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Associational Involvement, Social Capital and the Political Participation of Ethno-Religious Minorities: The Case of Muslims in Switzerland

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This paper looks at the determinants of the political participation of Muslims. We assess the impact of associational involvement on their overall political participation and their involvement in protest activities. We do so using original survey data consisting of a random sample of Muslim residents in Switzerland. Our analysis provides support to the argument that associational involvement is a strong predictor of political participation. The findings suggest that Muslims involved in cross-ethnic organisations are more likely to engage in politics. This holds for the overall political participation and for engagement in protest activities. In terms of social capital theory, our findings confirm that bridging social capital is as crucial when it comes to explaining the political participation of Muslims as it is when dealing with migrants in general. However, we also observe a positive impact of the involvement in religious associations. We interpret this effect as an indication that bonding social capital plays a role in the political participation of ethno-religious minorities, but one based on a religious rather than an ethnic cleavage. Future research should pay more attention to this relationship.

Keywords: Muslims; Political Participation; Voluntary Associations; Social Capital

Introduction

This paper examines the relationship between social capital and the political participation of Muslim immigrants in Switzerland. By doing so, we seek to advance knowledge on the political engagement of Muslims in general. Muslims constitute the
target of very heated public debates in European countries that often depict them as potential threat to democratic values (Modood, Triandafyllidou, and Zapata-Barrero 2006). However, systematic research about their political participation in western countries remains underdeveloped. The main factors explaining their political mobilisation are still unclear.

Besides this lack of empirical research, it is worth noticing that ‘Muslim’ refers to a complex and controversial social category (Allievi 2005; Martiniello and Simon 2005). Muslim immigrants differ in terms of ethnic backgrounds, as well as in terms of religiosity. Research has shown that many religiously unobservant or even irreligious individuals, nonetheless, identify themselves as ‘Muslim’ because of their family background, their personal attachments, their ethnic and group allegiance or the social and cultural environment in which they were raised (Ruthven 1997).

Our focus on Muslims is aimed to explore the interplay of the religious and the ethnic dimensions of social capital and therefore to dig deeper into the role of social capital for the political participation of immigrants. Recent works on the political participation of immigrants in Europe have focused on the role of associational involvement and social capital (Berger, Galonska, and Koopmans 2004; Eggert and Giugni 2010; Jacobs, Phalet, and Swyngedouw 2004; Morales and Giugni 2011; Tillie 2004; Togeby 2004). This body of works posits a link between involvement in voluntary associations and the political participation of immigrants. In this paper, we apply this line of reasoning to the political participation of Muslim immigrants in Switzerland. However, unlike previous works, which have focused on an ethnic-based definition of immigrants, here we add the religious component of such a definition. Thus, to take into account both the ethnic and the religious dimensions of the Muslim identity, we define Muslims as an ethno-religious minority and seek to explore how different kinds of social capital impact their political participation.

We examine in particular whether religiosity plays a role for associational involvement and the social capital stemming from it. This in turn may foster Muslims’ political participation. To do so, we look both at bonding social capital (involvement in ethnic organisations) and at bridging social capital (involvement in cross-ethnic organisations).

In addition, we distinguish between religious and non-religious associations. We argue that a focus on religious organisations is crucial to understanding the role of voluntary associations in the case of an ethno-religious minority such as Muslims. We consider involvement in religious organisations as producing a kind of bonding social capital, but one which is different from the ethnic-based bonding social capital usually depicted in the literature. We test for the impact of the different types of associational involvement by means of regression analysis, controlling for the effect of a number of individual-level factors relating to the political attitudes, social characteristics and feeling of discrimination of respondents.

Our empirical analysis is based on primary survey data collected in a research project on the social, political and cultural orientations of Muslims in Switzerland. Over the last decade, the place and integration of Muslims in Swiss society have
become controversial and salient issues in the Swiss political debate. The main illustration of this trend is the popular initiative ‘against the minarets’ which was accepted by more than half of the voters in November 2009. The initiative aimed at forbidding the building of new minarets in Switzerland and thus at providing a clear message and formal stop to what the Swiss People Party—the populist right-wing party that launched this initiative—termed the Islamisation of Swiss public space. The public debate created by and around this initiative has strongly contributed to foster the idea that Muslims’ religious practices and ties constitute a ‘problem’ in Switzerland and that public institutions should put a clear limit to the expression and the social and political visibility of Muslims’ cultural and religious values and practices. The supporters of the ban justified it as a way to avoid the expansion of political Islam.

Muslims’ political engagement was a central issue in the debate over the ban of the minarets. However, there is no systematic evidence of a pattern of political engagement and protest activities of the Muslim population in Switzerland. The latter have been often presented by commentators in the media as being too invisible and voiceless during the campaign, and therefore letting the representations about Muslim radicalism prevail in the public debate. This article also aims to clarify the terms of this debate: on the one hand, by providing original empirical data about Muslims’ political participation and protest activities in Switzerland; and on the other, by focusing on associational involvement and social capital as possible explanations. In particular, we will analyse to what extent religiosity fosters social capital, therefore leading to higher levels of political participation.

Associational Involvement, Social Capital and the Political Participation of Muslims

Voluntary associations have been described as a powerful vehicle of social integration and cohesion at least since de Tocqueville’s analysis of democracy in America (Paxton 2002). More recently, scholars have pointed to the important role of associations as a source of social capital (Maloney and Rossteuscher 2007). This concept (see Lin 2001 and Portes 1998 for overviews) was brought to the fore by the work of prominent sociologists such as Coleman (1988, 1990), Bourdieu (1984, 1986) and more recently Putnam (1993, 2000), and has received much attention in various fields since. Although definitions vary depending on the theoretical perspective adopted, most agree on seeing social capital as a specific kind of resource linked to the structure of relations among groups or individuals: ‘social capital exists in social relations of all sorts, especially within the family or community social organizations, and takes on a variety of forms’ (Stolle 2007, 656). Here we focus on the social capital that can be drawn from membership in voluntary associations.

The concept of social capital has found its way into the study of the political participation of migrants and ethnic minorities above all through the work of Meindert Fennema and Jean Tillie (1999, 2000). These two authors have argued that ‘voluntary associations create social trust, which spills over into political trust and
higher political participation’ (Jacobs and Tillie 2004, 421). In their study on Moroccans, Turks and Surinamese immigrants in Amsterdam, they found a correlation between the density of networks of their ethnic organisations and the degree of political participation at the group level. Organisational density, in this context, is an indicator of the degree of civic engagement (see further van Heelsum 2005 and Vermeulen 2006). Thus, in this perspective, organisational networks reflect the amount of social capital at the group level: '[s]ocial capital at the group level is a function of (1) the number of organisations, (2) the variety in the activities of the organisations and (3) the density of the organisational network’ (Tillie 2004, 531).

More recently, Fennema and Tillie, together with a number of colleagues, have departed from their original approach to embrace a perspective geared towards studying the impact of voluntary associations at the individual level. In this perspective, social capital not only derives from organisational networks, but also from individual involvement in organisations. In other words, if the number, variety and density of organisations provide social capital at the group level, individual involvement in voluntary associations refers to social capital at the individual level. Of course, the two levels are to some extent related, as the quality of the individual networks of members of an ethnic community is determined by the structure of the organisational network (Tillie 2004). However, only by looking at the individual level can one establish a link between associational involvement and individual political participation.

This individual-level approach was tested in a number of cities and the findings gathered in a special issue of the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies (Jacobs and Tillie 2004). In brief, they found that involvement in ethnic and cross-ethnic networks has both a strong and positive effect on the political participation of migrants (Berger, Galonska, and Koopmans 2004; Jacobs, Phalet, and Swyngedouw 2004; Togeby 2004; Tillie 2004). Furthermore, this holds across different groups of migrants. Further analyses conducted in Switzerland have confirmed such an impact (Eggert and Giugni 2010). In other words, the more an immigrant is a member of voluntary associations, the more she or he participates politically, and this has something to do with the social capital generated by such an organisational affiliation.

Recent research has also assessed the differential impact of involvement in ethnic and cross-ethnic associations on political participation. The distinction between ethnic and cross-ethnic networks refers to the composition of associations. Ethnic networks refer to involvement in associations composed mainly by co-ethnics, that is, people of immigrant origin. Cross-ethnic (or non-ethnic) networks refer to involvement in ‘mixed’ associations, that is, associations made by both immigrants and national citizens. In terms of social capital theory, this distinction reflects that between ‘bridging’ and ‘bonding’ social capital (Putnam 2000). While the latter lies within a specific community, the former overcomes certain cleavages, in our case the ethnic cleavage. In Fennema and Tillie’s (1999, 2000) perspective, cross-groups variations in political participation depend on the degree of ‘civic community’, conceived of as ‘ethnic’ social capital stemming from involvement in ethnic organisations. However, as the studies mentioned earlier have shown, cross-ethnic
organisations also play an important role and have a distinct impact on the political participation of migrants (Berger, Galonska, and Koopmans 2004; Jacobs, Phalet, and Swyngedouw 2004; Tillie 2004; Togeby 2004).

The strong impact of associational involvement also emerges in a recent study on the political participation and integration of migrants in several European cities (Morales and Giugni 2011). However, while some have found that the involvement of Muslim migrants in organisations strongly influences their propensity to participate politically (Eggert and Giugni 2011), others have found a differential effect of bonding and bridging social capital on political interest and participation (Morales and Pilati 2011). In particular, bonding ties among ethnic organisations do not have a significant effect on any type of political engagement, when controlling for contextual factors.

In this paper, we would like to elaborate on this approach by looking at the role of various types of associational involvement on the political participation of Muslims in Switzerland. Following the social capital theory, we expect involvement in cross-ethnic and ethnic associations to have a positive effect on the political participation of Muslims. However, our main contribution rests on a further specification of the potential impact of bonding social capital on political participation. More specifically, we test the impact of three types of bonding ties: the first type of involvement in an ethnic network, more in line with traditional research in the literature, refers to involvement in associations composed mainly of migrants regardless of their national origin; the second is aimed at capturing a ‘stronger’ definition of ethnic networks and refers more specifically to involvement in associations promoting the advancement of people of the same national or ethnic background and the third refers to the involvement in a religious organisation.

Because we are dealing with the participation of an ethno-religious group whose collective identity is not only ethnic, but also religious, it is worth looking at a possible differential impact of this latter type of organisational network. Involvement in mosques, for example, has been found in previous research to be an important vehicle for political mobilisation and civic participation as well as promoting and fostering group consciousness (Jamal 2005). One may expect religious associations to have a stronger effect for Muslims because such associations would forge stronger identities and therefore encourage participation along religious cleavages (see Pilati 2012 for a similar argument with regard to ethnic cleavages).

Data and Operationalisation

The Survey

The data used in this paper originate in a research project financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation under the National Research Program 58 (Religious Collectives, State and Society). In the context of this project, we have conducted a survey on a random sample of Muslim residents in Switzerland. The survey was conducted by the polling institute DemoSCOPE Genève between 6 April and the 6 September 2009, on a random sample of the Muslim population living in Switzerland and a control group of non-Muslim residents. We generated the sample
of Muslims from the lists of addresses provided by the Federal Office for Migration on the basis of nationality and stratified in three subsamples according to the three main areas of origin of Muslims in Switzerland: Turkey, Maghreb and the former Yugoslavia. We then retrieved phone numbers from the phone book, starting from the name and address of the people in the sample. The sample of Maghrebis includes people from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. The sample of former Yugoslavians includes people from Serbia (Kosovo), Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia.

We had to use formal nationality as a sampling frame because it is not possible to obtain official lists based on ethnic origin or religion on the national level. Two important analytical implications follow: first, it was not possible to retrieve naturalised Muslims as well as Swiss converts to Islam from the lists and second, for practical reasons, our sampling cannot cover all Muslims, but their three main groups, which cover about 85% of the Muslims living in Switzerland. As migration from predominantly Muslim countries is quite recent (therefore, the number of Swiss-born Muslims is low and these individuals are young) and because access to Swiss citizenship is very restrictive (which means the number of naturalised individuals is still low), we estimate our sampling procedure allows us to grasp the bulk of Muslims living in Switzerland.

We completed the sampling procedure at the survey stage through a number of questions aiming to control whether respondents retrieved from the lists could be considered Muslims. Our definition of 'Muslim' includes an ethnic dimension (being of a Muslim culture or heritage) and a religious dimension (being of the Islamic religion). Therefore, we excluded from the sample individuals who said that they were of another religious denomination as well as individuals defining themselves as atheists or agnostics and as not having at least one parent from an Islamic religious denomination (considered as an indicator of a Muslim heritage or culture). In sum, we constituted our sample according to the following criteria (1) foreign nationality from Turkey, Maghreb or the former Yugoslavia and (2) Islamic religious denomination or (3) atheist/agnostic denomination with at least one parent from an Islamic religious denomination.

We generated the sample of the control group of Swiss nationals randomly from the Swiss phone book. At the survey stage, foreigners and respondents declaring themselves of an Islamic religious denomination were excluded from the sample to have a homogeneous baseline of Swiss citizens against which to compare the results obtained on Muslims. We did not include in the study other groups of migrants; we designed our research to examine the attitudes and behaviours of Muslim immigrants and to compare them with those of Swiss nationals. While this focus has rarely been taken in previous research, several studies have addressed the relationship between social capital and political participation of various immigrant groups (see, for example, Morales and Giugni 2011).

We conducted the interviews by telephone (CATI method) using a standardised multilingual questionnaire. The respondents of the groups of Muslims had the opportunity to answer in their mother tongue or in the language spoken in their place of residence. We included this option to increase the response rate as well as to
minimise potential biases due to differing linguistic skills among respondents. In addition, to increase the response rate, we sent a letter to all selected individuals of the Muslim sample, mentioning they would be contacted for a telephone interview. The average duration of each interview was around 40 minutes. In total, we interviewed 302 Turks, 298 Maghrebis, 301 former Yugoslavians and 305 Swiss nationals.

Dependent Variables: Overall Political Participation and Protest Activities

Because the respondents were foreigners and since a large share of the latter are not eligible to vote in Switzerland, we consider the political participation of Muslims is best assessed by looking at other forms than electoral participation. Based on a list of 16 specific kinds of political activities ranging from contacting a public official to taking part in violent actions, we created a dummy variable measuring the overall political participation. A given respondent might have participated in a number of activities ranging from 0 to 16. The dummy variable was created by aggregating all responses higher than 0, so that code 1 stands for ‘participated in at least one of the 16 activities’, while code 0 stands for ‘did not participate in any activity’. Following the same logic, we also created three indicators of participation in the three major forms of political activities, namely participation in contacting activities, in group activities and in protest activities. Thus, code 1 stands for ‘participated in at least one contact/group/protest activity’, while code 0 stands for ‘did not participate in any contact/group/protest activity’. The rationale for creating these types of participation is based on Teorell, Torcal, and Montero (2007), who proposed a typology of political participation which includes, in addition to the three forms mentioned above, voting and consumer participation. Many if not most works on political participation today rely on this or similar typologies.

In the following regression analyses, however, we focus on two variables: the overall political participation and protest activities. We do so because we wish to investigate the role of associational involvement and social capital on a general indicator of political participation which has most often been studied in previous research as well as on a more specific measure of participation in contentious activities. Furthermore, the latter is particularly interesting because it captures a collective dimension of political participation, such as engagement in social movement activities.

Independent Variables: Associational Involvement

Our measures of associational involvement include two aspects: organisational membership and participation in the activities carried out by voluntary associations. Respondents had to mention, out of a list of seven types of associations, those of which they were members and whether they had participated in the activities carried out by these organisations in the 12 months prior to the survey. In addition, we asked respondents mentioning their participation in organisational activities whether more than half of the members of the organisation had an immigrant or foreign background.
On this basis, we created two dummy variables measuring associational involvement: *involvement in cross-ethnic organisations* refers to participation in at least one activity carried out by organisations that have less than 50% of their members who have an immigrant or foreign background; *involvement in ethnic organisations* indicates the participation in at least one activity of an organisation that has at least 50% of members with an immigrant or foreign background during the last 12 months.\(^{12}\) The latter variable captures a first type of bonding tie. However, as stated earlier, because we aim to provide a more comprehensive account of the role of social capital, we created two additional dummy variables to measure more specific types of bonding social capital: *involvement in organisations promoting people of the same national or ethnic background* refers to membership and/or participation in at least one activity of this specific kind of organisation; *involvement in religious organisations* refers to membership of and/or participation in at least one activity carried out by a religious or church organisation in the last 12 months. Finally, we include an indicator of religiosity, namely *mosque attendance*. This is a dummy variable created by collapsing the categories of the original variable to separate those who never go to a mosque from all the other respondents.\(^{13}\)

**Control Variables: Political Attitudes, Socio-Demographic Characteristics and Feeling of Discrimination**

Our explanatory models include three kinds of control variables. The first relates to political attitudes and includes four variables: *political trust* is captured by means of a scale ranging from 0 to 100 computed on the basis of 10-point scales of trust in eight Swiss institutions;\(^{14}\) *interest in Swiss politics* and *interest in homeland country’s politics* are measured through a four-category ordinal variable;\(^{15}\) and *attachment to Switzerland* is operationalised through a scale ranging from 0 to 10. The second set of control variables refers to the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and includes five variables: *age* and *gender*; *education*, measured through a scale ranging from 0 to 1, where the highest score indicates the highest educational level;\(^{16}\) *language proficiency*, measured through a scale ranging from 0 to 100, where the highest score indicates the respondents’ mother tongue is the language spoken in their commune of residence, or that the respondents can speak, read and write in the language spoken in the commune of residence as if it were a mother tongue; the *proportion of life spent in Switzerland* was computed by dividing the length of stay in Switzerland by the respondent’s age. Finally, we included a measure of the *feeling of discrimination*. This variable indicates whether the respondents had already felt discriminated against on the basis of their colour or race, nationality or origin, or religion. We control for this variable because there are reasons to believe that the participation to ethnic or religious associations increases individuals’ group consciousness, which can be measured through their feeling of being discriminated against (Jamal 2005).
Descriptive Analyses

In this section, we describe the dependent variables (overall political participation, contact activities, group activities and protest activities) and our main independent variables (the organisational variables). Here we focus on variations in these aspects across the three groups of Muslims (from Turkey, Maghreb and the former Yugoslavia). For each aspect, we also show the distributions for the control group of Swiss nationals as a reference point to assess the degree of political participation and associational involvement of the three groups of Muslims.

Political Participation

Table 1 shows that the differences across groups regarding our four indicators of political participation are statistically significant across the three groups of Muslims and the control group of Swiss nationals. For overall political participation, Muslims are less active than Swiss nationals regardless of their origin. Indeed, almost 80% of the latter have participated at least in one political activity, whereas the percentages for Muslims vary between 40% and 60%. At the same time, we observe significant difference across the three groups of Muslims. Maghrebis tend to participate more than Turks and especially former Yugoslavians; only 40.9% of the latter have already participated in a political activity.

Generally speaking, all three forms of political activities are more often used by Swiss nationals than by all the three groups of Muslims. However, the gap is particularly large for protest activities, while it is much less pronounced when it comes to contacting activities or group activities. According to our data, Swiss nationals are much more contentious than Muslims. This might be related to the protective and legitimating function of citizenship rights, namely, providing

Table 1. Political activities by group (percentage responding ‘yes’; N within parentheses).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Turks (302)</th>
<th>Maghrebis (298)</th>
<th>Former Yugoslavians (301)</th>
<th>Swiss (305)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contacting activities</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group activities</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>27.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest activities</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>71.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall political participation</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>78.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson Chi square: 24.796; Cramer’s V: .143*** (contacting activities)
Pearson Chi square: 23.477; Cramer’s V: .140*** (group activities)
Pearson Chi square: 116.229; Cramer’s V: .310*** (protest activities)
Pearson Chi square: 93.456; Cramer’s V: .278*** (overall political participation)

Note: Contact activities include the following items: contacted a politician, contacted a national or local government official, contacted the media and contacted a solicitor or a judicial body for non-personal reasons. Group activities include the following items: worked in a political party, worked in a political action group and donated money to a political organisation or group. Protest activities include the following items: worn or displayed a badge, sticker or poster; signed a petition; taken part in a public demonstration; boycotted certain products; deliberately bought certain products for political reasons; taken part in a strike; participated in an illegal action (e.g. blockade, building occupation) and participated in a violent action (e.g. violent demonstration, physical attack).
individuals both with the full legal protection and the social esteem needed to engage in political activities. Lacking such resources, immigrants may be more reluctant to participate politically, especially in protest activities.

In other words, Muslims’ lower level of protest could be related to the impact of citizenship, understood as a specific political opportunity structure. Because they suffer from a closed political opportunity structure in terms of legitimacy granted by the prevailing conception of citizenship, Muslims in Switzerland—much like other migrants—lack an important basis for political mobilisation (Koopmans et al. 2005).

Besides these general patterns, we also observe important differences among the three groups. In particular, Maghrebis are more active than the other two groups (but less so than the control group of Swiss nationals) on all counts—except for contacting activities, which are more frequent among Turks—and above all in terms of overall political participation. While providing a more detailed account of such differences is beyond the scope of this paper, this might reflect different opportunities, internal resources and individual-level characteristics among the three groups that, once aggregated, contribute to explain these differences. In particular, our data show that the respondents from Maghreb, on average, display a much higher level of education than respondents from the other two groups. This, together with a higher level of interest in Swiss politics and other aspects concerning political values, might go a long way in explaining why this group is more active than the other two.17

Associational Involvement

As discussed earlier, various forms of associational involvement are important indicators to explain the political participation of Muslims living in Switzerland. Table 2 shows the percentages of individuals involved in ethnic organisations, cross-ethnic organisations, organisations promoting people of the same national background and religious organisations for each of the three groups of Muslims as well as for the control group of Swiss nationals. Again, differences across groups are statistically significant. Generally speaking, Muslims are more involved in ethnic organisations than Swiss (less than 10% of the latter are involved in ethnic organisations). Among Muslims, Turks display the highest rate of involvement in this type of organisation.

The involvement in cross-ethnic organisations follows an opposite trend: Swiss are more embedded in cross-ethnic associations than Muslims. However, differences among Muslims should also be noted. Turks tend to be more involved in cross-ethnic associations than Maghrebis and former Yugoslavians. If we compare the rates of involvement in ethnic and cross-ethnic associations, Turks also distinguish themselves by being relatively more involved in cross-ethnic organisations than in ethnic organisations, whereas Maghrebis follow the exactly reversed pattern, and former Yugoslavians display the same rate of involvement in these two kinds of organisations. With regard to the involvement in organisations promoting people of the same
national background, Turks tend to be twice as involved as Maghrebis and former Yugoslavians.

Regarding involvement in religious organisations, the three groups of Muslims tend to present similar rates of involvement (around 10%). Swiss nationals are more embedded than Muslims in this type of organisation (18%). This difference can be explained by two lines of reasoning: at the macro level, Muslim religious associations are confronted with a relatively closed political opportunity structure because Islam is not recognised as an official religion at the national level. At the individual level, this finding illustrates Muslims’ highly individualistic ways of practising religion (Cesari 2004).

Turks tend to be more embedded in associational networks on an ethnic (national) basis than on a religious basis. Although explaining differences across the three groups of Muslims is beyond the scope of this paper, the case of the Turks shows the difficulty in disentangling the religious and ethnic-based activities carried out by associations. Turk associations have not only religious vocations, but also foster social and cultural activities such as the learning of language, nurseries and so forth (Haab et al. 2010).

**Explanatory Analyses**

We assess the impact of the various types of associational involvement on the political participation of Muslims by means of regression analysis. Because our dependent variables are dichotomous, we use binary logistic regression. We focus on two aspects:
the overall political participation and protest activities. For each of the two dependent variables, we run three separate models: the first model includes the indicators of associational involvement and the control variables; in the second model, we add the indicator of involvement in religious associations; finally, the third model controls for the effect of mosque attendance. Swiss nationals are excluded from these analyses to focus on the explanation of the political participation of Muslims.

Table 3 shows the results for the overall political participation. Considering Model 1, the most important finding is the statistically significant effect of associational involvement. Specifically, both the indicator of involvement in ethnic organisations and the indicator of involvement in cross-ethnic organisations have a strong and positive impact on the political participation of Muslims. In other words, Muslims who have participated in activities carried out by ethnic organisations in the 12 months preceding the survey are more likely to participate in some kind of political activity.

Similarly and displaying an even stronger effect, Muslims who have participated in activities done by cross-ethnic organisations during the same time frame are more likely to be active in politics. This kind of associational involvement approximately

| Table 3. Logistic regression of overall political participation on selected independent variables (odds ratios). |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
| **Organisational involvement variables** | | | |
| Involved in ethnic organisations | 1.693** | 1.405 | 1.408 |
| Involved in cross-ethnic organisations | 2.004*** | 1.907*** | 1.915*** |
| Involved in organisations promoting people of same national or ethnic background | 1.446 | 1.477 | 1.478 |
| Involved in religious organisations | | 1.721* | 1.721* |
| Attendance at a mosque | | 1.007 | |
| **Controls** | | | |
| Political trust | .992* | .993 | .993 |
| Interest in Swiss politics | 1.471*** | 1.497*** | 1.483*** |
| Interest in homeland country’s politics | 1.084 | 1.070 | 1.069 |
| Attachment to Switzerland | 1.001 | .996 | .995 |
| Age | .999 | .999 | .999 |
| Female | .804 | .817 | .821 |
| Education | 6.467*** | 6.602*** | 6.789*** |
| Language proficiency | .997 | .997 | .997 |
| Proportion of life in Switzerland | .778 | .761 | .761 |
| Feeling of discrimination | 1.204** | 1.195* | 1.191* |
| Group (ref: former Yugoslavians) | | | |
| Turks | 1.409* | 1.435* | 1.440* |
| Maghrebis | 1.298 | 1.314 | 1.321 |
| Constant | .182** | .172** | .171** |
| -2 Log likelihood | 953.089 | 949.203 | 946.869 |
| Nagelkerke $R^2$ | .233 | .238 | .236 |
| N | 799 | 799 | 796 |

*p ≤ .10; **p ≤ .05; ***p ≤ .01.
doubles the chances to be politically active. The data thus confirm the social capital perspective.

Our data also provide support for the impact of bonding (ethnic) and bridging (cross-ethnic) social capital alike. Both seem important resources for Muslims to become politically engaged. Notably, the more specific type of ethnic bonding social capital— involvement in organisations promoting people of the same national or ethnic background—has no significant impact.

However, if we look at Model 2, which adds the indicator of involvement in religious organisations, we need to qualify our conclusions. This variable has a statistically significant effect on political participation, although only at the 10% level. Thus, being involved in religious associations increases the chances to be politically engaged, net of the effect of the other types of associational involvement.

Furthermore, the effect of involvement in ethnic organisations is no longer significant. Therefore, not only religious organisations do play a role, but also the effect of involvement in ethnic associations previously observed was spurious once we controlled for the effect of involvement in religious organisations. Thus, bonding social capital favouring the political participation of Muslims stems above all from their involvement in associations made of people of the same religion.

Involvement in ethnic organisations—whether they are composed primarily by people with immigrant or foreign backgrounds or by co-nationals—does not provide Muslims with a bonding social capital convertible into political participation. This makes a case for the crucial role played by religious associations for the political participation of Muslims. In contrast, bridging social capital arising from involvement in cross-ethnic organisations keeps its important impact.

Nevertheless, one might argue that the disappearance of the effect of involvement in ethnic organisations once we include the indicator of involvement in religious organisations is because Muslims involved in the latter are more religious than non-members. To control for this, we included mosque attendance in Model 3 as an indicator of religiosity. This control does not change the results: the effect of involvement in religious organisations remains significant, while involvement in ethnic organisations is still non-significant.

We also observe some significant and interesting effects among the control variables. Education is the variable that has by far the strongest effect, multiplying the likelihood that Muslims participate politically by more than a factor of six. Being more educated provides crucial resources for political participation. The strong impact of education is not surprising and confirms findings in the literature on political participation in general (Dalton 2008; Teorell, Torcal, and Montero 2007; Verba and Nie 1972; Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995) as well as in works on the political participation of migrants and ethnic minorities (Berger, Galonska, and Koopmans 2004; Eggert and Giugni 2010; Jacobs, Phalet, and Swyngedouw 2004; Morales and Giugni 2011; Togeby 2004; Tillie 2004).

Political interest is another variable displaying a significant effect on the overall political participation of Muslims. Again, this is consistent with previous findings
concerning political participation in general and that of migrants more specifically, as noted earlier. Respondents who are more interested in Swiss politics are more likely to be engaged in politics. We also observe a statistically significant coefficient for political trust in Model 1 (although only at the 10% confidence level), but this variable does not have much of an impact; the odds of participating are close to 1 and, moreover, the effect disappears in Models 2 and 3.

The feeling of discrimination also seems to have an impact on the political participation of Muslims. In particular, we find that the more one feels discriminated against, the more one tends to be politically active, although the effect is not very strong. This finding can be interpreted according to two opposing views. On the one hand, one may expect the feeling of being discriminated against to have a negative impact on political participation. Discrimination on the basis of colour or race, nationality or origin, or religion could discourage Muslims from participating because they would feel excluded and therefore less legitimised to do so. On the other hand, some versions of the group consciousness approach have stressed the importance of the construction of discrimination as a collective, social grievance necessitating political action to redress it as instrumental for political engagement; a perception that the group is discriminated against is thus a measure of group consciousness (Jamal 2005; McClain et al. 2009).

Some variables we might have expected to matter do not have an impact at all. For example, neither age nor gender has a significant effect. This is particularly surprising in the latter case, because women traditionally participate less than men. Most importantly, some of the controls specifically relating to the situation of migrants are equally not influential. Thus, feeling attached to Switzerland, having a good command of the language of the place of residence and having spent most of the lifetime in Switzerland do not increase the chances to be politically engaged. The lack of an effect of language proficiency contrasts with previous studies (Jacobs, Phalet, and Swyngedouw 2004), although in the Swiss case this variable was shown to play a different role according to the group at hand (Eggert and Giugni 2010). The non-significant coefficient for the duration of residence could be due to the fact that most of the respondents in our sample have been in Switzerland for a long time or were born there.

The discussion of the findings concerning protest activities, shown in Table 4, can be shorter because they are consistent with those referring to the overall political participation. Among the most relevant aspects, we observe again the important impact of associational involvement, both in its ethnic and cross-ethnic variants. Most importantly, the effect of the former disappears when we control for the involvement in religious organisations, attesting once again of the importance of this kind of associational involvement for an ethno-religious minority such as Muslims. In this case, the inclusion of the control for mosque attendance in the model results in the coefficient for involvement in religious organisations no longer being significant. However, the coefficient for involvement in ethnic organisations remains non-significant as well, which is the most important aspect here.
The difference between the results concerning the overall political participation and those for protest activities relates to the groups. While Turks are more likely to participate in the former, Maghrebis are more likely to engage in protest activities. As for the other control variables, we observe once again the impact of political interest, education and feeling of discrimination as well as the lack of effect of the other control similar to the earlier discussion on overall political participation. Here, institutional trust shows no statistically significant effect in any of the three models.

### Conclusion

At the most general level, our analysis provides evidence supporting the argument that there is a strong relationship between associational involvement and political participation. This argument has been tested against survey data on different ethnic minorities in several European cities (Berger, Galonska, and Koopmans 2004; Eggert and Giugni 2010; Jacobs, Phalet, and Swyngedouw 2004; Morales and Giugni 2011; Togeby 2004; Tillie 2004). Here, we have applied it to the case of an ethno-religious minority in Switzerland. The findings suggest that Muslims involved in cross-ethnic...
organisations are more likely to engage in politics. This holds for the overall political participation and for the more contentious type of participation consisting of engaging in protest activities.

Most importantly, we also found evidence for an effect of ethnic organisations, but this effect disappears when we control for the involvement in religious organisations. According to our interpretation, this result not only suggests that the effect of involvement in ethnic organisations is spurious once we control for the effect of involvement in religious organisations, but above all indicates that the latter is crucial to understand how associational involvement influences the political participation of an ethno-religious minority such as Muslims. These findings, in general, hold once we control for religiosity through mosque attendance. In addition, they apply both to overall political participation and to protest activities, although in the latter case the involvement in religious organisations has no significant effect in the full model.

In terms of social capital theory, our findings show that bridging social capital is as crucial a factor when it comes to explaining the political participation of Muslims as it is when dealing with migrants in general. We can nonetheless interpret the impact of the involvement in religious associations as an indication that bonding social capital plays a role as well, but based on a religious rather than an ethnic cleavage. In other words, contrary to previous studies, which stressed the role of ethnic civic community (Fennema and Tillie 1999, 2000) and ethnic bonding social capital, our analysis suggests that religious bonding social capital is more important in the case of Muslims. Further research is needed to assess whether this trend is specific to the Swiss context or whether there is a more general impact of religious social capital on political participation.

These findings raise questions as to why associational involvement is so important to explain political participation, and above all, why involvement in religious organisations is a factor for explaining the political participation of Muslims migrants in Switzerland. Our analysis does not allow us to provide a definitive answer to these questions. However, we can advance some avenues for further research.

The role of associational involvement has been discussed at length in previous studies. In particular, the works mentioned earlier point to the role of social and political trust as crucial resources for becoming politically engaged (Fennema and Tillie 1999, 2000). More generally, the civic voluntarism approach to political participation points to the individual resources made available by voluntary associations such as civic skills and a sense of political efficacy and political knowledge that can favour participation (Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995). This line of reasoning can also be applied to religious organisations and institutions (Jones-Correa and Leal 2001). However, religious associations might also work through socio-psychological mechanisms by creating group consciousness and a sense of identity that empowers political participation (Calhoun-Brown 1996), rather than simply providing individual resources for use in politics.

With regard to the Swiss context, a clearer understanding of the link between participation in religious associations and political participation should be based on
an in-depth, more qualitative analysis of the associations at stake. The heterogeneity of the Muslim population in Switzerland implies that the religious associations are often structured along ethnic lines. Besides some exceptions (for example, attending the large mosques during some particular religious feasts), practicing Muslims tend to be involved in religious associations related to the ethnic groups to which they belong.

Moreover, at the local level, immigrant religious associations cover a number of fields of activities such as cultural activities, the improvement of linguistic skills, social counselling and so forth. This multitask function of local associations is in part related to the closeness of the Swiss political opportunity structure towards immigrants. The lack of proactive engagement of the public authorities aimed at fostering the immigrants’ social and cultural integration has compelled them to organise in local associations, providing them with the resources and social capital needed either to preserve part of their cultural, social and religious heritage or to help them integrate in the host society (Monnot 2013).

Thus, the theoretical distinction between various types of bonding social capital seems to be blurred by contextual specificities. This concerns in particular the specific roles played by religious associations in domains other than religious practices. Although our findings should be nuanced according to these contextual particularities, they point to the need for a systematic exploration of different bonding ties in the case of ethno-religious minorities.

Notes

[1] Ruthven (1997) uses the expression ‘cultural’ or ‘nominal’ Muslims to designate such a category of persons.
[2] The sample of Muslims considered in this paper is made exclusively of foreigners. According to the most recent data, more than two-thirds of the Muslims living in Switzerland are foreigners.
[4] The survey was relatively long due to a number of practical difficulties we met. First, the list of addresses obtained from the state office in charge of migrations included many wrong addresses and other inaccuracies. Therefore, the polling institute had to make numerous searches to find the respondents and to ask for additional addresses after the survey had begun. Second, obtaining responses by respondents from Maghreb proved particularly difficult because they had to be contacted a high number of times before reaching the targeted sample size. Third, the survey completion was slower for Muslim respondents because it was conducted during Ramadan.
[5] At the time of the survey (2009), Switzerland had not yet recognised Kosovo as an independent state.
[6] According to the Swiss census of 2000, 88.3% of the respondents who declared they belonged to a Muslim religious denomination were also foreigners. Among them, 56.3% came from former Yugoslavia, 20.2% from Turkey and 3.3% from Maghreb (Federal Statistical Office). See Purdie (2009) for a detailed sociography of Muslims in Switzerland.
The response rates were 66% among respondents from Maghreb, 14% among former Yugoslavians, 13% among Turkish respondents and 11% among Swiss respondents. The particularly high response rate for the respondents from Maghreb can be explained by the low number of available addresses for this group, relative to the targeted sample size. Therefore, we contacted these addresses a high number of times.

Question wording: ‘There are different ways of trying to improve things in society or to help prevent things from going wrong. During the last 12 months, have you for such reasons done any of the following?’

Contact activities include the following items: contacted a politician, contacted a national or local government official, contacted the media and contacted a solicitor or a judicial body for non-personal reasons. Group activities include the following items: worked in a political party, worked in a political action group and donated money to a political organisation or group. Protest activities include the following items: worn or displayed a badge, sticker or poster; signed a petition; taken part in a public demonstration; boycotted certain products; deliberately bought certain products for political reasons; taken part in a strike; participated in an illegal action (e.g. blockade, building occupation) and participated in a violent action (e.g. violent demonstration, physical attack).

Teorell, Torcal, and Montero (2007) refer to party activities. We prefer to speak of group activities; we included specific forms of participation that follow the same underlying logic but are not party related.

Question wording: ‘I will now read you a list of different types of associations and organisations. For each of them, please answer ‘yes’ if you (a) are currently a member or have been in the past, or (b) have participated in any activity arranged by any such organisation during the last 12 months’. The list of types of associations includes: sports club or club for outdoor activities/organisation for cultural activities, tradition preserving or any hobby activities; organisation for the advancement of people from the same national origin as the respondent; organisation for the advancement of immigrants in general/antiracist organisation; political organisation; religious or church organisation; organisation for humanitarian, peace, or environmental goals and other types of organisation. Political organisations were excluded to avoid making a tautological argument according to which political participation leads to political participation. In contrast, we follow the social capital theory (Putnam 2000) as well as the civil voluntarism model (Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995) in considering that associational and political participations are two different things.

Unfortunately, our data do not allow us to create an indicator of involvement in ethnic or cross-ethnic organisations that take into account both membership and participation in activities carried out by organisations.

Question wording: ‘How often do you go to the mosque or another place of worship?’ Response items: never, a couple of times a year, once a month, once a week or more, several times a day.

These institutions include the Swiss government, parliament, courts and the legal system, the police, civil servants of the respondent’s commune, the communal government, the cantonal government, and schools and teachers in the respondent’s commune.

Question wording: ‘People’s interest sometimes varies across different areas of politics. How interested are you personally in each of the following areas?’ Response items: Swiss politics; politics of the respondent’s country of origin or that of their parents/ancestors.

Question wording: ‘Which one of the following categories best defines your highest level of education?’ Value 1 in the scale corresponds to the second stage of tertiary education, while value 0 corresponds to an incomplete primary education. The values in between refer, in ascending order, to ‘primary education or first stage of basic education’, ‘lower level secondary education or second stage of basic education’, ‘upper secondary education’, ‘post-secondary or tertiary education’ and ‘first stage of tertiary education’.
See Gianni et al. (forthcoming) for a detailed discussion on the variations in terms of political, social and religious orientations among these three groups of Muslims.

The results of the analyses on the other two dependent variables (group activities and contacting activities) do not differ substantially from those found on the overall political participation and protest activities, at least as far as the impact of associational involvement is concerned.

In this vein, Koopmans et al. (2005) have argued that countries that have a restrictive citizenship regime offer less opportunities for the collective mobilisation of migrants (see Cinalli and Giugni 2011 for a similar argument applied to political participation at the individual level).

The variable measuring the proportion of lifetime spent in Switzerland yields the following mean values: 0.96 for the Swiss, 0.74 for the Turks, 0.63 for the former Yugoslavians and 0.41 for the Maghrebis.

While we have assumed that associational involvement and the social capital emanating from it lead to political participation, it could also be that political participation leads to associational involvement, rather than the other way around. Most of the existing works on social capital—certainly those dealing with migrants—make such an assumption. However, one cannot rule out the reverse causality and the possible existence of a selection effect. This has been shown to exist, for example, for the relationship between social trust (a major aspect stressed by the social capital theory) and participation (Bekkers 2012; Sønderskov 2011; Stolle 1998).

References


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