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## The participation paradox: demand for and fear of immigrant participation

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# The participation paradox: demand for and fear of immigrant participation

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, we address the ambivalence in European immigrant integration discourses toward the political participation of immigrants. We show how this ambivalence manifests in what we call a ‘participation paradox’, which is constituted by two apparently conflicting, but potentially mutually reinforcing characteristics of the discourse. The first emphasizes the need for immigrants to be active in order to attain a well-integrated society and well-functioning democratic polity; the second is a call for the protection of liberal democratic institutions from the alleged ‘illiberal threats’ that migrants pose to society. Immigrant participation is thus both demanded and feared. Using illustrations from Denmark, we show two different ways in which this paradox plays out in practice: i) the fear of participation results in debates around the general desirability of immigrant participation; and ii) the perceived threat of ‘undesired participation’ reinforces the demand for immigrants to be ‘good’ citizens by participating in a ‘civic’ way. In these cases, the content of immigrant participation is discursively restricted. We end the paper by exploring the consequences of the paradox in terms of the democratic position of immigrants.

## KEYWORDS

Participation; citizenship; immigration; integration; democracy; Denmark; electoral rights; religion

## 1. Introduction

This article addresses what we call a ‘participation paradox’, which emerges from the ambivalent attitude in European integration discourses toward the political participation of immigrants. In this discourse, immigrant participation is both demanded and feared. On the one hand, it is demanded that immigrants perform as ‘active citizens’: citizens who are willing to put in an effort, who feel engaged with issues of the public good, and who respect the institutions and values of the receiving society. On the other hand, claims are made implying that society *as it is*, with its proclaimed progressive liberal democratic values, needs to be defended: when immigrants participate politically, they might constitute illiberal, undesirable change.

Our main aim is to show how this ambivalence toward immigrant participation constitutes the parameters for the political participation of people with a migration background, thereby affecting their democratic position within the polity. In the interplay between the demand for and fear of participation, a specific image of the ‘good and

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civic' active immigrant is constructed. Within this specific understanding of 'civicness', these individuals are not allowed to participate in the democratic polity as full democratic subjects who are free to voice their interests and perspectives. Instead, their participation serves as a *tool* for them becoming 'civic', which means to be active and engaged, reinforcing the alleged status quo of liberal progressiveness.

The political inclusion of newcomers and settled immigrants is a flourishing research area, focusing on various forms of immigrant participation (Bloemraad and Vermeulen 2014; Marciniak and Tyler 2014; Shinozaki 2015), as well as questions of political trust and identification (Maxwell 2010; Morales and Giugni 2011). In doing so, it provides important insights into whether, and under what circumstances, people with a migration background participate politically in their (new) polities. Our analysis shifts the perspective on political incorporation away from the immigrant and starts from the receiving society instead. Political incorporation is a complex process, and more immigrant participation does not automatically imply more incorporation. Imagined, anticipated, or real political claims may be used as proof of how different people with a migration background are, and how their incorporation into society is actually failing (see also Verkuyten 2018). Unless resident foreigners, naturalized citizens, and their children are discursively acknowledged as legitimate participants, 'participation' and 'democracy' can amount to little more than tools of discursive Othering. Critical scrutiny of the discursive contexts of participation can, therefore, contribute to better understanding of the preconditions within which participation unfolds.

It is important to note that, throughout the paper, we use the term 'immigrant' when describing a policy or mechanism that applies to various categories of people with a migration background. This choice is a pragmatic one, and we do acknowledge that the paradox affects these various categories in different ways. Depending on formal status and social standing, both the expectations of participation and the actual opportunity to participate differ. When necessary, we use more specific terms.<sup>1</sup>

We use illustrations from the Danish integration discourse to establish the characteristics of the paradox and to explore how it works out in practice. Before we explicate the paradox any further, we first introduce the materials we have analyzed. The Danish context of immigrant incorporation provides interesting material for researching the paradox. First, the country has a strong tradition of active citizenship norms for all its citizens.<sup>2</sup> It is, therefore, not surprising that we find very explicit policies of 'active citizenship' that actively encourage migrants to participate in society and in Danish democracy (Mouritsen 2013). At the same time, nationalism and vocal opposition to immigrants is growing, and Denmark is developing ever more stringent policies against newcomers as well as resident foreigners (Ersbøll 2013, 7, 22–23; Gammeltoft-Hansen 2017, 105; Stokes-Dupass 2017). Both the demand for participation and the fear of participation are thus clearly present in the Danish policy discourse, enabling us to demonstrate the key elements of the paradox.

We have selected specific empirical materials for this purpose and do not claim to present a holistic country case. At the same time, we do not wish to imply that the participation paradox is an exclusively Danish phenomenon. We would expect similar situations in other European countries, such as the Netherlands, the UK and Germany, where there are similar discourses and an increasing emphasis on active citizenship.

The incorporation of newcomers gained political momentum in Denmark at the end of the previous century. In 1998, the first Integration Act was adopted by the then Social Democratic (SD) government. After the 2001 general elections, which led to a Liberal-Conservative (L-C) government supported by the Danish People's Party (DPP), legislation in this area started intensifying (see Gammeltoft-Hansen 2017, 102).<sup>3</sup> Since then, policymaking in the area has increasingly been characterized by restrictions and tightening (with a short period of slight relaxation under SD rule in 2011–2014). While many policy restrictions have been attributed to the DPP, pivotal in most parliamentary compositions since 2001, the SD has also often supported the L-C government's incorporation policy bills as the main opposition party (Green-Pedersen and Otjes 2017; Jønsson and Petersen 2010, 205).

The empirical material is comprised of 22 public documents: parliamentary debates, administrative documents, and educational publications. Together, they span a period of approximately 10 years, from 2006. The materials mainly reflect the positions of the biggest parties represented in the Danish parliament that were in government or supporting it at that time (the Liberals, the Conservatives, the Danish People's Party, and the Social Democrats). The documents are closely related to civic integration policy measures (see Joppke and Eule 2016, 346). At the same time, these texts also serve other purposes than actual incorporation policy: addressing the majority Danes' perceived concerns around migration, they have symbolic and expressive value (see Slaven and Boswell 2018). We selected the material based on its illustrative quality and authoritative position. Our aim was to look for examples that illustrate the mechanism in itself as clearly as possible, rather than compiling a broad sample to make claims about the range of the phenomenon. While doing so, we selected different types of materials, representing different aspects of political discourse: parliamentary debate and government communications toward immigrants and to society as a whole. All of the selected materials have an authoritative character through their intimate link to institutional – legislative, executive or administrative – power.

The public documents were analyzed with the help of critical close reading, inspired by the tools of discourse analysis and analysis of categories (Jokinen, Juhila, and Suoninen 2012; Potter 1996; Reisigl and Wodak 2001). In the case of longer text documents, the relevant passages were identified by skimming and searches. The content of the text, i.e. what was said, was then scrutinized, including vocabulary and categories applied, attributes attached to them, as well as assumptions implied by these (conscious or unconscious) choices. Reflecting on the unsaid, the (consciously or unconsciously) excluded alternatives, was also an important part of the reading.

This article consists of three parts. First, we establish the existence of the participation paradox. We start by discussing the specific characteristics of the civic integrationist discourse that constitute the paradox: demand for and fear of participation. We then illustrate the paradox by analyzing the Danish 'Declaration for Integration and Active Citizenship', adopted in 2006 (Ministeriet for Flygtninge Indvandrere og Integration 2006; Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet 2017). This is a street-level policy tool operated by municipal caseworkers that quite explicitly combines both elements of the paradox.

In the second part, we explore how the interplay between fear and demand plays out in practice. Using illustrations from the Danish immigrant incorporation discourse, we

distinguish two different mechanisms: the discouragement of participation (3.1) and the conditioning of participation (3.2). The first primarily applies to resident foreigners; the latter to both resident foreigners and naturalized citizens and their children. In [Section 3.1](#), the case of local and regional electoral rights for third-country nationals is discussed based on parliamentary debates and associated legislative documents, dating from the period 2010 to 2012 ([Folketinget 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d, 2017a, 2017b](#)). In [Section 3.2](#), educational materials are used to illustrate the conditioning of the contents of legitimate political speech ([Kulturministeriet 2016a, 2016b, 2016c](#); [Ministeriet for Flygtninge Indvandrere og Integration 2002, 2007a, 2007b, 2011](#); [Udlændinge-Integrations- og Boligministeriet 2016a, 2016b](#); [Undervisningsministeriet 2014](#)). These materials represent what is deemed essential by the incorporation regime for a newcomer to the country to know and accept. Most of the materials are book-format self-study publications for preparing for citizenship exams (either for permanent residence or naturalization). The Denmark Canon, however, is directed at youth in general. Finally, we use the official introductory film for newcomers, ‘A Life in Denmark’ ([Feldballe Film & TV 2010](#)). The documents used for the illustrations are listed separately at the end of the article.

Finally, we discuss three implications of these mechanisms in terms of the construction of ‘civicness’, and their implications for the democratic position of individuals with a migration background.

## **2. Civic integrationism and the participation paradox: demand for and fear of immigrant participation**

The participation paradox is constituted within debates on immigrant incorporation, diversity, and citizenship in Europe. Around the turn of the century, these debates started taking a ‘civic turn’ toward what has been described in the literature as a ‘civic integrationist discourse’.<sup>4</sup> This new discourse emerged together with a critique of ‘multiculturalism’, which was explicitly declared a failure by politicians, journalists, and other columnists and talking heads (e.g. by Angela Merkel and the Council of Europe, see also [Wright and Bloemraad 2012](#)).

In the civic integrationist discourse, citizenship is increasingly portrayed as an identity issue, rather than a legal status ([Meer et al. 2015](#)). The central narrative is that integration thus far has failed, and that the state needs to become more actively involved in integration processes. In order to regain control of integration, the state is urged to be more demanding and assertive, and to come up with policies that foster the creation of ‘good, liberal, self-sufficient citizens’ ([Jensen and Mouritsen 2017](#); [Lithman 2010](#)). This bears resemblance to other present-day management and policy reforms in the areas of employment and welfare, characterized as neo-liberal: it places responsibility upon the individual to become self-governing, resilient, and adaptive to the current demands of the society and market (see [Chandler and Reid 2016](#)).

Several scholars have pointed out ambivalences in discourses and policies of civic integration. While such policies and discourses formally have an inclusive goal, they often have exclusionary consequences (see e.g. [Bonjour and Duyvendak 2018](#); [Korteweg 2017](#); [Kostakopoulou 2010b](#); [Schrover and Schinkel 2013](#)). With regard to debates around ‘active citizenship’, several researchers have addressed the strong focus on proclaimed ‘liberal’ values, and the irony of enforcing liberal values upon people

(Mouritsen and Olsen 2013; Triadafilopoulos 2011). Taking on board these critical analyses of general in- and exclusion and (il)liberalism, we want to add to this critical literature by turning our focus toward the portrayal of democratic participation within this civic integrationist discourse.

The first characteristic of civic integrationism we highlight for the participation paradox is its call for the ‘active citizen’ (e.g. the Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy [Commission of the European Communities 2005]). This ideal of active citizenship, with its specific emphasis on fostering ‘civicness’, has become inseparably intertwined with the notion of integration: active citizenship is presented as *the* road toward integration, and in some cases, even presented as a condition for acquiring legal citizenship in the first place (Van Houdt, Suvarierol, and Schinkel 2011). Instances of this call for integration through active citizenship can be found in several national contexts, expressed in policy briefs<sup>5</sup> and phenomena such as the ‘Republican Integration Contract’ in France, and the ‘Declaration of Participation’ for newcomers in the Netherlands.

Civic integrationism thereby implies a distinction between legal citizens, who are citizens in name only, and active citizens, who are considered to be ‘real citizens’. Citizenship is portrayed as a virtue of ‘civicness’, which prescribes a notion of feeling engaged with the national community, feeling responsible for its well-being, and acting upon these feelings through ‘active citizenship’ (Schinkel 2010). Because the conduct of ‘the active citizen’ is juxtaposed against those who are not considered to be ‘real citizens’, the idea of ‘the active citizen’ is inherently orientated toward the preservation of the polity as it is (Isin 2009).

As noted by Schinkel (2010, 272), one of the consequences of this separation between the formal and the ‘real’ citizen is that the call for active citizenship can be applied both to newly arrived migrants, who may (or may not) apply for citizenship or permanent residence, and to people with a migration background, who may already have formal citizenship, but whose ‘civicness’ is questioned. The participation paradox, thus, also concerns both the participation of resident foreigners, who do not (yet) have full participation rights, and citizens, who do have formal rights but whose legitimacy as participants in the polity is questioned.

The second pillar of the participation paradox is the call for protection of liberal democratic values and institutions. While active citizenship is encouraged, the discourse also exposes a general fear of cultural incompatibility, embodied by newcomers who may abuse the tolerance and openness of ‘Western’ societies, and who through their participation may bring about (illiberal) change in these societies (Kundnani 2012, 157–158). Specifically, themes such as gender equality or the emancipation of the LGBTQ+ community are projected as progressive achievements which need to be protected against intolerance and illiberalism.

The demand and fear sides of the participation paradox are not just logically conflicting, but also potentially mutually reinforcing. The perceived threat of ‘the wrong kind of participation’ reinforces the demand for people with a migratory background to be ‘good citizens’ by performing democratic citizenship. Rather than containing the demand for active citizenship, the fear of participation actually seems to give the discussion on active citizenship more salience.

The case of the Danish Declaration of Integration and Active Citizenship crystallizes the tendency toward simultaneous demand for and fear of immigrants' agency, allowing us to show the presence of the paradox empirically. The declaration was first introduced in 2006 and the text has remained almost the same since. It is a tool for acquiring an individual's recognition of the 'fundamental values of the Danish society' (Ministeriet for Flygtninge Indvandrere og Integration 2006, 10; Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet 2017).<sup>6</sup> As such, it is part of the obligatory paperwork that municipal caseworkers process; the declaration is signed by newcomers when entering the municipal system of integration services. Hence, it applies to those foreign citizens residing in Denmark who come into contact with the incorporation regime – generally due to unemployment or another type of dependency on social benefits. Those economically independent may nonetheless face the declaration later on, since signing it is part of the basic requirements for the permanent resident permit.<sup>7</sup>

By signing the, approximately, two-page document, individual migrants confirm that they *know, understand, and accept* 15 statements. On the affirmative side, these points cover five themes: 1) respect for 'Danish democratic principles' and law; 2) a willingness to respect and act upon the rights and freedoms defined as fundamental for Danish society; 3) a willingness to be educated and collaborate with public institutions; 4) economic self-sufficiency; and 5) allegiance to norms of gender equality. On the renouncing side, we find three themes. These pertain to refraining from: 1) discrimination; 2) activities threatening security; and 3) illiberal family practices. The second and third themes particularly resonate with the defensive narrative of the civic integrationist discourse. Prospective citizens need to declare that they understand and accept that they must not engage in violence and criminal activities, endorse terrorism, or engage in illiberal practices.

These contents prescribe clear demands for various types of participatory action by the signatory. It is also possible to read the statements as a list of potential, suspected failures that the declaration, or the incorporation policy in general, hopes to prevent. The declaration makes visible the dynamic relationship between the demand for agency and the fear of its uncontrolled unfolding: the perceived threat informs the formulation of meticulous activity goals to be performed by the newcomers.

Active citizenship, as portrayed in the *Declaration*, is directed toward maintaining and reproducing the (alleged) status quo (see also Isin and Nyers 2014, 5). The various actions required of the signatory are framed as important for the sake of the preservation of society as it allegedly is thereby constituting a very specific prescription of 'desired civiness'. Being part of society is not presented in the light of getting one's preferences heard or contributing to societal development and change. The right to take part in 'democratic processes' is subsumed under the topic of men and women's equal rights and responsibilities. These processes are not explained or exemplified in the declaration text itself. The text furthermore omits any references to the possibility of obtaining Danish citizenship that endows one with full political rights.

A second point worth mentioning is how the imagined addressee of the text takes the figure of the Muslim Other. The illiberal practices renounced in the declaration are commonly associated with stereotypes about traditionalist or fundamentalist Muslims such as 'coercion against one's spouse', 'the use of force to contract marriage', the 'circumcision of girls' [*original English quotes*] as well as terrorist acts (the text has been



specifically extended over the years on the latter). Since it is the Muslim Other that is the primary source of the fear side of the participation paradox, the demand for active citizenship is primarily shaping an idea of the good, active Muslim immigrant.

### **3. The participation paradox at work: debates on the desirability and conditions of immigrant participation**

This interplay between demand for and fear of active participation of immigrants in European polities has implications for the parameters within which immigrants get the chance to participate. In this section, we discuss two different ways in which the participation paradox plays out. The first (3.1) concerns the overall desirability of participation of resident foreigners. We showcase a debate between those who state that *participation is desirable as a tool for integration*, and those who depict *integration as a condition for participation*. Here, demand and fear are explicit opposites. The second (3.2) involves a dynamic in which the fear of participation reinforces the demand for 'civic' participation, thereby dealing with the conditions set to the *content* of political participation. These conditions apply to resident foreigners as well as naturalized citizens and their children. Both examples underline our point about the challenges to the equality of the premises for political participation in the Danish context.

#### **3.1 Debating the desirability of electoral participation of third-Country nationals**

In 2010, the then pivotal Danish People's Party made an agreement with the Liberal-Conservative government about a number of changes to immigrant and integration policy. This package included raising foreign nationals' residence time in Denmark before being eligible to vote in municipal and regional elections from three to four years, except for EU and Nordic citizens (Folketinget 2010c).

The parliamentary debate on this issue unfolded around three main positions (Folketinget 2010a). The left opposed the extension of the residence time as an impairment of democracy. The government parties blamed the DPP for requiring the amendment to be part of the package. One Conservative MP distanced himself from the amendment, stating 'it is not a flower that grew in our garden' (Naser Khader in Folketinget 2010a, 18). The DPP, for its part, favored abolishing the right of resident foreigners to vote altogether.

In the government bill (Folketinget 2010b, 21), the only direct justification for the proposed amendment was to ensure that third-country nationals would not be eligible to vote in local elections before fulfilling the residence time criterion for permanent residence permit – 4 years of uninterrupted, documented residence. This discursive coupling of the electoral and residence permit rights was, however, rather arbitrary and did not establish a legal bond. The new, broadened, and sharpened set of criteria for permanent residence ensured that, according to the Danish Institute for Human Rights, many potential applicants would not qualify after 4 years, or ever (Institut for Menneskerettigheder 2010). Yet, irrespective of the type of their residence permit, adult residence foreigners would be eligible to vote after the required time of four years had passed.

The bill did not explicitly justify why and how the additional time would enhance newcomers' capabilities of participating in the Danish polity. Instead, emphasis was on the demonstration of citizenship before gaining eligibility. By discursively connecting the residence permit regime and stressing the notion of 'making an effort' to gain electoral rights, the government seemed to imply that making electoral rights *conditional* upon performance (similar to permanent residence) could be desirable (see also de Waal 2017):

The proposal is furthermore connected with the initiatives in the agreement [between the Government and the DPP] for the promotion of integration and civic citizenship, and underlining the responsibility of the individual foreigner for becoming integrated in Denmark. The proposal should therefore be seen against the background of a wish that the individual foreigner makes an effort to be integrated and to demonstrate civic citizenship (Folketinget 2010b, 21).

The decision to prolong the residence requirement for eligibility in subnational elections was reversed in 2012 after the government's composition had changed (Folketinget 2012d). As elections were held in 2009 and 2013, the 4-year rule was never implemented.

The parliamentary debate that unfolded around the reversal only partly followed the positions familiar from 2010. The Conservatives and Liberals, who back in 2010 had expressed support for the restriction, mostly due to give-and-take negotiating with the DPP, now explicitly defended the 4-year rule. The SD-led government now argued that voting was *beneficial for integration*, adopting a more instrumental approach to democracy than in the 2010 debate where foreign residents' voting rights were seen as indicative of the status of Danish democracy. This time round, electoral rights were framed as 'strengthening the possibilities of *foreigners* to participate actively in *our* democracy' (Jacob Bjerregaard [SD] in Folketinget 2012a, 29, emphasis added), and increasing 'opportunities for immigrants to be a part of the debate on integration in their municipality' (Anne Baastrup [Socialist People's Party] in Folketinget 2012a, 32). These framings do not reflect an idea of equality of democratic subjects, but rather uphold a division between the foreign element that is allowed in *our* democracy, even predetermining the subject matter for the foreigners' contribution: their own adaptation into Danish society.

The DPP meanwhile submitted an amendment that would have abolished resident foreigners' voting rights, except Nordic citizens (Folketinget 2012b, 14), and when that failed, an amendment making gaining electoral rights conditional upon passing a high-level Danish language test (Folketinget 2012c).<sup>8</sup> Seeking to limit all electoral rights to Danish citizens, combined with the preference for stricter naturalization requirements and a lower number of naturalizations than supported by other parties (see Folketinget 2017a, 5, 2017b, 1), the stances of the DPP come extremely close to saying only ethnic Danes belong to the polity. The opposition to the naturalization of individuals with a refugee background (Folketinget 2017a, 5) (the majority of whom belong to groups socially constructed as 'non-white'), together with allowing an exception for other Nordic citizens (who are considered 'white') in the amendment for voting rights, makes the racialized character of the DPP's approach discernible (see Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012).<sup>9</sup>

The status in 2018 is that the 3-year rule has survived despite the Liberal-Conservative regime's return to power in 2015. The issue is, however, not forgotten. 'The New Right', a splinter party from the Conservatives with representation in one municipal council since 2017, made it onto the public broadcasting company's (DR) news on 12 October 2017 by claiming that resident foreigners should be barred from voting in subnational elections due to the potential influence of letting a 'few foreigners decide'. In this line of argument, we clearly see the fear of migrant participation being reflected.

To sum up: there is clear pressure from right-of-center political actors to exclude resident foreigners from electoral influence. For the DPP, the fear of political participation is so central that it nullifies the demand for participation in the polity. Full assimilation in other spheres of life, expressed for instance as people 'being Danish at the bottom of their heart' (Jeppe Jakobsen [DDP] in Folketinget 2017a, 5), is portrayed as *a condition for any right to participate*. The L-C government too holds that the right to participate should only be granted to those who, in their perception, are already integrated up to a certain degree. Both the DDP and the L-C government accepted or promoted stricter criteria to bar 'excessively easy' access to electoral participation. Even though left-of-center actors defended the electoral rights of resident foreigners, these rights were mainly presented as a tool of integration. As a consequence, the political participation of immigrants is primarily constructed as an integration issue, rather than something concerning the Danish democracy as such (only mentioned by the opposition in the 2010 debate).

### **3.2 Conditioning political participation: the favored position of Christianity**

In addition to these debates about the overall desirability of resident foreigners' participation, the participation paradox is also constituted in discourse and policies around the *content* of desirable participation. In these cases, the fear of 'wrongful participation' leads to attempts to impose conditions for what counts as good, 'integrative' participation.<sup>10</sup> We acknowledge that the social norms of a political culture will always skew access to effective participation in favor of those most thoroughly socialized within it; adopting the formal as well as the informal 'rules of the game' is vital for political participation. Our point, however, is to highlight an inconsistency in which topics are off limits within the Danish 'rules of the game'.

Here, we discuss the discursive conditions for the participation of Muslims, as opposed to Christians or secular citizens. Muslims are heavily Othered in Danish society (Andreassen 2005; Sheik and Crone 2011), which tends to portray itself as a secular nation (Larsen 2010; Mouritsen 2017, 293). In this section, we show how condemning faith-related politics is effectively communicated to the general public and to people with a migration background in particular. Presenting religious language, perspectives, and interests as unacceptable in politics (which, in the wider sense, covers all public discussion), the good citizen is portrayed as someone who would not use democratic institutions for making claims motivated by faith.

Although religiosity and religiously motivated claims have been deprecated as alien to Danish political culture in the twenty-first century, the distinction between religion and politics is far from simple: the country's constitution stipulates a state-church system (§4) and there is a tradition of clerics of the Danish Evangelical Lutheran state church being involved in politics, as well as politicians making statements on religious issues (Larsen

2010; Mouritsen 2017, 293). Especially the parties on the right have positioned themselves positively toward Christianity, framing it as a characteristic feature of the nation and source of national cohesion – irrespective of the fact that most voters do not define their national belonging in terms of Christianity (Lüchau 2011). It seems that it is *religiosity* (faith) much more than *religion* (a socio-cultural institution) that is shunned in Danish politics and Islam to a much higher degree than Christianity (Lindberg 2014; Lüchau 2011).

In 2016, the Ministry of Culture published educational material on Danish immaterial culture – ‘The Denmark Canon: 10 Values for the Future Society’ (Kulturministeriet 2016a).<sup>11</sup> It follows a tradition of Canons published by Liberal-Conservative governments to address and fortify the idea of ‘Danishness’ against the perceived threats of multiculturalism and fundamentalism through compiling texts that crystallize the essence of the topic (e.g. the Culture Canon launched in 2006) (see Sheik and Crone 2011, 175–176). Our discussion of the Canon focuses on the main publication of the list of 10 values and the justification of the project.

The overall purpose of the Denmark Canon is to enlighten and engage. The aim was that through the canon process we would achieve a greater awareness of our cultural heritage. That which has made us who we are, and the value patterns and traditions that we adopt (...) which we believe in and apply when raising our children. (...) In the long term, such awareness can (...) prepare the ground for better integration – including that of non-ethnic Danish citizens. (...) The purpose of the canon is also to make it clearer what creates our national identity and cohesion (...) and make us a people of increased cultural awareness and common cultural experience (Kulturministeriet 2016b, English original).

‘The Christian cultural tradition’ made it into the final 10 Canon elements (Kulturministeriet 2016a, 10). Its depiction in the canon text makes visible the complicated relationship among state, politics, and Christianity/religion: it is noted that the church and state are linked through the constitution; that the state remains secular in its legislation; *that religious arguments are not socially accepted in political debates, or conversely, political statements in sermons*; and nonetheless that the parliamentary term always opens with a service in church. The constitution is presented as guaranteeing ‘freedom of religion but not the equality of religions’ (Ibid.).

The Danish language presentation webpage about the Canon quoted the Minister of Culture Bertel Haarder’s Facebook post explaining that the initiative was (also) about making clear ‘what is incompatible with life here’. He maintained that

‘We must not withdraw [from our own cultural practices] just because some arrive here with another type of foundation (...) Most Muslims are happy to let their children participate in Christianity lessons, the Christmas service and singing of hymns [in schools]. They have nothing against the fact that Denmark is a Christian country’ (Kulturministeriet 2016c).

Underlying this statement is an idea that it is perfectly defensible to demarcate Denmark as a Christian country and that most Muslims (the ‘good Muslims’) would not want to make any (political) claim to change this. This can also be read as a normative statement, discursively marginalizing those who actually would like to have a critical say, for example about the above-mentioned school practices. Desired participation, as in the case of the *Declaration* before, is framed as taking part in what is presented as the status quo

(here celebrating Christmas, singing hymns); proposing changes is implied to be undesired, i.e. the kind of participation that does not amount to integration.

The Canon project aimed for a broad outreach, especially through schools. A more immigrant-specific side to this civic education by the government is found in the vast range of brochures and self-study materials about Denmark. The same negation of religious political speech is found in these documents. The self-study materials for the official tests for a permanent residence permit and naturalization can be deemed the most powerful of these text policy tools, as the test aspirants need to know the material very well in order to succeed in the multiple-choice test.

The self-study materials for these tests educate the reader about the social norm of keeping religion away from the public sphere: ‘Although the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark is supported by the state, it has no political power. There is a tradition for drawing a clear line between religion and politics. Most Danes consider religion a private matter’ (Udlændinge- Integrations- og Boligministeriet 2016b, 84). Equivalent passages with only marginal variation are found in all five editions of the study materials since 2007 as well as in the film ‘Life in Denmark’ (Feldballe Film & TV 2010, 7:47–8:20; Ministeriet for Flygtninge Indvandrere og Integration 2007a, 78, 2011, 79; Udlændinge- Integrations- og Boligministeriet 2016a, 66; Undervisningsministeriet 2014, 83).<sup>12</sup> The wordings are notably similar to that in the Canon, implying a rather fixed state rhetoric around this issue. Through the link to the tests, being aware of (and desirably also accepting) the exclusion of religious reasoning from politics is made part of the conditions for gaining a more permanent status or full citizenship in the country. Yet, political claims about the Christian nature of Danish society seem to be fully acceptable.

These endeavors to secure Denmark as a secular-Christian polity illustrate how the fear of ‘wrongful’ participation construes a specific picture of the kind of ‘civicness’ to be attained through active citizenship: both newcomers and naturalized citizens need to participate to integrate, but not just any participation will do. Islamic rhetoric and claims fall outside the parameters of integrative participation, and are, therefore, deemed illegitimate. A discursive restriction like this stands in stark contrast with the emphasis on the value of the freedom of expression. According to Larsen (2014), “‘being blasphemous’ is even widely presented as an intrinsic part of Danish culture and society’. In other words: faith is legitimate as an object of and source for ridicule but not as a source of motivation.

#### 4. Democratic implications of the paradox

Based on the discussed material, we now turn to the democratic implications of the paradox. The political participation of immigrants may be attributed positive value from a democratic perspective. It could, for example, be argued that their participation brings in a broader set of perspectives and experiences, thereby enhancing the epistemic quality of decision-making in the polity (Anderson 2006). Or, that the self-transformative qualities of participation positively affect the autonomy and thereby freedom of immigrants (Warren 1992).

In contrast, the participation paradox actually limits the political freedom of immigrants. It crystallizes an idea of the *good* active citizen who showcases the ‘civicness’ that

is deemed necessary for integration. This outline of what does and does not make a good citizen sets restrictive parameters for the participation of migrants. As already emphasized in the introduction, the implications of the paradox are potentially different for various categories of immigrants, making it difficult to make general statements about them. For some people, they are more structural than for others. For some, they function primarily on a formal level (e.g. the requirement to sign the *Declaration*), whereas for others they also affect the informal level. Nevertheless, we distinguish three democratic implications that apply to ‘the immigrant’ more generally.

First, as we have seen in the debate around the voting rights for third-country nationals, the fear of participation has led to a discussion on the desirability of participation in general. The idea that a specific form of civiness is necessary for good democratic participation means that not everyone qualifies as a competent participant, or as deserving of political rights. This way, the paradox affects the democratic position of resident foreigners most directly, since the *right to participate* is on the line.

Second, when immigrants do participate, they are not free to voice any interest or perspective. Because participation is to function as a tool for integration, it is discursively restricted to supporting the status quo. Participation aimed at change could be interpreted as non-integration, which is feared, and could be used as an argument for restrictions of political rights. To borrow Isin’s (2009) distinction: immigrants are to act as ‘active citizens’, but not as ‘activist citizens’. They should follow ‘a script for already existing citizens to follow already existing paths’ (383), and not disrupt the existing order by breaching such norms (384).

Although the discursive restrictions mostly target immigrants with a Muslim background, they do not leave other categories unaffected. The increasing emphasis on what is ‘typically Danish’ tightens the cultural conditions of ‘good participation’ for all immigrants, who are all subject of policies aiming to educate ‘the immigrant’ about these cultural conditions.

Third, the participation of immigrants is predominantly discussed from an integration perspective rather than an issue concerning the democratic qualities of the Danish polity overall.<sup>13</sup> This tendency is discernible both in the *Declaration*, and the parliamentary debate around voting rights for third-country nationals. In demarcating participation as a tool for integration through which immigrants can or should show their dedication to the polity, the discourse on active citizenship problematizes the ‘passive immigrant’. Hence, an unequal distribution of a participation duty is constituted: while ethnic Danes may have a socially determined democratic duty for political participation as a part of their participatory political culture, they are free from the integration duty. Immigrants who refrain from democratic participation, in contrast, bear a double negative framing – that of both a democratic and an integration failure. While, depending on your understanding of citizenship, it may be justifiable to set up extra duties or conditions for people entering a polity (e.g. Miller 2016), there seems to be no justification for upholding this double duty after immigrants have obtained full formal citizenship. As noted in Section 2, the current integration discourse upholds ‘real citizens’ and ‘citizens in name only’. This way, even naturalized citizens and their offspring remain tied to this double duty.

## 5. Conclusion

In this article, we argued that participation features as a paradoxical element in the civic integrationist discourse, which is encouraged, discouraged, and conditioned in ways that compromise the democratic position of people with a migration background in their polity of residence. With illustrations from Denmark, we showed how the participation paradox means that: 1) in order to be acknowledged as ‘integrated’, immigrants need to show that they can be well-functioning democratic citizens; but 2) this participation should reinforce the status quo of an imagined, liberal, and progressive society. Resident foreigners or naturalized citizens should not make claims about interests or perspectives that depart from this status quo, specifically claims motivated by Islamic faith. If these conditions are not fulfilled, individuals are seen as an integration problem, which interferes with their social standing as a legitimate democratic participant. Consequently, the paradox potentially makes democracy a tool of Othering rather than a tool of inclusion. It leaves immigrants in the paradoxical position in which they need to demonstrate their capacity of being well-functioning democratic citizens, without expecting to be included as citizens with equal standing as democratic participants.

## Notes

1. A distinction is made between newly arrived immigrants, resident foreigners (foreign citizens who hold a residency permit and are registered in a municipality), naturalized citizens with a migration background, and their offspring. Danish policies and debates around active citizenship, which we draw on for the empirical part of the article, operate with the categories of ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western’ immigrants, the latter of which is also used as a euphemism when actually wanting to speak about Muslims.
2. Bolzendahl and Hilde (2013), for example, show in their cross-national comparative research on citizenship norms that 92% of the Danish populations thinks it is important for citizens to vote, and about 60% of Danes are involved in some form of political activism (see also Oser and Hooghe 2018, 9; Sloam 2016). These are relatively high numbers in comparison to other EU countries.
3. Jønsson and Petersen (2010) assert that the 2001 elections did not represent a ‘breaking point’ in immigration and incorporation policy-making, but rather a step in the direction in which the politics of integration were already heading. Yet, the elections mark some kind of change: the DPP grew from 13 to 22 seats out of a total of 179, and cemented immigration issues onto the political agenda.
4. For a debate whether, and to what extent, this civic turn has led to a decrease in national differences toward a more unified transnational discourse, see for example Joppke (2017) and Mouritsen (2013). Further, civic integrationism is not limited to the European context (see Triadafilopoulos (2011) for a discussion of the Canadian case).
5. To give two examples: The 2007 Dutch policy brief on integration (‘Make Sure You Are Part of It!’) states that active citizenship is a ‘vital part of the integration process’, portraying active citizens as those who identify with Dutch society and are willing to contribute to looking after common interests (Ministerie van VROM 2007, 17, 37). In the U.K. it is expected that migrants voluntarily participate in community-building initiatives (Cheong et al. 2007). In 2008, the U.K. Home Office even issued a plan for migrants to earn points through active citizenship, in order to speed up their naturalization process. Although this plan was not brought into practice, it shows what kind of consequences could be attached to ‘active citizenship’ (Kostakopoulou 2010a; UK Border Agency 2008).

6. The quotations from the empirical material are translations from Danish by the authors unless otherwise indicated.
7. There are exceptions to the basic framework. Most significantly, nationals of EU/EEC countries and Switzerland enjoy a lighter set of criteria where the declaration is not included (The Danish Immigration Service 2018).
8. A similar measure was proposed by the Dutch conservative-Christian (CDA) and conservative-liberal (VVD) (government) parties in July 2018: according to their proposal, resident foreigners should only be eligible to vote in local elections if they pass the knowledge and language test required for a permanent residence permit (Christen-Democratisch Appel 2018).
9. Over time and in different democracies, a variety of requirements have limited people's access to electoral rights related to, for example, wealth, gender and race (see Henrik, Knutsen, and Svend-Erik 2016; Free 2015). Today, limitations mainly relate to mental illness, criminal offences and specific professions (e.g. judge, military officer) (Piccoli et al. 2017). A requirement of documented language proficiency echoes the historical, oppressive rules like the literacy tests in the U.S. that were upheld in order to keep people of color disenfranchised (Karlan 1997).
10. This seems to be a similar mechanism to the one observed by Dahlstedt (2008). He shows how, in the Swedish context, 'mobilizing one's resources' was deemed highly desirable as a policy goal, but those resources were only perceived as constructive if not diverging from the imagined 'Swedish normality'. This 'normality' refers to social norms and language skills, linked to a historical continuum of exclusion on ethnic grounds.
11. Title directly translated from Danish. The official English language title is 'Denmark Canon: What Makes us Who We Are'.
12. However, a widely distributed handbook from the time before the test system does not contain this passage, merely linking the state church system to public service production (Ministeriet for Flygtninge Indvandrere og Integration 2002, 103, 2007b, 127).
13. While the notions of democracy vary between political systems as well as between scientific approaches to society (see Bauböck 2010), it is common to associate inclusiveness with a good quality democracy.

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