One foot in parliament, one on the streets: Studying the fluid relation between individual participation and party evaluations of protest.

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Abstract

This paper investigates the interconnection between electoral and non-electoral politics. Through a unique integration of social media and nationally representative survey data, we examine how political parties in Denmark, Germany, and the United Kingdom evaluate episodes of street protest and how these evaluations relate to their voters' participation in such protests. Our analysis shows that all political parties, regardless of type or ideology, engage with the non-electoral field, showing a greater tendency to express support for protests they agree with, rather than to criticize those they oppose, in their social media posts. Moreover, our findings underscore a robust association between party support or criticism of a protest and the likelihood of its voters either participating in or shunning the same protest. These findings renew our understanding of fluid linkages between parties and civil society through a less structured and deterministic double role of voters and street protesters than in the past.

Introduction

Political participation, analytically divided into its electoral and non-electoral varieties, is increasingly regarded as marked by manifold interconnections (Santos & Mercea, 2025). While voting remains a pivotal democratic act, it is no longer the sole normalized avenue for citizens to voice their political preferences. The burgeoning prominence of street mobilizations underscores this broadening landscape of political engagement (Meyer & Tarrow, 1998). The intersection of these two realms has become a central area of study for social scientists pursuing a comprehensive understanding of political action.

Previous scholarship has explored relations between the electoral and non-electoral realms from three perspectives. First, scholars have studied instances where actors from one arena engage in actions traditionally associated with the other — be it political parties participating or even organizing protests (Borbáth & Hutter, 2021) or social movements creating new political parties to compete in elections (Kitschelt, 2006). Second, individual-level work has noted that protest participants have a greater propensity to vote, and that party members are more likely to participate in protests (Giugni & Grasso, 2021). Finally, researchers have explored how social movements can influence policy outcomes (e.g., Giugni, 2004), making the most of the political opportunities they encounter (McAdam, 1999 [1982]).

Notwithstanding, little attention has been paid to the relation between the communication strategies of political parties and their voters' protest behavior. As citizens readily transition between roles as voters and demonstrators, contemporary political participation is no longer compartmentalized and channeled through rigid structures. Instead, there may be a mutual reinforcement or electoral and non-electoral participation that becomes apparent in the course of demonstrations (Giugni & Grasso, 2021) or on social media (Lobera & Portos, 2021). Political parties also navigate a mutable landscape, having one foot in parliament and one on the streets (Borbáth & Hutter, 2021). In this paper, we bridge such insights by examining the relation between party evaluations of protest episodes and their voters' propensity to participate in those episodes.

Through a unique combination of social media and original, quota-based nationally representative, survey data, as well as a series of descriptive and inferential (standard and multilevel regression analyses) statistics, we arrive at three conclusions. First, we find that all political parties—regardless of their type, experience in government, or ideology—engage with

the protest field, albeit to different degrees of intensity. Second, we find a robust association between publicly expressed support for a protest episode by political parties in Denmark, Germany and the United Kingdom, and the participation of their voters in the mobilization. Third, and conversely, we find a significant relation between critical party evaluations of a protest episode and their voters' nonparticipation. We argue that the dual role that active citizens play as voters and protesters acts as a central connection between the electoral and non-electoral fields. Individual voting and protest behavior are congruent and express similar political and policy views when casting their ballots as well as when participating in demonstrations. Consequently, we theorize a double mechanism that characterizes the nexus between political parties and protests. As parties signal their support for protests in which their voters participate, individual protest participation is influenced by party positioning vis-à-vis a demonstration. Conversely, the discursive opportunities created by protests allow electoral representatives to position themselves in relation to the demonstration and the issue related to it.

The interconnection of party politics and protest

In the late 20th and early 21st century, the connections between electoral and non-electoral politics tended to be coordinated by "mass parties" (Katz & Mair, 1995). These political parties had the capacity and the vocation to maintain large membership bases and organize vast sectors of the population. Mass parties were not only platforms for electoral competition but were also deeply entrenched in the fabric of society, bridging the divide between electoral politics and wider societal interactions (Epstein, 1980). Their symbiotic relationship with civil structures, including trade unions and civic organizations, underpinned this cohesive integration of the electoral and non-electoral spheres (Przeworski & Sprague, 1988). However, as state subsidies began to represent a greater proportion of their finances, supplanting member contributions, party apparatuses became increasingly professionalized and detached from their social bases, losing the mobilization capacity they once had (Mair, 2013). Citizens' political participation came to mirror these wider transformations. Electorally, the once-stable terrain of voting, grounded through structural anchors such as class and religious affiliations, became increasingly unpredictable as citizens' vote became more volatile (*Ibid*.). This shift has been understood as a personalization of politics engendered by the structural, socio-economic, transformation of late-modern industrial society, in the Global North (Giddens, 1991).

Against the backdrop of parties' diminished capacity of social organization, and citizens' transition towards individual reflexivity and self-actualization rather than dutiful allegiance to organized groups, grassroots civil society actors have grown in importance. Participation in social movement organizations and actions has become normalized in modern democracies (Meyer & Tarrow, 1998). This normalization of non-electoral activities is grounded in a complex web of relations among organizational, individual and issue-based networks that sustain and encourage participation during and in between protest cycles (Diani, 2015). For citizens, acts of non-electoral participation, including protests, fall into a repertoire of action allowing them, *inter alia*, to engage in a dynamic way with democratic institutions and seek to influence them or hold them to account between election cycles (Dalton, 2008). In this light, electoral and non-electoral participation are no longer alternative, parallel, pathways. Rather, the two are deeply interwoven. As Goldstone (2003, p. 4) contends, there is an "overlap and interpenetration of social movement actors and actions with conventional political participation and political parties" . The rise of digital activism has reinforced this trend, enabling decentralized mobilization and facilitating rapid collective action without reliance on hierarchical organizations (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). As a result, non-electoral actors exhibit a hybridity of engagement, simultaneously participating in electoral politics while also developing alternative avenues of political participation and prefiguration (Tarrow, 2012).

Consequently, the connections between electoral and non-electoral actors and fields have undergone a rejuvenation. Rather than engaging in long-term organizing, political parties now seek more immediate and unmediated connections with society. On the one hand, political parties have used social media to engage with the electorate in more direct and dynamic ways (Mercea & Mosca, 2021). On the other hand, political parties of all kinds increasingly participate and engage with street demonstrations, organized either by them or by other civil society groups (Borbáth & Hutter, 2021). Even if opposition parties with no experience in government are more likely to partake in protest than seasoned mainstream parties, the latter have not abstained from protest. Rather, they have rallied around events that are bigger and less disruptive (*Ibid*.).

Conversely, social movements have also entered the electoral domain. Movement parties, defined as "coalitions of political activists that emanate from social movements and try to apply the organizational and strategic practices of social movements in the arena of party competition" (Kitschelt, 2006, p. 4) have emerged across the world. Their ties to the grassroots

have allowed these parties to provide institutional representation for the more decisive policy changes certain sectors of the population wish to see implemented (Mercea & Santos, 2024). Likewise, they have received an important share of votes from protest participants (Santos & Mercea, 2025). As the dividing line between the electoral and non-electoral fields becomes ever more blurred, advancing our understanding of the complex relations between political actors from these arenas becomes a crucial task to obtain a comprehensive understanding of politics.

A framework for understanding the dynamics between the electoral and non-electoral fields

In their efforts to win (re-)election, political parties and politicians seek to show citizens that they are willing and able to represent and be responsive to their demands (De Mulder, 2023). Responding to protests may allow political representatives to appeal to voters, place pressure on political opponents, and present themselves as 'issue owners' (Walgrave et al., 2012). Thus, political parties closely follow active citizens' non-electoral participation. In this political climate, active citizens—in their dual roles as voters and protesters—have become the transmission belt that connects the electoral and non-electoral components of the democratic system. By virtue of their involvement in both the electoral and non-electoral arenas (Giugni & Grasso, 2021), protest participants occupy a unique place in democratic politics. The protests in which they participate signal to institutional actors what issues are growing in salience, in society (Wouters et al., 2023). Moreover, protests amplify public opinion shifts (Bernardi et al., 2021) and may strengthen and sustain media attention on social issues and mobilizations (Wouters & Lefevere, 2023). Conversely, protesters need allies among institutional representatives in order to amplify their chances to have policy impact (Amenta et al., 2005). This dynamic leads electoral and non-electoral actors to pay close attention to activities in the other field.

While research has shown mixed results on the effect that protests have on institutional politics (Burstein & Linton, 2002; Giugni, 2007), some authors argue that legislators are more inclined to respond to protesters than non-protesters, and notably, they are more responsive to demonstrations staged by low-resource groups than by affluent actors (Gause, 2022). Other scholars have proposed that the impacts that protests have on institutions consist on amplifying

public opinion (Agnone, 2007) or that protests impact institutions when they are aligned with the views of the public (Giugni, 2007). Despite the mixed results in how responsive institutional actors are to protests, research into parties' digital communication has consistently illustrated how they signal endorsement or criticism of protest mobilization via social media public organizational channels (Hoffmann & Neumayer, 2024; Wouters et al., 2023). As such, social media activities and engagement with social mobilizations, such as protests, become a common and essential component of political party activities. Hence, protesters' potential involvement as voters encourages institutional actors to pay attention and sometimes react to public protests.

Considering the relationship from an alternative perspective—of political party voters—helps further explicate this relationship between political parties and protest. Voters' ties to political parties influence their non-electoral behavior. Studies in European, African, and American countries suggest that political party membership is associated with more in-person attendance of protest event. Equally, the link between individual affiliation with parties and protest participation has been assumed to be stronger for some parties than others, depending on characteristics like their opposition or challenger nature (De Vries & Hobolt, 2020), being movement parties (Kitschelt, 2006), or being left- or right-wing populist parties (Pirro & Portos, 2021). Yet, researchers have been surprisingly silent about the possibility that acts of political communication influence individual behavior.

Seminally, Finkel and Opp (1991) proposed a *party incentives* model, arguing that parties may send behavioral cues that act as incentives influencing individual choices. Or, as they put it, "if a party encourages certain types of political action, those strongly identifying with the party will be more likely to comply with the party's behavioral expectations and cues" (1991, p. 345). Thus as Han (Han, 2009) pertinently stresses, a party endorsement of a movement that mobilizes around topical issues and aligns with the party's ideological principles can encourage voters to partake in movement activities. Empirical tests of this assumption, however, stopped short of incorporating a measure of these *cues*—such as parties' evaluations of protest—instead explaining political action through the strength of individual affiliation with a political party (Finkel & Opp, 1991), or pointing to a significant relationship between protest participation, voting for challenger parties and online political activism (Lobera & Portos, 2021).

Against this backdrop, this paper asks whether supportive or critical party evaluations of a protest episode are associated with protest participation on the individual level. We do so through three interrelated research questions, building on one another. We first ask, do parties engage with the protest field in their communication (RQ1a), and how does this engagement vary across parties (RQ1b)? Second, we enquire whether individual party support – as expressed through voting – is associated with protest participation (RQ2). Once we explore whether political parties, indeed, engage with the protest field and whether party affinities influence protest behavior, we consider, finally, whether there is a relation between the evaluation of protest episodes by political parties and their voters' protest participation (RQ3)? We hypothesize that supportive communicative evaluation by political parties correlates with individual protest participation (H1); and, conversely, that critical communicative evaluation by political parties correlates with abstaining from protest participation (H2). To probe this proposition, we proceed in three analytical steps.

In what follows, we argue that general statements on a direction in the relation between party cues and the protest engagement of their voters may be, if anything, imprecise. Thus, the direction of the relation should be evaluated taking into account the specific circumstances in which a protest episode develops. To grapple with this proposition, we first need to note that protest episodes are periods of sustained collective action during which protest events are linked through shared grievances, frames, repertoires and mobilizing structures (McAdam et al., 2001). During these episodes, there is a particularly high number of interactions between a variety of political actors, including movements and their organizations, legislators, political parties, and citizens. While protest episodes represent periods of peak mobilization around a particular issue, political parties and social organizations engage with these topics prior and after these episodes through, *inter alia*, policy proposals, mobilization attempts and a diversity of framing strategies. Social leaders and organizations, as well as institutional representatives and political parties often have strong connections to each other that preclude any cycle of mobilization (Carvalho, 2025), and protesters themselves influence their political environments, making later protests more or less likely (Tarrow, 2012).

Moreover, as already discussed, protests often represent ongoing shifts in public opinion (Bernardi et al., 2021) or an increase in the commitment to a political demand from specific sectors of the population (Gause, 2022). Consequently, voters may have been exposed to the views of the political parties they support prior to the cycle of mobilization, increasing

or decreasing the likelihood that they partake in protests on a specific issue, regardless of whether the party expresses its opinion on that specific mobilization. In the next section, we present our approach to analyzing these dynamics between parties, their voters and protests.

Research design

In this study, we attempt to combine social media and survey data in an innovative way to understand the interactions between political parties and their protest-going voters, in three European countries (Denmark, Germany and the United Kingdom). Representing Northern and Western Europe, these three countries have similar rates of internet penetration and social media usage (Newman et al., 2024). Historically, the countries have distinct party systems and protest cultures. First, their party systems are characterized by different degrees of openness (Casal Bértoa & Enyedi, 2016). Open party systems provide fertile conditions for the formation of new political parties and their access into institutions. Conversely, closed party systems put up more obstacles in the way of new parties and their institutional journeys. Importantly for our analysis, those authors argue that in open party systems citizens have greater incentives to channel their political views through institutional actors, whereas in closed party systems they are more likely to do so through extra-institutional channels, such as protests (*Ibid*.).

Among our country cases, specifically, Casal Bértoa and Enyedi (2016) consider Denmark to be a very open system. By contrast, the United Kingdom, with its first-past-the-post electoral system, is a closed one. Germany, with its mixed-member proportional system, combines relatively open opportunities for party entry with institutional mechanisms, such as electoral thresholds, stands in the middle. Second, our country cases differ considerably with regards to the proportion of individuals who participate in protests. As indicated in Table 1, our survey data shows that while around 23 percent of the German population participated in a demonstration in the three years prior to the fielding of our survey, only 14% did so in Denmark and, 12% in the United Kingdom. In sum, our study covers three countries from the same region of Europe. These countries represent an array of party systems that have seen dissimilar levels of protest participation. As such, we used country variables to control for fixed effects in our regression models.

Our selection of parties aims at a comprehensive picture of each country's party landscape, including a total of 27 parties in all three countries[1], and representing both long-established parties with government participation, as well as newly emerged parties, associated with social movements. Each party was represented in the respective national parliament or played otherwise significant roles in their respective political landscape (e.g. ReformUK/Brexit Party), and was active on social media, hence allowing us to collect data on their public, unmediated communication with the electorate, as well as data on said electorates individual protest behavior.

Finally, in each country, a panel of experts on contentious collective action nominated the most prominent episodes in the period from 2015 to 2021. Experts consisted of political scientists, sociologists and communication scholars, members of the [REMOVED FOR PEER REVIEW] project, which focused on the relationship between social movements and political parties. The authors checked those episodes against media reports before being included in the survey.

In our selection of countries, parties, and protest episodes, we thus follow a pragmatic approach that includes diverse electoral systems, political traditions, party families, ideologies, and policy demands. As such, we are less interested in isolating the effect of any of these factors but rather to control for these variations, to assess the robustness of the association between party evaluations and individual protest behaviour.

Table 1: Protest incidence per country

Country	Protest incidence
Denmark	14.99%
Germany	23.12%
United Kingdom	12.10%

Social media data collection

[1] See Appendix for an overview of parties and their social media activity.

We identified Twitter and Facebook as the two crucial social media platforms used by political parties (see Hoffmann & Neumayer, 2024) and collected data via their respective Application Programming Interfaces (API), i.e. Twitter API v2 and CrowdTangle API. For all three countries, parties were selected based on national-level parliamentary representation and ideological position. This way, we obtain a comprehensive picture of the political party landscape in each country, covering established parties from social-democratic, Christian-conservative, and liberal traditions, as well as parties of the green, radical left, and far-right families. As survey respondents were asked about participation in each county's major protest episodes between 2015 and 2021, social media data was collected retrospectively for the same time period. As Table 2 illustrates, we collected a total of 548,067 Tweets and Facebook posts by 27 parties.

Table 2: Number of Tweets and Posts by Country and Data Reduction Step

	Denmark	**Germany**	**UK**	**Total**
Collected Data	122,139	178,088	247,840	548,067
After protest-dictionary application (% of total)	1,731 (1.5%)	4,970 (2.8%)	3,430 (1.4%)	10,131 (1.8%)
After human validation (% of total)	1,371 (1.1%)	3,912 (2.2%)	2,392 (1%)	7,675 (1.4%)

As we are interested in how these parties publicly communicate their evaluation of specific protest episodes, we follow a multi-step data reduction strategy: First, we applied language-specific dictionaries of terms that signal an engagement with protest in the posts' or tweets' texts[2]. While this is standard practice for the identification of protest-related content in text corpora, results can still be expected to contain many false positives (Lorenzini et al., 2022). Hence, the resulting 10,131 observations were subject to human coding as our second step of data reduction: The authors developed a codebook in order to exclude false positive results, and code the remaining observations in more detail: Most importantly, coders were asked to identify if the observation referred to any protest, as well as to identify whether the mobilization was one of the major protest episodes that survey respondents were asked about – and if so,

[2] See Appendix for an overview of dictionary terms and results of their application.

which one. Second, coders were asked to identify whether the text evaluated the respective episode in a positive and supportive way, a neutral, or in a negative and discouraging way[3]. Through multiple rounds of training on samples of n=100 for each country, the two (DK, GER) respectively five (UK) coders reached sufficient inter-rater reliability scores (Fleiss' Kappa) for each country, ranging between .66 and .77 (false positives), .73 and .91 (protest episode), and .64 and .80 (evaluation). Given the known difficulty of inter-rater reliability in protest-related coding, we interpret these scores as very satisfactory in comparison to similar studies (Lorenzini et al., 2022). Ultimately, the resulting social media dataset allows for a comparative assessment of parties' engagement with protest relative to their overall public communication, as well as an understanding of each party's evaluation of the major protest episodes in their respective countries between 2015 and 2021.

As for the survey data, we obtained it from online panel surveys (N = 5,249 participants) conducted in Denmark (N=1,001), Germany (N=2,024), and the United Kingdom (N=2,224). Fieldwork took place from February 21 to March 11, 2022. YouGov, our pollster partner, applied quotas in each country to align with national censuses in terms of age, education, region, gender, and past voting behavior.

Data format and dependent variable

As part of the survey,[4] we asked respondents about their participation in the major protest episodes that took place in each country from 2015 to 2021.[1] Given the variety of protests we included in the study, as well as different individual patterns of participation across individuals, we transformed our dataset from wide to long format. Instead of having the data from each survey participant in one row, we organized our dataset along protest opportunities, each constituting one observation. Each protest episode we asked about in our survey represents one protest opportunity in our dataset, in which individuals may have participated or not. Additionally, we associated each protest opportunity with a unique individual identifier for each survey participant. In this way, each individual identifier is associated with several protest opportunities. This data structure (protest opportunities nested within individuals) allowed us to analyze participation in a diversity of protests, identifying general patterns across cases while

[3] For detailed results and coding instructions, see Appendix.
[4] For a complete list of the survey questions used to construct each variable, please, see the appendix.

accounting for the nested nature of our data, as forms of participation vary across individuals. Following the restructuring of our dataset, we constructed our binary dependent variable, and assigned "1" to an instance of individual participation and "0" to instances of non-participation.

Independent variables

Our main predictors of interest are whether the political party individuals voted for in the last general election had publicly supported or criticized the protest episode. To create these variables, we matched the social media data we collected on whether political parties had expressed support for or criticism of a protest episode with data in our survey about the party individuals voted for in the last general election. For our party support variable, for each protest opportunity, we assigned the variable a value of "1" if the party the person voted for in the last general election expressed support for the protest episode on social media, and "0" otherwise. Similarly, for our party criticism variable, we coded it "1" if the political party that an individual supported with their ballot in the last general election had expressed criticism of the protest episode, and "0" in the rest of the cases.

Beyond our main variables of interest, in subsequent models, we include a number of controls. We account, first, for whether individuals are members of a political party through a binary variable. Second, we control for membership of social movement organizations, combining 14 items recording membership of different types of organizations into a binary variable that is "1" if the person is a member of at least one organization and "0" otherwise. Third, we record political interest through a five-point scale ranging from "very interested" to "not at all interested". Fourth, we measured perceptions of collective efficacy through a five-point scale variable measuring the degree to which respondents believed protests could influence the situation in their country. Fifth, we accounted for respondents' ideology in two ways. First, we combine five items into a composite ten-point scale that measured the degree of cultural liberalism of respondents, which has been portrayed as an appropriate way of capturing contemporary political cleavages (e.g., Pirro & Portos, 2021). Second, we also account for respondents' self-positioning in the left-right political axis. Finally, we controlled for several demographic variables, including respondents' sex, age, income, and educational attainment which we recoded into a three-point scale for low, middle and higher education. In

a second model, we also control for the issue category of the protest episode, including binary variables for whether the main claims of the mobilization were related to labor and social rights, civil rights, global justice, Covid-19, far-right, against the far right, as well as in favor or against Brexit. We used the social rights code as the reference category. A detailed categorization of each protest episode can be found in the appendix. Finally, in a third model, we included controls for the party individuals voted for in the last general election. To compare political parties across countries, we coded each party's membership[5] to one of the European political groups (e.g. EPP, S&D, etc.). As research on parties and protest has shown, ideological leaning serves to explain variations in parties' stance toward street mobilization (Borbáth & Hutter, 2020; Hoffmann et al., 2022). While ideological affinity can be operationalized in multiple and more fine-grained ways, European-level party membership has been shown to serve as a shorthand and useful proxy (Bressanelli, 2012). Hence, we argue that this level of aggregation facilitates the reporting and interpretation of our results, without distorting them.

Multiple imputation and analytical approach

Before implementing our statistical models, we applied multiple imputation (Rubin, 1987) to address the common issue of incomplete data often encountered in survey research. We employed a probabilistic model and generated 20 separate datasets, which included the variables relevant to our study. Each replacement value introduced an element of randomness to accommodate the inherent unpredictability in our predictions. To carry out this process, we made use of the "mitml" R package (Grund et al., 2023), which has been specifically designed to multiply impute multilevel data. Following the creation of these randomly imputed datasets, we proceeded to calculate estimates for each one and subsequently combined the results.

We used multilevel binary regression models to analyze our data. Engagement with protest opportunities varies substantially across individuals but each individual is likely to follow a pattern, both in terms of protest participation rates as well as the types of mobilizations individuals engage in. Multilevel models allow us to account for the clustered nature of our data, as they assume a greater degree of relation among the data points of protest opportunities related to the same individual than those that are related to different individuals. Moreover, this modelling strategy allowed us to account for variables related to each protest opportunity, as

[5] Or, in the case of the UK: *former* membership.

well as for each individual within whom protest opportunities are nested, allowing us to compare the effects of individual-level and protest-level variables in the outcome variable.

Results

We start our inquiry by looking at whether political parties express their opinion about protests and the types of evaluation—positive or negative—they make. Second, we explore whether individual voting choice has any relation to protest participation. Finally, we investigate whether the party evaluation of a protest episode has any relation to the participation of its voters in a mobilization.

Beginning with the question of how and whether parties express their evaluation of protests (RQ1a), Table 3 presents the count of social media posts that each party under study dedicated to street mobilizations (both those protest episodes included in our survey and others), as well as the proportion these messages represents in relation to their overall social media engagement. An initial exploration of the data indicates that, during the period of our study, all political parties made statements in relation to protests, albeit with some paying more attention to them than others (RQ1b).

Table 3: Political parties' social media posts and engagement with protests

	Total obs.	Protest related (N)	Protest related (%)	Supportive of protest (N)	Supportive of protest (%)	Critical with protest (N)	Critical with protest (%)	Unclear position (N)	Unclear position (%)
Denmark (means)			0.74%		74.90%		14.70%		10.20%
Alternativet (Greens/EFA)	33,959	442	1.30%	423	95.70%	7	1.58%	12	2.71%
Enhedslisten (GUE/NGL)	12,010	224	1.87%	211	94.20%	4	1.79%	9	4.02%
Dansk Folkeparti (ID)	9,775	42	0.43%	14	33.33%	21	50.00%	6	14.29%
Frie Grønne (Greens/EFA)	4,119	86	2.09%	83	96.51%	3	3.49%	0	0.00%
Det Konservative Folkeparti (EPP)	8,322	12	0.14%	5	41.67%	5	41.67%	2	16.67%
Kristendemokraterne (EPP)	2,006	10	0.50%	7	70.00%	3	30.00%	0	0.00%
Liberal Alliance (RENEW)	7,286	14	0.19%	9	64.29%	1	7.14%	4	28.57%
Nye Borgerlige (ECR)	1,527	7	0.46%	4	57.14%	1	14.29%	2	28.57%
Radikale Venstre (ALDE)	15,973	84	0.53%	74	88.10%	1	1.19%	9	10.71%
Socialistisk Folkeparti (Greens/EFA)	12,786	134	1.05%	129	96.27%	3	2.24%	2	1.49%
Socialdemokratiet (S&D)	3,875	7	0.18%	7	100.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Venstre (RENEW)	9,039	13	0.14%	8	61.54%	3	23.08%	2	15.38%
Germany (means)			2.49%		75.18%		18.42%		6.40%
Alternative für Deutschland (ID)	9,350	252	2.70%	142	56.35%	92	36.51%	18	7.14%
CDU/CSU (EPP)	48,490	225	0.46%	99	44.00%	92	40.89%	34	15.11%
Freie Demokratische Partei (RENEW)	24,571	253	1.03%	198	78.26%	40	15.81%	15	5.93%
Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (Greens/EFA)	13,404	410	3.06%	391	95.37%	13	3.17%	6	1.46%
Die Linke (GUE/NGL)	33,380	2118	6.35%	1970	93.01%	82	3.87%	66	3.12%
SPD (S&D)	48,893	654	1.34%	550	84.10%	67	10.24%	37	5.66%
United Kingdom (means)			1.27%		81.85%		14.53%		3.42%
Conservatives (ECR)	26,648	65	0.24%	25	38.46%	35	53.85%	5	7.69%
Greens (Greens/EFA)	37,348	1059	2.84%	1039	98.11%	7	0.66%	13	1.23%
Labour (S&D)	28,837	153	0.53%	148	96.73%	3	1.96%	2	1.31%
Liberal Democrats (RENEW)	40,300	454	1.13%	434	95.59%	6	1.32%	12	2.64%
Reform UK (ID)	6,282	194	3.09%	175	90.21%	18	9.28%	0	0.00%
Scottish National Party (Greens/EFA)	76,647	237	0.31%	209	88.19%	11	4.64%	17	7.17%
UK Independence Party (ID)	31,778	230	0.72%	151	65.65%	69	30.00%	9	3.91%

In addition, we observe a tendency across countries whereby parties tend to post about protests on social media to express support rather than criticism. However, looking into ideological differences, we detect a pattern in which left-of-center parties tend to be more supportive of protests in their public messages, while right-of-center parties tend to be more critical. In Denmark, more than 94% of the protest-related messages from Alternativet, Frie Grønne, Socialistisk Folkeparti, and Enhedslisten were supportive of protests. We observe the same trend in Germany (>93% for Bündnis 90/Die Grünen and Die Linke), and the UK (>96% for The Greens and the Scottish National Party). In the United Kingdom, Labour and Liberal Democrats also express support in more than 95% of their protest-related social media posts. Conversely, right-wing parties stand out for their criticisms. In Denmark, radical right Dansk Folkeparti dedicated 50% of their messages about protests to expressing criticism, and center-right parties Det Konservative Folkeparti and Kristendemokraterne did so 36% of the time. In Germany, CDU/CSU expressed criticism in 41% of their protest references, and far-right AfD did so 37% of the time. In the United Kingdom, 54% of protest-related messages from the Conservative party expressed critique, and 21% of posts from UKIP and Reform UK were critical of protests.

Next, exploring whether there is any association between individual voting and protest participation (RQ2), Table 4 presents a set of binary logistic regression models for the relationship between protest participation and several independent variables, including voting behavior. Notably, the model aggregating all protest episodes together does not show any significant correlation between the vote for a party and the propensity to participate in a protest. The finding is broadly in line with existing theory. One would expect both electoral and non-electoral participation to be driven by ideology and for individuals to participate on issues which they support.

Table 4: Protest participation and vote models

	All	*Against far-right*	*Civil rights*	*Covid-19*	*Environment*	*Far-right*	*Global justice*	*Labor & social rights*	*For Brexit*	*Against Brexit*
Female	0.9945 *	0.9924	0.9727	0.8671	0.9932	0.5181 *	0.9933	1.1274	0.9938	0.9953
Age	0.9508 ***	0.937 ***	0.0337 ***	0.0432 ***	0.931 ***	0.0866 ***	0.9549 ***	0.147 **	0.986	0.9663 *
Socio-economic status	0.9919	0.9831	0.5002	1.5187	0.9823 *	1.0712	0.9976	0.8645	0.9913	0.9931
Urban	1.0077 **	1.0144 *	1.6858	1.1349	1.0105 **	1.1753	1.0074	1.6453	1.0058	1.0097
Care	1.0094 ***	1.0188 **	2.1477 **	1.755 **	1.0079 *	1.4034	1.0064	2.9043 ***	1.0025	1.0047
Partner	1	1.0055	0.7128	0.8405	1.0016	0.8887	1.0013	0.5875	0.9985	0.9984
Party member	1.0379 ***	1.0517 ***	3.173 ***	1.6544	1.0397 ***	1.3071	1.0603 ***	3.2295 **	0.9869	1.0162
SMO member	1.0176 ***	1.0359 ***	1.5037	2.2387 ***	1.0239 ***	1.6207	1.0167 ***	2.413 **	1.0125 **	1.0126 *
Culturally liberal	1.0335 ***	1.066 ***	7.1125 *	0.3687	1.0696 ***	1.5504	1.0351 **	24.3692 **	0.9802	1.0336 *
Economic right	0.9939	0.9862	0.1829 **	2.0224	0.991	3.4281 *	0.9888	0.1777 *	0.9782 **	0.9646 ***
Political interest	1.0176 ***	1.0297 *	4.8479 **	1.9994	1.0192 **	5.5619 **	1.0105	1.4833	0.9936	1.0071
Collective efficacy	1.0184 ***	1.0012	2.6352 *	5.4813 ***	1.0205 ***	2.2793	1.0213 **	5.1068 **	1.0128	1.0143
RENEW	0.9952	0.9881	1.8664	0.3884 *	0.9894	0.4066	0.9954	1.1885	0.9938	1.0164
ECR	1.0038	0.9801 *	0.5948	0.839	1.0087	1.0625	1.0068	1.0068	0.9983	1.0034
EPP	0.9952	0.9994	2.6041	0.8517	0.9971	0.6291	0.9944	8.0813 *		
Greens/EFA	1.0044	1.042 *	1.7956	0.1922 **	1.0297 ***	0.4497	0.9978	2.3962	0.9968	1.0158
GUE/GNL	1.0055	1.0094	1.2242	1.1823	0.9908	0.3496	1.0238	2.0972	1.0181	0.9918
ID	1.0107	0.9983	0.3985	2.5742 **	0.9963	1.8683	1.0155	1.3637	0.9859 *	1.0066
S&D	0.9971	0.9971	1.1641	0.84	0.9904	0.2399 **	1.001	2.1147	1.3637	1.3637
DK	0.9705 ***		0.2365 ***	0.2071 ***	0.9617 ***	0.5096				
UK	0.9798 ***			0.2029 ***	0.9671 ***	0.3234 **	0.3234 **	0.3301 *		

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

When we separate protest episodes by policy issue, we see that voting becomes a relevant covariate. However, there are differences in how parties and policy issues combine. For instance, voting for liberal and Green parties is negatively associated with participation in anti-lockdown Covid-19 protests. Moreover, voting for Green parties increases the odds of having participated in protests in support of environmental causes, and voting for radical left parties increases the odds of participating in protests against the far right. Similarly, voting for Social Democratic parties increases the odds of having participated in protests against the far right, as well as in protests related to labor and social rights. Far-right voters, in their turn, are more likely to have participated in anti-lockdown Covid-19 demonstrations. Overall, these results indicate that individuals act in a coherent manner in relation to their electoral and non-electoral participation.

Focusing on the relationship between protest participation and support or criticism from the party for whom an individual voted (RQ3), Table 5 displays the results of our multilevel binary logistic regression models. Participation in a protest and the evaluation of the protest by the party individuals voted for are consistently related across our models. Support of a protest episode by the political party individuals voted for increases the odds that an individual participates in that mobilization. Conversely, the criticism of a protest by the political party an individual voted for in the last general election is significantly and inversely correlated with that individual's participation in the event. These results are robust when including these two variables alone (Models 1, 4, and 7 for support and Models 2, 5, and 8 for criticism and in combination (Models 3, 6, and 9), as well as when controlling for common individual-level predictors of protest behavior (Models 1-3); the issue category of the protest episode (Models 4-6); as well as when controlling for the party an individual voted for in the last general election (Models 7-9). Hence, overall, we see a significant relation between political parties' evaluation of a mobilization and the participation, or lack thereof, of their voters in a protest episode that goes beyond mere ideological affinities among political parties, protest issues and voting preferences.

Table 5: Individual protest participation and party evaluations

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
PROTEST-LEVEL VARIABLES									
Party supportive	1.0184 ***		1.0171 ***	1.0179 ***		1.0167 ***	1.0195 ***		1.0182 ***
Party critical		0.9873 ***	0.9941 *		0.9876 ***	0.9926 **		0.9871 ***	0.9949 *
Against far-right				0.9899 **	0.9889 ***	0.9883 ***			
Civil rights				0.9992	0.9985	0.9993			
Covid-19				1.0018	0.9984	1.0022			
Environmental				1.0009	0.9989	1.0002			
Far-right				0.9912 **	0.9887 ***	0.992 **			
Global justice				0.9916 **	0.9876 ***	0.9909 **			
For Brexit				0.9935	0.9891 ***	0.9932 *			
Against Brexit				1.0014	0.9991	1.0013			
INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL VARIABLES									
Female	0.9945 *	0.9945 *	0.9945 *	0.9945 *	0.9945 *	0.9945 *	0.9946 *	0.9944 *	0.9946 *
Age	0.9509 ***	0.9513 ***	0.951 ***	0.9509 ***	0.9512 ***	0.9511 ***	0.9508 ***	0.9508 ***	0.9508 ***
Socio-economic status	0.9898 *	0.9908 *	0.9899 *	0.9898 *	0.9908 *	0.99 *	0.9919	0.9918	0.9919
Urban	1.0073 **	1.0074 **	1.0073 **	1.0073 **	1.0074 **	1.0073 **	1.0075 **	1.0076 **	1.0075 **
Dependents under care	1.0094 ***	1.0094 ***	1.0094 ***	1.0094 ***	1.0094 ***	1.0094 ***	1.0094 ***	1.0094 ***	1.0094 ***
Living with partner	0.9998	1	0.9998	0.9997	1	0.9997	0.9998	1	0.9998
Party member	1.038 ***	1.0375 ***	1.038 ***	1.038 ***	1.0375 ***	1.038 ***	1.0382 ***	1.0378 ***	1.0382 ***
SMO member	1.0171 ***	1.0174 ***	1.0171 ***	1.0171 ***	1.0174 ***	1.0171 ***	1.0175 ***	1.0176 ***	1.0176 ***
Culturally liberal	1.0278 ***	1.0308 ***	1.0278 ***	1.0279 ***	1.0308 ***	1.0278 ***	1.0328 ***	1.0333 ***	1.0327 ***
Economic right	0.9969	0.9952	0.9969	0.9968	0.9952	0.9969	0.9939	0.9944	0.9941
Political interest	1.0171 ***	1.0193 ***	1.0175 ***	1.0171 ***	1.0193 ***	1.0176 ***	1.0173 ***	1.0178 ***	1.0174 ***
Collective efficacy	1.0178 ***	1.0187 ***	1.0179 ***	1.0178 ***	1.0187 ***	1.0179 ***	1.0182 ***	1.0184 ***	1.0182 ***
ERC voter							1.0042	1.0045	1.0045
EPP voter							0.9912	0.9984	0.9927
GUE/NGL voter							0.9937	1.0073	0.9951
Greens/EFA voter							0.9945	1.0051	0.9954
ID voters							1.007	1.014 *	1.0086
RENEW voter							0.9905 *	0.9971	0.9915 *
S&D voter							0.9916 *	0.9985	0.9925 *
COUNTRY CONTROLS (r.c.: Germany)									
Denmark	0.9745 ***	0.9683 ***	0.9732 ***	0.9702 ***	0.9631 ***	0.9679 ***	0.9746 ***	0.9681 ***	0.9734 ***
United Kingdom	0.9828 ***	0.978 ***	0.9814 ***	0.9796 ***	0.9748 ***	0.9775 ***	0.9801 ***	0.9778 ***	0.9793 ***

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

In Table 6, we report the multilevel regression models weighting party evaluations by the attention parties devoted to each protest episode. We calculate party attention to a mobilization as the proportion of party tweets linked to the protest episode from the total number of tweets it posted. Then, we multiply this measure by the binary indicator of whether a party supported or criticized the mobilization, obtaining a continuous measure of a party's supportive or critical attention. As can be observed, the associations remain highly consistent with those observed in the previous models. The more a party communicates supportive messages about a protest, the more likely it is that its voters report participating in that mobilization. This positive correlation holds across all models, even when controlling for individual- and protest-level factors. Hence, party support appears to be linked to protest participation not only through its direction but also through its communicative salience. The results suggest that elite endorsements and visibility are associated with higher levels of voter engagement in collective action, reflecting how partisan approval may coincide with the legitimization of certain forms of protest.

By contrast, the correlation between critical attention and participation is less stable, although its direction is consistent with theoretical expectations. When modeled together with supportive attention, the coefficient for critical attention loses significance and exhibits wide confidence intervals. This results from the rarity of protest episodes that received sustained critical coverage from parties and the near absence of overlap between supportive and critical communication. In other words, parties that express support for a protest seldom devote comparable communicative effort to criticizing others, leaving limited information to estimate both associations simultaneously. The imprecision of the estimates should therefore be interpreted as a function of data sparsity and collinearity rather than as evidence against a negative association between critical cues and participation.

When critical attention is analyzed in isolation, however, its correlation with protest participation is negative (odd ratio below 1), substantial, and statistically significant. Voters whose preferred parties communicated strong criticism of a protest are less likely to report participation in that event, suggesting that negative party evaluations coincide with lower engagement among their supporters. Taken together, these results indicate that party communication is systematically associated with voter participation patterns: supportive attention correlates with mobilization, while critical attention correlates with disengagement.

In sum, our results show that party cues–=both in relation to the evaluation of the protest episode as well as its salience–have a relation to voters' protest behavior. This conclusion takes this analysis past a simple confirmation of an anticipated party-voter ideological alignment. In the appendix, we include the results per country. There, we likewise restrict our observations to voters and to right-wing voters—as our social media analysis showed that they are the parties who are most likely to criticize a protest. All results point to the same relations, giving us confidence in the robustness of our conclusions.

Table 6: Individual protest participation and party evaluations x party attention

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
PROTEST-LEVEL VARIABLES									
Party supportive x Party attention	1.3218 ***		1.3199 ***	1.3187 ***		1.3155 ***	1.3314 ***		1.3302 ***
Party critical x Party attention		0.7655 **	0.9705		0.7775 **	0.9357		0.7643 **	0.983
Against far-right				0.9855 ***	0.9888 ***	0.9853 ***			
Civil rights				0.9969	0.9969	0.997			
Covid-19				0.9981	0.997	0.9983			
Environmental				0.9972	0.9979	0.997			
Far-right				0.9865 ***	0.9849 ***	0.9866 ***			
Global justice				0.9872 ***	0.9855 ***	0.9871 ***			
For Brexit				0.9887 **	0.9876 **	0.9887 **			
Against Brexit				0.9939	0.9989	0.9939			
INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL VARIABLES									
Female	0.9952	0.9951 *	0.9952	0.9952	0.9951 *	0.9952	0.9953	0.9951 *	0.9953
Age	0.9502 ***	0.9504 ***	0.9502 ***	0.9502 ***	0.9503 ***	0.9503 ***	0.9495 ***	0.9501 ***	0.9496 ***
Socio-economic status	0.9916	0.9922	0.9916	0.9916	0.9922	0.9916	0.9939	0.9938	0.9939
Urban	1.0075 **	1.0077 **	1.0075 **	1.0075 **	1.0077 **	1.0075 **	1.0077 **	1.0079 **	1.0077 **
Dependents under care	1.0095 ***	1.0094 ***	1.0095 ***	1.0095 ***	1.0094 ***	1.0095 ***	1.0095 ***	1.0094 ***	1.0095 ***
Living with partner	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.9998	1	0.9998
Party member	1.0389 ***	1.038 ***	1.0389 ***	1.0389 ***	1.038 ***	1.0389 ***	1.039 ***	1.0383 ***	1.039 ***
SMO member	1.0164 ***	1.0167 ***	1.0164 ***	1.0164 ***	1.0167 ***	1.0164 ***	1.0168 ***	1.017 ***	1.0168 ***
Culturally liberal	1.0286 ***	1.0322 ***	1.0286 ***	1.0286 ***	1.0322 ***	1.0286 ***	1.0339 ***	1.0351 ***	1.0339 ***
Economic right	0.9995	0.9984	0.9996	0.9995	0.9984	0.9996	0.9964	0.9972	0.9964
Political interest	1.0194 ***	1.0217 ***	1.0195 ***	1.0194 ***	1.0217 ***	1.0196 ***	1.0196 ***	1.0204 ***	1.0196 ***
Collective efficacy	1.0193 ***	1.0202 ***	1.0193 ***	1.0193 ***	1.0202 ***	1.0193 ***	1.0199 ***	1.0199 ***	1.0199 ***
ERC voter							1.0033	1.0051	1.0033
EPP voter							0.9946	0.9975	0.9948
GUE/NGL voter							0.9984	1.0062	0.9985
Greens/EFA voter							0.9935	1.0047	0.9936
ID voters							1.0054	1.0128 *	1.0055
RENEW voter							0.99 *	0.9961	0.9901 *
S&D voter							0.992 *	0.9985	0.9921 *
COUNTRY CONTROLS (r.c.: Germany)									
Denmark	0.9779 ***	0.9706 ***	0.9777 ***	0.9722 ***	0.9654 ***	0.9717 ***	0.9781 ***	0.9704 ***	0.978 ***
United Kingdom	0.9837 ***	0.979 ***	0.9836 ***	0.9803 ***	0.9758 ***	0.9799 ***	0.9823 ***	0.978 ***	0.9822 ***

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Discussion and conclusions

As political participation dynamics become ever more complex, this paper aimed to contribute to the understanding of the interconnections between electoral and non-electoral politics. With this goal in mind, we asked: How do political parties' endorsement or criticism of protests, relate to their voters' decision to take part in street protests? Using data from Denmark, Germany and the United Kingdom, we find a significant association between party evaluations of protest episodes and their voters' protest participation. Regardless of ideology, the fact that a party expressed a positive evaluation of a protest episode increases the likelihood that its voters participated in that episode. Contrariwise, negative evaluations decrease that likelihood. With that finding, we invite an examination of the direction of this association.

As discussed, and in line with McAdam and Tarrow's (2010) call for political participation research to encompass both electoral and non-electoral engagement, scholars have begun exploring them together. However, while the organizational linkages among social movements and political parties have received much attention—as has party involvement in street protests (e.g., Borbáth & Hutter, 2021; Giugni & Grasso, 2021)—less is known about the relation between public communication by political parties and their voters' protest participation. With this paper, we continue advancing this fertile area of research by fleshing out the relation between parties, on the one hand, and voters' electoral and non-electoral participation, on the other.

We used a unique combination of survey and social media data to match citizen and political party engagement with protest episodes. We collected nationally representative survey data on citizens' voting behavior as well as on their participation in the major protest episodes in their countries, between 2015 and 2021. Moreover, we obtained data about the position expressed by political parties on these mobilizations, on Facebook and Twitter. This original dataset allowed us to precisely analyze the relation between citizen protest participation and the evaluation of the same protests by the parties for which they voted in general elections.

We carried out our analysis in four steps. First, we probed whether political parties express their opinion about street mobilizations while differentiating between positive and negative evaluations of them. Descriptive statistics of party social media statements, across our country cases, evidenced that all political parties made public comments about street protests, on social media. We further established that political parties tend to refer to mobilizations they

support, rather than to criticize those they oppose. However, we noted that support for protests is more prominent among left-leaning parties, while right-leaning parties criticize protests more often.

Second, we explored whether there is any relation between individual voting and protest behavior. Using binary logistic regressions, we find that vote choice is a significant covariate of protest behavior. The party an individual voted for in the last general election is a good predictor for the protest issues that will drive them to the streets. This result points to an ideological coherence between people's electoral and non-electoral participation. Third, we studied whether parties' evaluation of a protest episode has any relation to their voters' propensity to participate in that action. Employing multilevel binary logistic regression models, we found that the party expression of support for a protest episode is associated with a greater tendency by voters to participate in a demonstration. Conversely, when political parties express criticism towards a mobilization, their voters are more likely to refrain from participating in it. Finally, we weighed parties' evaluations of protests against the attention they paid to each episode, finding a similar association between parties' supportive attention and the participation of their voters, as well as parties' critical attention and their voters' disengagement. These results are robust when controlling for well-established predictors of protest behavior, as well as for the issue category of a protest or for the political party for which someone voted.

Against the backdrop of the evolving landscape that we have sought to paint, our study supports the assumption that boundaries distinguishing the electoral from the non-electoral are no longer impermeable (Kriesi, 2015). While, in the past, these two subjects were studied separately from each other, individuals, political parties, and social movements increasingly combine the two types of engagement in their repertoires (Borbáth & Hutter, 2021; Giugni & Grasso, 2021). We have revealed that party engagement with street protest extends into their public social media communication with the electorate. Political parties pay attention to and engage with mobilizations taking place on the streets. By operationalizing the proposed behavioural cues in Finkel & Opp's (1991) party incentives model, we have added a new element to this analysis that moves us beyond a rather obvious assumption of ideological alignment between voting preferences, protest behaviour, and party stances on protest episodes. Notwithstanding our evidence in support of this alignment, we crucially add that what political parties publicly communicate on a specific episode is significantly associated with individual

protest behaviour. As such, our results evidence that politics have become more immediate and unmediated, moving the locus of party-civil society linkages also outside of the organizational arena and into the public domain—namely, of online communication and protest participation. Therein, parties and voters interact on more equal terms.

It should be noted, however, that our analysis highlights only an association, albeit an important one, between party evaluations and voter engagement in a protest. As our survey items inquired into participation in protest episodes that often encompassed several events over time, we are unable to establish the direction of causality in this process. Nevertheless, we identify three possible causal mechanisms. First, party evaluation of a protest may influence their voters' decision on protest participation. Second, political parties may react to their voters' participation in a protest episode, expressing an evaluation of the mobilization based on the engagement of their supporters. Finally, it may also be the case that party anticipation of their voters' participation in a protest may lead them to express their support or opposition to the protest, even before it has taken place. While we expect all three causal mechanisms to apply to this relation, depending on the specific circumstances in which a protest episode takes place, further work could explore the complexities of causality in the relation we have identified.

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