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How prejudice shapes public perceptions of minority-organized spaces: the case of community education

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ABSTRACT

As European societies become continuously more diverse, understanding the dynamics of minority rights endorsement becomes increasingly crucial. This paper investigates the variations in citizen support for minority rights and how these endorsements differ across various minority groups and purposes. This study focuses on minority organized supplementary schooling for minoritized youth in Flanders, Belgium as a case study for examining the endorsement of rights. Using new observational evidence, we first show that there is significant variation in citizens' opposition to community education. Subsequently, we conduct a survey experiment to unravel what explains public opposition to certain minority-organized initiatives, but not others. Specifically, we examine the causal effect of the organizing ethnic community (i.e. Italian, Chinese, or Moroccan) and the school's stated purpose (i.e. heritage language training or math tutoring) on public support. The study reveals that public approval of such minority-organized spaces is not uniform across initiatives. It is influenced by the perceived cultural threat posed by specific minority groups and the nature of the initiative. This research is the first to comprehensively examine public perceptions of minority-organized spaces. The findings indicate that deeper research into the support for minority rights and freedoms is imperative.

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Introduction

As a result of globalization and immigration, European countries have witnessed a demographic transformation in which societies are increasingly diverse, or 'superdiverse', in terms of ethnicity, nationality, culture, language, and religious affiliation (Vertovec 2007). The reality of superdiversity entails significant challenges and tensions on a societal level. Moreover, minorities are structurally confronted with discrimination and prejudice. Their rights and freedom to self-organize are disputed, and this is more true for some

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minority groups than for others. In this paper, we investigate how the endorsement of minority rights varies across citizens, and how citizens differentiate in their endorsement of rights for different groups and for different purposes. In other words, we ask who endorses minority rights and whose rights are endorsed and whose are not?

The presence of ethnic minorities in European societies has resulted in a wide variety of minority-organized spaces. Ethnic minorities self-organize in community and cultural centers as well as in religious congregations to preserve their cultural heritage, promote social cohesion, and address common challenges. Such minority organized spaces are highly relevant for the communities themselves. At the same time, they make ethnic diversity publicly visible and tangible. Given the ubiquity of minority-organized spaces across European societies, the lack of research on public opinion towards such spaces is surprising. There is ample research on the determinants of support for immigration (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014; Hellwig and Sinno 2017; Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo 2013; Valentino et al. 2019) While this research has improved our understanding of public support for ‘immigrant flow’, i.e. support for the entry of immigrants (see Margalit and Solodoch 2022), we argue it remains unclear how support for minority spaces of ‘immigrant stock’ is structured. Work on multiculturalism and minority rights has examined public support for different models of migrant acculturation and integration (Guimond, de la Sablonnière, and Nugier 2014; Verkuyten 2009; Verkuyten and Yogeewaran 2020; Yogeewaran et al. 2018; Ziller and Berning 2021). This research has been fundamental for our understanding of whether citizens of the dominant ethnic group are prepared to accrue general rights and freedoms to migrant and ethnic minority groups. Nevertheless, we argue this body of research has not examined support or acceptance for *specific* minority-organized spaces. Examining public approval of specific minority-organized spaces is important as it enables the study of specific mechanisms of (dis)approval.

We therefore examine the public approval of minority-organized spaces by focusing on supplementary schooling for minoritized youth. These schools are minority-organized educational spaces, initiated by minoritized communities in support of their youth (Steenwegen, Clycq, and Vanhoof 2023) and we argue that minority-organized supplementary schooling is an ideal case to study the endorsement of rights for several reasons. First, in many societies worldwide, ethnic minority communities and migrant groups have a long history of organizing supplementary schooling (Li 2006). Even though supplementary schools are widespread, they have operated for the most part under the public radar (Fishman 2014). Academic scholarship, too, has long overlooked such educational spaces by migrant groups and ethnic minorities. A recent study, however, estimates that almost half of all children with a migration background attend such minority-organized spaces (Coudenys et al. 2023). These initiatives are aimed at academically supporting minoritized youth, teaching heritage language, and preserving cultural traditions (Steenwegen, Clycq, and Vanhoof 2023). Often organized after formal school hours or in the weekends, supplementary schools perform important educational and social functions in migrant and minority communities, while navigating the expectations of the majority societies as well.

Second, in recent years minority organized educational spaces have become politically contentious and contested in various European countries. Education is often seen as an integral component of a state’s cultural identity. Apart from knowledge transmission,

schools are vehicles of cultural values and norms. From this perspective, it is not surprising that politicians have recently suggested that minority-organized schools pose a risk to the integration of migrant groups. They have argued that such schools can lead to the segregation of ethnic groups from mainstream society, or worse, to political radicalization and extremism (Awan 2018). Given the ubiquity and the increased politicization of such minority-organized spaces we assert that it is important to study their public approval.

It is likely, however, that not all minority-organized spaces are evaluated equally. Research on ethnic prejudice has found that different ethnic minority groups are evaluated differently. The cultural threat hypothesis specifies that the larger the perceived cultural difference, the bigger the perceived threat is among citizens (Esses 2021; Ford 2011; Zárate et al. 2004). Particularly, minority groups which are Muslim are perceived to form a threat to society (Verkuyten 2022). The political backlash against minority-organized schooling has also been primarily aimed at cases that share an Arabic or Islamic background. This seems to suggest that not all minority-organized spaces are treated equally in the political arena. Yet in-depth research into whether citizens accrue different rights to different minority groups remains missing. Moreover, it is likely that the nature of the educational initiative affects its perceived cultural threat. This study therefore sets out to investigate how public opinion towards these minority-organized educational spaces is structured and how the characteristics of the educational space affect public support.

Building on both the literature on public opinion for immigration as well as on the research on public support for multiculturalism and minority rights, we study public perceptions of minority-organized spaces in the Belgian region of Flanders. Flanders is a compelling case study for exploring perceptions of minority-organized educational spaces due to its significant achievement gap between majority and minority students, the conscious efforts of minoritized communities to address educational challenges through community schools, and the highly politicized nature of such schools in the region – offering a unique perspective on varying attitudes towards minority-organized spaces.

We examine public perceptions of minority-organized schools in two steps. Given the dearth of empirical research on public attitudes toward minority-organized supplementary schools, we first descriptively examine public approval of supplementary schools using new observational evidence of Flemish citizens ($N = 2039$). In our main empirical analysis, we conduct a survey experiment ($N = 2650$) to unravel what explains public opposition to certain minority grassroots initiatives, but not others. Specifically, we examine the causal effect of the organizing ethnic community (i.e. Italian, Chinese, or Moroccan) and the stated purpose (i.e. heritage language training or math tutoring) of the educational initiative on public support. This allows us to understand *which citizens* support or reject minority-organized educational spaces, and *which spaces* receive higher and lower public support. To our knowledge, this is the first study to examine the public perceptions of minority-organized spaces.

Our observational evidence shows that a slight majority of respondents hold a negative view of minority-organized schools, believing they would worsen societal segregation and hinder minority integration and the development of a Flemish identity. Evidence from our survey experiment demonstrates a clear ethnic hierarchy in approval for

ethnic minority groups' educational programs, with approval for the Moroccan school being significantly lower than the Chinese school, which in turn was evaluated less positively than the Italian school. Moreover, whereas Arabic language training is perceived as a threat, Italian language training was seen as enrichment. This suggests that the Arabic language provokes a strong cultural threat, which is in line with previous findings regarding majority members perceiving 'threat' by Muslim minorities. We moreover find that respondents with a far left-wing ideology and with higher levels of multicultural recognition view minority-organized schools more positively and do not differentiate between the Italian, Chinese and Moroccan initiatives.

Analyzing attitudes toward migrants, as previous research has extensively undertaken, is not enough on its own. It is crucial to recognize the vital implications of delving deeper into the support for the rights and freedoms of minoritized groups. This becomes even more urgent in light of the actions taken by policymakers to limit the rights of minority populations in the name of safeguarding the freedoms of the native population. Therefore, it is imperative to underscore the importance of conducting research to comprehensively understand these implications, particularly when, as this paper illustrates, such support is motivated not by a desire for successful integration but by ethnic hierarchies.

The importance of minority-organized educational spaces

In many countries, ethnic and religious minorities organize formal full-time schools, which has been shown to have beneficial effects on the students attending them (Driessen, Agirdag, and Merry 2017). They are powerful tools in disrupting the structural inequality in education that students with migration backgrounds are confronted with (Driessen, Agirdag, and Merry 2017; Merry and Driessen 2016). However, in some countries or regions, such as Flanders, Belgium, the right of minorities to organize their own schooling is limited. A more readily accessible way to organize minority-led schooling is to organize it supplementary to mainstream schooling. These supplementary schools are usually organized in the weekend and rely heavily on volunteers. Such schools are organized in response to the gaps that minoritized communities perceive in mainstream education, either as a refuge from racism, a space to teach heritage language or to offer additional academic support, or any of those reasons combined. Access to such schools can help the development of minoritized students' identities, offer a safe space from racism or discrimination as well as support the students academically, all of which enhance their opportunities in mainstream society (Baldrige et al. 2017). Research into these supplementary schools has found that they are not only important to the students that attend them, but also by extension, to the students' parents and other community members. They can be instrumental to the social mobility of minorities in providing access to social capital and information (Khachikian 2020; Steenwegen and Clycq 2023).

Even though the importance of such supplementary schools for minority communities is uncontested in the academic literature, the right to organize those spaces is. In recent public debate, community-organized schools have been said to pose a risk to integration, leading to the segregation of different ethnic groups, or worse, radicalization and extremism. The discussion on the desirability of minority-organized schooling mirrors primarily the debate on the endorsement of minority rights. In this light, these schools

do not only lay bare feelings of fear and uncertainty in society towards immigration, but they are illustrative of the challenges of co-existing in a superdiverse society which grants minorities the same rights as majority citizens. The 2014 so-called Trojan Horse Affair in the UK is indicative of the political and public opposition to minority-organized schools. In the ‘affair’, unsubstantiated accusations of an ‘Islamist’ plot to take over schools and radicalize the youth in Birmingham were made by both media outlets and government bodies with pervasive effects on the community (Abbas 2017; Awan 2018). In the Netherlands, the government recently announced that it will put all minority-organized supplementary schools under increased scrutiny by the authorities (NOS Nieuws 2022). The issue is particularly salient in the Belgian region Flanders, as public subsidies for grassroots organizations which rely on a shared ethnic background, including supplementary schools, have been withdrawn (Goris 2020). Furthermore, even though by law every community should be able to open their own schools (Vernimmen, Willems, and Lemmens 2022), the national conservative Party N-VA, as part of the Flemish government, has repeatedly blocked the opening of an Islamic secondary school, despite criticism from the Belgian supreme administrative court (HLN 2022).

Public perceptions of minority-organized educational spaces

Building upon the research into attitudes towards migrants and interculturalism we, first, investigate the overall public perceptions towards the contested spaces of minority organized supplementary schools in Flanders. Then, in our main experimental study, we take an innovative approach to find which characteristics of the supplementary school predict positive or negative views. We build on the extensive literature on public opinion and prejudiced attitudes towards migrants to formulate our hypotheses for public perception of minority organized spaces. Some studies have investigated how individuals perceive the rights of different ethnic minority groups, however, they have mainly focused on majority perceptions of the commitment of migrants to the nation-state (Banting, Harell, and Kymlicka 2022; Harell et al. 2022), on how dual citizenship affects the endorsement of rights (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2020; Kunst, Thomsen, and Dovidio 2019) or on cross-national comparisons in the granting of religious rights (Carol and Koopmans 2013; Koopmans, Michalowski, and Waibel 2012). We expand this research on attitudes towards migrants and the endorsement of their rights in majority society by investigating differentiated attitudes towards supplementary schools organized by different minority communities.

Ethnic hierarchy and cultural threat

Previous research has demonstrated that not every minority group experiences discrimination in the same degree (Esses 2021; Ford 2011). When it comes to those migrants that are already settled, field experiments find differential attitudes towards different groups. These prejudiced attitudes towards different groups of migrants translate into discriminatory tendencies in the housing market, labor market as well as in schooling and even carpooling (Auspurg, Schneck, and Hinz 2019; Bourabain, Verhaeghe, and Stevens 2023; Liebe and Beyer 2021). Another strand of studies has shifted the focus of research from the characteristics of natives to the traits of migrants that predict more prejudiced

attitudes and find significant differences between minority groups (Ceobanu and Escandell 2010). These differences can be triggered by the way migrants are portrayed in the media (Blinder and Jeannet 2018; Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008), their socio-economic background (Valentino et al. 2019), the perceived threat of these migrants (Turper 2017), or, simply, by how different they are felt to be from the majority group (Hedegaard and Larsen 2023).

We lean on the cultural threat hypothesis and expect that Italian communities are perceived as more proximate to the majority culture, as they are European, and therefore treated more positively than the other groups. The cultural threat hypothesis (Zárate et al. 2004) poses that the more ‘different’ the ethnic minority group is felt to be from the dominant group the bigger the risk they are felt to pose to society (De Rooij, Goodwin, and Pickup 2018; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014).

Hypothesis 1: Respondents are more positive towards initiatives undertaken by the Italian community than by the Chinese or Moroccan communities.

Moreover, migrants who are Muslim, or who are perceived as Muslim, are confronted with more prejudice and discriminatory attitudes (Buijs 2009; Di Stasio et al. 2021; Nar-kowicz and Pędziwiatr 2017; Schaffner 2013; Strabac, Aalberg, and Valenta 2014; Triandafyllidou and Gropas 2009). Bringing together the cultural threat hypothesis, the perceived threat, and the fact that Muslims, or those perceived as Muslims, are treated with more hostility, we expect that the Moroccan community is treated with more negative attitudes than the Chinese community.

Hypothesis 2: Respondents are more positive towards initiatives undertaken by the Chinese community than by the Moroccan community.

Research into attitudes towards migrants has also showed that prejudiced attitudes are more concerned with language and culture than potential economic threat (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). The perceived cultural threat of migrants is particularly pronounced when members of the native group are exposed to immigrants communicating in a foreign language (Hopkins, Tran, and Williamson 2014; Newman, Hartman, and Taber 2012). We therefore expect that heritage language classes trigger the cultural threat to the majority culture and therefore the schools offering language classes are seen more negative than the ones that offer academic support.

Hypothesis 3: Respondents are more positive towards initiatives that are presented as offering academic support than those transmitting heritage language.

We understand the organizing of supplementary schooling as a way in which minoritized communities exert their right to maintain heritage language and culture in a diverse society. These arguments align closely to ‘multicultural recognition’ as they emphasize the importance of diversity and the right to maintain the diverse culture and group identities of minorities. If the fear for ‘segregation’ truly is at the root of those qualms against supplementary schooling, each supplementary school should be regarded with the same level of appreciation or misgivings as most of the research into multiculturalism would suggest. Building upon the literature on prejudiced attitudes and the cultural threat hypothesis however, we expect that the attitudes towards such schools vary according to the community that organizes them and which lessons they offer.

Data & methods

To test our hypotheses, we fielded a survey in Flanders, Belgium between December 16, 2022, and January 23, 2023. We test our hypotheses with a preregistered survey experiment.¹ To take stock of citizens' general views on community education, we collected observational data on public approval of supplementary schools in addition to the experimental evidence. Responses of a total of 4689 respondents who were recruited from the Kieskompas ('Election Compass') panel. The panel constitutes an opt-in sample recruited via Voting Advice Applications (VAAs). VAA users were given the option to voluntarily enclose their email addresses in order to be contacted with surveys in the future. The sample is constituted by adult respondents, aged 18 or older.² The study has been approved by the Ethics Assessment Committee of the home institution of one of the authors.³ In the survey, respondents were randomly routed to the questions for the observational study ($n = 2039$) or the experimental study ($n = 2650$). Poststratification weights were designed for both subsamples (see the appendix for more information on the post-stratification procedure). Prior to both studies, we have implemented two attention checks. The first one is after the demographic covariates, the second one is asked just before respondents enter the round of the experimental treatments. The attention checks are taken from Berinsky, Margolis, and Sances (2014) and adapted to the Flemish context by the authors (see the appendix for more information).

The case: Flanders, Belgium

Flanders, the Dutch-speaking Northern part of Belgium is an especially interesting context from which to investigate the differential endorsement of minority rights by looking at community schooling. Schools in Flanders have one of the biggest achievement gaps between majority and minority Flemish peers, when comparing their scores in international tests (Franck and Nicaise 2019). This blatant difference in achievement indicates that the region continues to struggle to offer each student equal opportunities, especially to students of Moroccan or Turkish descent (Danhier and Jacobs 2017). Minoritized communities in Flanders are also conscious of the challenges their youth are confronted with in education and initiating community schools is one way of responding to those challenges (Steenwegen, Clycq, and Vanhoof 2023). To this end, they organize supplementary schooling, meeting the educational needs of the communities where Flemish mainstream schools cannot. Research into the goals of supplementary schools in Flanders has shown that the organizers of these spaces hope to counter racist experiences, nurture a sense of pride in their students as well as offer additional support to help them in their academic endeavors (Piqueray, Clycq, and Timmerman 2016). Supplementary schools are widespread in Flanders with 45% of students with a migration background attending such schools at a certain time. Schools organized by minoritized communities are, however, highly politicized in Flanders with the minister of Education explicitly forbidding the opening of an Islamic-oriented school organized by the Turkish community (HLN 2022). Supplementary schools too have been contested. The schools are self-organized and can, at least theoretically, apply for subsidies to rent a location or buy materials. Recently, however, subsidies for spaces organized within minoritized communities for the members of those communities have been withdrawn as they are understood to be

segregating and stand in the way of community members' successful integration in Flemish society (Paelinck 2019; Goris 2020). Given Flanders' identity as a sub-state nation in Belgium and the salience of separatist views, Flanders' linguistic and ethno-cultural identity is particularly salient, a pattern we also see in Québec and Catalonia (Xhardex 2020). What is more, education policy is a prerogative of the Flemish Government in the Belgian federal state, and the Education Ministry is led by a minister from the conservative Flemish national conservative party N-VA since 2019. In this light, public attitude towards supplementary schools in Flanders poses a relevant case to study differential attitudes towards minority organized initiatives.

Design of the observational study

To capture Flemish citizens' attitudes toward minority-initiated community education, we measured eight different dimensions of community education (see Table 1 for the full item descriptions). Positively phrased items were reversed so that higher scores express negative evaluations for all items. The eight dimensions tap into different motivations citizens can have in their approval or support for minority-initiated supplementary schools. In the Flemish public debate, community education has been criticized on account of its supposed effect on social segregation and integration (Gianni Paelinck 2019; Goris 2020). The first two items tap into this sentiment ('segregation' and 'integration'). Relatedly, the third item ('Flemish identity') covers concerns that educational spaces organized by minorities harm the fostering of a Flemish identity, something that is particularly salient in the Belgian region of Flanders. Next, the items 'concern', 'heritage', and 'tutoring' capture different perceptions on the substantive education content of these schools.

Design of the survey experiment

To test our pre-registered hypotheses, we embedded a factorial experiment in the survey. A total of 2,650 respondents were exposed to the treatment. Prior to conducting the experiment, we conducted a power analysis using the R package *DeclareDesign* (Blair et al. 2019).⁴ The goal of the survey experiment is to assess whether respondents' opposition to community education is driven by initiating community in question and the

Table 1. Wording of items on community education in English.

Item	Direction	Item Wording
Segregation	-	Weekend schools of minority groups promote segregation (the living apart of ethnic or social groups).
Integration	+	Weekend schools have positive effects on the integration of [ethnic] minorities in Flemish society.
Flemish identity	-	Learning the language and culture of origin in weekend schools hinders the development of a Flemish identity.
Concern	-	I am concerned about what children learn in minority groups' weekend schools.
Heritage	+	It is important that minorities can learn about their heritage language and culture.
Tutoring	+	It is a good thing that minorities organize tutoring for children in their language of origin.
Achievement	+	Weekend schools can have a positive impact on pupils' school results.
Self-esteem	+	It is good for the self-esteem of pupils from migrant backgrounds to attend weekend schools

purpose of the community. We therefore vary both the ethnic community (1/3: Chinese, Italian, or Moroccan) and the purpose of the educational initiative (1/2: math tutoring or heritage language lessons). This yields six different conditions, shown in Table 2.

Stimulus material

Respondents were presented with a vignette of a hypothetical flyer, distributed by a community educational initiative to attract new pupils. We tell respondents that the flyer could hypothetically be found on the pinboard of a local library. The flyer describes the educational initiative of a minority group in both Dutch and the native language of the community in question, Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), or Italian. The Chinese Mandarin, Italian, and Arabic texts have been translated by native speakers. The aim of showing the community's native text is that languages (and, in particular, non-Roman languages) also cue the identity of the community to respondents. We complement the flyer with a flag of the community's country of origin. An example of the treatment, with the Dutch text translated to English, is shown in Figure 1.

Outcome measures

To estimate the effect of the experimental treatment on respondents' attitudes toward community schools, we measure three dependent variables directly after the experimental treatment. The first dependent variable captures respondents' *overall evaluation* of the initiative with the question: 'In general, do you think it is just right or just wrong that the [Italian/Chinese/Moroccan] community organizes such classes?'. The second dependent variable measures the perceived effects of the initiative on the *children* of the respective minority community with the question 'Do you think it is either a good thing or a bad thing for [Italian/Chinese/Moroccan] children that the [Italian/Chinese/Moroccan] community organizes such classes?'. Finally, the third dependent variable asks how respondents think the school initiative will affect *Flemish society* with the question 'Do you think it is either good or bad for society that the [Italian/Chinese/Moroccan] community organizes such classes?'. All items are asked on a 1–7 scale: [1] Very bad, [4] Neither bad nor good, [7] Very good.

What is more, we include two manipulation checks to see if the experimental manipulation in the two conditions worked well. One question asked which ethnic minority group organized the educational initiative, the other question asked what the stated purpose of the initiative was. Figure A4.2 in the appendix show the results remain the same when controlling for the succeeding both manipulation checks. Figure A4.3 shows that the main effects are driven by respondents who succeeded the manipulation checks. Figure A4.4 and A4.5 show findings are also robust to controlling for attentiveness and across attentive and non-attentive subsamples. As preregistered, we conducted balance tests to see if treatment group allocation was truly random across a wide range of

Table 2. Overview of treatment conditions.

		Community		
Purpose	Math tutoring	Chinese	Italian	Moroccan
	Heritage language	Chinese / math	Italian / math	Moroccan / math
		Chinese / language	Italian / language	Moroccan / language

 <p>المدرسة المغربية يوم السبت! دروس في اللغة العربية من أجل الأطفال ذوي آباء أو أجداد مغاربة</p> <p>هل ستستضم أيضا إلى المدرسة المغربية؟</p> <p>تدرب على التحدث باللغة العربية وقراءتها وكتابتها كل أسبوع لكي تتمكن من التواصل مع عائلتك وأصدقائك. تلقى هذه الدروس من قبل مدرسين يجيدون اللغة العربية.</p> <p>من أجل: الأطفال التي تتراوح أعمارهم بين 6 و 16 عامًا متى: كل يوم سبت من الساعة 10 صباحًا حتى الساعة 14 مساءً أين: في 'Gemeenschapszaal 'de Ooievaar' التكلفة: 30 يورو في السنة البريد الإلكتروني: Marokkaanse.school@gmail.com</p> <p>هذه مبادرة من الجالية المغربية.</p>	 <p>Moroccan school on Saturday! ARABIC LESSONS for children with Moroccan (grand)parents</p> <p>Will you also come to Moroccan school?</p> <p>Practice speaking, reading and writing Arabic every week so you can communicate with your family and friends. Classes are taught by teachers who speak Arabic.</p> <p>For: Children aged 6 to 16 When: Every Saturday from 10am-14pm Where: Community hall 'the Stork' Cost: 30euros per year e-mail: Marokkaanse.school@gmail.com</p> <p><i>This is an initiative of the Moroccan community.</i></p>
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Figure 1. Example of experimental treatment (translated to English).

covariates. Multinomial regression analyses with the treatment group as outcome variables show no significant differences across the tested covariates (see Tables A4.1 and A4.2). Finally, we conduct several analyses exploring possible heterogeneous treatment effects of various subgroups. An overview of these variables and their operationalization can be found in Appendix 5.

Results: public approval of community education

How do citizens in Flanders think about educational initiatives organized by migrant groups, how are these attitudes structured, and do school-level characteristics matter for citizens' evaluations? This section answers these questions in two steps. Before we discuss the results of the survey experiment, we explore descriptive observational evidence from the newly designed survey items measuring public support for community education (see Table 1 for the wording of the items). Figure 2 shows the distribution of the eight items as density proportions. While there is significant variation across individuals, we see that a majority of Flemish respondents believe community schools to have negative effects on segregation (i.e. worsen segregation), the integration of minorities, and the development of Flemish identity. Most respondents also express concern about the existence of these schools and do not believe that tutoring in these schools benefits children from a minority background. At the same time, most of the respondents tend to believe it to be a good thing when minorities can learn about their language and culture, that weekend schools can have a positive impact on pupils' school results, and that it can boost minority children's self-esteem. That said, the differences between the overall evaluations of these different dimensions of minority education remain rather small as the means of all items are around the midpoint of 4.

To explore how individual characteristics structure citizens' approval of community education, we regress respondents' support for multiculturalism, left-right ideology alongside several socio-demographic variables on a latent variable 'opposition to community education' – based on the factor analysis on the eight individual items.⁵ As Table A3.5 in the appendix shows, respondents' degree of multiculturalism, left-right placement, age, and migration background affect their overall opposition to community education in a statistically significant manner. Respondents who score low on

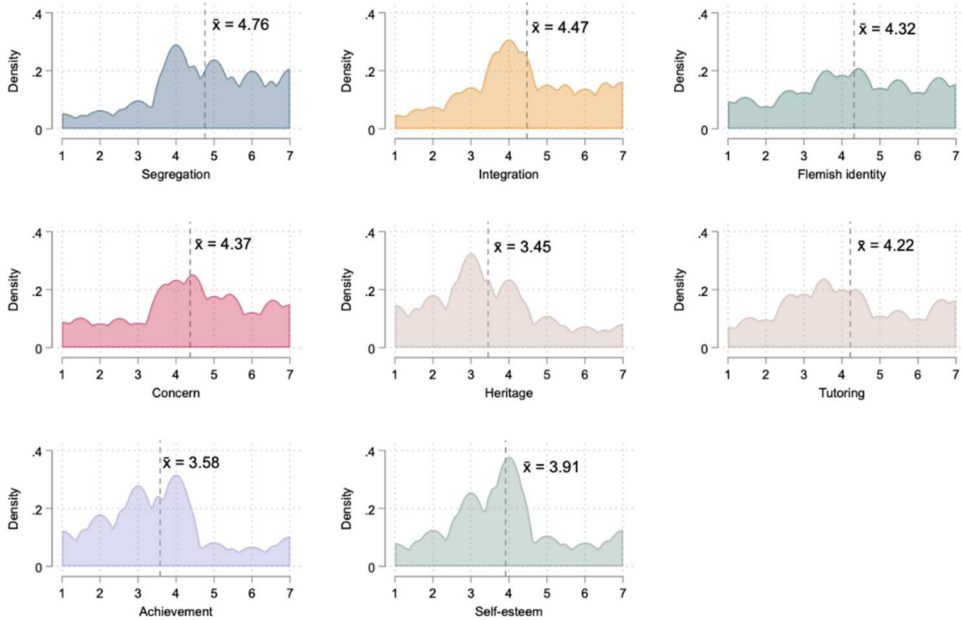


Figure 2. Density plot of the distribution of items measuring community education. Note: The figures show the density proportion per variable. $N = 2052$.

multiculturalism, are right-wing, older, and do not have a migration background are more likely to oppose community education. This is not surprising and very much in line with the existing literature on public attitudes toward immigration. This literature has found that native citizens' cultural concerns are key drivers of negative attitudes toward immigration (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). Sides and Citrin (2007) similarly show that preferences for cultural homogeneity shape Europeans' opinions about immigration.⁶

Experimental evidence

The findings from the observational study show that there is substantial variation in citizens' attitudes toward community education and that citizens' political views and values significantly steer these preferences. But how do school-level characteristics of the minority-led educational initiative drive public preferences? Do citizens fear the segregating potential of community schools regardless of the organizing minority group and the school's stated purpose, or are there differences across minority communities and school purposes? We turn to our survey experiment to answer these questions. Figure 3 shows the main results of the survey experiment.⁷

Hypothesis 1 expressed the expectation that there are significant differences between support for educational initiatives organized by the citizens with an Italian migration background compared to citizens with a Chinese or a Moroccan migration background. Hypothesis 2, in turn, expected that Flemish citizens are more likely to reject a community school organized by the Moroccan community than one organized by the Chinese community. In support of Hypothesis 1, Figure 3 shows that compared to the Italian

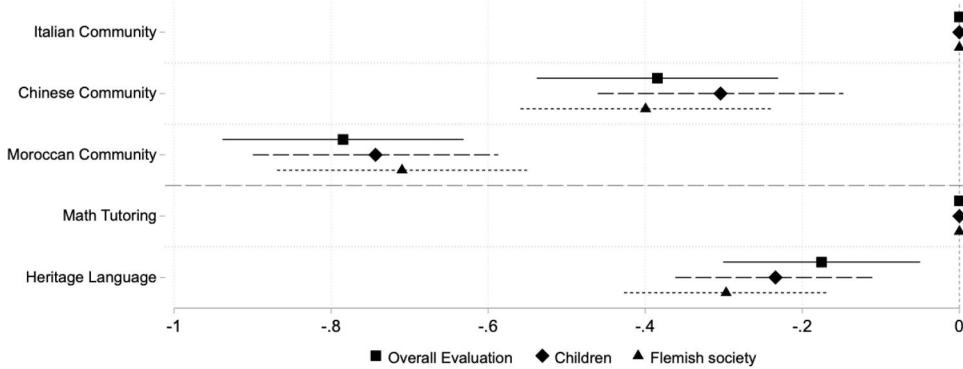


Figure 3. Estimates of the ATEs of the community and purpose treatments. Note: The figure shows a coefficient plot of the OLS regression analysis estimating the effect of the community and purpose treatment for three dependent variables. Point estimates with 95 per cent confidence intervals are shown. $N = 2650$.

community (baseline condition), the Chinese and the Moroccan school find less public support ('overall evaluation'). In addition, Flemish citizens believe that the Chinese and the Moroccan initiative have negative effects on the well-being of children and on Flemish society as a whole.⁸ What is more, while both the Chinese and the Moroccan educational initiatives are valued less positively than the Italian school, there are also significant differences in respondents' evaluation of the Chinese and the Moroccan school. If we take the Chinese school as the baseline, the Moroccan school is evaluated more negatively with a coefficient of 0.4 ($p < 0.001$) – on a 1–7 scale – for the overall evaluation outcome variable. As a result, we can accept Hypothesis 2.

To sum up, if we present respondents with identical flyers of a minority-organized educational initiative and only varying the minority community (Italian, Chinese, or Moroccan) as well as the language of the flyer (Italian, Mandarin, or Arabic), there is a clear ethnic hierarchy in preferences for community education among our respondents.

Hypothesis 3 formulated the expectation that initiatives that offer academic support to children are perceived more positively than those transmitting the heritage language of the organizing community. In accordance with this hypothesis, Figure 3 shows that schools which invite children to attend math tutoring (in their own language) are evaluated more positively than schools offering heritage language lessons. If an initiative offers language lessons rather than math tutoring respondents' overall evaluation of the initiative drops by -0.175 on a 1–7 scale ($p < 0.01$). The perceived effects on the children and on Flemish society are even more negative for schools with language training as the respective coefficients of -0.234 and -0.297 show ($p < 0.001$). Yet, these average effects of schools' purpose can mask relevant heterogeneity between the three organizing minority communities. Figure 4 shows a split-sample analysis per minority community for the effect of school purpose. The analysis reveals stark differences in favorability of math and language training across the three minority communities. For the Italian community, a school is evaluated significantly more positively when it engages in Italian language training compared to math tutoring. By contrast, we see pronounced negative evaluations of a Moroccan school organizing Arabic language training as opposed to

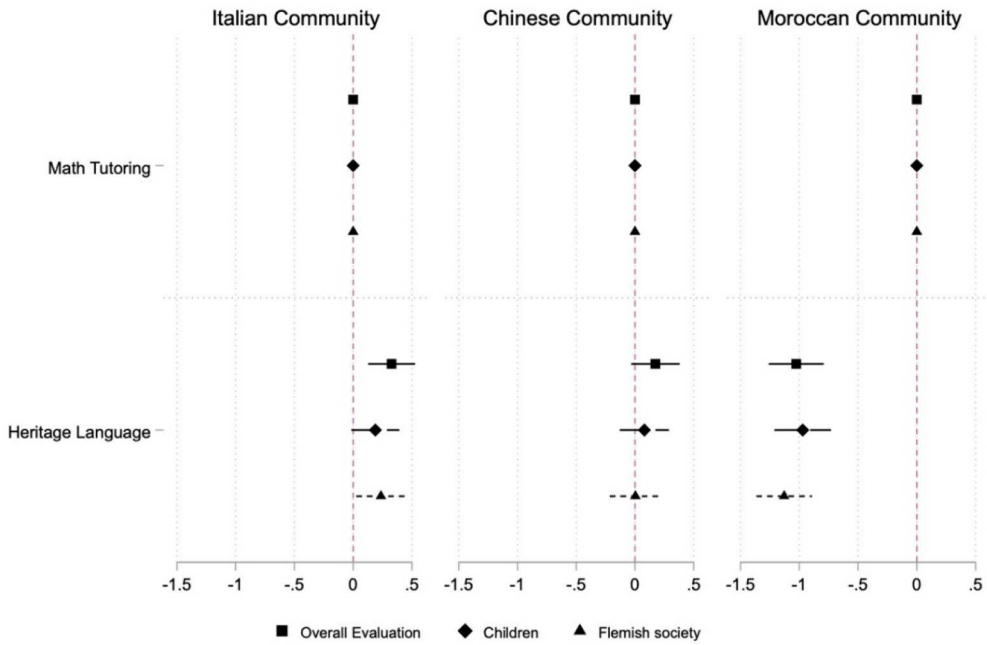


Figure 4. Estimates of the ATE of the purpose treatment per community. Notes: The figure shows a coefficient plot of the OLS regression analysis estimating the effect of purpose treatment per community for all three dependent variables. Point estimates with 95 per cent confidence intervals are shown. $N = 885$ (Italian community); $N = 882$ (Chinese community); $N = 885$ (Moroccan community).

math tutoring. For the Chinese community, there is no statistically significant difference between language and math classes and the coefficients are also substantively near zero. These results suggest that while Italian language skills are considered to be enrichment for both the children and Flemish society, Arabic language training is perceived as a threat.

Heterogenous treatment effects: left-right, multicultural recognition, immigration salience, and partisanship

Do the average treatment effects presented above hold across relevant sub-groups? It is likely that the individual characteristics of our respondents affect how they respond to our experimental treatment. Previous research has namely shown that individual traits of citizens affect both attitudes toward immigration and prejudiced attitudes (Mayda 2006). We therefore test whether respondents’ *left-right ideology*, adherence to *multicultural attitudes*, perceived *immigration salience*, and *partisanship* shape respondents’ reactions to the experimental treatments. The operationalization of these variables is discussed in Appendix 5.

Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014; 2015) have shown that people who are more right-wing are more likely to hold negative views of migrants than citizens who are more left-wing. Hence, one could expect that people who hold more right-wing, conservative views are more negative towards supplementary schooling and distinguish to a greater extent between Italian, Chinese and Moroccan initiatives (Hellwig and Sinno 2017; Mayda

2006). To examine how left-right ideology affect respondents' responses to the treatment, we explore the moderating effect of both variables on the community treatment. The left panel of Figure 5 shows the marginal effect of respondents' left-right self-placement their 'overall evaluation' per organizing community. We find that the more right-wing a respondent is, the more negative his evaluation of the school initiative. For respondents with strongly left-wing identities, there is no significant difference in respondent evaluation between the organizing communities. Yet, for respondents who place themselves at approximately 2.5 or higher on the left-right scale there is a significant difference between their evaluation of a Moroccan school and an Italian school, and for respondents scoring 3 or higher on the left-right dimension, there is also significant differences between their evaluation of a Moroccan school and a Chinese school initiative. For respondents placing themselves at approximately > 4.5 , there is also a significant difference between the evaluation of the Chinese and the Italian school.⁹

What is more, it is likely that respondents' multicultural attitudes or 'multicultural recognition' (Verkuyten 2006) shape their responses to our experimental treatment. Contrary to other ideologies such as colorblindness and assimilationism, multicultural recognition involves an appreciation of diversity which includes respecting the minorities' rights including that to maintain their group identity and culture (Guimond, de la Sablonnière, and Nugier 2014b). Critics of multiculturalism however warn for the risk of stereotype threat, out-group hostility and promoting segregation and separation (see Dinesen, Schaeffer, and Sønderskov 2020; Haidt, Rosenberg, and Hom

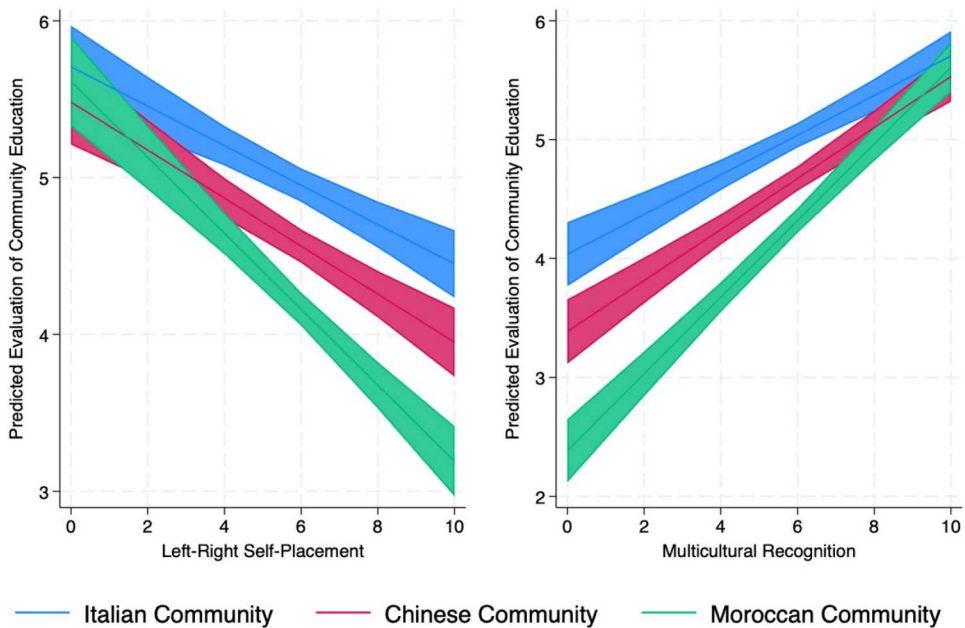


Figure 5. Estimates of the interaction effects of left-right and multicultural recognition on of the effect of the community treatment on overall evaluation. Notes: The figure shows the predicted support ('Overall Evaluation') for different levels of left-right self-placement (left panel) and multicultural recognition (right panel) based on the marginal predictions of interactive OLS regression models with 95 per cent confidence intervals. $N = 2653$ (both panels).

2003). Therefore, we test whether respondents who embrace multicultural values respond differently to our experimental treatments. The right panel of Figure 5 shows significant differences across levels of multicultural recognition in overall approval of the community education initiative. The higher a respondents' level of multiculturalism, the higher one's acceptance of the initiative. Moreover, we see significant differences in the effects of the community treatment across levels of multicultural recognition. Respondents who score ca. 8.5 or lower evaluate the Italian school more positively than the Moroccan school. Respondents at approximately 7.8 or lower also differentiate between the Chinese and the Moroccan school with the latter finding less support. For respondents scoring 7 or lower on the multicultural recognition scale there is a significant difference between all three communities. Figure A5.1 in the appendix moreover demonstrates that respondents scoring low on multiculturalism evaluate initiatives with heritage language training less positively than initiatives with math tutoring.

Citizens also differ with respect to the importance they attach to the issue of immigration. Citizens who find immigration salient are found to express more concern for immigration (Hatton 2021). We examine therefore whether the salience citizens attribute to the issue of immigration affects how they respond to our experimental treatment. Figure A5.2 in the appendix shows that respondents who find immigration important express less approval of a minority-organized initiative and apply an ethnic hierarchy in their evaluations running from the Italian, the Chinese to the Moroccan initiative.

Finally, it is likely that respondents' partisanship or party identification plays a role in how they respond to our experimental treatments. To be sure, partisanship strongly correlates with left-right ideology, multicultural values, and perceived immigration salience. We believe it is nonetheless illustrative to explore how vote choice in the 2019 Flemish parliamentary elections moderates the treatments effects. Figure 6 displays the marginal effects of vote choice per 'community' treatment effect on respondents' overall evaluation.¹⁰ We see that voters of parties on the left evaluate community education initiatives more positively than those on the right. As is to be expected, far right *Vlaams Belang* ('VB') voters are particularly negative. Figure 6 also indicates that voters of different parties differ in terms of applying an ethnic hierarchy in their evaluation of the Italian, the Chinese, and the Moroccan initiative. Right-wing nationalists voting N-VA and VB make a statistically significant distinction between a Moroccan initiative on the one hand, and an Italian or Chinese initiative on the other. Yet also voters of the center-left *Vooruit* party evaluate the Moroccan initiative significantly more negatively than the Italian initiative.

These findings suggest that, when it comes to community education, ethnic prejudice exists across the political spectrum in Flanders.¹¹

Discussion

In this paper we set out to investigate the endorsement of minorities' right to self-organize by natives. To this end, we studied public perceptions of minority-organized educational spaces in Flanders, Belgium. Such schools are organized by minorities and migrants throughout superdiverse societies for a variety of reasons (Steenwegen, Clycq, and Vanhoof 2023). They are important tools in navigating the majority society and confronting experiences of inequality. Yet, they are also, in many instances,

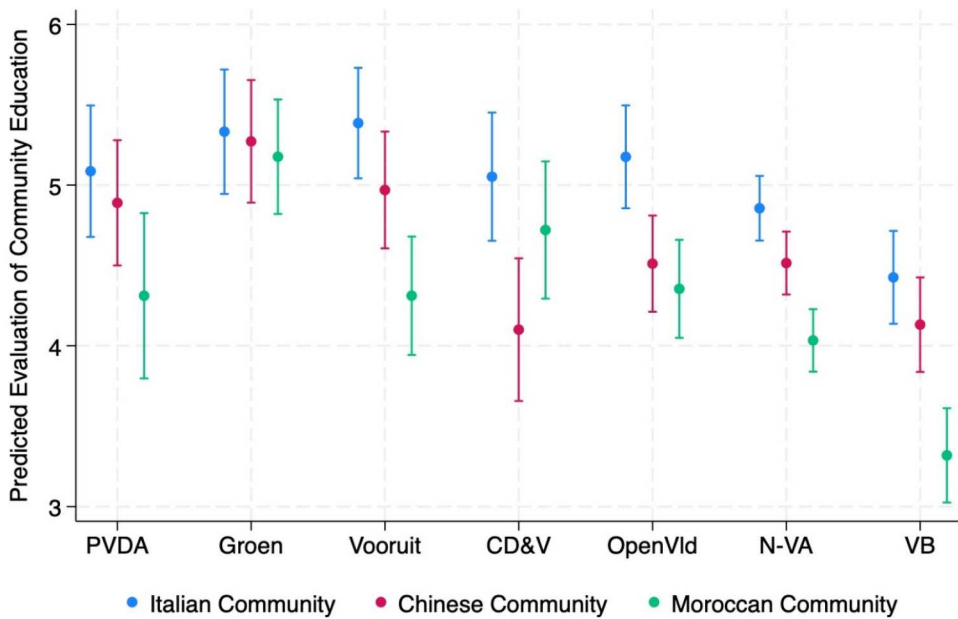


Figure 6. Estimates of the moderating effects of partisanship of the effect of the community treatment on overall evaluation. Notes: The figure shows the predicted support ('Overall Evaluation') for different parties respondents recalled voting for in the 2019 Flemish election per community treatment based on the marginal predictions of interactive OLS regression models with 95 per cent confidence intervals. $N = 2230$.

contested spaces (Morrissey and Gaffikin 2006). Therefore, they are a relevant vantage point from which to study the attitudes of natives towards the exertion of ethno-cultural minorities rights. In our preliminary, observational study, we investigated how individuals in Flanders perceive minority-organized schools. The results revealed that, even though respondents did see potential benefits for minoritized children in learning their heritage language, a majority of Flemish respondents held a negative view, believing that these schools would worsen societal segregation, hinder minority integration, and hinder the development of a Flemish identity. In essence, most respondents believed that these schools would have a negative impact on the majority society.

To explore whether implicit prejudices that might underlie the evaluation of schools organized by different communities, we conducted a survey experiment in our main empirical study. This allowed us to unravel what explains public opposition towards specific minority-initiated educational spaces. We examined the effect of the organizing ethnic community (i.e. Italian, Chinese, or Moroccan) and the stated purpose (i.e. heritage language training or math tutoring) of the educational space on public support. The results were very clear. Support for initiatives undertaken by Italian communities is highest and that for Moroccan communities lowest, indicating a clear ethnic hierarchy in the evaluation of these spaces. While Italian language skills are considered to be enrichment for both the children and Flemish society, Arabic language training is perceived as a threat. The characteristics of the respondents also play a role in their evaluation of the different schools. Whereas far left respondents do not differentiate among

communities, all others do, with more rightwing placed respondents also differentiating between the Chinese and the Italian school. In short, there is a clear ethnic hierarchy in preferences for community education among all our respondents, except for those on the far left.

The inclination to view educational efforts initiated by the Moroccan community in a negative light appears to be linked to the perception of communities seen as markedly distinct from the majority society (De Rooij, Goodwin, and Pickup 2018; Turper 2017). The Moroccan community frequently faces negative portrayals in the media, and, due to being perceived as inherently ‘Muslim’, they often encounter Islamophobic biases (Buijs 2009; Di Stasio et al. 2021; Strabac, Aalberg, and Valenta 2014). The reluctance to endorse their rights might be understood in light of the public debate around the granting of religious rights to Muslims (Carol and Koopmans 2013). Other research shows that individuals tend to oppose migrant rights when they perceive migrants to have a lower loyalty to the majority state (Banting, Harell, and Kymlicka 2022; Harell et al. 2022; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2020; Kunst, Thomsen, and Dovidio 2019). It is possible that the respondents in our experiment perceived the Moroccan community to have lower loyalty towards the Flemish majority society. However, such a lower evaluation in terms loyalty is likely also based on prejudiced attitudes as the experimental treatments were held constant across the experimentally manipulated communities. Hence, the widespread opposition we find against minority-initiated educational initiatives, particularly those by the Moroccan community, suggests that key democratic rights of self-organization and association are at stake for non-Western minorities. This situation becomes particularly concerning when these perceptions of threat and ethnic prejudice influence policy decisions, as seems to be the case in Flanders, where the Minister of Education has intervened to prevent the establishment of a school initiated by the Turkish community (Vernimmen, Willems, and Lemmens 2022).

Examining attitudes toward migrants alone is insufficient. There is a pressing need for further research into the endorsement of rights and freedoms for minority groups, especially given the efforts by policymakers to restrict the rights of minorities in the name of preserving the freedoms of native populations. This calls for a deeper exploration of these dynamics, particularly in cases where, as demonstrated in this paper, such endorsements are driven not by a desire for successful integration but rather by ethnic hierarchies or preferences. These findings expand our current understanding of public attitudes toward minority rights. Doing so, they go beyond the question how people perceive ‘flow’ migrants and immigration policies, and instead shed light on their attitudes towards ‘stock’ migrants – those who are already settled into our diverse societies (Margalit and Solodoch 2022). While limited research exists on the endorsement of minority rights, it is essential for scholars to acknowledge the significance of ‘stock’ migrants in this context. Further research should investigate the attitudes of natives towards other minority-organized spaces as well as other instances of minority rights.

For a first study into public attitudes toward minority-initiated public spaces, examining public approval of supplementary schools in the context of Flanders proved insightful. As a sub-state nation with a strong ethno-national character, community-organized education is relatively salient in the public debate. It is likely that the focus on cultural and linguistic ethno-centrism triggered a strong cultural threat response. At the same time, public debate about minority-initiated educational initiatives in the

UK and in the Netherlands was conducted in similarly culturalist terms and was also targeted primarily at Muslim minorities. This suggests that our findings have bearing on public attitudes on minority-initiated education beyond the Flemish context. Nevertheless, future research should look at other contexts, too, where multicultural attitudes are more prevalent (Guimond, de la Sablonnière, and Nugier 2014) and where full-time minority-led schools are common.

Notes

1. The preregistration and pre-analysis plan can be found at: <https://osf.io/zxw5e>. The data is publicly available on Harvard Dataverse: Meijers, Maurits, and Julia Steenwegen. 2024. "Replication Data for: How Prejudice Shapes Public Perceptions of Minority-Organized Spaces: The Case of Community Education." *Harvard Dataverse*. <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/8F4UFO>.
2. Data collection deviated from the preregistration as quotas for age, gender, and education could not all be filled. Instead, the data contains an over-representation of males and higher educated individuals. For the observational study we use post-stratification weights for the descriptive and OLS regression analyses. For the main experimental study, we report both the sample average treatment effects (SATEs), and analyses using post-stratification weights for robustness purposes.
3. Approval number: Ref No: 2022.14
4. For more information see the pre-registration attached to this submission.
5. Table A3.2 shows the results of the iterated principal exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using orthogonal varimax rotation of the eight community education items. Table A3.3 shows the wording of the multiculturalism items and Table A3.4 shows the EFA results for multiculturalism.
6. To be sure, we make no claims of causality here, but merely explore associations. In fact, opposition to community education is correlated with left-right ideology ($r = 0.44$) and multiculturalism ($r = -0.55$). Left-right ideology and multiculturalism are similarly correlated ($r = -0.54$). That said, these correlations are far from perfect. Moreover, there are no indications of multicollinearity in the OLS regression model presented in Table A3.5.
7. Figure A4.1 shows that findings hold when poststratification weights are applied.
8. The full regression model is shown in Table A4.3.
9. Figure A5.1 in the appendix shows there is no statistically significant moderating effect of left-right ideology on the effect of an initiative's purpose (i.e., heritage language or math training).
10. Parties are ranked based on parties' left-right score (Meijers and Zaslove 2021). 'VB' stands for 'Vlaams Belang'.
11. Figure A5.3 in the appendix shows no relevant differences per party affiliation in respondents' evaluation of initiatives with math tutoring or language training.

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