

On 7 January 2015, two Islamist gunmen forced their way into the Paris headquarters of *Charlie Hebdo* and opened fire, killing twelve. The shooters were later identified as French Muslims of Algerian descent. Over recent years, attacks similar to the ones committed at the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* have occurred throughout Western Europe. Nations of democratic values experiencing such violence has become a serious concern for policy makers in the European Union. There are several causal factors as to why individuals commit these violent acts including educational opportunities, unemployment, geographical region, personal grievances and alienation from one's society. Conventional wisdom suggests that the feeling of alienation creates an environment where it is more likely for an individual to turn towards violent extremism. However, how best to combat these feelings of isolation among European minority groups remains unclear.

In this thesis, I seek to explain the role of political representation in preventing or exacerbating minority violence. In an example of a large minority group in France, Muslims fill none of the 555 deputy posts in the National Assembly, and as a large minority group in Germany, only two people of Turkish descent are present among the 603 members of the German parliament.¹ Given these examples, it is fairly easy to assume that minority groups in these Western European states are extremely underrepresented.

Democracies are based upon the idea that the elected officials of a state should adequately represent the population that they govern. Despite this general notion, political scientists have continuously noted the fact that minority groups have been, and

¹ Dittrich, Mirjam, *Muslims in Europe: addressing the challenges of radicalization*, 2006, p. 22

continue to be, vastly underrepresented in Western democracies. Is this minority violence an effect of the different democratic systems employed by each Western European government?

European Union integration policies of minority and immigrant groups are crucial in preventing radical extremism in Europe. The term integration is defined as “wanting to take part in the society in which you live. But it also means taking part.”² One of the essential factors of successful EU integration is participation in a member state’s democratic process and political decision-making.³ Unfortunately, this participation and representation of minority groups is more difficult in some EU member states than others. For example, “ethnic groups are not recognized in French law, under which all are considered equal, so such a ‘positive discrimination’ policy would be difficult to implement; some policy makers in France and elsewhere in the EU also contend that such a policy could lead to further segregation of immigrants or ethnic minorities rather than less.”⁴

If integration policies fail, there can be serious implications for national security. In many works of political science, isolation or alienation has been noted as a core, driving factor of radicalization. The process of radicalization frequently begins by individuals feeling frustrated with their lives, international events or politics. They are searching for an identity and a cause, and they often find a solution in violent extremism. This prospect of being part of a group and to feel important is a major contributing factor

² Gallis, Paul, Archick, Kristin, Miko, Francis, Woehrel, Steven, *Muslims in Europe: Integration Policies in Selected Countries*, 2005, p. 6

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid. p. 9

towards the progression towards radicalization.⁵ If a minority group is underrepresented at the political level, it sends a message of exclusion to the group. As a consequence, it creates a situation of alienation that in turn can be a strong motivating factor for an extremist. If an individual feels as if they do not belong or are not welcomed in their society, they will search for other ways to feel included. Though alienation is not the sole, triggering factor of radicalization, it can play a large role. The solution to this issue lies in integration policies, especially political representation. If minority groups feel as if they have a voice in their society's political process, the feeling of alienation in society lessens.

Representation Discussion

Minority representation in the political sphere is significant because of four reasons. First, minority representation carries symbolic implications. The legitimacy of a nation's political parties, as well as its political system as whole, is at risk when its minority groups are underrepresented. This calls in the question of whether a state is truly, by definition, a democracy if its representatives do not reflect the diversity of its population.⁶ Second, without a certain level of diversity present in legislatures, a message of exclusion is automatically conveyed to minority groups, which in turn, can elevate the political alienation of those groups.⁷ Third, the election of a politician belonging to a minority group can be viewed as a type of acceptance of that minority by the majority

⁵ Precht, Tomas, *Home grown terrorism and Islamist radicalization in Europe*, 2007, p. 35-36

⁶ Bloemraad, Irene and Schönwälder, *Immigrant and Ethnic Minority Representation in Europe: Conceptual Challenges and Theoretical Approaches*, 2013, p. 565.

⁷ Bloemraad, Irene, *Accessing the Corridors of Power: Puzzles and Pathways to Understanding Minority Representation*, 2013, p. 654.

population of the country. It can also gauge the level of the socio-cultural and economic integration of the minority group.⁸ Fourth, there can be serious consequences attached to the lack of statistical minority representation in government. When elected, those representative members are able to work for their group by advocating specific policies, influencing the allocation of public resources and serving a role as the spokesperson for the concerns of their minority group. Without this representation, minority groups are at an automatic disadvantage. Even if minority interests can be represented in government by politicians of the majority, the inherent lack of diversity still conveys a message of exclusion.⁹

When certain individuals feel as if they have no voice or say in the policy decisions of their government or feel they are being purposely excluded from the political process, they may reject the political system, completely. Unfortunately, this harsh rejection is sometimes expressed through violence, whether that results in violent protests, or the possibility acts of terrorism against the seemingly oppressive and barring government system.

Didier Ruedin notes that only in nations where minority communities are properly included can conflict be avoided. He continues by saying that in areas where particular groups are being excluded, there will remain the potential for future conflict.¹⁰ In addition to this theory, Rafaela Dancygier contends that increases in minority descriptive

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid. p. 655.

¹⁰ Ruedin, Didier, *Ethnic Group Representation in a Cross-National Comparison*, 2009, p. 336.

representation have been shown to lead to a lower incidence of anti-state violence on the part of minorities.¹¹

Research Question

Given the above statements, one question that surfaces involves the reasons why we continuously see minority groups underrepresented in democracies. There exist several, different types of democracies with different electoral laws and systems as well as diverse types and sizes of minority communities within their populations. As is evident in just the last decade, a great number of democracies have experienced some category of violence perpetrated by minority citizens of that country. Little research has been done on this topic to date, but I intend to explore the major types of political systems of democracies in an attempt to determine whether or not a particular form of democracy, whether its system be more inclusive or more exclusive to minority groups, impacts the level of minority violence in that country. Therefore, the question my thesis seeks to answer is whether the political characteristics of a democracy increase the likelihood that it will experience minority violence.

Numerous political scientists have argued that one of the many factors that can lead people to committing acts of violence, as well as radical extremism, is the feeling of alienation in a person's society.¹² Studies have been done linking minority group representation in government and the level of alienation felt by these groups. This is not

¹¹ Dancygier, M. Rafaela, *Electoral Rules or Electoral Leverage? Explaining Muslim Representation in England*, 2014, p. 229.

¹² See the following: Dittrich, Mirjam, *Muslims in Europe: addressing the challenges of radicalization*, 2006, Pretcht, Tomas, *Home grown terrorism and Islamist radicalization in Europe: From conversion to terrorism*, 2007, and Gallis, Paul, Archick, Kristin, Miko, Francis and Woehrel, Steve, *Muslims in Europe: Integration Policies in Selected Countries*, 2005.

to say that low or non-representation of minority groups at the political level creates radical extremists from these groups, but it could play a role as one of the causal factors of the sense of alienation from the rest of the population. This feeling of being alienated, in turn, can be an influential element leading to acts of violence in a country.

Theory

I will be comparing types of democracies and the electoral systems they employ to the level of violence in the states that use each system. The different systems are listed as follows: proportional representation, single-member party districts and multi-member party districts. I will give a brief description of the characteristics of each system as well as use these characteristics to form hypotheses about each systems implication on violence.

Based on previous research and ideas on this subject matter and upon reasoning stated in the introductory portion of this article we can assume that employ systems of democracy that create a difficult situation for minority group members to be elected will experience more acts of violence. That being said, states that employ systems of democracy that create a situation where there is a greater chance of a member of a minority group being elected will experience fewer acts of violence.

Proportional Representation

In the systems of proportional representation, whether that is closed list, open list or semi-open list, competition among parties is normally, relatively strong. The party leadership itself wields a significant amount of power over who is put on the list by controlling appointment procedures. In terms of candidate procedure, party leadership priorities are based upon the composition of party factions in parliament. Whether or not

a minority group member will be placed on the list is determined by the mainstream parties' decisions to recruit minority representatives. These decisions are made based on different types of concerns. Allotting even a single seat to any specific group is a costly act for the party; it is also a significant indicator of the party's commitment to the group. From the viewpoint of maximizing the number of votes, including minority representatives on party lists makes sense when it holds the promise of vote gain.¹³ In order for a member of a minority group to be elected, a party must make the decision to place them on a list. Karen Bird states that the geographic location and concentration of a minority group are also important. The chance of a traditional party choosing a minority candidate is greatest where the party considers that such a candidate can generate new voter support where the party has not performed well in passed elections. Even so, parties will display caution in order to avoid being identified solely with the interests of minority groups. In order to win an election, they need to acquire votes not just from the minority communities, but also from the rest of the population.¹⁴ That being said, it is primarily up to a state's political parties whether or not a minority group member will even have the chance at being elected. The preferential characteristics of the proportional representation system are key in determining whether or not minority groups are adequately represented. The priorities and decisions of political parties vary from each party and each state, therefore *hypothesis 1: proportional representation systems will have no significant effect on the likelihood of minority violence.*

¹³ Protsyk, Oleh, *Recruitment and Representation of Ethnic Minorities under Proportional Representation: Evidence from Bulgaria*, 2012, p. 320.

¹⁴ Bird, Karen, *The Political Representation of Women and Ethnic Minorities in Established Democracies*, 2004.

In many right-wing political parties, minorities suffer from what political scientist, Karen Bird, labels as “imputed prejudice”. This situation is when the selectorate of a party argue that voters are not ready for the election of a minority. In addition, as long as minorities are absent from the selectorate, parties will continue to nominate primarily white males as political candidates. In some cases, like Britain, the Conservative Party has promised to establish ways for ethnic minorities to participate more in furthering their knowledge of Conservative politics. Though these actions by right-wing parties seem as if they are attempting to reach out to minority groups, Bird argues that these attempts are merely symbolic and do not create concrete changes within the parties. Continuing, Bird finds that even when minorities are involved in right-wing parties, they still find it more difficult to speak for the interests of their groups.¹⁵

H1a: Proportional representation systems with Right-leaning parties in power will increase the likelihood of minority violence.

In contrast to right-wing parties, Bird suggest that when left-wing parties reach out to minority groups, there will be concrete changes to the traditional platforms in favor of minority interests. Left-wing parties have historically been more open and minority-friendly than those on the right of the political spectrum. As a result, minority groups frequently display a consistent allegiance to particular parties. For example, African Americans have overwhelmingly voted for the Democratic Party, and a similar situation exists among black voters in Britain with the Labour Party. Because of these historical

¹⁵ Ibid.

ties, the cohesive support of minorities for generally left-wing parties will endure even when said party does not succeed to advance the interests of the minority group.¹⁶

H1b: Proportional representation systems with Left-leaning parties in power will decrease the likelihood of minority violence.

Multi-Member Party Districts

Most theoretical accounts assume that multi-member elections should lead to higher shares of ethnic minority representatives. This assumption is based on the facts that multi-member elections allow party leaders to balance the slate and many parties do so thinking that a balanced ticket will be attractive to new voting blocs. Statistically speaking, the more seats there are in play, the more likely it is that someone from a minority group will be elected, therefore minorities are likely to enter multi-member races. Many political scientists find the multi-member electoral system to be beneficial for the election of underrepresented groups.¹⁷ As stated above, minority group members have a greater chance to be put on the slate of major parties and therefore have a greater chance of being elected, which leads me to *hypothesis 2: systems of multi-member party districts will decrease the likelihood of minority violence.*

Single-Member Party Districts

Unlike the multi-member system, there is a “winner take all” nature that exists within the single-member system rules out the possibility of a balanced slate. Balancing of the ticket is not an option in the single-member system when only one seat is up for grabs in a particular election. In these circumstances, competition for a place on the ticket

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Dancygier, M. Rafaela, *Electoral Rules or Electoral Leverage? Explaining Muslim Representation in England, 2014*, p. 231-240.

may be stronger, and strategic considerations about what type of candidate will most likely win, come to the forefront. In these situations, parties are more likely to run candidates belonging to dominant majority groups, not minorities.¹⁸ Given the “winner takes all” description of single-member party systems, *hypothesis 3: systems of single-member party districts will increase the likelihood of minority violence.*

Methods and Research Design

In order to test the hypotheses, I use both quantitative as well as qualitative data. For the quantitative portion of the research, I utilize the Database of Political Institutions to measure proportional representation.¹⁹ This database is well respected and frequently used in other works of political science research. I use the same database in order to measure the level power of the left-wing and right-wing parties in states that employ systems of proportional representation. To measure single-member party districts and multi-member party districts, I use the database Johnson & Wallack.²⁰ I will compare these systems in European countries over a time period of 27 years from 1978 to 2005. In order to compare the type of political systems to minority violence, I will draw data from the Global Terrorism Database over the same time period as the data collected for the political systems.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Beck, Thorsten, Clarke, George, Groff, Alberto, Keefer, Philip, and Walsh, Patrick, 2001. "New tools in comparative political economy: The Database of Political Institutions." 15:1, 165-176 (September), *World Bank Economic Review*.

²⁰ Joel W. Johnson; Jessica S. Wallack, 2012, "Electoral Systems and the Personal Vote", <http://hdl.handle.net/1902.1/17901>, Harvard Dataverse, V1

I will then perform a cross-national comparison of four European states, France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Denmark. I will compare each states' political systems to minority violence over (TBA) period of time.

I use qualitative data in order to explain the link between underrepresentation of minority groups and minority violence by drawing upon previous works and theories of political scientists including (list of authors I use).