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

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## 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
<i>Education (Ref.: Lower vocational secondary school)</i>				
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 <sup>2</sup>	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).

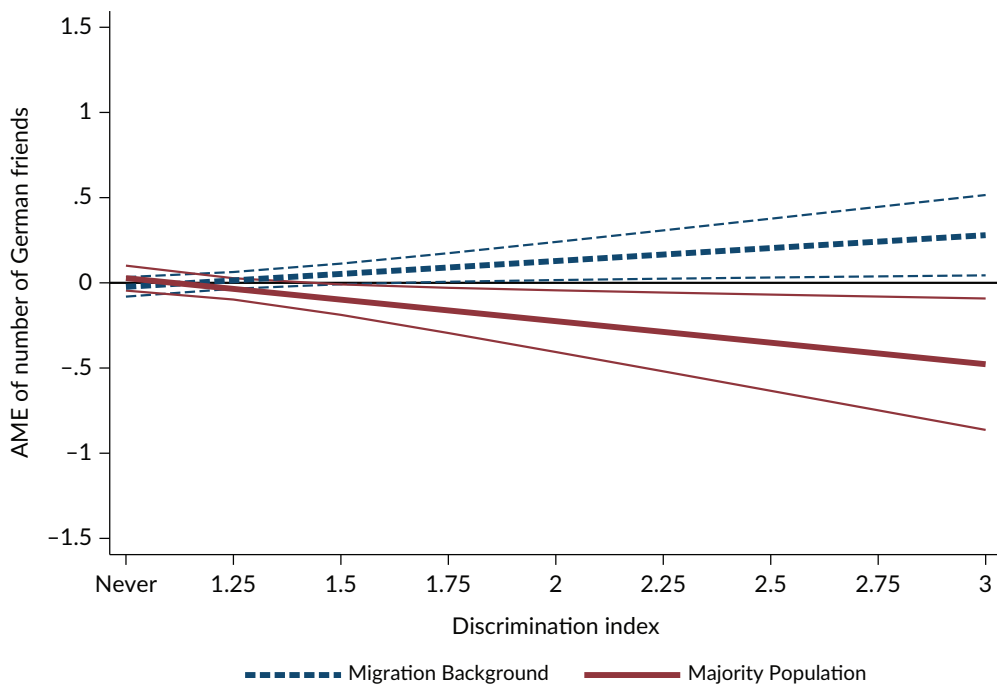
**Table 2.** Moderating the impact of national identification on unconventional and conventional political participation.

	Unconventional political participation		Conventional political participation	
	Majority population	Migration background	Majority population	Migration background
<i>Education (Ref.: Lower vocational secondary school)</i>				
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)

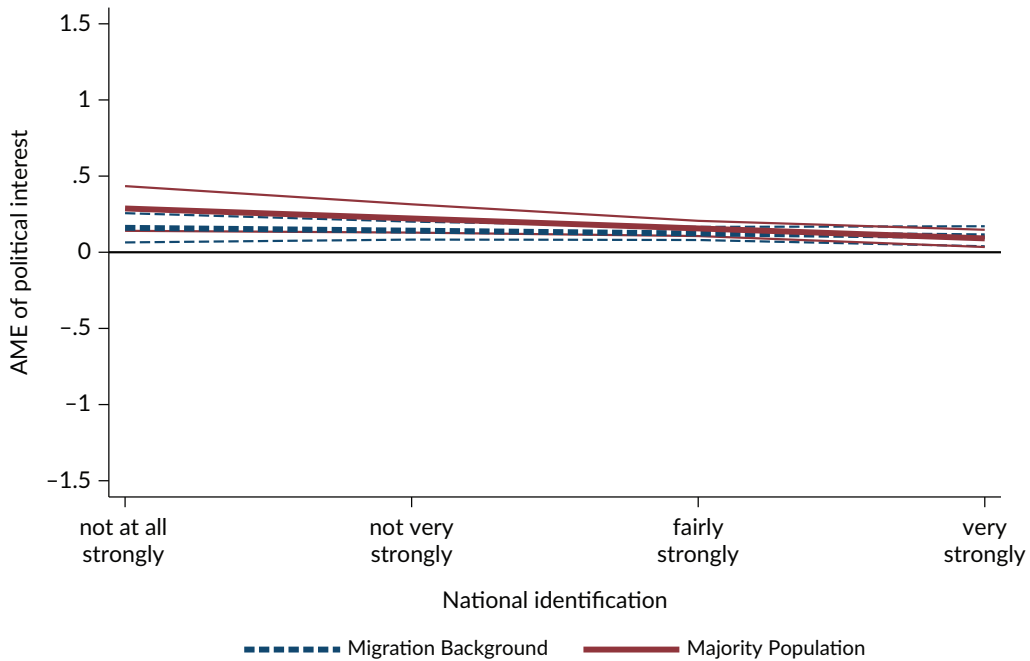
**Table 2.** (Cont.) Moderating the impact of national identification on unconventional and conventional political participation.

	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 <sup>2</sup>	0.12	0.17	0.10	0.16

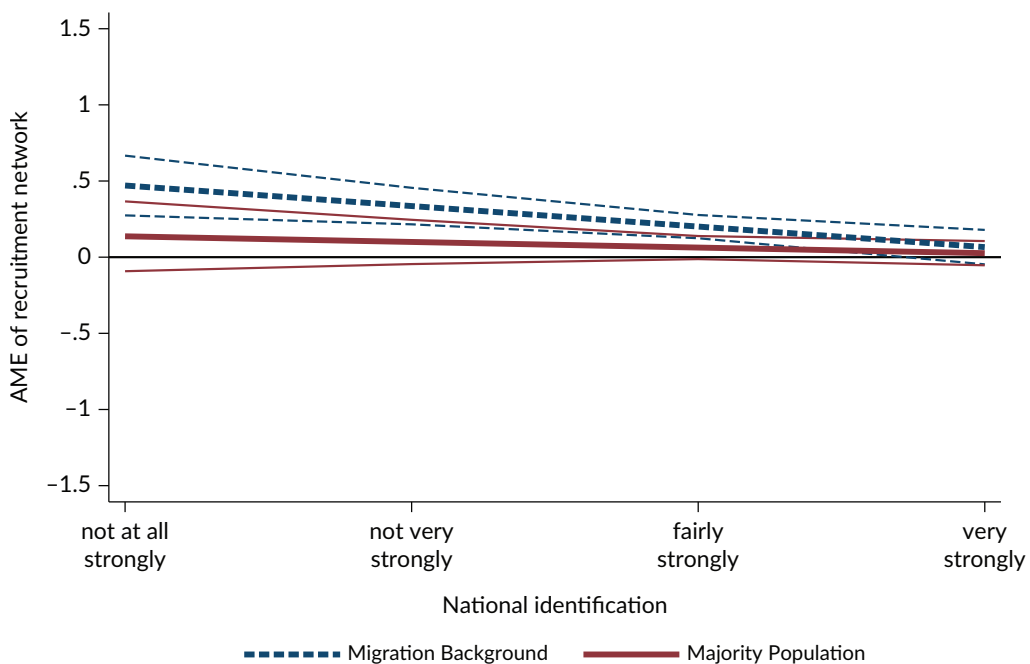
Notes: Linear regressions; standard errors in parentheses; level of significance: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . Source: Own results; data source: CILS4EU-DE (Kalter et al., 2024).



**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.

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### 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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