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DOI

[10.1057/s41304-022-00410-9](https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-022-00410-9)

Publication date

2023

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

European Political Science

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Citation for published version (APA):

Aydemir, N., & Vermeulen, F. (2023). Political preferences across a transnational space: interviews with dual citizens of the Netherlands and Turkey. *European Political Science*, 22(1), 159-174. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-022-00410-9>

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Political preferences across a transnational space: interviews with dual citizens of the Netherlands and Turkey

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Accepted: 13 September 2022 / Published online: 25 January 2023
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Abstract

What do national votes mean for dual citizens who have the right to vote here and there? Does political socialization in a liberal democratic system lead to a democratic remittance or do immigrant minorities align with authoritarian regimes challenging the West's liberal democratic values? In this article, we analyse voting preferences by using a transnational lens that focuses on the convergence of two different political systems via immigrant-origin voters. We focus on the Turkish-Dutch population from conservative backgrounds in our aim to gain a thorough understanding of support towards Islamic parties here (in the Netherlands) and there (in Turkey). This is one of just a few studies that have investigated the complex and layered nature of political preferences in a transnational world. A qualitative approach is followed to acquire in-depth insights of the ideas and evaluations of our research group. We collected data through semi-structured interviews ($N=21$) between 2017 and 2018. Our conclusions indicate the significance of ethnic and religious identity, opening the way for Erdoğan's authoritarian populism in shaping political preferences across the transnational political environment. Such influence, however, is limited by other factors such as adherence to democratic values and norms on the one hand and rational political calculations on the other hand.

Keywords Transnational voter · Political preference · Turkey · The Netherlands

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Introduction

Support for Erdoğan's authoritarian rule is higher among the Turkish diaspora in Europe than in Turkey itself. In the Turkish Constitutional Referendum of 2017, the overall percentage of 'yes' votes for the proposed presidential system was 51.18% in Turkey, whereas this was 59.46% among external voters.^{1,2} Presidential elections in 2018 revealed similar patterns. There was a rather reserved support for Erdoğan in Turkey, with a percentage of 52.38%,³ whereas he garnered 60.24% of votes abroad.⁴

Support for Erdoğan among the Turkish diaspora in Europe was questioned by opposition forces in Turkey, but also by different political leaders in Western Europe (Vidino 2019). How could these immigrant-origin Turkish voters, living in free liberal democratic European countries, support an authoritarian regime in Turkey? The underlying, more academic questions were: does political socialization in a liberal democratic system yield to democratic remittance in origin-country elections? Do Turkish-origin voters who align with the policies of a conservative Islam challenge the West's liberal democratic values? In this article, we analyse such political preferences on a transnational basis. This study goes beyond looking for consistency and compatibility in the voting behaviour of immigrant-origin voters and attempts to gain a deeper understanding of political preferences of immigrant-origin voters across the two different political systems of the countries of origin and residence.

The behaviour of immigrant-origin voters is, however, not so much a trade-off between 'here' (country of residence) and 'there' (the country of origin), but a more nuanced process of convergence between different political systems in which immigrant-origin voters provide the linking pin. While immigrants and their children are no longer physically present in the country of origin, they are still part of it in many different ways, also politically. Many immigrants and their children operate in two political systems linking them in one transnational space (Waldinger 2015; Mügge et al. 2021). Also at a more macro-level the political systems become more converged because of immigration. Aydın (2016) illustrates how, for the Turkish diaspora in Europe, domestic issues have become a foreign-policy issue for the Turkish and European governments. For some domestic issues for European states, such as the integration of immigrants, dual nationality laws, and the placement of children of Turkish origin with foster parents, the Turkish state actively interferes in an attempt to intervene and to connect to the Turkish diaspora and potential constituencies. Turkish foreign-policy topics, on the other hand, become matters of domestic politics in European countries: think for instance of EU membership for Turkey, the role of Turkey in the Syrian civil war or criticism towards perceived authoritarian

¹ <https://www.ysk.gov.tr/doc/dosyalar/docs/2017Referandum/2017HO-Ornek136.pdf> (Accessed 2 September 2020).

² <https://www.ysk.gov.tr/doc/dosyalar/docs/2017Referandum/2017HO-UlkelerdeOyKullanma.pdf> (Accessed 6 November 2021).

³ <https://www.ysk.gov.tr/doc/dosyalar/docs/24Haziran2018/KesinSecimSonuclari/2018CB-416A.pdf> (Accessed 2 November 2020).

⁴ <https://www.ysk.gov.tr/doc/dosyalar/docs/24Haziran2018/KesinSecimSonuclari/2018CB-416B.pdf> (Accessed 2 September 2020).



measurements by Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) government. These issues become intertwined with domestic political topics as a large part of the Turkish diaspora takes a different position on these issues than European governments. A local Dutch or German mayor might, for instance, be confronted with pro- and anti-AKP protests in his or her city. This emerging transnational political space needs to be included to make sense of the political behaviour of immigrant-origin voters in different political systems (origin and residence).

Diaspora communities can find themselves at the centre of a transnational battlefield, especially when national votes in origin and residence countries overlap. The diplomatic crisis between the Netherlands and Turkey in 2017 is a prime example of this. In both countries, politicians were campaigning: the Netherlands was holding national parliamentary elections and Turkey had a referendum on a new constitution. The weekend before the Dutch elections, Erdoğan sent his Minister of Family Affairs to Rotterdam to speak to a crowd of young Dutch-Turkish people about the upcoming referendum. Dutch officials perceived this act as a provocation just a few days before the Dutch elections in which populist parties were doing very well in the polls. They expelled the Turkish minister from the country by declaring her an unwanted foreigner. Turkey, in return, claimed that the Netherlands violated international law by referring to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (Capone and de Guttery 2017). This diplomatic incident fuelled further populist rhetoric (emphasizing 'us' against 'them') and mobilized different constituencies on both sides. The elections were won by the party of sitting Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte, the VVD (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy), and Rutte's reaction to the presence of the Turkish minister is seen as one of the decisive factors in this victory (Beijen et al. 2021).

We aim to illustrate the political effects of this inter-societal convergent transnational political space, of which the diplomatic crisis is just one example, through qualitative interviews conducted with Dutch-Turkish citizens between 2017 and 2018. The Dutch-Turkish case around and after the overlapping votes of 2017 is an influential case to study this phenomenon (following Seawright and Gerring 2008). Minorities of Turkish background in the Dutch case are highly relevant in this special issue for being part of an active diaspora on the one hand and facing questions of loyalty in the country of settlement on the other hand. Turkish immigrants first arrived in the Netherlands as guest workers from conservative cities in Central and Northern Anatolia in the 1970s. Most of these immigrants, and their descendants, maintained their ties with the country of origin despite settling in the Netherlands as full citizens. Strong ethnic ties make Turkish immigrants the most active immigrant group among all others in the Dutch context (Vermeulen et al 2014; Vermeulen 2018). The Dutch case is further important for hosting intense debates on migration and integration since the 2000s, despite its long known tradition of multiculturalism and tolerance (Entzinger 2017; Kaya 2009; Vermeulen 2018). The strained relations between Turkey and the Netherlands further adds a diplomatic dimension to our study.

Before we present our data, we first focus on three debates to explain the transnational space these Turkish-origin voters were confronted with. First, we will assess the influence of different political values and norms across the



transnational space. Second, the impact of populist developments in sending and receiving states will be discussed. Lastly, we will focus on the emergence of new parties in the Netherlands with roots in specific parts of the Dutch-Turkish communities.

Values and norms around political preferences in a transnational world

An important manifestation of a de-territorialized form of citizenship is the increasing number of states promoting dual or multiple citizenship (Bloemraad et al. 2008; Vink et al. 2019). The earliest studies on external voting often provided an optimistic perspective. Electoral participation from abroad enables emigrants to exercise their democratic rights. According to the social/political remittance hypothesis, emigrants have the potential to contribute to democracies in their homeland by transferring democratic values and norms (Bauböck 2007; Caramani and Grotz 2015; Lafleur 2013; Umpierrez de Reguero and Dandoy 2020). Sending states and their ruling parties, however, are not passive actors receiving external influences without any resistance. Quite the contrary, the influence can be the other way around, with sending countries importing their own norms and values to receiving countries through loyal emigrants—often in manners unwelcome by the countries of settlement (Mügge 2012; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Margheritis 2007; Turcu and Urbatsch 2020; Arkılıç, 2020).

In fact, sending states' passion for voting rights for citizens living abroad has been increasingly problematized in recent years (Şahin-Mencütek and Erdogan 2015). External voting can become a perfect tool to build a loyal community promoting foreign interests who are in the hands of the sending states (Bauböck 2003; Şahin-Mencütek and Erdogan 2015; Brand 2010). Contrary to the democratic remittance hypothesis, strong attachments to the countries of origin can be perceived as an obstruction to political integration in the country of residence—particularly when homeland politics is shaped along principles countering democratic politics (Luthra et al. 2018; Mügge et al. 2021; Vermeulen 2018). A growing fear claims that countries of origin target political systems in the West through their active diasporas in Western countries (Kirdiş and Drhimeur 2016; Nell 2008; Kinnvall and Svensson 2010; Wackenhut and Orjuela 2023 in this special issue). Western European countries have become highly critical of such political engagements by Turkey, claiming that a populist understanding of political Islam is penetrating into their territories through an immigrant community under Erdoğan's domination. In such a context, Dutch-Turkish voters' support for Erdoğan is seen as a preference for authoritarian tendencies over liberal democratic norms and values (Capone and de Guttry 2017: 78; Vermeulen 2018). The already tense situation can become even more troublesome when national votes collide here and there. Political leaders can turn diaspora communities into a battleground in their tough campaigns to mobilize their supporters in a transnational world, as was the case in 2017 when the Netherlands and Turkey had votes just one month apart.



Populism 'here' and 'there': emphasizing 'us' versus 'them'

Growing populism in both countries lies at the very core of debates on Turkish transnational voting as populist politics position dual citizens as a fight between two opposing forces. We concur with Jakobson and colleagues (2012) who argue that transnational populists claim to represent and defend the native people and popular will against corrupt elites and societal antagonists located partly in host societies (Germany, the Netherlands or other Western European countries). Populism in Turkey is shaped by the rise of formerly excluded conservative Muslims, who have been governing the country for two decades under the rule of President Erdoğan and the AKP (Selçuk 2016). Erdoğan's populist rule is associated more with the rise of conservative Islam, from which many guest worker communities originate, rather than referring to a discontent with the contemporary political system or economy. Aytaç and Elçi (2019: 106) emphasize the particular importance of relating Erdoğan's version of populism to a conservative understanding of Turkish identity. In fact, the AKP has become increasingly Islamist and authoritarian, and the Turkish political system has been experiencing a period of deteriorating horizontal and vertical accountability. The availability of strong media and institutional infrastructure strengthens Erdoğan's hand in spreading a conservative kind of populist nationalism among the Turkish diaspora (Turcu and Urbatsch 2020; Jakobson et al. 2012).

Populist politics is of course not only an issue in Turkey. The strong and influential populist discourse in Western Europe has a major impact on the political behaviour of immigrant-origin voters in Western Europe (Vermeulen 2018). These populist narratives claim that Europeans have been too generous and too tolerant towards Muslim immigrants, that illiberal immigrants, from predominately Muslim countries, have exploited this tolerance to institutionalize their own anti-Western value system, and that a crisis has emerged because such groups are unable and unwilling to integrate into liberal European countries. The narrative then pushes for a political solution to alleged cultural conflicts and has serious, stigmatizing affects for Muslim immigrants (Vermeulen 2018; Loukili 2019). Erdoğan and his diaspora policy is the perfect antipode for European populist politicians, illustrating the perceived threat of illiberal foreign influence. They hold Erdoğan up as an emblem of illiberal Muslim leadership promulgating an ideology that is opposite to, and incompatible with, the civic liberal values they supposedly uphold (Vermeulen 2018).

The emergence of new parties as a reaction to the rise of Dutch populism

The rise of populist parties in the Netherlands has also uncovered the shortcomings of mainstream parties in responding to the needs, wishes and problems of immigrant minorities (Aydemir and Vliegenthart 2016; Vermeulen et al. 2020). In the Dutch context, the Labour Party (PvdA) illustrates this best. For more than 20 years they have been the most popular party among citizens of immigrant origin, especially for voters of Turkish descent (Vermeulen et al. 2014). Nevertheless, the support from the immigrant constituency for the Labour Party has decreased significantly



in the last two elections. In 2006, more than 85% of the voters of Turkish descent in Amsterdam voted for the Labour Party; in 2014 this percentage was just above 40% (Vermeulen et al. 2014). Other left-wing parties like GreenLeft (GroenLinks), the progressive liberals Democrats 66 (D66) or the Socialist Party (SP) did not significantly gain from this loss. This can be explained by a mismatch between what left-wing and/or progressive parties offer on the one hand and what immigrant minorities demand on the other hand. As is generally the case throughout Europe, mainstream parties in the Netherlands have also taken a turn to the right in matters of immigration, integration and Islam. As a result, these parties have excluded parts of this electorate to a large extent (Vermeulen 2018).

DENK appeared in 2017 as a new party with strong ties to the more conservative part of the Dutch-Turkish community (the same group that identifies with AKP ideology) and as a new alternative for Muslim voters in the Netherlands. Using large-scale survey data of individual DENK supporters, Vermeulen et al. (2020) showed that in terms of the political space, DENK supporters take a particular position: they combine progressive views on the globalization part of the cultural dimension (immigration, EU) with conservative views on the tradition-versus-individualism part of the cultural dimension (law and authority, LGBT rights). The ideology of secular progressive parties resonates with the integration and immigration stance of this group, but not with the social-cultural dimension in which the social democrats are more progressive. By contrast, conservative mainstream parties mirror DENK voters' views on traditional values, but these parties are increasingly opposed to immigration and critical of the presence of Islam in Dutch society. It is important to mention here that despite the strong support for DENK among Dutch-Turkish voters, a majority of the Dutch-Turkish electorate either abstains from voting or votes for another party. Even among the more conservative Dutch-Turks, different opinions exist about whether voting for a small party that represents the specific interests of Dutch Muslims is an adequate political strategy (Loukili 2019; Vermeulen 2018). In this article, we are specifically interested in these internal discussions among conservative Dutch-Turkish voters as they represent the potential AKP constituency. These discussions reveal how individuals have approached this party in a transnational political space that is strongly influenced by populist political forces from both sides (i.e. Turkey and the Netherlands).

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach to shed light on political preferences of dual citizens from conservative backgrounds across a transnational context. To achieve that aim, we provide an in-depth examination of electoral behaviour of voters from conservative backgrounds in the Turkish diaspora. Our data were collected through semi-structured interviews. This enabled us to stay focused on our subject matter while opening room for respondents to bring their perspectives. Twenty-one Dutch-Turkish citizens with dual nationalities were interviewed. All these respondents were from conservative networks associated with mosques, sister organizations in mosques or Islamic civil society associations, or at least they had connections



to people with networks in these organizations. Since only citizens have the right to vote in general elections in both countries, only dual citizens of the Netherlands and Turkey were interviewed. The age range was 18–30 years old, and only those with a higher educational status were chosen. Educational level is a strong predictor of political engagement (Verba et al. 1995), so by selecting respondents with high education levels we aimed to select individuals we expected to have relatively high levels of political interest and knowledge, and more likely to be politically engaged in two different political systems (see also Vermeulen and Keskiner 2017). We interviewed people aged 18–30 so that we could study the ways in which ‘here’ and ‘there’ are linked among the children of immigrants. Among the second generation, political engagement in the political system of the country from which their parents emigrated usually becomes weaker. However, in certain contexts and because of specific factors, the link can remain strong (Waldinger 2015). We wanted to study this dynamic and see to what extent political socialization in the Netherlands influences this process.

As the interviews took place six to eight months after an intense diplomatic crisis between the Netherlands and Turkey, some of the respondents were reticent about being interviewed. Several networks, institutions and groups were approached to provide help in building trust among our respondents. Eighteen of the interviews were done face-to-face to ensure better communication. The other three interviews were conducted online, due to time and budget constraints. As for gender, twelve of our interviewees were female and nine were male.

Identity politics opening the channels for origin country influence?

Our interview data show Erdoğan’s strong influence on party choices through his ability to regenerate an already established Turkish Islamic identity among the offspring of the nationalist conservative immigrants. An adherence to the Turkish (minority) identity was often mentioned by the interviewees, even though there was a clear choice among them to remain in the Netherlands (also for the foreseeable future). Erdoğan and his AKP is the natural issue owner of identity matters concerning religious members of the Turkish community. DENK, on the other hand, is portrayed as ‘our party’, i.e. a party founded by Sunni Muslim Turks in their country of residence.

Erdoğan’s AKP is the natural habitat for those maintaining the nationalistic conservative ideologies of emigrants from Central Anatolia. This is especially strengthened by mosques, which are directly associated with the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs, or non-governmental religious communities that cooperate closely with the AKP. In various interviews, we heard about efforts by mosque directors to detach themselves from politics by noting the problems after the crisis between the Netherlands and Turkey in 2017 and their wish not to be involved in it. Our respondents’ answers were also mainly in-line with this distant approach towards politicians. Regular mosque attenders told us that there are no electoral candidates accepted during the campaign processes, and neither are there other kinds of political gatherings. Still, this was more a kind of precaution in response to pressure by Dutch officials,



rather than being the genuine preference of the natural habitat of a Turkish nationalistic version of Sunni Islam. The following words of a former leader of one of the youth organizations at a mosque show how mosques are the ecosystem of an Islamic version of Turkish nationalism in-line with Erdoğan's agenda:

"... Well, I only go to Friday and religious holiday prayers. There are no such political messages in these prayers. There should not be, either. They only touched upon this 15th July coup attempt [in 2016] in Turkey the last time I went there. But I don't think that has anything to do with politics. There, our country's future was at stake. And I have heard that something happened in Serbia [referring to the Srebrenica Massacre]. After this interview, I will go to a talk on this at the association next to the mosque..."

Erdoğan's issue ownership of these subject matters concerning Muslims makes him the natural leader in environments where such matters are salient. Many of DENK's grassroots members also regularly attend these places.

Close affiliation with kinship networks across transnational contexts, or strong bonds with earlier generations of extended family members, provide further grounds for the maintenance of and voting along Turkish (Sunni) Islamic identity lines among our research group. A female respondent who we met at a Turkish café in a Turkish neighbourhood in Amsterdam said that she votes for the AKP as her family members in Turkey live in good conditions. Those who are more integrated into Dutch society, often in the form of Dutch political parties other than DENK, are more critical of the influence from family members. Still, the emotional pressure can be high if they divert from existing patterns of voting along Sunni Islamist political identity lines. Pressure to vote for the AKP rules out the possibility of abstaining in Turkish elections, even if the individual voter does not have much motivation to cast a ballot. The following words of one respondent who works for a local branch of the centre-right Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) are illustrative at this point:

"... Yes, I have voted in the Netherlands. I've also voted in Turkey but I regret that... I did not vote voluntarily; I was kind of pressured into [it]... by my family members... I was pressured by my aunt to... go and vote, you have to vote..."

The influence of the country of origin weakens when Islamic identity is not accompanied with Turkish nationalism. Kurdish voters with a Sunni Islamic identity often prefer to vote AKP in the Turkish context. Yet, having a Kurdish background weakens commitment to the AKP even among religious Kurdish respondents. One Kurdish respondent, for instance, reported having voted for the AKP in the last elections in Turkey. Still, his Kurdish identity means he has some reservations, unlike those Turkish citizens of Turkish background.

"... I voted in the [presidential] referendum: I voted no. I also voted in the elections of 2015 and then I voted for the AKP... A lot changed between 2015 and 2017... You know, you have cities like Cizre, Diyarbakır and Sur [cities mostly populated by people of Kurdish backgrounds] that have been totally razed to the ground by the Turkish military and security forces. This has been



done by the AKP government, so that's one of the main reasons I voted no, and also after the coup d'état, the attempted coup, all these people got fired and were arrested. So those are the reasons I voted no...".

Our Kurdish respondents had a clear stance against DENK. Coming from a Kurdish minority in Turkey means there is a higher possibility of voting for parties in Dutch elections defending minorities and politically excluded groups such as Article1 (Artikkel1), GreenLeft or the SP.

Populism 'here' and 'there'

Our interview data are in-line with studies showing that Turkish-origin electorates are more likely to participate in elections when Turkey pursues active campaigns in their countries of residence (Arkılıç 2016). Currently, active campaigning from the Turkish side mostly takes place in the form of populist accusations against the Dutch, conveyed through Turkish mainstream TV channels, Turkish associations in the Netherlands, and social media posts. Unlike usual campaigning when elections take place in one single country, a diplomatic crisis becomes a part of a populist way of campaigning across the transnational space studied in this research. Despite all its negative impact on democracies, Erdoğan's use of such tactics appeared to mobilize especially those politically uninterested respondents to cast a ballot in the referendum. In this regard, the political crisis between the Netherlands and Turkey in 2017, just before the national votes in both countries, appears to be a significant reference point for those respondents lacking political knowledge. Our respondents, who had difficulties identifying specific political actors, institutions and processes, referred to the crisis when explaining why they voted in the referendum. Such influence becomes apparent especially among firm supporters of the AKP–DENK combination. The diplomatic crisis between the two countries was the most—if not the only—salient issue in the interviews conducted with them.

In such a hostile political environment, voting is turned into a battlefield in which citizens—like soldiers in the field—protect their own members. As discussed above, our interviewees, who were more in-line with Erdoğan's ideology, emphasized the importance of even one single vote. In many cases, such a notion of duty is enclosed within a wider rhetoric of siding with a charismatic political leader. From this perspective, our respondents can be best understood as being under the influence of the perceived charisma of Erdoğan rather than having a preference for political parties organized along Islamist ideology. The following statements of a 28-year-old female respondent is illustrative of this point:

"... Well, I don't know whether it is right or left but I feel close to the AKP, to Erdoğan. I don't know whether Erdoğan is a rightist or leftist. The others [other Turkish parties] were in power until now ... but what did they do? I am an Erdoğanist...".

In such a context, Erdoğan's issue ownership makes DENK, the first immigrant party in the Netherlands, a natural extension of the AKP rather than a party on



its own in the country of residence. Our respondents barely mention a specific characteristic of DENK other than portraying it as ‘our’ party, or the voice of Muslims and Turks.

Populist motivations in voting behaviour, however, are not only shaped by Erdoğan’s rhetoric extending from Turkey. Feeling discriminated by the anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim and anti-Turkey components of Dutch populism, leads our respondents to side with Erdoğan in his fight against ‘the other’. A perception of being discriminated or even humiliated by anti-Islam, anti-immigrant populist discourse in the country of residence further strengthens the already existing attachment to the Turkish–Islam synthesis. A female respondent, who we met at a mosque in Amsterdam, underlined the role of exclusionary attitudes from the home country as a factor pushing her towards Erdoğan’s AKP in Turkey and DENK in the Netherlands:

“... Actually you are neither totally connected to here [the Netherlands] nor there [Turkey]. But for some reason there is a closer relationship towards there. And most probably it is because of the discrimination here. You feel it. Your identity is constantly questioned. Actually, you are the other, and so you feel closer to Turkey, whether you want to or not...”.

The political crisis between the Netherlands and Turkey intensified these perceptions. The following words of an ethnically Kurdish Turkish-Dutch citizen, who voted for the HDP in Turkey and Article1 in the Netherlands, are illustrative:

“... For example, my father wanted to vote ‘no’ in the (presidential) referendum but after this fight in Rotterdam, he voted ‘yes’ because he saw the reactions from the Dutch politicians. The Dutch politicians were really negative in their stance and this had a positive impact for them in terms of gaining votes, conservative votes...”.

In fact, populism has a double effect on diaspora communities, as dual citizens find themselves squeezed between two opposing forces targeting each other—limiting the impact of a political approach trying to win elections through polarization. Being Dutch-Turkish can be described as being at the centre of a battlefield between Turkish and Dutch populists who blame each other for the problems experienced by their own ‘people’. The following words of a respondent are representative of a general dismissal of both sides:

“I don’t think their policies were positive... I actually think they [Turkish politicians] came here to have a fight with Dutch politicians and gain a lot of attention and also to win votes. ... and that was actually achieved. And you know, the people were the biggest victims of this; we’ve got a lot of hate from both sides and so that’s my political view about that...”.

Still, rational calculations limit voting under the influence of such populist campaigning. The influence of a Turkish Muslim identity under such populist discourse reaches its limits when our respondents start experiencing the negative consequences of Erdoğan’s policies in countries of settlement. Even the strongest



AKP–DENK supporters are critical of Erdoğan and the Turkish side for causing trouble in their lives and leaving them on their own after causing too many problems. The following words of one respondent are illustrative in showing how support for a charismatic leader turns into criticism when experiencing difficulties because of that leader:

“...I was raised here. I went to school here, but still I feel more Turkish than Dutch ... But still, we are living here... There is a saying in Turkish that you belong to the country where you have been fed, you know. Or where you get food from... so it’s...I’m standing in the middle...”.

Another respondent addressed the potential threat of causing counteractions from the Dutch side with the following words:

“... Turkey should consider that the Dutch state can cause harm to the Turkish minority here in the Netherlands. These people here, in the Netherlands, might become more nationalistic or fearful when they see the Turks waving their flags here.... That Erdoğan and his ministers have given rise to these nationalistic sentiments is something negative – for both sides... I don’t think that this [crisis] has done any good for the Turkish people here, or for the Dutch ...”.

Limits of authoritarian influence from the country of origin

Our interviews challenge a linear understanding of the conservative–progressive spectrum of politics. Respondents show a pattern of identifying with, and being embedded in, their immigrant community as well as combining their conservative nationalist morals with progressive views on globalization. Even though departing from a conservative form of Turkish nationalism, they attach significant value to progressive norms and values such as commitment to participation in representative mechanisms, adopting a secular lifestyle, supporting women’s rights and embracing diversity. For instance, one of our female respondents, who works together with her husband at a sister organization in a mosque, explained that the presence of female candidates was very important in her decision to vote:

“... Well, actually I didn’t vote for Kuzu [then leader of DENK]. I voted for the woman in that party. I always vote for the female.... Well, I don’t remember the name of the woman, but I voted for her... I have also voted for other parties defending the rights of minorities. But my choice has always been for the women...”.

A critical understanding appears as the main reason behind the weakening of populist leaders’ power to shape electoral behaviour. Our respondents adopt a liberal stance emphasizing a civil articulation of different ideas rather than adhering to a populist fight. Many of our interviewees criticized the leaders of both countries for being opportunistic in their populist quest to increase votes—limiting the intensity of polarization. Both the Netherlands and Turkey were criticized for triggering the conflict in 2017, which could have been solved by a civil approach, argued respondents. Such a liberal stance even undermines Erdoğan’s powerful influence among his



supporters voting for the AKP–DENK combination. There is a general criticism of Erdoğan and Turkish officials for adopting unnecessarily tough language during the crisis.

“...Well, Turkey’s determined stance was good. I see that in a positive light. But Erdoğan’s fascist discourse was a bit too much. It was also too much for me. Governments manage to come to an agreement in the end. Yet, such kinds of things lead to segregation within society...”

Another respondent, who played an active role during the formation of DENK, said the following: “...The thing is that Erdoğan reacted very aggressively. It was not necessary... just say we are not happy with the Dutch government doing this, and just be political..., You should not lower yourself to that point...”. Those AKP–DENK voters who have higher positions in the labour market were the most critical of the AKP, even having voted for the party.

“I voted for DENK. You guys know that... It was just to try it. I know the guys in person as well, but I don’t like their way of working at this moment. They are shouting and screaming too much, while I would expect some more constructive way of doing politics. But let’s see: a lot of people gave them a chance, including me. So I hope they will do good things for the people...”

Almost all of our respondents were against the Nazi references used by the Turkish side. Being socialized in a political culture in which Nazism is seen as one of the biggest crimes in humanity, our respondents criticized the Turkish side for going too far.

Our respondents’ conditional support of the AKP–DENK combination brings us to the democratic remittance hypothesis. Even in an AKP–DENK combination, the support fades away when voters think that these parties fail to comply with liberal democratic norms and values. An AKP–DENK voter, for instance, said that she was very confident in her ‘no’ vote for the presidential referendum in Turkey, as such a regime would lead to a significant level of power for one single person. In such a context, it is not unusual that AKP–DENK voters with strong attachment to this conservative Turkish Muslim identity say that they might change their voting preferences in the future if other parties appeal more to them. The respondent that voted ‘no’ in the referendum, but for the AKP and DENK, said that she also supports GreenLeft because of their commitment to environmental issues. In this regard, our research group not only fluctuates between parties that are close ideologically but also parties far away from each on the ideological spectrum.

Party preferences are especially unstable when there is not a strong attachment to the country of origin. Not having strict bonds to recruiting agencies, like sister organizations in mosques, further adds to such volatility. As stated above, party preferences can change significantly with alternatives sought from different sides of the political spectrum rather than voting for different parties close to each other. The following words of an AKP voter also substantiate this point:

“... The party should act for the good of the country. So, it does not matter if it’s conservative, or it’s left or right. So, I mean if, for example, the left parties



HDP or the CHP [the secular Republican People's Party] did something that I believe is good for the country, I would support that. If the right wing did something bad, we should tell them "Guys, you are doing such and such things badly" and that our support is not guaranteed".

Having more sophisticated knowledge about politics is another factor contributing to such volatility. Our respondent, a journalist, referred to many different political issues and happenings and highlighted the presence of alternatives: "... *Things are very complicated in Turkey. I voted first for the CHP... I did not want the AKP being the ruling party on its own... There was no coalition even after three months. Thereafter I voted for the AKP...*".

Conclusions

This study investigated patterns of voting participation and preferences of dual citizens with Dutch and Turkish citizenship. Our research verifies those studies claiming the influence of the country of origin in voting preferences across a transnational space (Bermúdez 2010; Guarnizo et al. 2019). Interviews with respondents embedded in conservative networks revealed the fundamental role of political identity and populism in shaping the political preferences even among highly educated members of Dutch-Turkish society. Erdoğan has a significant capacity to shape our respondents' party preferences both here and there. Such an influence is more in the form of regenerating the already strong attachment to (Sunni) Muslim Turkish identity rather than an export of authoritarian norms and values. Those respondents with a strong attachment to an Islamic Turkish identity show commitment to vote for the AKP and DENK. In this regard, the strong social capital of the Turkish diaspora provides opportunities for influence coming from the country of origin. Yet, Turkish or Muslim identities are not the only significant political identities shaping political preferences across the transnational context analysed. A strong ethnic identity among Dutch-Turkish respondents with Kurdish backgrounds also leads to political activism, especially in the Netherlands. This group regularly votes for left wing or progressive Dutch parties.

Populist politics in both contexts foster the already existing pattern of voting along religious and ethnic identity lines. Many of our conservative respondents see Erdoğan as the only saviour of their minority identities in an exclusionary political setting. Still, such support also has its limits. Our research shows that support for Turkish Islamic political parties are conditional on their adherence to democratic norms and values. Many of our respondents voting for the AKP–DENK combination are critical of Erdoğan's populist politics—especially during the crisis between the two countries. In fact, our focus group demonstrated an ability to merge seemingly contradictory conservative values of religious and ethnic adherence with more progressive stances when it comes to tolerance and democracy.

This study is one of the first pieces of research to investigate the transnational development of political preferences. Our qualitative endeavour focused on highly educated young voters with Turkish and Dutch citizenships. How dual citizens with



different backgrounds shape their political preferences could add a broader perspective to such transnational impacts on electoral preferences. Furthermore, comparative studies looking into variation across different diaspora communities could provide more generalizable conclusions in explaining the roles of political identity and populism on the electoral preferences of diaspora communities.

Appendix I: Topics Covered in Interview Questions

The interviews were conducted by following a semi-structured approach, which led to different formulations of questions. Still, the topics included in all the interviews are as follows:

- Electoral participation in the Netherlands and Turkey.
- Party choice in elections in the Netherlands and Turkey (where the respondents had voted).
- Attitude towards Dutch/Turkish government's stance in the 2017 crisis between the Netherlands and Turkey.
- General party preference in the Netherlands and Turkey.
- General political ideology in the Netherlands and Turkey.

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