 1997, 2001).

Thirdly, a classic explanation that has gained renewed attention is what is known as gendered political socialization (Bos et al., 2021). This explanation focuses on the differences in the socialization processes of boys and girls. Traditional social norms depict men as the primary actors in the political sphere, while women are more oriented (or relegated) to the private sphere. In shaping these roles, society emphasizes the communal dimensions for girls, which involve a strong sense of empathy and interconnectedness with others. In contrast, boys are encouraged to develop traits such as independence and assertiveness (Eagly & Wood, 1991). This gendered socialization has significant consequences for how women and men position themselves in society in general, and in the political world in particular (Jennings, 1983). The gap is surprisingly resistant to societal changes and is also visible among young people (Cicognani et al., 2012; Donbavand & Hoskins, 2021; García-Albacete & Hoskins, 2024; Wolak & McDevitt, 2011; Wray-Lake & Abrams, 2020). For example, three studies of youth in the US show that while boys are attracted to partisan political conflict, girls prefer the consensual dimension of politics (Bos et al., 2021; Fridkin & Kenney, 2007; Wolak & McDevitt, 2011). Similar results were found among German children (van Deth et al., 2011).

3. Migration-Background-Based Inequalities in Political Interest

Citizens with an immigrant background also tend to show lower levels of political interest and engagement than the rest of the population (Morales & Giugni, 2011). To explain immigrants' political participation, de Rooij (2012) and Morales and Giugni (2011) provide comprehensive accounts of arguments on why their participation differs from that of non-migrants. First, immigrants often have less resources that enable participation. The resource deficit includes, among others, social networks, socioeconomic status, civic abilities, and mobilization networks (de Rooij, 2012; Verba et al., 1995). Newcomers may also have less information on how the political system works. Moving to a new country may imply less civic skills due to, for example, a different mother tongue or because of more difficult access to high-responsibility positions at work. Furthermore, they often have less economic resources, little job security, and higher financial

instability, which are all significant constraints to political involvement. A second group of factors relates to integration, language, social networks, regulations, etc. On the one hand, we can expect immigrants to have fewer social networks, on the other, studies have shown that both for adults and adolescents with foreign-born parents, social networks and legal rights are key to predicting and understanding their political involvement (de Rooij, 2012; Dollmann, 2021; Eggert & Giugni, 2011; Gatti et al., 2024; Gidengil & Stolle, 2009; Morales & Pilati, 2011; Terriquez, 2017; Terriquez & Kwon, 2015), although effects and mechanisms vary across the country of origin (Togeby, 2004). Finally, the context is an important source of factors that affect the relationship of citizens with an immigrant background and the political world. By "context" we refer to the origin of citizens and the country of reception (i.e., Spierings & Vermeulen, 2024), but also to all the institutional factors that surround them and the structure of political opportunities they encounter (Kim & Seltzer, 2024; Morales & Giugni, 2011), both at the national and local level (Kassam & Becker, 2023; Morales & Pilati, 2011).

Do adolescents with foreign-born parents find the same constraints to get involved in politics? Partially they do. Terriquez and Kwon (2015, p. 427) show that barriers to political engagement experienced by immigrant parents suppress the political engagement of their children. After all, parents serve as role models in shaping basic political orientations, determining socioeconomic status, and providing the context in which children and adolescents socialize politically (Jennings et al., 2009). However, when youth are equipped with civic skills and political information, due to college or involvement in civic associations, they can promote the political integration of their families via political engagement (Terriquez & Kwon, 2015). Similarly, children with undocumented parents in the US are more likely to protest on immigration issues and be more positive about the potential of protest action to induce political change (Street et al., 2017). When it comes to political interest, we can also expect adolescents with foreign-born parents to have awareness of inequalities, as their families and themselves confront a larger number of obstacles than natives. Experiences of discrimination, for instance, have been shown to mobilize citizens with an immigrant background (Spierings & Vermeulen, 2024). Additionally, among young adults with an immigrant background, a sense of belonging to the nation has a positive effect on their political interest that is not yet visible for children without an immigrant background (Hochman & García-Albacete, 2019). Following political socialization research, we can also expect that political saliency is particularly relevant for those adolescents with foreign-born parents who come from homes where politics is often discussed. All in all, there is mixed evidence regarding (young) immigrants' political involvement. Whereas scarcity of resources might impede them from political engagement, their sometimes precarious position in society can also politically mobilize them.

4. Migrant and Gender-Based Inequalities

To date, scholars have confirmed that both sex and immigration background can significantly impact both political behavior and political attitudes. Regarding a potential intersection of gender and immigration background on political interest among adults, there is evidence that a gender gap also exists within the migrant population, with migrant women feeling less capable of understanding politics, showing less interest (Montoya et al., 2000), participating less (Gatti et al., 2024; Kam et al., 2008), and having different partisan preferences (Lien, 1998), compared to both native women and immigrant men. Most studies apply the traditional explanations to the gender gap in politics among the general population to explain migrant women's relatively low interest and political engagement. However, other factors show a positive effect on

the political engagement of women compared to men following the migration experience. Jones-Correa (1998) discussed the status inconsistency before and after migration, a disparity experienced by men but not by women. Typically, migrant women, upon arriving in the new country, must seek work outside the home. Although these jobs are often low-status, they do not experience downward mobility because many of them were not working outside the home in their countries of origin (Jones-Correa, 1998). This role outside the home allows them to assume a new role within the household. Moreover, as they are often responsible for their children, migrant women tend to establish more connections with the wider population, such as in school settings. This leads to greater involvement in the host country and strengthens their civic participation (Jones-Correa, 1998; McIlwaine & Bermúdez, 2011). In fact, recent studies indicate that participation in communities and organizations has a greater positive effect on the political participation of migrant women than that of migrant men (Gatti et al., 2024).

Although most quantitative studies on inequalities in political engagement focus on adults, there are several reasons to focus on gender, on origin, and on the interaction between gender and origin among young people. First, literature that explores this question quantitatively seems to be particularly scarce for young adults, as Kleer et al. (2023) concluded in a recent systematic review. Our proposal is a first step in this endeavor by providing evidence on the potential interaction between gender and origin among young people in levels of political interest. Additionally, findings about adult migrants' political interest might not apply to young people. For instance, contrary to their parents, adolescents with foreign-born parents have socialized in the country, although they still probably perceive discrimination, which creates a differentiated situation. They might also have internalized different standards and norms as they have socialized in a different country than their parents. Furthermore, particularly for girls, new gender roles might have impacted their political interest. Finally, focusing on how young people in general and girls with immigration backgrounds in particular relate to politics is essential to understanding their future political engagement and to designing policies directed to compensate for potential inequalities.

Overall, we expect girls to show less political interest than boys, but: Can we expect girls from immigrant backgrounds to be more politically involved than boys with the same background or than girls born in the country of residence? Due to the scarcity of evidence, and to previous contradictory findings, our first hypotheses are rather exploratory and alternative. On the one hand, we expect that the combination of gender and immigration background will have a negative effect on political interest due to the accumulation (or rather intersection) of inequalities. After all, as said, research has repeatedly shown that immigration background and gender are two important sources of inequalities when it comes to political engagement in general and political interest in particular. Having "both instead of one" could imply a unique set of experiences and inequalities. If this is the case, we would find that girls with personal or family immigration stories are less interested in politics than boys with immigration backgrounds, and less interested than girls without an immigration background. In the form of hypotheses:

> H1a: The negative effect of being a girl on political interest is stronger among youth with an immigrant background than among youth without.

On the other hand, among the few studies focusing on youth, Alozie et al. (2003) studied 10-year-olds in the US, comparing boys and girls from native and migrant backgrounds, and found that it was precisely the girls who showed greater political engagement across all groups than the boys, although there were

variations among groups, with the Hispanic and Black cohorts showing the smallest gender gap but also the lowest levels of political engagement. In another study by Jugert et al. (2013), analyzing offline and online civic engagement among adolescents from different ethnic groups in Germany, neither gender nor ethnicity-based differences were found. If anything, young people from the Turkish minority group showed relatively stronger engagement. The unique effect of the combination of gender and immigration might result in higher levels of political awareness due to, for instance, the development of one's self-perception in the community or even to experiences of discrimination. In addition, following previous literature on adults, the political socialization of migrant-background girls may be influenced by shifts in their mother's roles—both in terms of increased status outside the home and a relaxation of traditional gender roles—making politics seem more approachable. Mechanisms may vary, but these previous findings and arguments mean we expect that:

> H1b: The negative effect of being a girl on political interest is weaker among youth with an immigrant background than among youth without.

First-generation migrant women often bear a heavy domestic burden that hinders their political participation (Gatti et al., 2024; McIlwaine & Bermúdez, 2011). However, other studies suggest that women might gain higher status within the household after the migration experience, as they begin to work outside the home (Jones-Correa, 1998) and change their views on gender roles (McIlwaine & Bermúdez, 2011). Coherently, as said, empirical evidence shows that there are differences in political engagement between first- and second-generation migrants among women, but not among men (Gatti et al., 2024). Using this rationale, a second expectation can be drawn from the generational change perspective. Specifically, we expect that daughters of immigrants will develop higher levels of political interest for various reasons. First, adolescents with foreign-born parents may overcome the constraints faced by their parents due to improved language proficiency, as well as the education they receive in the host country, which may help them adopt the norms of that country (Terriquez & Kwon, 2015). Secondly, adolescents with foreign-born parents are likely to perceive discrimination because of their immigration family histories, which can make them aware of the importance of politics early in life. Furthermore, they may be exposed to gender roles at home, and particularly see that their mothers, as noted, have to some extent moved from traditional roles due to their experiences in the host country (Jones-Correa, 1998; McIlwaine & Bermúdez, 2011). Reinforcing this maternal effect, previous studies highlight the strong transmission of political engagement and ideology between mothers and daughters (Acock & Bengtson, 1980; Cicognani et al., 2012; Gidengil & Stolle, 2009; Kestilä-Kekkonen et al., 2023; Weiss, 2023). Based on this, and comparing the four different groups "daughters of immigrants," "sons of immigrants," "girls born in a foreign country," and "girls with no immigration background," we expect that:

> H2: Daughters of immigrants will show higher levels of political interest compared to the other three groups: girls born in a foreign country, sons of immigrants, and girls without an immigration background.

5. Data and Methodology

The data used in this study come from the CILS4EU project (Kalter et al., 2017). The first wave was collected during the 2010/2011 school year, when most of the respondents were 14 years old. Subsequent waves were collected annually over the following two years. The question on political interest was included in

waves 2 and 3. Among the two waves available, we opted to analyze wave 2 because panel attrition is lower than in wave 3. Attrition was a significant issue by the third wave, as many of the original respondents were no longer attending the schools where the sample was recruited. Most variables used in this analysis were gathered during the 2011/2012 academic year, a period marked by economic crisis, prior to the 2014 refugee crisis. CILS4EU is, to our knowledge, the only dataset with an international focus and an overrepresentation of adolescents with a migrant background, which allows for the study of political interest in relation to immigration background and gender with a sufficiently large sample.

The data were collected in Germany, England, the Netherlands, and Sweden. Of the four, Sweden has the policies most favorable to migrants' integration according to the Migrant Integration Policy Index (Solano & Huddleston, 2020). Germany and England are next, scoring around the average in the same index, with 56 and 55 points out of 100, respectively. The Netherlands lagged somewhat behind with an index of 49. Examining specific dimensions, the four countries perform best in labor market mobility and the effectiveness of their anti-discrimination policies. Regarding political participation, the focus on ensuring free and effective engagement for migrants shows consistent average scores across the four countries analyzed. The countries under study also differ in overall levels of political interest among their populations. According to data from the Round 6 of the European Social Survey, political interest ranged from 2.39 out of 4 in England to 2.78 in Germany. A consistent gender gap is observed in all cases, with women showing lower levels of political interest compared to men (ESS, 2012). In the CILS4EU sample, a consistent gender gap in political interest is observed across all countries, with women consistently reporting lower levels than men. On a scale from 1 to 5, women's average political interest is 2.23, while men's is 2.45 ($p \leq 0.001$). This gender gap appeared in all countries, with the widest gap observed in Germany, where women scored 2.62 and men scored 3.00 ($p \leq 0.001$), and the smallest gap in Sweden, where women scored 2.04 and men scored 2.21 ($p \leq 0.001$). Additionally, individuals born in the country of residence exhibited the lowest levels of political interest, averaging 2.29, compared to 2.36 for immigrants and 2.45 for adolescents with foreign-born parents ($p \leq 0.001$). This trend was consistent in all countries except Germany, where natives showed greater political interest than immigrants and children of immigrants ($p = 0.391$). Sweden was the only country where immigrants scored the highest in political interest.

5.1. Operationalization

Although most research into gender or immigrant-based political inequalities focuses on political participation, the main outcome of this study is political interest. Political interest can be understood as a prerequisite for participation. As previous research suggests, to overcome the costs of political participation both adults and young people need to be interested in politics, even if—once interested—their preferred mode of participation differs (García-Albacete, 2014). On the other hand, interest alone may not be sufficient as political participation also requires other resources such as time, money, and/or recruitment networks. Additionally, young people may not have access to some forms of political participation yet (e.g., voting) and therefore may not be as exposed as adults to mobilizing recruitment networks.

The dependent variable, political interest, is measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*very little or not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). Although this measurement is strictly speaking ordinal, we applied linear regressions, as done by other researchers in the field. In comparison, probit models are more difficult to interpret, so we treat political interest as a pseudo-metric (see Neundorf et al., 2013). Furthermore, Hellevik (2009) showed

that the results of linear and logistic regression with a binary dependent variable (in this case interested vs. uninterested) showed nearly identical results.

The two main independent variables are gender and immigration background. Gender was coded as a binary variable, where 1 indicates girls and 0 boys. Immigration status was coded in two ways. First, we create a variable that differentiates between children with immigrant background (either migrants or with migrant parents) and all others. The second variable differentiates between natives, first-generation migrants (respondents not born in the survey country), and second-generation migrants (respondents born in the country of residence with at least one parent not born in the survey country). In addition to gender and migration background, control variables are included in the models to test the robustness of the findings. First, we control for country of origin, grouped into substantively meaningful regions: Europe and North America, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Africa and the Middle East. The reference category for this variable is having been born in the country of the survey. Secondly, having the country's nationality is key for political integration. Nationality was asked for in the first wave and we applied it to the second wave. The categories are "only survey country nationality," "survey country and other nationality," and "only other nationality." In Sweden, no respondents reported dual nationality, likely due to Sweden's prohibition of dual citizenship prior to 2001, when the respondents were born.

Age was calculated based on the year of birth. In general, research shows that political interest increases with age, although the growth is steeper during adolescence and young adulthood than during adulthood (Neundorf et al., 2016; Prior, 2010). The question of whether young adults have developed sufficient curiosity and maturity to participate in politics has recently been raised in the debate on the effects of voting at 16 (i.e., Rossteutscher et al., 2022).

Furthermore, parental political engagement is included as a well-known predictor of early development of political interest in children (Jennings et al., 2009). Respondents reported how often their parents discuss political and social issues with them, on a scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*every day*). Regarding cultural capital, we use the number of books respondents reported having at home, on a scale from 1 (*0–25 books*) to 5 (*more than 500 books*) as proposed by Sieben and Lechner (2019). The variable parental education resulted in a substantial loss of data, with nearly half of the sample missing (7,161 out of 15,790). Moreover, the reliability of this variable was questionable, as 17% of respondents who answered this question changed their response from one year to the next, likely due to it being reported by students rather than parents. Additionally, it introduced collinearity issues in the model.

The next two control variables refer to social capital, as social connections facilitate political involvement in the host country for immigrants (de Rooij, 2012; Dollmann, 2021; Gatti et al., 2024; Morales & Giugni, 2011). Formal social capital is measured through associational and religious participation, and operationalized by two questions: "How often do you spend time in a sports, music, drama, or other club?" and "How often do you visit a religious meeting place?" Both were measured on a five-point scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*every day*). Informal social capital is measured through friendship patterns and is assessed using a dichotomous variable where 1 represents having "half or more friends from another group" and 0 represents having "half or more friends from the same group."

5.2. Method

To answer our research questions, we utilize multivariate linear regression models with interaction terms. As recommended by Block et al. (2023), our strategy consists in running the models with interaction terms and then relying on postestimation techniques to be able to say something about intersectionality. For each model, we first calculate five quantities of interest: the effect of gender among young people without an immigration background; the effect of gender among young people with an immigration background; the effect of immigration background for boys; the effect of immigration background for girls; and, finally, the interaction effect between gender and immigration background. The last quantity, the interactive effect, we can interpret as preliminary evidence compatible with an intersectional effect. Additionally, and for illustrative purposes, we provide predictions about the levels of political interest of the groups we are interested in.

6. Results

Our expectations are tentative, as we found arguments for both relatively higher and relatively lower levels of political interest among girls with an immigrant background in comparison to other groups. Model 1 in Table 1 shows the results of a linear regression equation with the outcome "political interest and gender" and "immigrants vs. natives" as main independent variables. It shows that while being a girl is negatively associated with political interest, having an immigration background implies higher levels of political interest.

To address the potential intersectionality between gender and migration background, we follow mainstream advice on how to explore intersectionality quantitatively (Block et al., 2023). We first incorporate in the previous equation the multiplicative term "gender and immigrant" (Model 2 in Table 1). The interaction is positive and statistically significant (see Model 2 in Table 1), but interpreting the positive coefficient correctly requires postestimation calculations (Block et al., 2023, p. 14). As discussed above, to test intersectional claims, we need to calculate five predictions (see Figure 1): the effect of gender among young people without an immigration background; the effect of gender among young people with an immigration background; the effect of immigration background for boys; the effect of immigration background for girls; and, finally, the interaction effect between gender and immigration background. In Figure 1, each of the effects is shown with its two-tailed 95% confidence interval that helps us conclude whether the effects are significantly different from zero if they do not cross the dashed vertical line. The results show that being a girl has a negative effect on levels of political interest for both natives and immigrants, but that the effect is larger among natives (Figure 1). An immigration background, for its part, is accompanied by higher levels of political interest for both boys and girls, and the positive effect is larger for girls (see Figure 1). Finally, the interaction is positive (0.12), which indicates that "immigration background and gender," beyond their individual effects, have a differentiated effect when encountered together. In this case, they interact positively to increase political interest. We can conclude that the evidence is compatible with intersectionality, but in a positive way.

Table 1. Political interest for girls and boys with and without an immigrant background.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Girl	−0.228*** (0.022)	−0.275*** (0.028)	−0.237*** (0.025)
Immigration background (ref = Non-immigration background)	0.139*** (0.023)	0.076** (0.033)	0.031 (0.045)
Europe and North America (ref = Survey country)			−0.011 (0.038)
Asia (ref = Survey country)			0.024 (0.048)
Latin America and the Caribbean (ref = Survey country)			−0.011 (0.056)
Africa and Middle East (ref = Survey country)			0.171*** (0.048)
Survey country and other nationality (ref = Only survey country nationality)			0.028 (0.043)
Only other nationality (ref = Only survey country nationality)			−0.005 (0.039)
Age			0.182*** (0.017)
Books at home			0.083*** (0.009)
Parents' political talk			0.376*** (0.008)
Associationism			0.045*** (0.007)
Religious participation			0.057*** (0.010)
Mixed friendship			0.134*** (0.030)
Girl*Immigration background		0.122*** (0.046)	0.158*** (0.041)
Constant	2.415*** (0.018)	2.438*** (0.020)	−2.035*** (0.264)
Observations	10,726	10,726	10,726
R^2	0.013	0.014	0.224
Adjusted R^2	0.013	0.013	0.222
Residual std. error	1.149 (df = 10723)	1.149 (df = 10722)	1.020 (df = 10710)
F statistic	71.225*** (df = 2; 10723)	49.890*** (df = 3; 10722)	205.576*** (df = 15; 10710)

Notes: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. Source: Adapted from Kalter et al. (2017).

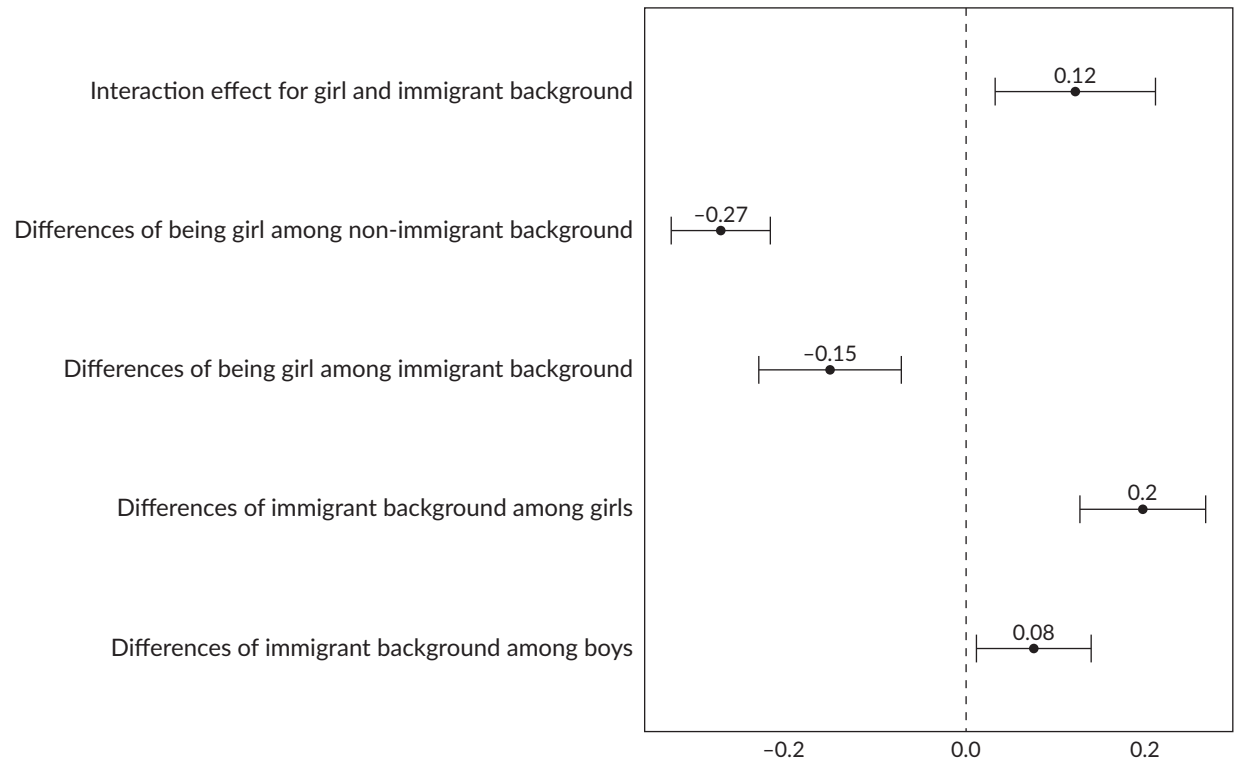

Figure 1. The conditional differences of gender and migration background on political interest. Note: Estimates come from Model 2 in Table 1.

The intersectional effect does not imply that girls with personal or family immigration background are more interested in politics than other groups. To further illustrate the results, we use a second postestimation strategy. We present predictions of political interest levels for each group. Figure 2 shows the predicted marginal effects of being an immigrant for girls and boys on political interest (Brambor et al., 2006). The figure illustrates the negative effect of being a girl on political interest. The predicted level of political interest is always higher for boys (black markers) than for girls (grey markers). The positive immigration effect is also visible in that levels of political interest are higher for boys with an immigrant background compared to boys without an immigrant background and for girls with an immigrant background in comparison to girls without an immigrant background. The interaction between being a girl and having a personal or family immigration history is visible in the smallest gender gap among adolescents with an immigrant background. The gender gap among immigrants even disappears when control variables are included in the estimation (Figure A3 in the Supplementary File).

To further corroborate the results, Model 3 in Table 1 provides the results of replicating the interaction equation adding the control variables presented above. The interaction term remains positive and significant when the controls are included; furthermore, the computation of the interactive terms confirms the positive significant effect of being a girl and having a migrant background (see Figure A2 in the Supplementary File). Other coefficients remain significant and in the same direction, with the only exception being the effect of being an immigrant among men, which loses statistical significance (see Figure A2 in the Supplementary File). Control variables mostly show the expected relationship with political interest. Regarding the country of origin, only those from Africa and the Middle East show a significant coefficient, indicating that having origins in these regions, compared to the survey country, increases levels of political interest. In connection

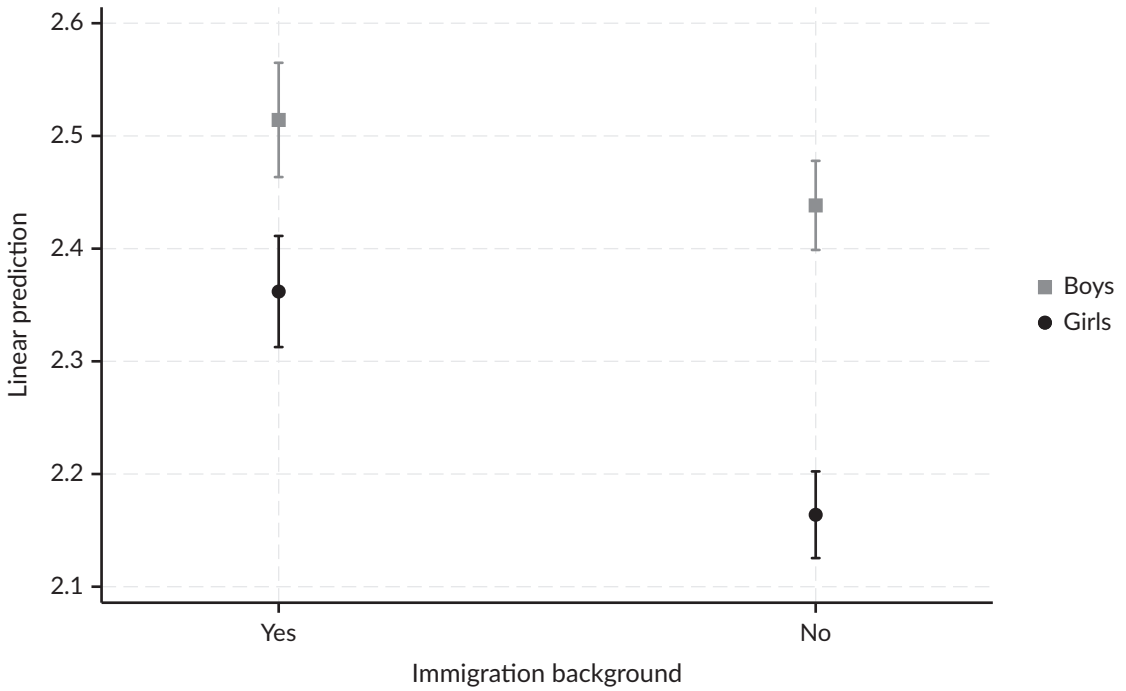

Figure 2. Predicted political interest of boys and girls with and without immigration background. Note: Estimates come from Model 2 in Table 1.

with this, nationality was added, assuming it captures inclusion in the host country. However, holding nationality or not has no significant effect on political interest. Age shows a positive relationship with interest. Although the age range in the sample is relatively narrow (between 13 and 20 years), the result aligns well with the literature, as interest grows exponentially during these formative years (Neundorf et al., 2013; Quintelier, 2015). Additionally, the number of books at home, used as a proxy for socioeconomic status, has a positive effect on levels of political interest. Likewise, the frequency of political discussions at home is positively correlated with political interest. The same applies to participation in associations and religious activities. In this regard, establishing community networks and having friendships across different backgrounds also raises declared levels of political interest.

Do the results hold across countries? Mainly they do. Replicating the models and calculations for each country shows that the positive interactive term "women and immigrant background" is visible in all four countries (see Tables A1 and A2 in the Supplementary File). The interaction loses significance, however, in England and Germany, and to some extent in Sweden (see Table A1 and Figure A5 in the Supplementary File). Nevertheless, the replication with control variables shows the robustness of the intersectional finding for the Netherlands, Sweden, and Germany (see Table A2 and Figure A6 in the Supplementary File). England remains the only country where there is no evidence compatible with a positive intersectional effect. An additional main variation when replicating the analyses across countries refers to the coefficient of having immigration background among boys, as the positive effect observed is again found for England and the Netherlands, but it turns negative and significant in Germany and loses significance in Sweden (see Tables A1–A2 and A4–A5 in the Supplementary File). Furthermore, the model with control variables shows that the significant positive effect is only clearly visible in the Netherlands, suggesting that control variables can take care of the variance. Overall, we find that the intersectional dynamic composed of gender and

immigration is robust across countries even if it varies from the statistically non-significant coefficient in England (0.06) to the largest coefficient in Germany (0.28; see Figure A6 in the Supplementary File).

To address our second expectation, which states that that girls born in the country of residence but with migrant parents have higher levels of political interest than girls born in other countries, we replicate the empirical strategy used above modifying the migrant variable to capture whether a respondent was born in the country of residence, whether they were born in another country, or whether their parents were born in another country. As before, the models show a significative positive interaction, in this case between both being a child of immigrants and a girl and between being an immigrant and a girl (see Model 2 in Table 2). We follow the same strategy used above to decompose the interaction. The results show again a significant intersectional effect for girls but, contrary to our expectations, the effect is the same for both adolescents with foreign-born parents and for migrants (see Figure 3). Furthermore, the calculation of the coefficient of being a daughter of immigrants vs. an immigrant girl is statistically non-significant (see Figure 3). That is to say, the results do not support our expectation because the intersectional positive effect is visible for both groups. As before, the main results show robustness when control variables are added (see Model 3 in Table 2).

Following our second strategy to illustrate the results, Figure 4 presents the marginal effects of the interaction, that is, the predicted levels of political interest for each group. Migrant girls are significantly more interested in politics than girls born in the country of residence. While it is true that daughters of immigrants show the highest levels of interest within the group of women, the difference is only significant when compared to girls born in the country of residence, but not when compared to migrant girls. In addition, we expected second-generation migrant girls to show higher political interest than second-generation migrant boys (H2) which again is not compatible with our findings. On the contrary, sons of immigrants show the highest level of political interest in the sample, significantly higher than daughters of immigrants and higher than boys born in the country of residence, although the difference is reduced when other antecedents of political interest are included.

Replicating the equations across countries (see Tables A3 and A6 in the Supplementary File) confirms that there are only small differences between the interaction of being a girl with being a child of immigrants or being a migrant. The interaction is positive in all four countries, with or without controls, but not always significant (see Figures A5 and A6 in the Supplementary File). A note of caution is necessary here regarding potential issues of statistical power due to the more limited number of foreign-born youths in the sample, particularly when running country-specific models (see Table A5 in the Supplementary File for descriptive information on the sample).

Table 2. Political interest of first- and second-generation immigrants and of girls and boys.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Girl	−0.228***	−0.275***	−0.237***
	(0.022)	(0.028)	(0.025)
Immigration background (ref = Non-immigration background)	0.088**	0.011	−0.038
	(0.039)	(0.055)	(0.062)
Adolescents with foreign-born parents (ref = Non-immigration background)	0.156***	0.098***	0.048
	(0.025)	(0.036)	(0.047)
Europe and North America (ref = Survey country)			−0.013
			(0.038)
Asia (ref = Survey country)			0.027
			(0.048)
Latin America and the Caribbean (ref = Survey country)			−0.009
			(0.056)
Africa and Middle East (ref = Survey country)			0.167***
			(0.048)
Survey country and other nationality (ref = Only survey country nationality)			0.032
			(0.043)
Only other nationality (ref = Only survey country nationality)			0.020
			(0.041)
Age			0.184***
			(0.017)
Books at home			0.083***
			(0.009)
Parents' political talk			0.376***
			(0.008)
Associationism			0.045***
			(0.007)
Religious participation			0.056***
			(0.010)
Mixed friendship			0.134***
			(0.030)
Girl*Immigration background		0.149*	0.163**
		(0.077)	(0.069)
Girl*Adolescents with foreign-born parents		0.113**	0.156***
		(0.050)	(0.045)
Constant	2.415***	2.438***	−2.060***
	(0.018)	(0.020)	(0.264)
Observations	10,726	10,726	10,726
R^2	0.013	0.014	0.224
Adjusted R^2	0.013	0.014	0.223
Residual std. error	1.149	1.149	1.020
	(df = 10722)	(df = 10720)	(df = 10708)
F statistic	48.381***	30.504***	181.694***
	(df = 3; 10722)	(df = 5; 10720)	(df = 17; 10708)

Notes: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. Source: Adapted from Kalter et al. (2017).

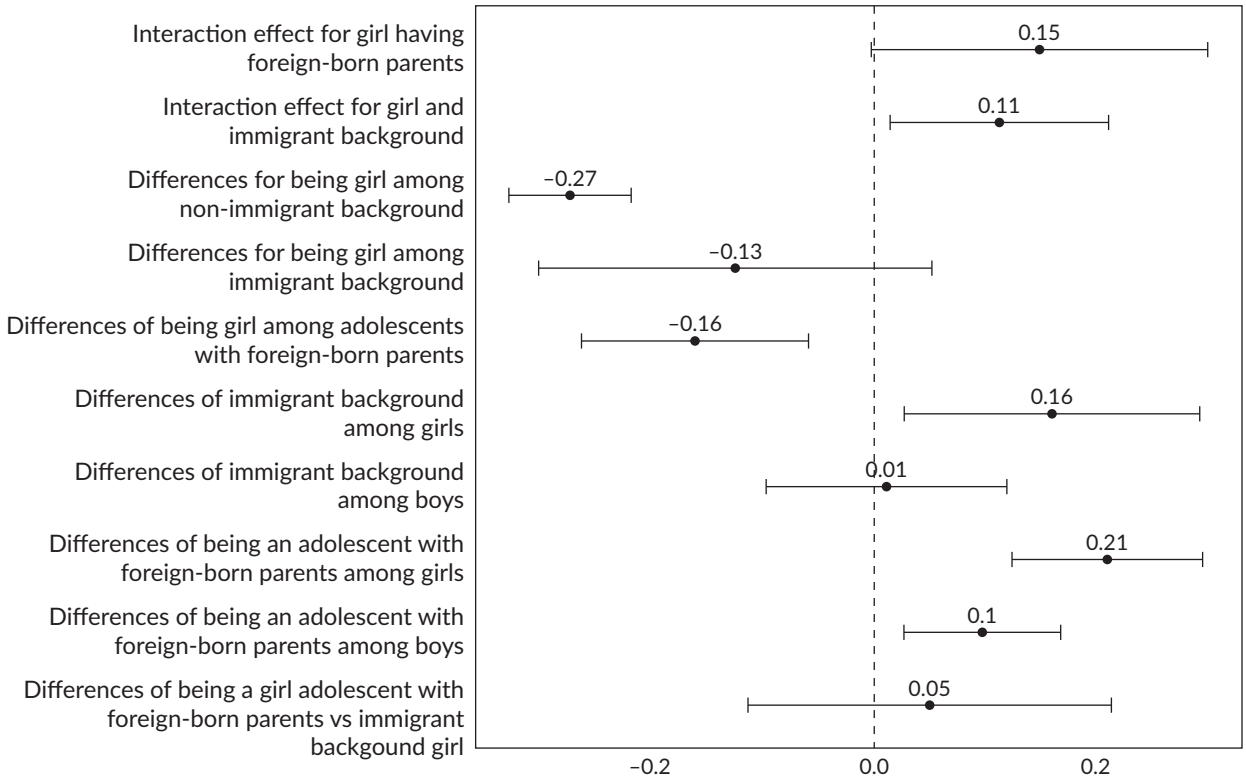

Figure 3. The conditional differences of gender and immigration background on political interest. Note: Estimates come from Model 2 in Table 2.

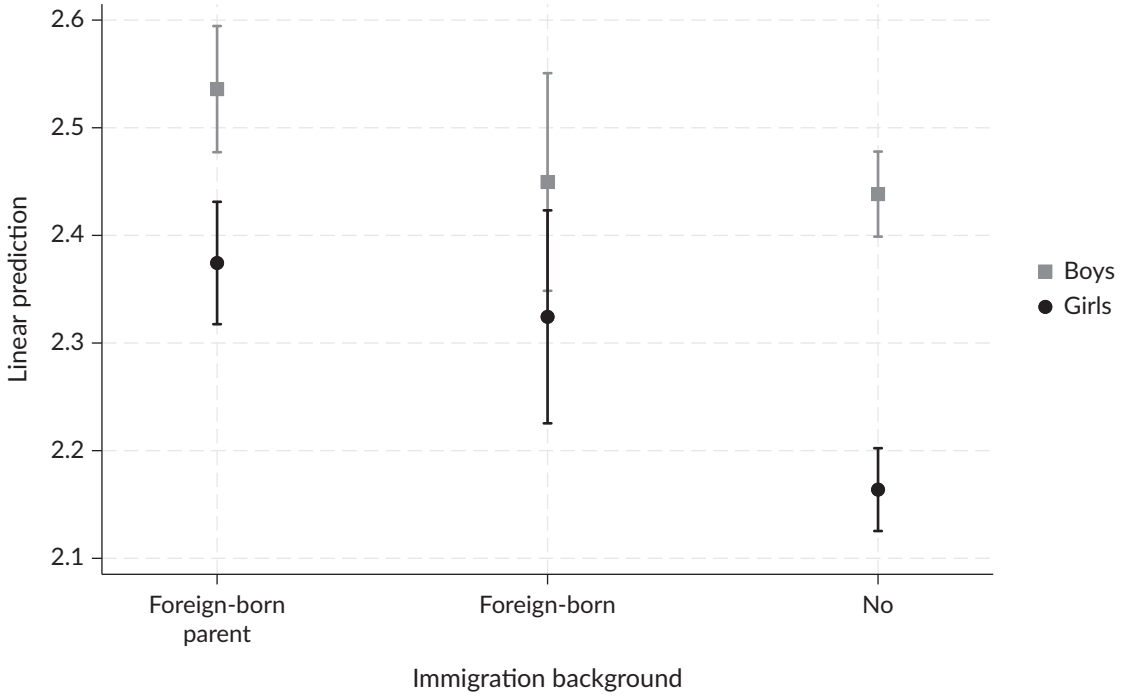

Figure 4. Predicted political interest of boys and girls with and without immigration background. Note: Estimates come from Model 2 in Table 2.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

Despite the relevance of developing political interest early in life, and the known constraints migrants and women encounter to fully integrate politically, empirical evidence is relatively scarce regarding the potential interaction between gender and immigration background on political interest. There are several reasons why this is the case. First, intersectionality implies complex and multiple processes and, to be studied, requires, especially, qualitative methods that can explore the dynamics between many elements. Secondly, the diversity of countries of origin and of structures of political opportunity across reception countries is huge, and capturing all potential combinations would require equally vast datasets. Due to the complexity, in this article we have set a modest goal: to provide some quantitative evidence on whether gender and immigration background interact, and if they do, in which direction. Our findings show a positive intersectional dynamic, that is, being both women and having an immigration background implies a unique positive addition to levels of political interest. Although intersectional approaches were developed to address inequalities and discrimination patterns, an intersectional perspective also expects that a group may be empowered in one specific context or outcome (Hughes & Dubrow, 2018). In this case, the additional constraints encountered when being both a girl and an immigrant can result, for instance, in higher levels of awareness on how important politics is, and thus motivation to understand and get involved in politics.

The interaction is visible across all countries except in England, and robust when adding known sources of inequality as control variables. We have, however, failed to explain it. Our expectation was that second-generation girls would have learned from a combination of new household dynamics at their home and the country of residence's gender norms to show a significantly higher level of political interest than other groups. However, the positive intersection of gender and migration background is found for both migrants and adolescents with foreign-born parents.

This finding will have to be further addressed for specific origins and countries. However, if confirmed, it has several implications. Firstly, the group "left behind" in their levels of political interest, according to our findings, are native women. Secondly, the immigration background comes with a boost in political interest for boys; however, for boys, known antecedents of political interest were able to explain the variance in the models presented above. When it comes to girls with an immigrant background, the potential intersectional effect identified here provides grounds to expect political engagement as adults, although with the important qualification that political participation requires not only interest, but also resources. We should also stress that the gender gap persists across natives and immigrants, although its magnitude varies and it is most pronounced among natives, as native women are the least interested in politics. Thus, our findings are compatible with previous studies highlighting inequalities in political engagement among women with an immigration history.

This study is a first step and has at least three important limitations that are also future avenues for research. First, it sticks to a potentially narrow definition of politics. As previous work has shown, when prompted to think about politics in a survey, most respondents immediately think about traditional politics, such as parties and the electoral process. Party-related politics may however not include topics in which some groups are interested politically. This has been shown to be the case for women (Ferrín & García-Albacete, 2023). In related research on political knowledge, studies have shown that the gender gap, the Latino gap, or the Black gap in knowledge is reduced when a broader, more inclusive set of items is used (Abrajano, 2015; Cohen & Luttig, 2020; Ferrín et al., 2018). Similarly, a broader set of indicators on political interest reduces the standard

gender gap observed (Ferrín, Fraile, García-Albacete, & Gómez, 2019). Adding additional indicators on political issues to capture youth's interest would allow a better understanding of the development of the gender gap.

Secondly, our research is limited in its contextualization. Intersectional approaches place emphasis on structural sources of disadvantage, and thus the need to attend to the histories and context of the interconnected categories studied (Cho et al., 2013). In that sense, to start thinking about dealing with such sources, a careful study of national contexts, where subordinate groups are stratified, sources of economic exploitation, and historical events are important. Extensive research is needed in this direction that goes beyond the scope of this article. Future work should aim to provide a comprehensive contextual and historical examination of the inequalities identified here, most likely starting with a qualitative perspective.

Third, and most importantly, immigration status is a crude simplification of several potential sources of inequality. Although some have been indirectly controlled for, such as socioeconomic status, most have not been accounted for here. Emigration stories, institutional constraints, differences in immigration statuses according to the host society, consequences on family and social networks composition, historical legacies of discrimination, and many more, vary significantly according to the country of origin and the country of reception. Both quantitative and qualitative work that focuses on specific population groups might start by decomposing the development of political integration and identify potential constraints encountered by particular groups.

Funding

This work was done under the project Gender Empowerment Through Politics in Classrooms which received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement no. 101095000.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

We used the data from the CILS4EU project (https://www.cils4.eu). We used a combined data set of all three waves (version 3.3.0). The data has restricted access and is available at the GESIS repository under the identifier ZA5656: https://doi.org/10.4232/cils4eu.5656.3.3.0. Replication materials with data preparation and data analyses scripts are available at the Harvard Dataverse (https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/PQ3QH0).

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE
ISSN: 2183-2463

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