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In search of an appropriate channel for voicing political concerns: political participation among radicalised youth in Europe

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to identify values related to political and civic participation methods among the two groups of radicalised youngsters: native youth who support movements labelled as far-right (*N*= 122) and migrant-origin self-identified Muslim youth with strong organisational ties with religious communities (*N*=109) in Germany, Belgium, France, and the Netherlands. The study posits that these these radically aligned youngsters position themselves against politically moderate European citizens, who are less intuitive when making judgements on political affairs comparing to them. Diverging from the unifying European values and hypersensitivities, these youngsters' political reactions are often radical and loud in their safe-to-speak, segregated movements. By using the narrations of the range of mainstream modes of political participation, the current qualitative research asks what appears valuable for the two groups of young people to express their political discontent. Findings revealed that both groups highlighted similar values regarding voting. Self-identified Muslim youth stressed the importance of volunteering and street protests (despite not having participated in one). Many native youths, on the other hand, stressed the function of unlawful behaviour in street protests to pursue political objectives. The findings such as these are discussed considering the group differences.

KEYWORDS

Political participation; radicalisation; social movements; marginalized youth; Muslim youth; right-wing politics

Introduction

Political participation is one of the prevailing ways one can use to raise their voice and involve in collective effort to reshape dominant political discourse. The current study aims to identify and explore the value(s) of expressing political discontent using the mainstream modes of political and civic participation among two groups of youngsters: native youth who support movements labelled as far-right and migrant origin self-identified Muslim youth with strong organisational ties with religious communities in four European countries (Germany, Belgium, France and the Netherlands). To put it succinctly, the study focuses on values expressed in the narrations of the prevailing methods of political and civic participation that the radicalised and collectively organised subpopulations of youth engage in the four countries.

Drawing on data from a large-scale transnational study, the current article is concerned with subpopulations of youth, who are active in their detested organisations. The principal investigator of the larger research has been studying changing youth cultures in the given four countries for two decades. Familiarity of the political and historical contexts as well as access to research network in the four countries allowed for this large-scale qualitative study to take place. For having gathered

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and presented the viewpoints of marginalised and disadvantaged youth over the years in those country contexts, the study identified those two groups of youth, who are in the similar process of radicalisation for experiencing alienation and humiliation due to their ethnic, religious, or political alignments. The study posited that, on one hand, the appeal of some native youth to right-wing nativism and Islamophobia looks like a reaction against an order that, they think, alienates the local and marginalizes the nation at the expense of the global (Kaya 2021; Kaya and Benevento 2022). On the other hand, many self-identified Muslim young people find it important to represent themselves by utilising the Islamist ideology in Europe and to strengthen their organisational ties within their communities (Ayhan, Metin, and Benevento 2023). As a result, both groups, who already have had little to no opportunity to contact one another, continue drifting apart from each other and mainstream society, and develop even stronger and more novel narratives to convey their ethnic, cultural, economic, and political grievances in segregated movements. While past research questioned whether marginalisation and deprivation might result in a situation where young people are lacking social and economic resources, hindering their full participation in a society (Seim, 2014), the current research join Robert Young's (2004: 5) claim: it is not that young people do not know how to speak (politics), 'but rather that the dominant would not listen'.

Rather than reproducing the contents of mainstream discourse in Europe, these radically aligned youngsters position themselves against politically moderate European citizens, who are less intuitive when making judgements on political affairs comparing to them. Diverging from the unifying European values and hypersensitivities, these youngsters' political reactions are often radical and loud in their safe-to-speak, segregated movements. In the instances where they use non-violent and prevalent modes of political and civic participation to either show their reaction to the existing grievances they have or as a result of the injustices they have experienced, the social/political order acts as if it is faced with *serious trouble*. Conceptualising radicalisation as a side-effect of a democratic deficit (Kaya 2020), the current research considers narrations of the range of modes of political participation as documentations detailing what young people, who often do not get tolerated in the mainstream political discourse, value to express their political discontent outside of their sheltered castles in the air.

Contextualising radicalisation and political participation and situating the current study in social movement studies

As much as radical persons would like to believe that they develop their own progressive thoughts independently, radicalisation involves meaningful engagement with ideologies and movements formed by individuals or groups organized to object to the prevailing political/social order. Not every political participation is radical but all radicalisations involve participation in a discourse or movement, even without the physical encounter and interaction with organized members of a group. Even though some have claimed that there exists paths of lone-actor radicalisation (e.g. Malthaner and Lindekilde, 2017), this article posits that, as there could be no lone-actor participation, there could also be no radicalisation not linked to other individuals, groups, and movements. For that matter, radicalisation and participation are similar concepts as both encompass intergroup processes. Individuals do not become radicalized on their own; rather, they do so in the context of a group and through the socially manufactured reality of that group.

This article makes a conceptual distinction between political participation and civic participation (Amnå 2012, Ataman et al., 2017; Bee and Kaya, 2017). According to Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995), political participation is defined as having the intention or effect of influencing local, national, or international governance, either directly by influencing how public policy is implemented or indirectly by influencing how those who make the policy are chosen. Contrarily, the term civic participation is used to describe a variety of self-directed activities, such as aiding others, attaining a public benefit, or resolving a local issue. This includes effort done either alone or in collaboration with others to bring about change (Zukin 2006).

Young people engage in civic and political activities. Their engagement implies a cognitive process in which they show awareness towards civic and political matters (Bee and Kaya, 2017). Young people use civic and political participation as strategies to contribute to society (Lister 2007). Political participation encompasses both traditional forms, such as voting, campaigning, and running for office, and non-traditional forms, which take place outside of the electoral process (such as signing petitions, taking part in political protests, and writing letters to elected officials). The idea that one does not have to actively participate in political action to be engaged in society is made clear by the unique ways that contemporary perspectives on civic engagement question and change traditional forms of political participation (Amnå 2012). This shift in perception of civic engagement raises awareness of civic participation, which encompasses a range of actions like cooperating to address a local issue, being a part of a community organisation, attending meetings about issues of personal and public concern, or boycotting or shopping selectively for certain products (Barnes and Kaase 1979; Brady 1999). All these activities entail cultivating a concern for the greater good and a commitment to other people's rights and needs. Radicalisation of political and civic actions and thoughts could also be attributed to the satisfaction of people who have demands from the state.

The social movement literature has focused on factors that can be used to explain mobilising dynamics of disgruntled, disenfranchised, thus radicalized groups. Among those are 1) collective or individual grievances involving a loss of opportunity or the familiar past (Bergstrand 2014; Simmons 2014), 2) the state of the current political system (Almeida, 2003; Guzman-Concha 2015; van Dyke and Soule, 2002) –based on authorities' response to citizen's demands, and 3) access to resources which also involves interpretations of repertoires of contention (Skocpol 2007; Tilly 2008) - community infrastructures, religious institutions, cultures of solidarity, etc. Not simply people's identities or labels associated with them but the interplay between those factors heavily influence political behaviours and involvement in collective action. Many self-identified Muslim youth in Europe have been reporting feelings of unfairness brought on by misconducts that are blamed on the government or other state actors (Kaya 2015, 2021; Yazdiha 2019). Many native white youth in Europe, on the other hand, have been manifesting a sense of loss of nation, adequate government and of a voice (Baker 2018) as a reaction against the flow of new migrants. Having access to varying sources of social, cultural, and financial capitals, both groups, differ in terms of the resources available to them. By limiting the study to four countries, the study also somewhat accounted for the political system across the places where the two subpopulations of young people (aged 18–30) in Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, and France: 1) 122 native European youths who support movements labelled as far-right; and 2) 109 migrant origin self-identified Muslim youth with strong organisational ties with religious communities.

Method

Between-group studies involving ethnic minorities often involve majority group members as the comparison group (Phinney and Landin, 1998) and as a result, they have come under heavy fire for viewing the majority group as the standard (Graham, 1992). This study, however, demonstrates awareness of this issue and pays greater attention to group differences, with the recognition that differences do not reflect deviance from the majority. Taking a comparative perspective, the research design aims to identify meaningful patterns of implicitly or explicitly expressed values in the narrations of participatory actions.

Meaningful patterns arise as a result of how our participants were positioned in relation to some of the factors preventing or promoting their political and civic participation. It is crucial to emphasize that a comprehensive analysis of the impact of all these elements is outside the purview of this article because it would require a whole different research methodology. With the current method, our participants were able to discuss the elements that, in their eyes, either constrained or reinforced their political actions.

Interviews and procedure

The study included semi-structured interviews performed by local researchers in each country. The local researchers conducted the interviews in the participants' native language and then translated the transcripts into English. Instead of audio recording the interviews, the researchers made notes during the conversations. We wanted to ensure that the research participants' identity is fully anonymous and also to allow research participants to open up freely and not be cautious about expressing radical beliefs and experiences they would otherwise hide in the research setting. The research participants were offered access to the transcriptions and make changes of their narrative if they do not agree with the notes. Many research participants took this offer but modifications they suggested were rather minor and factual. Not recording the interviews not only supported our efforts to access to individuals, who are often skeptical and resistant to establish contact with researchers, but also created a reflexive alliance between the researchers and the research participants. Note taking still allowed to retain the overall tone and message and depth of what was said, even if it cannot be reproduced literally.

The interview lasted almost an hour and a half. The interview guide included questions that the interviewer can use to stimulate the interview and explore pertinent information about the participants' thoughts and feelings on their neighbourhoods, as well as their mobility experiences and perspectives on diversity, politics, and globalisation. The field researcher took interview notes in a narrative form and, a few times, noted follow-up questions individually. The questions relevant to the current article are as follows:

(1) *How are you being informed about what is going on in your country and in the world? Are you using Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook or Instagram? Some of these platforms or other sites such as forums, chat rooms, YouTube channels allow people to form networks and even friendships based on their interests. Do you feel connected to an online community based on your worldview?*
(2) *There could be many ways of participating in politics and influencing the policy-making processes. Do you think voting is an important way of influencing politics in this country? Have you ever voted? If yes, or no, why?*
(3) *Have you ever joined an organisation that deals with social, economic, political issues? If yes, what kind of group, or organisation it was? What motivated you to join that?*
(4) *What do you think about street demonstrations? Have you ever participated in a street demonstration? Why? If yes, have you done anything unconventional (e.g. painting graffiti on government buildings to express a political message or trying to stop the building of roads by chaining yourself to trees etc. during the demonstrations)? Would you consider doing it?*

Initially, the interviews were planned to be conducted in person. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has created a challenging yet advantageous atmosphere in which the research participant could choose to meet in person or online. The collecting of data has taken over two years in two consecutive periods of data collection (March 2020-January 2022). The participation in the research was voluntary and not incentivised. The participant did not have to answer all the questions.

Research participant profile

In order to identify and recruit research participants, the field researchers strategically proceeded in several distinct but complementary ways. Researchers focused their efforts on organisations or community connections that are the most specific to the migrant origin Muslim and the conservative native populations and the identities within those populations. First, the researchers made an overview of Muslim homeland organisations (e.g. *Milli Görüş – National Outlook, Diyanet*, etc.) and native organisations that are labeled as radical or right-wing (e.g. Alternative for Germany in

Germany, Rassemblement National in France, New Flemish Alliance in Belgium, Party for Freedom in the Netherlands, etc.) in specific regions or places (e.g. Bible Belt in the Netherlands, Kreuzberg in Germany). To recruit youngsters from these organisations and places, the researcher either contacted someone who was considered a community representative, such as an imam or a party representative, or directly went to the events organized by the group to meet people. Second, the field researchers also studied social media profiles to identify the most politicized or the most religiously invested youngsters from the organisations and contacted them via the social media accounts (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn) they set specifically for the research. Finally, the researchers also used the snowball sampling technique.

The field effort resulted in 307 interviews across Belgium, France, Germany, and the Netherlands. Among the 153 self-identified Muslim youth, 109 reported having had an affiliation with a community-based establishment or political party for its religious agenda. All the participants were EU citizens. Among the 154 native youth, 122 highlighted a connection with a right-wing political organisation, mainly in the form of a political party. The current analysis employs the interview transcripts from those 231 participants, who have had religiously or politically driven organisational ties.

Analysis

A form of narrative analysis method, Values Analysis (Daiute 2013; Daiute, Ataman, and Kovács-Cerović 2015; Todorova, Ataman et al. 2017) is selected to analyse the interview transcripts. Values analysis is grounded on the idea that values guide individuals' narratives. Values can be defined as principles people live by (Daiute 2013). People interpret, adopt, modify existing values of their cultural contexts in order to be part of or differentiate themselves from others. When given a chance to narrate, people position themselves in line with the ideals they have in mind and enact their values. For instance, one may believe the importance of gender equality and emphasize the importance of giving incentives to women to open businesses when speaking about issues immigrants face in a given context. In response to the same prompt, another person might emphasize the importance of hiring country citizens by linking the high rates of immigrants to the unemployment problem.

When responding to a narrative prompt or question, an individual interacts with their values, ideals and the principles they live by and expresses themselves accordingly. Because values are 'culturally-specific goals, ways of knowing, experiencing, and acting in response to environmental, cultural, economic, political, and social circumstances' (Daiute, Stern, and Lelutiu-Weinberger 2003, 85) they provide an important clue to show how an individual's diverse beliefs and goals may be interacting with, and situated within, a larger context. Such internal interaction is very much influenced by the listener's position, the kind of questions or prompts that initiated a narrative response, and the context where the listening is happening (Bakhtin, 1986; Daiute, 2014). Values analysis is appropriate for examining how individuals reflect their experiences and perspectives around the open-ended questions we intentionally asked in the interviews. The questions allowed interlocutors to open and spontaneously illustrate the kinds of values they have rather than simply announcing their positions. The open-ended nature of the questions also allowed interlocutors to sometimes enact conflicting beliefs they have and negotiate their dilemmatic mix of values during the conversations.

In addition to the style of the questions we asked in the interviews, the novelty of the way we collected data also influenced the reason why the values analysis is relevant for our research. As stated in the sub-section above, our research heavily relies on our local researchers' re-narrations of what they have heard, rather than the participants' expressions verbatim. In other words, what we analysed is essentially the results of our researchers' sense makings, not the style of telling nor the word choices. There exist other narrative analysis methods that heavily focuses on patterns of linguistic details (e.g. plot analysis, significance analysis, etc.) Even though we tried to standardise

the transcription process by providing guidance to the researchers, there exists the assumption that the researchers paid attention to different details and further decoded what they have heard when transcribing the interviews. In fact, the interviewers' position as researchers might have influenced the kinds of values we read in the interview transcripts. While such detail might seem like a limitation, it allowed us to know and control the positions of the narratives. In a typical qualitative study, it is hard, almost impossible to interpret participants' motivations to narrate their experiences and their positions in a research setting. By limiting the number of positions to four and guiding those four researchers to be sensitive to unique voices, we believe we created a relatively controlled environment to hear variety of values buried within each narrative.

The analysis process involved two researchers examining the interview transcriptions. They identified 159 value expressions organized into 12 categories, tested several rounds of analysis for reliable application by the group, and analysed 307 transcriptions using NVivo 12. The unit of analysis is the full interview transcript, which means that the value expression carries the importance, not the place where it is expressed. Our group of analysts created a coding manual (Benevento, Koca and Kaya 2022) based on a multiple reading of all the interview transcriptions and achieved 90% reliability. This coding manual contained a collection of values that were important for our research participants. A strong emphasis on political participation was prevalent and diversely represented as we had expected that radicalisation processes of both groups are likely to be related to their political expressions engraved in daily life as well as in conventional ways. In total, we identified nineteen value expressions organized around issues related to political participation. Analysing and discussing all the value expressions that emerged across the countries and subsamples is beyond the scope of this article. The current article will focus only on the value expressions that emphasize the following expressions for appearing saliently among the participants, who had organisational ties:

(1) **Voting**: Voting in elections is important.
(2) **Voting does not work**: Acknowledging the little to no power voting has in election processes is important.
(3) **Voluntary work**: Doing voluntary work is important.
(4) **Protests**: Participating in or acknowledging the value of street demonstrations is important.
(5) **Protests are useless**: Acknowledging the little to no power street demonstrations have in democratic processes is important. This often involves an emphasis on disturbances or questions regarding their efficiency.
(6) **Protests are okay but no participation**: Recognising the merit of street demonstrations but not having had participated in one is important.
(7) **Illegal action is okay**: Acting upon one's political thoughts despite the action being illegal is important.
(8) **Remind law/security**: Acknowledging the function of law or morals against illegal demonstrations is important.
(9) **Online debates**: Observing or participating in online debates about politics is important.
(10) **Social media sharing**: Documenting and sharing news and opinion on social media is important.
(11) **Local politics**: Emphasising the importance of local aspects in policy making, participating in local councils/politics are important.
(12) **Not trusting politics**: Recognising the reservations about politicians' conducts, being critical of and voicing mistrust towards them is important.
(13) **Collaboration with youth**: Acknowledging young people's involvement in organisational processes, collaborating with them to build a community, a social capital is important.

The first ten value expressions related to political participation experiences were primarily prompted by the interview questions. The last three value statements were unexpectedly presented by the research participants. In other words, emphases on involvement in local politics, collaborating

with the young members of their community, and recognising mistrust in political parties and figures emerged in the discussions rather spontaneously.

Findings

Values analysis of interview transcriptions yielded a set of values related to the ways of being involved in politics. Among the thirteen value expressions that appeared to be relevant to political and civic participation, values in regard to voting and protesting were relatively prevalent. The two highly involved groups of young people – native youth who support movements labelled as far-right and migrant origin self-identified Muslim youth with strong organisational ties with religious communities in Germany, Belgium, France and the Netherlands – shared similar values about voting, protesting in the streets, sharing political information and opinion online, and engaging in local politics. Thought-provoking conclusions were reached as a result of the parallels between value statements that appear throughout the perspectives of the participants, although diverse interpretations of political behaviour also arose from the investigation (Table 1 and Figure 1).

Overall, the findings revealed that the research participants approached prevailing forms of political participation indifferently while sharing similar rates of distrust against politics. Both sample groups highlighted similar values in similar levels about the usefulness or uselessness of voting and street protests across different countries. As a matter of fact, the findings did not reveal noticeable differences across the countries except for one value expression: Among the participants who expressed their disbelief in voting processes (*n*= 68), many were from France (*n*= 29).

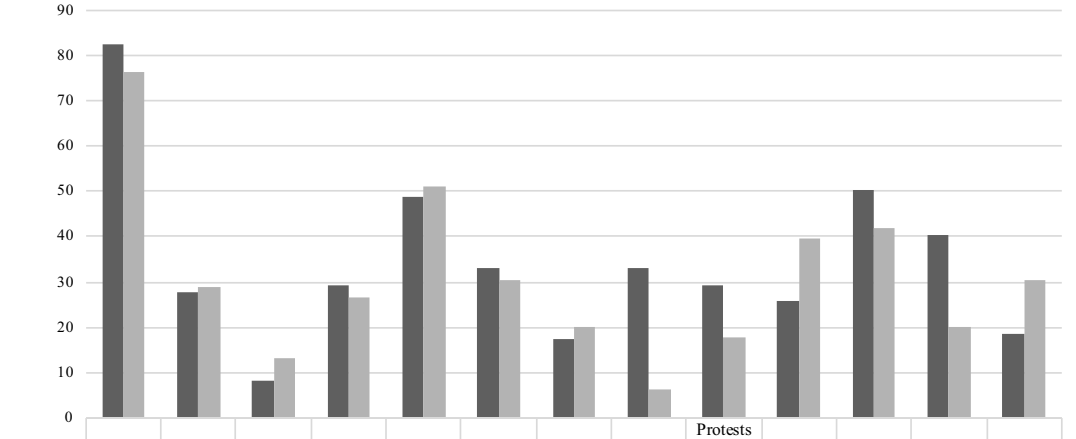
Believing in street demonstrations but not partaking in them

During the conversations, some research participants (almost 1/3 of the self-identified Muslims) brought up a nuanced perspective by stressing their positive views about street protests despite not having participated in one before. While this finding is a good example to reiterate one more time that attitudes by themselves do not provide sufficient directions for clear behavioural outcomes, the reported contrast between favouring street protests and lack of participation signalled to three major categories of issues: safety concerns, avoiding misunderstandings, and confusion about the worth of the cause. Some self-identified Muslims with strong religious ties felt restrained from partaking in street demonstrations for lacking confidence that they would be legally or physically safe during or after the demonstrations. Although our research participants were European citizens, their migrant and religious background might have contributed to a concern about being in

Table 1. Percentages and frequencies of values organising issues related to political and civic participation across research participants (with abbreviated labels).

	Self-identified Muslim (*n*=109) % N	Native youth (*n*=131) % N
Voting	82 (90)	76 (100)
Voting does not work	27 (30)	29 (38)
Voluntary work	33 (36)	6 (8)
Protests yes	48 (53)	51 (67)
Protests useless	33 (36)	30 (40)
Protests are meaningful but have not participated in one	29 (32)	17 (23)
Illegal action is okay	25 (28)*	39 (52)*
Remind law/security	50 (55)	42 (55)
Online debates	18 (20)	30 (40)
Social media sharing	17 (19)	19 (26)
Local politics	8 (9)	13 (17)
Not trusting politics	29 (32)	26 (35)
Collaboration with youth	40 (44)	19 (26)

The field researcher in Belgium chose not to ask the relevant part of the question in the interviews. Thus, the number of people and percentages are possibly higher here.



	Voting	Voting does not work	Local politics	Not trusting politics	Protests	Protests are useless	Sharing on social media	Voluntary work	Protests are ok but no participation	Illegal action is ok	Remind law/security	Collaboration w/ youth	Online debates
Muslims	82.57	27.52	8.26	29.36	48.62	33.03	17.43	33.03	29.36	25.69	50.46	40.37	18.35
Natives	76.34	29.01	12.98	26.72	51.15	30.53	19.85	6.11	17.56	39.69	41.98	19.85	30.53

Figure 1. Percentages of values organising issues related to political and civic participation across research participants (with abbreviated labels).

a situation where there is a possible quarrel with security forces. Second, motivations about joining the street protests sometimes contradicted the drive to be a *good* Muslim who shows respect to the police, who work to establish security, peace, and protect public properties. Joining in a street demonstration that might potentially turn into a riot is something to be avoided at all time. And third, some Muslim youth, who expressed favourable opinions about street protests, yet did not participate in one, also expressed juxtaposing mixed of values about the merit and the function of street protests. While many aspired to be involved in demonstrations to raise awareness about the injustice for the other discriminated and impoverished members of society in the rest of the world (e.g. Muslims in Yemen, black people in the USA, etc.), the place where the justice is broken muddied rather than clarify one's position. As seen in the excerpt below, interrelations between different countries, consideration of politics of different places sometimes intersected with the bigger value of justice:

> *It depends on what you demonstrate for. I think it's nice to lobby on the behalf of others. When it changes something. When it doesn't (change anything) it's a pity. Everyone should be heard. Not of course if you demonstrate for someone who is in jail. Then of course not. He is not in jail for no reason. But when it's for George Floyd in America. But when we demonstrate for America, it doesn't really change anything. To demonstrate willy-nilly (einfach so), I think that's a pity.* *(24 y-o Turkish origin female in Cologne, Germany)*

For many self-identified Muslims, justice for all appeared as a central value, which seems to be enough to motivate one to silence their hesitations and participate in street protests. As seen in another excerpt below, those who strongly supported the cause of political protests referred to their religious background and suggested the teachings of Islam to internally motivate them to join actions that could help others:

> *Environmental protection, for example. Or the defense of poor people, who cannot live without the help of others. Anything related to justice, not only in France, but even internationally. Personally, I find it sad that there are so few demonstrations to defend the Uyghurs. Muslims do not mobilize, to protest against that. And it's not only a question of religion, but also of simple humanity. Even if normally, it's a religious duty too . . . You asked me about religion earlier : Islam gives us points of reference, to distinguish between what is just and what is unjust, when you feel lost sometimes.* *(25 y-o Turkish origin female in Lyon, France)*

Implicit purposes behind volunteering

Compared to the native youth we interviewed, self-identified Muslim youth had significantly prevalent number of utterances about the importance of volunteering and engaging in charitable activities in collaboration with young community members, which indicate a higher involvement in civic forms of political participation. One might think that this finding is not surprising as the study purposely focused on those Muslim youth with strong organisational ties with religious communities. Volunteering and charity work are de facto modes of activities in those communities. On the other hand, focusing on what and how the value of volunteering appeared in the narratives provide clues about why and with what purpose the volunteering occur amongst the members of this particular sample group. That level of focus might also provide a perspective to look at what might be lacking in similar contexts where native youth showed no interest in partaking in voluntary actions.

Collaborative efforts put forward at their discretion appeared to afford four functions for those religiously involved Muslim youth, who emphasized their self-initiated political actions: 1) an avenue to learn and teach religion, 2) responding to feelings of righteous indignation about freedom and conditions, 3) youth friendly excursions and activities, 4) closeness to the diaspora youth, whom they share similar religion and experiences with. The below excerpt exemplifies the variety of meanings those youth assign to their civic involvement in charitable organisations:

> *I was a member of the Muslim association in my town, when I was a teenager. I took part in it first and foremost to learn Arabic and to get to know my religion better. As I told you earlier, my parents did not give me a religious education. I also took part in Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF) meetings, but unfortunately I didn't have the time to involve deeply in this association, even though I helped them from sometimes. I was giving them legal assistance, thanks to my legal training, I could help people who contacted the CCIF. I wanted to fight for more justice. I wanted to be useful to society. I worked for them for a year as a volunteer.*
>
> *(29 y-o Moroccan origin female in Paris, France.)*

Yet again, effort for just society emerged when self-identified Muslim youth discussed alternative and community-based efforts put forward by some organisations campaigning on behalf of religious, environmental and human rights causes. Some highlighted their voluntary participation in community organisations as a more meaningful effort put forward for equitable society than the work done by political parties:

> *My motivation is that I get a better feeling, to help poor people in such an organisation in comparison to working my way up in a political party. Direct help. In a political party, help is too oblique.*
>
> *(30 y-o Turkish origin female in Cologne, Germany)*

The above excerpt is also significant for pointing to the distrust against political parties among the Muslim youth involved in this study. While some were members of political parties, a majority of them, including those who were involved in political parties, were critical about the work done by *their* political parties (e.g. DENK in the Netherlands). Some expressed not having another alternative but support Islamist, diasporic political parties in order to stay involved in politics. In the fragments of narratives where the research participant discussed the lack of options to exist as a young European Muslim who cares about Islamist doctrine in politics, they frequently offered mentoring young people as a mean of transforming future by involving the next generations, including the non-Muslims. Having a space where they can have informal discussions about "*topics about day-to-day life is necessary, because we* (they) *don't want our* (their) *youngsters go to the discotheques and get lost* (27 y-o Turkish origin male involved in Milli Görüş in Lyon). Another research participant from the Netherlands interpreted his voluntary efforts to involve youth in Dawah Foundation (an organisation dedicated to spread information about Islam) as a meaningful and self-serving effort for his religious beliefs:

> *I believe that Islam fits well with the 'Dutch' norms and values. This initiative is an example thereof. It is up to us that people have a positive view of Islam. I mean if you look at the Dutch daily news it is 'normal' that Islam is framed as*

something bad. If nobody is showing the other side of Islam, that is a problem. That's why I tell a lot about our foundation at work. But I know that there are a lot of Muslims who think: I am happy I found a job; I will keep my mouth shut. People have to be triggered to change their views, Muslims can be this trigger. I believe if people like me, they will also like Islam. *(23 y-o Moroccan origin male in Utrecht, the Netherlands)*

The narrator for the above excerpt also emphasized the potential to create a social capital in this foundation as he declared that he met with his current wife in the foundation. Similarly, many self-identified Muslim participants highlighted the socialising function of their involvement in religiously oriented groups:

In Genk, I have been joining Milli Görüş activities. Going out for dinner, making excursions and trips, even to Italy with the university group. I have also been volunteering with them. There have been discussion days, in which we talk about religion. At first, these activities were much oriented toward us as a Turkish community but it has become more inclusive as we expanded towards outsiders. *(21 y-o Turkish origin female in Schaarbeek, Belgium)*

Searching for alternative means to intensify political message in the streets

Compared to the Muslim youth we interviewed, many more native youth with involvement in movements labelled as far-right highlighted the inevitability and the worth of disobedience in street protests to pursue political objectives. Although the contrast is not evident across most of the interviews, the differing collections of sources of influence for legitimising or condemning unlawful behaviour bring forward an audacious acceptance of illicit political acts among the native groups we interviewed. The sources cited in the excerpts below are good examples to reveal the contradicting cultural references the participants used to justify their positions:

One should seek to change the law one is criticising but not break it. In a democracy, no. A dictatorship is another thing. "Hence, one should walk the approved paths [quote from the Quran]"
(22 y-o Turkish origin Muslim male in Berlin, Germany)

Personally, I am in favor of disobeying the law if it is necessary. I have two references to Charles Maurras [the principal philosopher of the French Action, far-right monarchist movement from 1910s] *in mind. The first is about the distinction between the "legal country" and the "real country". If the legal country does not serve the real country, one should destroy the legal one. The second quote I have in mind is: "By all the means, even legals". This quote teaches you pragmatism. Personally, I am in favor of a coup de force. France is my carnal homeland, even if I dislike the French. But I hate the French State, the French deep State, and I would not hesitate to destroy those if I have the opportunity. If I need to commit terrible actions there will be no problem. If these actions enable my ideas to come to power I'll sign right away.* *(23 y-o native male in Lyon, France)*

The young Muslim man citing the verse from Quran is affiliated with a DITIB (Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs) mosque. He is positioned against unlawful political actions, supports the necessity to comply with the state's rules, and refers to a verse in Quran to underline his view. The young native French Action member, however, expresses his detestation of the state in cases where the state ignores *its* people. He refers to a significant French conservative intellectual behind a political movement that is monarchist, anti-parliamentarist, and counter-revolutionary.

Another cultural reference emerged among two native Germans, who supported Alternative for Germany (AfD) in completely opposite sides of Germany: Bertold Brecht, the German playwriter. Sympathising with those who use illegal ways to fight against human right violations, the two referred to the same exact saying by Brecht: 'When wrong becomes right, resistance becomes a duty'. One is an AfD member living in the small town of Riesa in Saxony area and the other former AfD member living in Essen, Düsseldorf about 500 km away. This particular remark is interesting as Brecht is largely noted for his communist leanings and politics was a central element in many of his works.

The issue with arguments that make use of references to religious texts or cultural icons is how well they work to eliminate internal conflicts about radical political actions and respect for the state. Such justifications for unlawful behaviour help people cope with psychological stress and maintain

their self-image, but they might also give them license to act unconventionally, rendering their sense of morality an illusion.

Discussion

Religious and ideological identities are not uniform; they have different meanings for individuals and consequences for political behaviours (Baysu and Swyngedouw 2020). The current study attempts to determine the forms of political and civic behaviours preferred by the two groups of young people: native youth who support movements labelled as far-right and migrant origin youth who identify as Muslims and have close organisational ties to religious groups in the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, and France. The analysis makes use of narratives about a variety of political engagement strategies to better understand the methods, which the radically oriented young people choose to voice their concerns outside of their communities. Instead of parroting 'the politically wise' discourse in Europe, these young people seek out like-minded people and prefer to socialize with them. Thus, their radical perspectives are only *heard* in their isolated, safe-to-speak communities. Those religiously or ideologically driven communities of social movements are formed in response to dominant political discourses and through dialogue and interaction with prior or co-existing movements.

Similarities in values regarding conventional political participation

Findings showed that both groups cared about conventional methods of participation, such as the usefulness of voting in similar levels, which means that they both value this conventional method of political participation. This finding hints at migrant origin Muslims' successful political integration and is in line with the literature that suggests a strong link between religious attendance and political mobilisation for elections (Moutselos 2020; Oskooii and Dana 2018). Regular religious community meetings and voting is mediated through the acquisition of relevant political information and stronger associational involvement. The highly regarded value of voting across both groups also signals that voting is still a pervasive method of political participation among those who have strong organisational involvement.

Another point of similarity appeared to be the shared acknowledgement of distrust. Regardless of their ideological, religious and ethnic backgrounds, many of the research participants expressed their lack of trust in politicians and problematized the function of voting and street protests in similar levels. The current study did not run an empirical test on whether those who expressed lack of trust in politics also believed that some political actions, including voting, do not have any function. Here it is worthwhile to remember that social movement literature has differing views on the relationship with trust and political actions. Almond and Verba (1963) suggests that political trust is a precursor for one to participate in politics. Following literature, however, introduce a crucial distinction between conventional and unconventional forms of participation and claim that trust would have differing behavioural consequences for different forms and could be associated with sufficiently high levels of political efficacy and/or dissent in democratic system (Barnes and Kaase 1979; Craig and Maggiotto 1981; Rosanvallon 2008). Radically positioned and critical citizens might be leading to an increase in elite challenging forms of conventional participation and turning to grassroot political action. Because the expression of disbelief in voting processes was prevalent especially among the French participants, a study focusing on intricacies of citizen distrust among varying subpopulations of youth (Koca, 2023) might be interesting and fruitful to tackle the poor level of turnout in elections and ideological polarisation in France (see Durovic 2023) and beyond.

Different values emerge through unconventional methods

Within the scope of this research, expressed values about street protests and voluntary actions appeared to be very informing to understand how youth make sense of the challenge of being heard

in their own terms. Indeed, protests and voluntary actions entail more cost and risk for participants than other forms of political participation like voting. Muslim youth who identified themselves as such emphasized the value of community service more than their native counterparts. Their narratives about street protests brought forward their reluctance about joining in street protests. On the other hand, many native youth emphasized the role that illegal actions might play in public rallies to advance political goals. The mixture of prevalent value expressions of reluctances and choices about street protests and alternative interpretations of charitable work direct our attention to specific characteristics and (de)motivations among the research participants.

Given that religion is well known to play a significant role in fostering civic participation and philanthropy (see Donnelly, Kyle Matsuba, and Hart 2005; Ataman et al., 2017), the significant importance of volunteering amongst self-identified Muslims is not surprising. According to several studies (Kerestes, Youniss, and Metz 2004; Nielsen 2013; Peucker 2018; Youniss, McLellan and Yates 1999), religiosity, volunteering and helping are positively correlated. Similar findings were revealed by Hart and Fegley (1995) about the beneficial influence of religion in the lives of young people honored for their dedication to charity and community service. It's also possible that the self-identified Muslim participants' religious commitment similarly aided their civic participation.

Furthermore, the larger concept of sense of community, which is defined as 'a feeling that the members of a community have in relation to their belonging to a community; a feeling that members worry about each other and that the group is concerned about them; and a shared faith that the needs of the members will be satisfied through their commitment to being together', (McMillan and Chavis 1986, 9) could also be related with the significant importance of volunteerism for migrant-origin Muslims across the four European countries. The capacity to recognize one's influence on one's living setting is, in reality, one of the components of a sense of community. Having an increased sense of community or having a sense of belonging and influence in one's community, is claimed to be key precursors to civic participation (Whitlock 2007; Chiessi, Cicognani, and Sonn 2010; Cicognani et al. 2015).

As for the value of street demonstrations, the perceived risks and chances of success of protest are not similar across research participants. Our Muslim research participants' reluctances about joining in street protests are influenced by a number of factors, including their concerns for safety, critical interpretations of the cause of the protest, etc. Past literature has shown that young people who usually have a higher risk tolerance are more likely to protest both legally (Renström, Aspernäs and Bäck, 2021) and illegally (Gavray, Fournier, and Born 2012). The same holds true for men as opposed to women, since the latter are more risk averted (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010) and have to face more structural barriers with regard to political engagement (Alan and Soule 2005. Besides all these different factors at hand, some individuals are more willing to overcome the costs and risks of street protests due to their political values and prior experiences of protests. The present research revealed that native youth with organisational ties to movements labelled as far-right highlighted values that are specifically related to opposing law, order, and authority, which are the principles related to the fundamental definition of illegal protest itself.

Past literature attempted to answer who is more likely to be engaged in illegal protest and violence escalation. This question became especially popular after the Trump supporter's attack on the US Capitol Building in 2021 and the Black Lives Matter protests across the USA. Both unconventional high-risk protests have employed different cultural repertoires and were on the extreme sides of the left-right scale. Thus, the position in the left-right scale is not helpful to interpret one's perspective on the necessity of following rules and law in street protests.

Della Porta (2018) believes that previous engagement in violent and unlawful acts in protests might be considered as an alarming characteristic of those unlawful protest participants. In their recent research based on a panel survey data in the USA, Inguanzo, Mateos, and Gil de Zúñiga (2022) claimed that one's values about authoritarianism have a predictive power of support for illegal street protests. They revealed that the relationship between participation in illegal demonstrations and authoritarianism follows a curvilineal pattern, meaning that the people with average levels of authoritarian values are most likely

to be involved in such acts. The native young people we have interviewed are not at the extreme ends of the authoritarianism pole. They are also average people, mostly living in rural parts of their countries. Their involvement with right-wing political organisations, known for their conservative political propaganda, might have heavily influenced their past protest experiences and narratives of street protests. It is possible that they feel the need to do *much more* than simply taking over the streets in order to intensify the volume of their messages. Most of the migrant-origin Muslim youth we interviewed, on the other hand, might have less tolerance to disorder and be more submissive to authority, the state, for instance. In that sense, the present research is significant for providing a direction for the under searched area of unlawful protest activities without intending to do so. Future research might investigate whether religiosity and the merit of submission to the state order in the context of street protests have any relationship. That line of research would be much valuable if it is conducted not only with Muslims in non-Muslim states but also with non-religious natives and religious fundamentalists in any given context.

Finally, our methodological strategy (lengthy qualitative interviews) is not very common in both radicalisation studies and research interested in political participation. While this method gave us more information about the participant profile and their stories, problem of sampling is also present in the current research. Thus, the findings of the study should be taken with caution, and we invite scholars in the field to confirm/enrich these findings with other research designs aimed to increase the number of participants across these places or in one locality/community.

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