

Identity Dynamics Among Left-Leaning, Politically Active Kurds in Germany: The Role of Perceived Injustice, Collective Efficacy, and Online/Offline Participation

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The current study highlights the multiplicity of Kurdish diasporic identity construction in relation to distant conflict, the Afrin conflict in particular. It first distinguishes between different reference points for identity construction: national Kurdish identity, ethnic Kurdish identity, and politicized Kurdish identity. Second, it explains diasporic identity construction by means of collective action variables: perceived injustice, perceived efficacy, and past online/offline participation. By means of a quantitative survey of members of the Kurdish diaspora in Germany ($N = 94$) and subsequent regression analyses, the findings show that past online/offline political participation represents a vital factor in the construction of a *politicized* Kurdish identity, while perceived injustice and perceived collective efficacy represent key predictors of identifying with a Kurdish *national* identity. Identifying with an *ethnic* Kurdish identity is not meaningfully explained by the chosen collective action predictors in this study. The study aims to connect diaspora communication and social psychology literatures by using the above-mentioned identity and collective action variables.

Keywords: Kurdish identity, Kurdish diaspora, perceived injustice, collective efficacy, online collective action, offline collective action, ethnic identity, diaspora identity, politicized identity, national identity

A growing body of research in communication and media studies underlines the importance of social media for the identity construction of diasporic communities (Aghapouri, 2020; Brinkerhoff, 2009;

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Georgiou, 2006, 2007, 2013; Gillespie, 1995; Mahmud, 2016, 2019). According to this work, social media contribute to the political mobilization of transnational diasporas (Demmers, 2002) and facilitate the construction of ethno-national (Aghapouri, 2020) as well as contested or politically subversive identities (Alonso & Oiarzabal, 2010; Conversi, 2012; Odağ, Uluğ, & Solak, 2016; Uluğ, Odağ, & Solak, 2020). Using social media, diasporic communities construct their identities in association with distant conflicts in their home countries (Aghapouri, 2020; Baser, 2015; Brinkerhoff, 2009; Koinova, 2018; Mahmud, 2016, 2019; Smets, 2016, 2018). In this, online and offline actions often melt into each other, with Internet technology mobilizing diasporic communities for engaging with home country affairs in the virtual and the physical world (Brinkerhoff, 2009). One example of this is the Kurdish diaspora, constituting the largest stateless group in the world, dispersed across Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and large portions of Europe (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). Their increasing involvement in a series of armed conflicts in the Middle East has raised the Kurdish struggle for homeland and identity (Smets & Sengul, 2016)—thus rendering the Kurdish community a well-suited case for the study of global and transnational communication and identity building (Keles, 2015; Mahmud, 2016, 2019).

Communication scholarship has demonstrated that diaspora Kurds use various media to highlight Kurdish consciousness (Aghapouri, 2018; Candan & Hunger, 2008), negotiate their identity across geographic borders (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Eliassi, 2013; Keles, 2015), and make their voices heard globally (Sheyholislami, 2010). Studies have emphasized that Kurds use social media to discuss sanctioned topics related to Kurdistan and its politics (Smets & Sengul, 2016), thereby forming transnational “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1991, p. 6), maintaining a “cyber-nation” (Candan & Hunger, 2008; Mills, 2002, p. 82), and building a “pluralistic community” that reflects the existing sociopolitical fragmentations among Kurds (Aghapouri, 2020, p. 173). At the same time, this scholarship has failed to specifically distinguish between distinct diasporic identities.

The current study examines the identity construction of the Kurdish community in Germany, the largest Kurdish community in Europe with more than 600,000 members (Ammann, 2005), during a time of distant conflict in Afrin ensuing in January 2018: Turkish military forces and allied Arab and Turkmen militias started to attack the Kurdish dominated and controlled Afrin district in the northwest of Syria, causing many civilian casualties and a refuge of thousands of Kurds to nearby camps (“Turkish Offensive Displaces,” 2018). The present study, first, highlights the multiplicity of identities that Kurdish diaspora members based in Germany constructed as part of this distant conflict. It examines particularly three reference points for identification: Kurdish national identity, ethnic identity, and politicized identity. While previous studies have set their focus on a melted, unified version of these identities, using qualitative methodology, our goal is to analytically tease them apart by means of quantitative methodology. Most importantly, we would like to, second, explain diasporic identity construction (mostly studied in digital diaspora scholarship) with variables that are at the heart of the literature on collective action (extensively studied by social psychologists). We claim that these variables are key for the Kurdish diaspora: perceived injustice, perceived collective efficacy, and online and offline protest participation. Thirdly, we establish connections between two scholarships that have looked at the above constructs from different angles and thus been disconnected in their conclusions: diaspora communication scholarship on the one hand and collective action scholarship in social psychology on the other hand. We are hoping to hereby establish a vital ground for interdisciplinary exchange.

The Kurdish Conflict in Turkey and the Kurdish Diaspora in Germany

Human rights violations against Kurds, such as torture and unidentified murders followed the 1980 military coup period in Turkey, with many Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan/Kurdistan Workers' Party militants imprisoned or killed and a considerable number escaping to Europe (Casier, 2011). Estimates suggest that there are more than a million Kurds who have left Turkey, with the majority living in European countries, particularly Germany (Ammann, 2005), as either political refugees or immigrants (Baser, 2017; Gunter, 2011; Ünal, Uluğ, & Blaylock, 2020). The Turkish military coup in 1980 targeted to oppress especially leftist groups in Turkey, thus stimulating the emigration of especially leftist Kurds to Germany (Demmrich & Arakon, 2021). Higher education and economic success have constituted further distinguished features of this group (Ammann, 2005). Kurds in Germany currently account for the largest Kurdish diaspora in Europe (Ammann, 2005) and continue to persist in their political battle for human rights (Emanuelsson, 2005). Kurdish Sunni and Alevi individuals are known to be most strongly engaged in the politics of their homeland (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003), reflecting the mostly left-wing, politically engaged Kurdish subgroup in Germany (Ammann, 2005).

In 2014, Kurdish protesters in Turkey started to support the Syrian town Kobani and protest the Turkish foreign policy toward Syria. Afrin was under the control of the Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat/Democratic Union Party (PYD) at the time, the most powerful Kurdish party in Syria (Gunter, 2014). However, the Turkish government opposed the PYD's existence and responded with brutal attacks against Kurds in Afrin. Kurds and their allies in Germany thus protested the Turkish state's repeated attacks, raising awareness in Europe of the Kurdish conflict in Turkey and creating a strong global solidarity (Baser, 2017; Uluğ, Ünal, & Bilgen, forthcoming; Ünal et al., 2020). With its long history of diasporic consciousness as a result of political asylum and activism (Keles, 2015), the Kurdish diaspora in Germany, the largest Kurdish diaspora in Europe (Ammann, 2005), represents a well-suited case to study the relationship among distant conflict, diasporic identity construction, and online and offline collective action.

Multiplicity of Identities in Diaspora Communication Scholarship

Diaspora communication researchers have produced countless studies evidencing how processes of identity construction are at the core of diasporic media and communication activities (Alonso & Oiarzabal, 2010; Keles, 2015; Shi, 2005). In this, mediated processes of identity construction are associated with practices of contesting or resisting dominant narratives and creating social capital and collective agency, especially in marginalized minority groups (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Keles, 2016; Silverstone & Georgiou, 2005). Migrants have multiple sets of social membership that shape their identity, leading to a multiplicity of communication networks and identities across territorial borders, and allowing migrants to "balance the need to integrate in their countries of settlement while fulfilling their diasporic communication desires" (Karim, 2018, p. 19). This gives rise to diasporic identities that are complex, multiple, and transnational (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Keles, 2015; Smets, 2018).

Diaspora Kurds use various media to highlight Kurdish consciousness, often representing a political engagement with the homeland (Brinkerhoff, 2009), in ways that are repressed and sanctioned in the countries of origin (Hanafi, 2005). The media facilitate collective action and participation possibilities in the name of homeland conflicts, making it possible to organize and attend demonstrations and vent sentiments

about the conflicts transnationally (Al-Rawi & Fahmy, 2018; Brinkerhoff, 2009; Giglou, d'Haenens, & Ogan, 2018). This engagement with distant conflicts, in both virtual and physical worlds, substantially contributes to diasporic identity construction (Koinova, 2018). But distinct types of identity are often not distinguished.

Communication studies on the role of the media in the identity construction of diaspora Kurds have tended to focus on several types of identity, often using these interchangeably. The first type of identity we often find in this literature is *national identity* (Aghapouri, 2020; Candan & Hunger, 2008; Saunders, 2011). It is defined in the literature as "shared feelings of belonging to a cultural or national group as well as a shared awareness of differences from other groups and nationalities" (Sheyholislami, 2010, p. 291). In the case of the Kurdish diaspora, the concept taps into collective identities specifically tied to an imagined homeland nation and to being stateless (Aghapouri, 2020). Communication studies have predominantly investigated this *national* dimension of diasporic identity construction (see Eriksen, 2007; Mills, 2002), and have often tended to subsume ethnic, religious, cultural, and political identity under it (see, e.g., Aghapouri, 2020). In research on specifically Kurdish online and TV communication, the aspects of nation-building and long-distance nationalism are likewise connected with national identity as a central term (Aghapouri, 2020; Smets & Sengul, 2016). Members of the Kurdish diaspora connect online to develop national identities and engage with distant affairs through the use of Kurdish websites (e.g., www.kurdmania.com), information portals (e.g., www.rizgari.com), online forums (e.g., www.rojakurd.de), blogs (e.g., www.kurdistan-blogg.de), and websites (e.g., www.kurdos.de or www.palpal.de; see Candan & Hunger, 2008, for an overview).

Second, a growing number of research highlights how new media are used as tools to negotiate *ethnic* identity (Bozdağ, 2014). The concept *ethnic* identity acknowledges that in migrant and diasporic communities, identity is constructed within a different majority culture. It emphasizes the active exploration and commitment of diaspora members to values and meanings attached to the home culture vis-à-vis values of the country of residence (Phinney, 1990). A large proportion of communication studies have stressed particularly *ethnic* identity as part of diasporic communication activities and studied how identity negotiations are facilitated by digital media technologies (e.g., Bozdağ, 2014; Gillespie, 1995; Hepp, Bozdağ, & Suna, 2011). Digital media technologies are understood in this context as instruments that are able to "lift out" and "disembed" social relations from the local contexts and restructure these "across indefinite spans of time-space" (Giddens, 1990, p. 21). According to this idea, the construction of diasporic identities based on the heritage culture goes together with new social ties in the host culture and requires a balancing of identity between homeland and host country (see the term *hybrid identity* in Brinkerhoff, 2009, p. 32).

Finally, in the context of research on political engagement, collective action, and mobilization, a third type of identity, *politicized* identity, has garnered attention, (Klandermans, 1997; Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Identities can count as politicized to the extent that group members become aware of shared injustice and identify with group interests and goals that stand for change, producing "an inner obligation to act . . . in the public arena" (Alberici & Milesi, 2016, p. 45). Politicized identity has a strong regulative component as well as normative content, addressing the obligations of the social group with which one is identified. The role of politicized identity has been studied extensively in the context of online political mobilization, demonstrating that politicized identity is a major catalyst of collective action and politics "from afar," specifically in transnational diasporas engaging with home politics through digital media technology (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Koinova, 2018; Lyons & Mandaville, 2012). The studies have shown that diasporas tend to engage with

homeland struggles in politically active ways, by means of a large variety of political activities such as demonstrating, petitioning, organizing and coordinating protest, and networking (Alonso & Oiarzabal, 2010; Conversi, 2012; examples in Karim & Al-Rawi, 2018).

The Relationship Between Identity and Collective Action in Social Psychology

While the digital diaspora scholarship described above has been very productive in emphasizing the link between identity construction and collective action of diasporic communities using qualitative methodology (Brinkerhoff, 2009), social psychologists have suggested models to understand the link between identity and collective action, using mostly quantitative methodology (Ufkes, Dovidio, & Tel, 2015). The social identity model of collective action, based in social psychology (SIMCA; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008), for example, suggests that individuals are likely to engage in collective action to the extent that they perceive their world as unjust (*perceived injustice*), identify strongly with a group that stands for change (*social identity*), and consider this group as effective in bringing change (*perceived efficacy*). A substantial amount of research has confirmed the relevance of these concepts for *offline collective action* (Brandstätter & Opp, 2014; Setiawan, Scheepers, & Sterkens, 2019; van Zomeren et al., 2008) as well as, more recently, *online collective action* (Alberici & Milesi, 2013, 2016; Odağ et al., 2016; Uluğ et al., 2020; Valenzuela, Correa, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2018; see Hsiao, 2018, for review). Borrowing many concepts from social psychology, this research has shown that Internet-based social media serve as invaluable tools for the expression of shared grievances and the fight for human rights.

In the majority of psychological studies based on SIMCA, identity is conceptualized as a *predictor* of collective action (e.g., Odağ et al., 2016; Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Uluğ et al., 2020; overview in Hsiao, 2018). By contrast, diaspora communication scholars have shown how media-enabled collective action leads to the construction of national, ethnic, and politicized identities as *outcomes*, serving especially diasporic media users in their quest for belonging. Identity is conceptualized as a dependent variable in the majority of this work (see, e.g., Aghapouri, 2020).

The two fields—social psychology and diaspora communication—are thus inconsistent in conceptualizing the link between media-enabled collective action and identity. This inconsistency might be related to the methodologies of communication scholars and political psychologists. Social identity, perceived injustice, and perceived efficacy have constituted central components of a variable-oriented quantitative collective action literature (Odağ et al., 2016; van Zomeren et al., 2008). Though we do find similar components in the literature on diaspora and political communication (e.g., Brinkerhoff, 2009; Lyons & Mandaville, 2012), we find them mostly in the context of conceptual and qualitative/ethnographic studies (Smets, 2019). Such research designs are suitable for highlighting the complexity of identities, but insufficient to understand the specific variables that inform these identities.

The Present Research

The current study takes up the quantitative logic of *social psychology* and, at the same time, follows the idea of identity as an outcome variable most strongly enforced in *diaspora communication research*. It hereby aims to connect the two fairly independent scholarships. The main argument is that (a) *national*

Kurdish, (b) *ethnic Kurdish*, and (c) *politicized Kurdish identities* (emphasized most strongly in digital diaspora scholarship) can each be explained by a different configuration of three collective action variables: (1) perceived injustice, (2) perceived efficacy, and (3) online/offline participation (emphasized most strongly in social psychology). Concrete hypotheses concerning these relationships are outlined below. Despite the hypothesis-testing approach in this study, however, our study can count as highly exploratory, as it is one of the first to test relationships between identity dynamics and collective action variables in a quantitative study.

More specifically, we assume that *Kurdish national identity* is tied to the Kurdish history of *perceived injustice* as well as a heightened *efficacy perception* of the Kurdish diaspora in the struggle for homeland independence. Applied to the Afrin conflict, we hypothesize that national identities of members of the Kurdish diaspora in Germany are strongly linked to (1) their perception of the Afrin operations as unjust and (2) their confidence in the capacity of the Kurdish diaspora in Germany to bring change through transnational communication efforts.

H1 & H2: We hypothesize strong and significant correlations (1) between perceived injustice and national Kurdish identity and (2) between perceived efficacy and national Kurdish identity.

By contrast, we assume that *politicized Kurdish identity* is the result of a general action-mode, relying heavily on political participation efforts offline and online, including protesting, attending meetings, networking transnationally, signing petitions, and joining discussion groups. It is in this context that we assume social media use to constitute an avenue toward a *politicized* form of identity.

H3 & H4: We predict that politicized Kurdish identity will be most strongly correlated with (3) online participation and (4) offline participation.

Finally, even though frequently studied in communication research as an important variable associated with diasporic media use (e.g., Bozdağ, 2014), we argue that ethnic Kurdish identity should be least associated with collective action tendencies of diaspora members in the context of distant conflict. The reason behind this argument is that we believe ethnic identity taps less into national, political, and injustice concerns, but more into ethnic belonging in terms of exploring and committing to cultural values and norms (Phinney, 1992; Phinney & Ong, 2007). We consider these less relevant for explaining identity construction in a politically active Kurdish diaspora.

H5: Ethnic Kurdish identity should be least associated with collective action tendencies of diaspora members in the context of distant conflict.

Method

Research Design and Procedure

The current survey took place between March and August 2018, involving a combination of paper-pencil and online questionnaires distributed to a purposeful sample of politically active Kurds living in Northern Germany, Bremen, through snowball sampling and social media outreach. To this end, we (1)

reached out to personal contacts and snowball sampled further participants through their acquaintances using a paper–pencil version of our questionnaire. In addition, we (2) posted the Qualtrics link to an online version of our questionnaire on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. The paper–pencil and online versions of our questionnaire were identical.

Our aim was *not* to reach a representative sample, but rather a *homogenous* sample of politically active Kurds in Germany, as they represent a “typical” subgroup within the population of Kurds in Germany (Ammann, 2005; Baser, 2017). Based on such a non-representative sample, we are unable to generalize our findings to the general Kurdish diaspora in Germany. We are, instead, able to draw fine-grained conclusions about the impact of collective action variables on the identity dynamics of a politically active subgroup of Kurds in Germany (Baser, 2017). In other words, our aim is an analytical, theoretical generalization, not a generalization to a population (Boehnke, Lietz, Schreier, & Wilhelm, 2011).

Data collection of the current study ensued in close time proximity to the Afrin protests mentioned above. For reasons of feasibility, data were collected in Turkish rather than Kurdish: The large number of Kurdish language dialects (e.g., Zazakî, Kirmanckî) made it difficult for us to create a questionnaire in a unified Kurdish language. In addition, Kurds from Turkey were educated in Turkish and not allowed to speak and write Kurdish officially for a long time. Most Kurds are thus especially skilled in speaking and writing in Turkish.

Participants

Ninety-four members of the Kurdish diaspora in Germany participated in the survey. The final sample consisted of 68% men ($n = 64$), including seven participants who did not specify their gender, and ages ranging between 18 and 65 years ($M = 37.74$, $SD = 10.25$). Participants indicated that they had lived in Germany between three months¹ to 35 years, with an average of 14.49 years ($SD = 9.13$), representing a large variety of diasporic experiences. A larger portion of the sample was highly educated, with 36.2% having obtained a university degree ($n = 34$) and 26.6% a high school diploma ($n = 25$). A third of the sample (31.4%) indicated having graduated from a primary ($n = 18$) or middle school ($n = 9$). The sample represented a left-wing to center political orientation, with 68.2% ($n = 45$) placing themselves on the left of the political spectrum ($n = 45$) or left of center ($n = 14$), 30.2% in the center ($n = 26$), and only 1.2% in the right of center ($n = 1$). The majority of the sample (88.3%; $n = 83$) felt closest to the Peoples’ Democratic Party, a left-wing pro-Kurdish party in Turkey. In Germany, participants endorsed either the left-wing party Die Linke ($n = 59$; 62.8%) or no party at all ($n = 20$; 21.3%). In terms of past participation, the sample was active both online and offline. Online, protesting for Afrin evolved through protest groups on social media like Twitter and Facebook ($M = 3.1$, $SD = 1.45$) as well as petition signing ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.36$). Offline, participants protested as part of demonstrations on the street ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.04$) and by attending protest meetings and discussion groups ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.32$). As expected from the Kurdish diasporic community, participants reported identifying strongly with *national* Kurdish ($M = 4.56$, $SD = .71$), *ethnic* Kurdish ($M = 4.55$, $SD = .49$), and *politicized*

¹ Ninety-nine percent of our sample had lived in Germany between one and 35 years. Only one participant reported a migration history of three months, indicating that she had frequently been in Germany preceding her move and moved to Germany *permanently* due to political pressure and job-seeking reasons three months ago. We thus decided to leave her data in our data set.

Kurdish identity ($M = 4.40$, $SD = .62$). Taken together, the sample represented a highly politically active, left-wing oriented group of Kurdish individuals with varying degrees of migration experience and education and a high degree of identification with national, ethnic, and politicized Kurdish identity. The sample can thus count as typical for the politically active group of Kurds in Germany (Ammann, 2005). It is, however, not representative of the larger Kurdish population Germany, as this was beyond the aim and scope of the study.

Measures

For all measures described in the following, we used a Likert-type response scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*.

National Kurdish Identity

To assess the extent to which participants identified with Kurdish national identity, three items were adapted from Roccas, Klar, and Liviatan (2006). Sample items were *Being Kurdish is an important part of my identity* and *When speaking about Kurds I usually speak of "us" rather than "them"* ($\alpha = .65$).

Ethnic Kurdish Identity

To assess the extent to which participants identified with their ethnic background, we used Phinney's Multi-Group Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R; Phinney, 1992; Phinney & Ong, 2007). It assesses two dimensions of ethnic identification: *commitment* (sample item: *I have a strong sense of belonging to my ethnic group*; three items) and *exploration* (sample item: *I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs*; three items). The results of an exploratory factor analysis indicated that all six items loaded on the same factor, explaining 45.26% of the overall variance and item loadings ranging from .47 to .86 ($\alpha = .72$).

Politicized Kurdish Identity

To assess politicized identity, we created four items such as *I see myself as a politically active Kurd*, and *I actively contribute to changing the existing unfair legislation and traditions against Kurds* ($\alpha = .70$).

Perceived Injustice

To measure the *perceived injustice* of Kurds living in Germany in the aftermath of the Afrin operation, we used three items adapted from van Zomeren, Leach, and Spears (2010), with sample items being *The Afrin war instigated by Turkish military is not fair*, and *As a Kurd, I do by no means approve of the Turkish military's invasion of Afrin* ($\alpha = .89$).

Perceived Efficacy

To measure the perceived efficacy of Kurds in Germany in being politically influential as a group, we used four items adapted from van Zomeren and colleagues (2010). Sample items were *Kurds in Germany are able to affect German politics toward the Afrin case*, and *Kurds in Germany can make the voices of Kurds in Turkey heard to the global world* ($\alpha = .89$).

Past Online and Offline Participation

We assessed past participation in the Afrin case by asking participants *how frequently they engaged in online activity for Afrin (such as attending a Facebook or Twitter protest group)* and *how frequently they signed petitions concerning Afrin through emails or online petition forums* ($r = .77$). We measured *past offline participation* in the context of Afrin by asking about the *frequency with which participants took part in walks or demonstrations for Afrin and attended discussion meetings* ($r = .65$).

Results

Three hierarchical regression analyses were calculated, one for each type of identity (national, ethnic, and politicized). Empirically, the three identities were interconnected, and we were unable to tease them apart by means of exploratory factor analysis. In each hierarchical regression, the control variables *gender* and *time spent in Germany* were entered in step one; *perceived efficacy* of the Kurdish diaspora in Germany and *perceived injustice* concerning the Afrin operation were entered in step two; *past online/offline participation* was entered in step three of the model (for bivariate correlations, see Table 1).

Table 1. Correlations and Descriptive Statistics.

Variables	<i>M (SD)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Gender (1 = <i>female</i> , 2 = <i>male</i>)		-	-.01	.17	.25*	.04	-.01	.02	.04	.03
2. Years spent in Germany			-	-.06	-.16	-.22*	-.12	-.14	.05	.18
3. National Kurdish identity	4.56 (0.71)			-	.43***	.52***	.44***	.27**	.03	.25*
4. Ethnic Kurdish identity	4.55 (0.49)				-	.31**	-.01	-.02	-.02	.12
5. Politicized Kurdish identity	4.40 (0.62)					-	.55***	.06	.31*	.38***
6. Perceived injustice concerning Afrin	4.94 (0.44)						-	.21	.14	.13
7. Perceived efficacy of Kurdish Diaspora	4.50 (0.77)							-	-.06	.19
8. Past online participation	2.85 (1.32)								-	.60***
9. Past offline participation	3.18 (1.07)									-

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Table 2 presents the results of regression analysis 1 with *national Kurdish identity* as the criterion variable ($F(6, 77) = 6.49$; $p < .001$; $R^2 = .35$).² The analysis yielded significant effects of *perceived injustice concerning Afrin* ($\beta = .39$, $p < .001$) and *perceived efficacy of the Kurdish diaspora* ($\beta = .21$, $p = .043$). Results indicated that participants identified with national Kurdish identity to the extent that they perceived the Afrin operation as unjust and the Kurdish diaspora to be efficient in reestablishing justice. Gender also turned out to be a significant predictor in this analysis ($\beta = .21$, $p = .035$), indicating that male participants endorsed this identity more strongly than female participants in our sample.

² We tested the regression assumptions in the current study before analyzing the data. The results indicated that there is no multicollinearity in our data (all VIF scores < 10 and tolerance scores $> .02$), the values of the residuals are independent (the Durbin-Watson score of 1.83 is in the range of $DW > 1$ and < 3), and the values of the residuals in the data are normally distributed. Last, we should note that our plot of standardized residuals vs. standardized predicted values suggests that the assumption of homoscedasticity may have been violated.

Table 2. Model of Summary of Regression Analysis 1—With National Kurdish Identity as Criterion Variable.

	National Kurdish Identity			<i>F</i>	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2
	Unstand. β	Stand. β	<i>t</i>			
Step 1				2.03	.05	.05
Gender (1 = female, 2 = male)	.36 ⁺	.22 ⁺	1.94			
Years spent in Germany	-.00	-.06	-.50			
Step 2				8.79***	.33	.28
Gender	.34*	.21*	2.16			
Years spent in Germany	.00	.04	.40			
Perceived injustice	.16***	.38***	3.81			
Perceived efficacy of Kurdish Diaspora	.27**	.28**	2.75			
Step 3				6.485***	.35	.02
Gender	.34*	.21*	2.15			
Years spent in Germany	.00	.00	-.04			
Perceived injustice	.21***	.39***	3.82			
Perceived efficacy of Kurdish Diaspora	.21*	.21*	1.97			
Past online participation	-.10	-.18	-1.42			
Past offline participation	.15	.22	1.73			

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p < .10$.

Regression analysis 2 with *ethnic Kurdish identity* as the criterion variable (see Table 3) only reached marginal significance, $F(6, 74) = 1.98$, $p = .08$, $R^2 = .14$. A closer inspection of the separate predictors revealed that only *gender* ($\beta = .27$, $p = .018$) constituted a significant predictor of ethnic identity, and *years spent in Germany* was marginally significant ($\beta = -.22$, $p = .067$). This ethnic identity was especially relevant for the men in the sample, as well as the *shorter* the participants had actually lived in Germany.

Table 3. Model of Summary of Regression Analysis 2—With Ethnic Kurdish Identity as Criterion Variable.

	Ethnic Kurdish identity					
	Unstand. β	Stand. β	t	F	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1				4.14*	.10	.10
Gender (1 = female, 2 = male)	.32 ⁺	.27 ⁺	2.46			
Years spent in Germany	-.01	-.15	-1.39			
Step 2				2.13 ⁺	.11	.01
Gender	.32*	.27*	2.42			
Years spent in Germany	-.01	-.17	-1.44			
Perceived injustice	-.02	-.07	-.62			
Perceived efficacy of Kurdish Diaspora	.00	.00	.01			
Step 3				1.98 ⁺	.15	.08 ⁺
Gender	.32*	.27*	2.43			
Years spent in Germany	-.01 ⁺	-.22 ⁺	-1.86			
Perceived injustice	-.02	-.08	-.63			
Perceived efficacy of Kurdish Diaspora	-.07	-.08	-.65			
Past online participation	-.07	-.18	-1.23			
Past offline participation	.13 ⁺	.27 ⁺	1.79			

Regression analysis 3 with *politicized Kurdish identity* as the criterion variable yielded overall significance, $F(6, 78) = 10.45, p < .001, R^2 = .47$ (see Table 4). *Past offline participation* turned out to be a significant predictor of politicized identity ($\beta = .48, p < .001$) as well as *past online participation* ($\beta = .35, p = .002$), indicating that the more participants were active in the protests online and offline, the more they endorsed a politicized Kurdish identity. An additional significant predictor was *perceived injustice concerning Afrin* ($\beta = .51, p < .001$), showing that politicized Kurdish identity also rested on the perception of the Afrin operations as unfair. The control variable, *years spent in Germany* ($\beta = -.24, p = .010$), turned out to be significant as well, indicating that the shorter time the participants spent in Germany, the more they endorsed this type of identity.

Table 4. Model of Summary of Regression Analysis 3—With Politicized Kurdish Identity as Criterion Variable.

	Politicized Kurdish identity					
	Unstand. β	Stand. β	t	F	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1				2.06	.05	.05
Gender (1 = female, 2 = male)	.06	.04	.38			
Years spent in Germany	-.02 ⁺	-.22 ⁺	-1.99			
Step 2				8.85***	.32	.28
Gender	.07	.05	.51			
Years spent in Germany	-.01	-.15	-1.52			
Perceived injustice	.19***	.54***	5.38			
Perceived efficacy of Kurdish Diaspora	-.05	-.05	-.53			
Step 3				10.446***	.47	.15
Gender	.06	.04	0.49			
Years spent in Germany	-.02*	-.24*	-2.66			
Perceived injustice	.18***	.51***	5.53			
Perceived efficacy of Kurdish Diaspora	-.15 ⁺	-.17 ⁺	-1.80			
Past online participation	.17**	.35**	3.35			
Past offline participation	.28***	.48***	4.10			

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, ⁺ $p < .10$.

Discussion

The current study highlighted the multiplicity of identities in diasporic communities (Georgiou, 2007), examining particularly three types of identities that received attention in diaspora communication studies: national identity (Candan & Hunger, 2008), ethnic identity (Bozdağ, 2014), and politicized identity (Alonso & Oiarzabal, 2010; Conversi, 2012). Existing literature had highlighted the relevance of a melted version of these multiple identities for diasporic communities (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Smets, 2018), but failed to analytically separate them and identify their predictors with statistical approaches. In addition, while identity construction was often demonstrated in high complexity in diaspora communication and political science research (see Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston, & McDermott, 2006; Aghapouri, 2018; Egan, 2020), it was often not tested in the sense of a statistical effect. The current study aimed to fill this gap by examining the identities of the politically active Kurdish diaspora in Germany in close proximity to the Afrin operation that ensued in January 2018. More specifically, the study modeled national Kurdish, ethnic Kurdish, and politicized Kurdish identities (gleaned from the diaspora communication literature) as a function of three collective action concepts: (1) *perceived injustice*, (2) *perceived efficacy*, and (3) *past offline and online participation* (gleaned from the social psychology literature). We were hereby connecting diaspora communication literature (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Smets, 2018) and social-psychological literature on digitally enabled collective action (Alberici & Milesi, 2016).

Our results confirmed that Kurdish diasporic identity is multiple and connected to various reference points (Hepp et al., 2011; Karim, 2018; Mahmud, 2016, 2019). These included cultural values of countries of origin and settlement on the one hand, and distant conflict, politics, and social justice efforts on the other hand (Smets, 2018). Our study showed that Kurdish diaspora members in Germany not only engage with a national identity construction, in terms of creating an attachment to being Kurdish, they also engage with their home territory in politically active ways, constructing a *politicized identity* that enables transnational political participation from afar (Brinkerhoff, 2009). This finding is much in line with previous diaspora communication and conflict literature demonstrating that diaspora communities maintain strong affective and civic ties to homeland conflicts even if they have not experienced these conflicts first-hand (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Mügge, 2010; Smets, 2018). Internet media allow for the construction of shared identities that connect with homeland struggles and mobilize for collective action (Brinkerhoff, 2009). They offer spaces to embrace complex, and sometimes contradictory national, ethnic, and politicized identities, and at the same time, contest, disrupt, and challenge these (Mahmud, 2016, 2019).

Most importantly, however, our results indicated that different predictors are influential for the different Kurdish identities in question: To start with, confirming Hypotheses 1 and 2, *national Kurdish identity* (in line with Candan & Hunger, 2008) was predicted most strongly by the two collective action variables perceived injustice and perceived efficacy (van Zomeren et al., 2010). The more members of the politically active Kurdish diaspora in Germany perceived injustice to be inflicted on Kurds in Afrin, and the more they believed in the power of the diaspora to make Kurdish voices heard, the more were *national* identities of Kurds endorsed. In other words, *national Kurdish identity* appeared to be linked particularly to the Kurdish resistance movement, tapping into perceptions of oppression (*perceived injustice*), and collective opposition (*perceived efficacy*), which are characteristic of Kurdish consciousness (Uluğ & Uysal, 2021) as well as Kurdish history more generally (Yavuz, 2001).

It is against this background that the current study tied in with several communication studies that have emphasized the national dimension of identity construction through media use (see especially Aghapouri, 2018; Eriksen, 2007; see also Mills, 2002). In fact, most studies on Kurdish online and TV communication emphasize particularly the aspect of nation-building and long-distance nationalism (see Aghapouri, 2020; Smets & Sengul, 2016), showing that members of the Kurdish diaspora connect online through Kurdish websites and social media to develop national identities (Candan & Hunger, 2008). Aghapouri (2018) refers to the advent of Internet technology as a "turning point in the history of the Kurdish national movement" (p. 3), one that moves Kurdish diasporas into a more active position as Kurds in Europe. New media technologies facilitate the active contribution of diaspora Kurds to the political and cultural development of their homeland and influence their notion of *Kurdayeti* (Kurdish national identity; Aghapouri, 2020, p. 173). Our study extends these studies by yielding quantitative evidence for the specific predictors of Kurdish national identity: Perceptions of injustice and perceived efficacy in the context of a distant conflict (like the Afrin conflict) are highly influential here, highlighting the role of collective action variables, much discussed in social psychology, for diasporic identity construction.

By contrast, and in line with Hypotheses 3 and 4, *politicized Kurdish identity* was explained by a different set of predictors (i.e., by concrete acts of political participation): attending a Facebook or Twitter protest group, signing petitions concerning Afrin through e-mail or online petition forums, and attending walks or

protests as well as discussion meetings online and offline, were among the predictors of this type of Kurdish identity. In addition, perceived injustice played a role here. Politicized Kurdish identity was thus explained in our study by injustice perceptions combined with concrete counteractions, including online and offline acts of protest participation (see Brinkerhoff, 2009, for grassroots online communities on the Internet like Afghanistanonline, Somalinet, and Tibetboard, where we find a similar fusion of online and offline participation of diaspora members). With its strong emphasis on moral responsibility and obligation (Simon & Klandermans, 2001), politicized identity appears to be most strongly endorsed through acts of online and offline communication (Alberici & Milesi, 2016; Aouragh, 2008) and most clearly linked to collective action activities in the cyber-space (see the term *digital activism* in Andén-Papadopoulos & Pantti, 2013; see also Brinkerhoff's, 2009, model for digital diaspora identity and engagement, p. 54). In our study, while such participation appears irrelevant for national or ethnic Kurdish identity, it is a key factor for the construction of a politicized Kurdish identity. Recent scholarship had highlighted that the vibrant social media activity of diaspora Kurds contests traditional notions of national and cultural Kurdish identity (Mahmod, 2016, 2019). This is much in line with the present finding of online and offline action as predictors of a *politicized* identity, underlining its participatory goal. We agree with Mahmod (2016) in that much media activity by Kurdish diaspora members can be characterized as a performative act for change, including shifts in nationally defined norms concerning class, gender, and victimhood. Our findings show, in line with this work, that online and offline political engagement lead, not to a national, but to a politicized, mobilized, and engaged identity. Our findings also confirm Brinkerhoff's (2009) claim of Internet technology as a mobilization tool for diasporic communities in both virtual and physical worlds.

Finally, *ethnic Kurdish identity* (Phinney, 1992) was hardly explained by our collective action predictors, confirming Hypothesis 5 of the current study. Only gender and years spent in Germany were (marginally) influential. Men endorsed ethnic types of identity more than the women in our sample, and ethnic identity was more strongly endorsed the shorter Kurdish diaspora members lived in Germany. This could be explained by the different genders and generations representing different degrees of ethnic identification and migration histories (in line with Barkey, 2000; Georgiou, 2006). The more important finding, however, was that in line with Phinney's (1992) sociopsychological conceptualization, *ethnic Kurdish identity* was informed by demographic and generational variables, rather than variables of collective action and previous political online/offline participation. This finding is also much in line with Mahmod's (2016, 2019) observation that the cyberspace allows for contestations of ethnic belonging, and surpasses traditional notions of ethnicity toward transnationalism and cosmopolitan belonging.

The transnational implications of our study are in showing that the politically active, left-leaning Kurdish diaspora in Germany invokes traditionally national discourses of identity and belonging in line with historical grievances and perceptions of injustice and efficacy. Politicized identities, instead, are tied to participatory dimensions of identity, most strongly endorsed through transnational online and offline political action. Acting online and offline in transnational spaces appears to tap much less into a Kurdish national identity than into a politicized transnational identity.

Limitations and Future Directions

The current study conceptualized identity in line with diaspora communication scholarship as the *dependent variable* of the underlying correlational design. But the correlational nature of the study is limiting

our confidence in the direction of this influence. A longitudinal design would be more revealing in this regard and should be used in future studies.

Our sample was not representative and is thus highly limited with respect to its generalizability. Our conclusions are constrained to our sample of choice: a highly left-wing oriented, politically active group of Kurds located in a moderately large and liberal town (Bremen) in Germany. As noted earlier, drawing a representative sample was not intended. We instead aimed to reach a homogenous sample of politically active Kurds in Germany with roots in Turkey, representing a typical case in the German context (Ammann, 2005; Baser, 2017, Emanuelsson, 2005). Our goal was analytical, aiming to explore linkages among theoretical concepts; it was not to generalize to the larger population of Kurds in Germany (see Boehnke et al., 2011, for different aims related to sampling). By drawing a homogenous, typical sample, we were able to gain invaluable insight into the interplay among diasporic communication activity, identity, and collective action in a specific sample of politically active Kurds. Future studies could be more daring and comprehensive with respect to sample characteristics. Most importantly, different European countries (e.g., France, Belgium), cities (e.g., Berlin, Paris), and Kurdish subgroups (e.g., Kurds who do and do not support the Erdoğan government; Kurds from Syria and Iraq) should be distinguished.

Finally, our sample was evidently small, underpowering the regression analyses central to the current work (Maxwell, 2000). Yet, with the available sample size, we had 95% power to detect at least a small effect. Future studies should work with larger samples to increase statistical confidence in the effects tested. Drawing a larger diaspora sample is certainly always challenging, and researchers could resort to already available national or international data sets for secondary data analyses. At any rate, the size of our sample prevented us from carrying out more sophisticated analyses (confirmatory factor analyses, for example), and the regressions in the current study thus count as only a fruitful starting point for understanding the linkages among diaspora communication, identity, and distant conflict.

Conclusion

In a time of massive migration caused by the war in Iraq and Syria, political engagement with the media has constituted a central resource in “struggles for visibility, presence, community, influence and symbolic power which many, if not all, minority groups seek” (Silverstone & Georgiou, 2005, p. 433). The current study has shown how in the context of the Afrin conflict politically active left-leaning Kurds in Germany construct national, politicized, and ethnic identities through very different avenues for identification: Offline and online acts of political participation appear to be especially crucial for the formation of transnational *politicized identities*; perceived injustice and collective efficacy contribute to the formation of traditional *national identities*; and these variables play a smaller role for *ethnic identity*. The study constitutes a first attempt to tease apart various diasporic identities that are often lumped into one in existing transnational and diaspora communication research. Collective action concepts appear to be highly viable predictors in this context, deserving much further attention.

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