

Race, Gender, and Migration: Augmented Exclusion in the Netherlands

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Abstract

In an era of increased support for far-right populist movements, women of colour are positioned to experience increased exclusion in European politics. This paper will examine how migrant women of colour experience exclusion and oppression in the Dutch political landscape. This paper presents a case study of the Netherlands, examining the Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV). I seek to answer the question: how do women of colour who have migrated to the Netherlands experience augmented levels of exclusion as compared to migrant men of colour, and can Dutch feminist discourse mitigate high levels of exclusion? The paper finds that far-right populism in the Netherlands excludes and oppresses women of colour, preventing these women from attaining inclusion and equality.

Keywords: populism, far-right populism, women, feminism, Partij voor de Vrijheid

Introduction

Far-right populism is increasingly visible in the European political landscape, with the Netherlands Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV) possessing particularly radical anti-immigration stances (Akkerman, 2015, P. 41). This paper will seek to answer the following question: how do women of colour who have migrated to the Netherlands experience augmented levels of exclusion as compared to migrant men of colour, and can Dutch feminist discourse mitigate high levels of exclusion? I will conduct a case study of the Netherlands that examines how the PVV influences the Dutch population's opinions surrounding migration. This paper will argue that far-right populism in the Netherlands excludes and oppresses migrant women of colour, preventing feminism from achieving inclusion and equality for individuals with these intersecting identities. For the purpose of this paper, far right populism in Europe is conceptualized as a right-wing political ideology that enforces 'European cultural belonging' or autochthony discourse that is often paired with a campaign against Islam (Vietan, 2016).

First, I will provide a literature review and the theoretical framework. Second, I discuss the autochthone-allochthone discourse in the Netherlands, demonstrating how Muslim migrant women are targeted as allochthones. This section will examine the PVV's instrumental use of gender equality discourse to divide feminist discourse, creating a dynamic that separates autochthones and allochthones, further entrenching exclusion.

Third, I will conceptualize far-right populism, analyzing the PVV stance on migration. This section will identify Muslim migrants of colour as the key targets of the PVV's anti-immigration stance. I will argue that women are disproportionately excluded from Dutch social relations insofar as the PVV is concerned with migrant women who wear headscarves. Finally, the paper will analyze varying levels of party documentation borrowing qualitative content analysis and interview-based research to demonstrate the exclusion of Muslim women from the Dutch

population. Finally, the paper will question the ability of feminist discourse to mitigate the exclusion of Muslim women of colour.

Literature Review

There are three key themes in the academic literature on the conditions of Muslim women in the Netherlands: (1) gender equality policy in the Netherlands has changed; (2) far-right populism has developed to a fuller extent with the introduction of the PVV; and, (3) the ‘headrag tax’ is a widely denounced policy initiative which nonetheless has significant effects. Since the turn of the century, Dutch gender equality policy has seen a shift to a focus on migrant women’s equality – it is believed that there are issues with migrant [Muslim] culture, and there are no issues with dominant culture and society (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007). Roggeband and Verloo (2007) reach such a conclusion using strategic framing to analyze the evolution of frames over time by studying policy documents and transcripts of parliamentary debates (from 1995 to 2005) regarding the integration of minorities and the emancipation of women. One of the most notable policies that demonstrates a shift in the framing of gender equality is the introduction of the ‘headrag tax.’ This idea was forwarded by PVV leader Geert Wilders who stated that women who chose to wear a headscarf should have to pay an annual tax of 1000 euro which would be then donated to women’s organizations (Korteweg, 2013; Vietan 2016). Korteweg conducts her analysis of the ‘headrag tax’ using transcripts of parliamentary debate, newspaper responses, and interviews with politically active women where she analyzes frames to see how they produce varying discourses (Korteweg 2013, p. 760-761). It is key to note that the PVV has influenced Dutch political and public debates and policy since 2006 (Vietan, 2016; Korteweg, 2013). Currently, the literature focuses on changes to gender equality policy, especially given the introduction of the PVV.

It is also necessary to analyze research limitations. There is limited research into how policies of the PVV impact people in the Netherlands specifically, although the literature on

European countries in general and their interactions with far-right populist parties is much more extensive (Vrânceanu & Lachat, 2018). For this reason, there are limitations in understanding the interaction between the influence of the PVV on feminist and women-centred organizations. There is, however, research of this nature in other countries and contexts. Notably, Yilmaz (2015) suggests that the political landscape has changed, focusing on culture-based identifications in Denmark. This has meant that feminist and traditionally sexist forces have converged, which has sometimes led to progressive groups (including the feminist movement) to criticize Muslim immigration (Yilmaz, 2015, p. 38). In the literature, the key reasons for far-right party criticism toward Muslim people is the focus on ‘Islamic practices’ that are seen to violate women’s rights. Such practices include genital mutilation, the veil, the headscarf, healthcare concerns, and gender segregation in public facilities (de Lange and Mügge, 2015, p. 77). Key to these issues is the assumption that Muslim women should be saved from male-domination which is seen as inherent to Islamic traditions. To adequately address the intersections of the subject material of this paper, I use intersectionality theory as this paper’s framework.

Theoretical Approach: Intersectionality Theory

This paper uses intersectionality theory as its theoretical approach. The paper applies an intersectional frame to observe context-specific identities. Intersectionality considers how varying identities (i.e., race, gender, class, age, ability, and sexual orientation) can overlap to create power dynamics that discriminate certain groups and individuals (Cho et al., 2013). Intersectionality theory extends beyond this definition. It is used to show how discrimination and disadvantage do not simply add upon one another; rather, intersectionality theory determines how identities can intersect and produce unique forms of disadvantage (Best et al., 2011). Thus, this paper examines how racialized women who are religious minorities are impacted by the PVV.

Intersectionality theory is useful in this context by providing analysis to capture and engage with the contextual dynamics of power that exist in the Dutch political landscape (Cho et al., 2013). Further, intersectionality grants the ability for open-ended investigation into overlapping and conflicting dynamics of race, gender, sexuality, nation, and other inequalities (Lykke, 2011). Thus, I examine race, gender, nation, and religious intersections of identity in this paper.

The paper also briefly discusses the presence of liberal feminism in the Netherlands. Liberal feminism posits that social justice can be achieved for women with formal legal equality (Okin S.M., 1994, p. 41). In the context of this paper, Dutch liberal feminism is cited as a method to achieve equality for women but does not consider the unique intersections of gender, race, and religion. Thus, liberal feminism sees equality as attainable through formal legal mechanisms, while intersectionality acknowledges that power dynamics are entrenched in all aspects of public and private life (e.g., legal systems, the family, and political institutions). Intersectionality theory, by examining the unique forms of discrimination experienced by individuals with various intersecting identities, recognizes that formal legal mechanisms are only one aspect of the search for equality. Likewise, Dutch feminist discourse that focuses exclusively on legal mechanisms for equality will inadequately address existing power dynamics that precipitate discrimination and disadvantage. Although liberal feminism is a theory that could have been implemented in this paper, I use intersectionality theory due to its centrality in defining contemporary and emerging feminist approaches and its ability to identify how particular power dynamics in the Netherlands precipitate exclusionary political and social outcomes (Cho et al., 2013). Liberal feminist approaches, due to their value on women's equality without using an intersectional lens, may in fact be disrupted by the PVV's anti-immigration discourse. Focus on culture-based identifications by the PVV can lead to the convergence of traditionally feminist and non-feminist groups to critique Muslim migrants

and immigration, just as in Denmark (Yilmaz, 2015). Therefore, intersectionality theory is used in this paper to analyze how Dutch women of colour are impacted by far-right populism.

Dutch Autochthony and Far-Right Populism

The experiences of women of colour are impacted by autochthony discourse, which is an important aspect of far-right populist ideology. Autochthony is a method of labelling people that are Indigenous to an area, with the root words meaning to have ‘come from the soil’ of a place, while ‘allochthone’ is a label that functions as an implicit call to exclude strangers (Ceuppens and Geschiere, 2005, p. 386). In the Netherlands, however, the term does not refer to indigeneity. Instead, autochthony is enforced by ideas of what it means to belong to Dutch culture. It is critical of immigration, specifically the immigration of Muslim people. In Europe, Muslims have become a primary target for autochthony discourse (Ceuppens and Geschiere, 2005, p. 397). In the Dutch context specifically, allochthone has come to mean ‘of foreign descent,’ implicitly referencing Moroccan and Turkish migrants and their children (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007, p. 275). Most Muslim women in the Netherlands are Turkish or Moroccan migrants (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007, p. 284), thus these individuals are seen as migrant people of colour who are assumed to be Muslim women. Vietan’s interview-based research quoted a woman who has been excluded vis-à-vis social segregation in the Netherlands. The interviewee states: “I still have a lot of white Dutch friends who only know me as a token, a kind of their own example of the *allochtone gemeenschap* [allochthone community]” (Vietan, 2016, p. 629). Muslim migrant women experience social segregation that has transcended political discourse and become a common-day practice. Autochthony in the Netherlands threatens an intersectional approach to feminism in its exclusion of allochthones.

Autochthones are considered an ideal Dutch citizen which reinforces their power as it excludes migrants and disregards their unique experiences and identities. Muslim culture is seen

by Dutch autochthones as a hindrance to migrant women's emancipation (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007, p. 281). Thus, Muslim women must follow autochthonous rules of cultural presentation or remain part of the *allochtone gemeenschap*, where they are excluded from the mainstream Dutch population. Not only do these women experience social exclusion, but they encounter cultural exclusion as well. Cultural understandings surrounding women's emancipation have shifted from a male norm to a female autochthone norm. This means that Dutch women's emancipation was formerly determined with reference to Dutch men as a normative point; however, migrant women are the new reference group, with autochthonous Dutch women acting as the norm for emancipation (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007, p. 282). Women are further divided by this normative lens, leading to the view that Dutch autochthone women possess a cultural superiority due to their perceived emancipation, and allochthone women remain unemancipated and culturally inferior. In creating a division between autochthone and allochthone women, Dutch feminism is unable to recognize cultural diversity and is unable to mitigate the exclusion of migrant women of colour by far-right parties.

Far-Right Populism: Approaches to Migration

With the increasing popularity of far-right populism, migration is an important topic in political thought and discussion. Many far-right populist parties in Europe believe that nation-states should be exclusively inhabited by natives (as defined by individual nations), suggesting that individuals, ideas, or material objects that are interpreted as 'non-native' are threats to the ideal nation-state (Mudde, 2007, p. 19). These parties see non-Western countries as a threat, frequently focusing on regions with Islamic fundamentalism as the primary threat to Western culture (Akkerman, 2015, p. 57). Far-right populism exists in the Dutch political party, the Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV), or Party for Freedom. Similar to other European far-right parties, the PVV forwards exclusive and nationalist ideas, anti-immigration agendas, and authoritarian values

(Akkerman, 2015, p. 38). The PVV offers a more radical anti-immigration and anti-Islam program as compared to most other far-right European parties (Akkerman, 2015, p. 41). This party adheres to a combination of nationalistic and xenophobic attitudes, supporting far-right ideas of closing borders to non-Western immigrants and enforcing compulsory assimilation (de Lange and Mügge, 2015, p. 64). The PVV is relatively new to the Dutch political landscape, having developed with the rise of far-right populism across Europe. Vietan (2016) argues that the rise of far-right populism has occurred because of moral panic surrounding non-European migrants and refugees and an increased frequency of terrorist attacks (p. 623). These two intersecting factors have led to the founding of the PVV, and other far-right parties across Europe, that focus on anti-immigration strategies.

Far-right populism in the Netherlands is critical of migration as a process but is also critical of migrants. Morgan and Pornting (2013) note that far-right populism is often involved in gendered anti-Muslim racism and culturalism that adds to Islamophobia. Although the PVV was not founded until after the tragic events of September 11, 2001, far-right anti-Muslim sentiment was present in the years leading up to its founding. Vietan conducted interviews with a number of women, gathering information regarding their experiences as Muslim migrants in the Netherlands in the aftermath of the tragedy. A woman named Fatma expressed “her deep shock that she was not seen as part of the ‘mourning community’ but instead addressed as someone close to the ideology of the perpetrators” (Vietan, 2016, p. 630). Vietan’s interviews found that many other Muslim women felt as if an individual criminal act had become the responsibility of all Muslims and was blamed on all Muslims (Vietan, 2016, p. 630). The anti-Muslim racism present after September 2001 has also been visible following other disasters, including the political murder of a Dutch filmmaker, Theodoor van Gogh. Following van Gogh’s death, one of Vietan’s interview participants

commented that “there was no position for us, because there was really a *bedreiging* [threat], we really are a *bedreiging* for the Dutch, a danger for the Dutch citizens” (Vietan, 2016, p. 630). The hostility that Muslim migrants have experienced in the Netherlands has actualized in the form of a party, the PVV. The PVV targets the ‘backwardness’ of non-Western cultures, specifically condemning discrimination and violence against women by immigrant groups (Akkerman, 2015, p. 40; Akkerman, 2015, p. 55). They see Islam as a culture that oppresses women; thus, the PVV uses a liberal approach to gain support. The PVV fights the oppression of women by supporting anti-Muslim immigration policy (Akkerman, 2015, p. 40). Wilders, leader of the PVV, has said: “Mass immigration has enormous consequences for all facets of our society... and it flushes decades of women’s emancipation down the drain” (Wilders, 2010, p. 6; de Lange and Mügge, 2015, p. 70). Thus, the PVV uses ‘gender equality’ as a way to popularize anti-immigration ideology. Despite the PVV’s focus on gender equality for immigrant and non-immigrant women, the only proposals the party presents are confining proposals that call for restrictions or bans on veils and headscarves (Akkerman, 2015, p. 53). The PVV distaste toward immigration, however, has had a profound impact on people of colour. A Muslim migrant was quoted in Vietan’s research: “[We] are not regarded as human beings any longer; [Wilders] uses animal names and terms to address us” (Vietan, 2016, p. 631). Migrant women of colour have unique experiences that men of colour do not encounter.

Migrant women of colour are uniquely impacted by far-right populism due to the patriarchal expectations that surround women’s roles and physical presentation. Turkish and Moroccan women, specifically Muslim women, are seen as having the most ‘backward’ positions as compared to Dutch women (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007, p. 283). Hass and Lutek (2018, p. 4) demonstrate Dutch opinions regarding Muslim women: “Dutch society often still perceives

Muslim women as passive victims in need of rescue.” Thus, Muslim women are punished for their alleged passivity and backwardness, which allows the Dutch-ness of these migrant women of colour to be denied (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007, p. 283). One such form of punishment is the PVV’s policy recommendation of a headscarf tax which would charge an annual fee to women who choose to wear a headscarf (Vietan, 2016). Furthermore, the PVV is critical of ‘import brides,’ women who marry and move to the Netherlands. They are disliked at even greater levels than Muslim women who have been in the Netherlands for a longer period of time due to their low levels of education, poor language skills, poor knowledge of cultural norms, and subsequent challenges in accessing the labour market. The PVV and Dutch supporters are fearful that these women will become dependent on the Dutch welfare state (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007, p. 283-284). The unique forms of exclusion experienced by women appear to be particularly severe for women who wear headscarves. Orla and Fatimah, two women who wear headscarves and participated in Vietan’s (2016) research, expressed feeling upset and intimidated by far-right interpretations of their headscarves. Geert Wilders (leader of the PVV) proposed a ‘headscarf tax’ to express distaste toward the cultural differences of Muslim migrants, thus inciting the fear that Orla and Fatimah shared in their interviews. Wilders was taken to court over the proposed tax policy. However, the Dutch court ruled that he was only targeting Islam, and not targeting Muslim people (Vietan, 2016, p. 631). Despite the determinations of the ruling, women still experience intimidation through anti-headscarf rhetoric.

The Intersection of Identity and Policy

The PVV has a gendered understanding of migration, which is evident beyond anti-headscarf rhetoric, in their policies and party documentation. De Lange and Mügge (2015) engaged in a qualitative content analysis of far-right party manifestos in Europe, analyzing their differing ideological stances. The researchers found that the PVV is critical of immigration in general, but

specifically targets Islam. The PVV believes that Islam as a religion does not respect women's equality; thus, Muslim women are prevented from emancipation (de Lange and Mügge, 2015, p. 76). In their content analysis, de Lange and Mügge find that PVV cites women's emancipation as being unattainable due to the veil, headscarf, genital mutilation, healthcare (i.e. not allowing male physicians to treat Muslim women), and segregation of women and men in public facilities (i.e. hospitals, libraries, theatres) (2015, p.77). In agreeance with the PVV vision of a homogenous nation within the nation-state, the PVV has shared policy ideas that would assimilate Muslim migrant women.

Across Europe, governments have proposed regulating Islamic face and head-coverings. Many of these governments have recommended restricting women's access to public institutions if they wear a headscarf or banning face coverings from the entirety of the public sphere (Korteweg, 2013, p. 759). The PVV, however, has presented a different idea: a headscarf tax (Korteweg, 2013, p. 760). Wilders, aiming for a solution to the problematized headscarf, introduced the idea of the headscarf tax in the Netherlands. This proposed tax recommends charging a fee for women's 'cultural pollution of public space' (Korteweg, 2013, p. 760). An income tax of 1,000 Euros would be applied to women who wear a headscarf, with that money to be donated to women's shelters (Korteweg, 2013, p. 760). The donation would entrench ideas of protecting Dutch [white, non-migrant] women from the cultural pollution of Dutch [non-white migrant] Muslim women. Wilders interprets the headscarf itself as a symbol of the negative material impact of Muslim migrants on the Dutch economy (Korteweg, 2013, p. 765), and specifically targets Muslim women by recommending an anti-headscarf policy. The PVV even requires a license for those migrants who choose to wear a headscarf, as outlined by Wilders:

My first proposal: why not introduce a headscarf tax? I would like to call it a headrag tax. Just, once a year, get a license... it seems to me that 1,000 Euros would be a nice sum.

Then we'll finally get some payback for that which has cost us so much already. I would say: the polluter pays. (Korteweg, 2014, p. 764)

This proposed tax aims to protect a homogenous Dutch nation state by specifically targeting Muslim migrants from full and free expression of their religion. The headscarf tax is unlikely to pass in the Dutch legal system due to constitutional protections for religious freedoms (Korteweg, 2013, p. 760). Although a headscarf tax is unlikely to become law, the symbolic impact of rejection from Dutch national belonging has serious implications for Muslim migrant women (Korteweg, 2013, p. 771). Korteweg conducted interviews with Muslim women to determine the impact of Wilders' headscarf tax proposal. Two women, one who wears a headscarf and one who does not, expressed that they feel Dutch, but "do not see that feeling reflected consistently... [and] upheld by members of [the] majority Dutch society" (Korteweg, 2013, p. 770). The women claim that Dutch individuals around them use derogatory language when speaking with them (Korteweg, 2013, p. 770).

The headscarf proposal is particularly problematic because of the top-down impact political parties have on public opinion (Vrânceanu and Lachat, 2018). Elites, such as Wilders, can influence public opinion through the positions and policies they adopt in their discussions of immigration policy (Vrânceanu and Lachat, 2018, 16). Thus, the PVV has exercised influence of public opinion, creating negative attitudes toward immigration. These negative attitudes reinforce the aforementioned autochthone-allochthone dichotomy. Allochthone [Muslim] women are constantly avoiding coercion to an autochthonous cultural viewpoint as they search for a legal understanding, moreover a cultural acceptance, of their right to wear the headscarf (Korteweg, 2013, p. 768). Muslim women that have migrated to the Netherlands (most frequently from Turkey and Morocco) experience augmented levels of exclusion vis-à-vis the proposal of a headscarf tax which invades their right to choose to don religious wears.

Multilayered Identities, Multilayered Exclusion, Multilayered Feminist Approaches?

Feminist approaches to gender equality have varied understandings of which religious and cultural practices are liberating and which practices limit women's freedom. In the Netherlands, gender equality is considered a central Dutch value (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007, p. 272). This is a value that has been used by a variety of political actors to mobilize support for their policies through the instrumental use of gender equality. Political actors that have never been strong advocates for gender equality are co-opting the concept for political gain. By protecting women's equality, parties like the PVV are able to reassert national identity and place restrictive demands on migrants and minorities (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007, p. 272). Thus, the PVV has instrumentalised the fear of gender inequality to exclude Muslim migrant women from the Dutch population using policies such as the headscarf tax. The policy was successful in a symbolic rejection of Muslim women from the Dutch public because it cited the key Dutch value of gender equality while donating the tax to women's shelters (Korteweg, 2013, p. 764). The proposed tax demonstrates that 'Dutch women' in shelters deserve protection from the influence of a Muslim culture of 'gender inequality.' However, not all proponents of gender equality are in favour of a headscarf tax, leading to a division between feminists. This division has occurred because the multicultural desire of some feminists to respect all cultures is in conflict with the liberal values of freedom and gender equality. Some practices and values of cultural minorities (i.e. wearing a headscarf) are understood as reinforcing gender inequality and violating women's rights (Okin, 1999, p. 14).. The cultural antagonism that the PVV uses to divide feminists and women has replaced the economic antagonism that once separated migrants and natives. Whereas migrants were once seen as placing an economic burden on social programs, they are now interpreted as implementing regressive, cultural burdens (Yilmaz, 2015, p. 48). Therefore, Dutch feminist discourse has placed 'Dutch' autochthones against migrant allochthones.

This autochthone versus allochthone dissonance exists in part due to liberal feminist understandings of gender equality. The Netherlands is well-known as a clear example of a country with a policy shift in regard to gender equality (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007, p. 272). As previously mentioned, policy framing has shifted to view autochthone women as the ‘norm’ as compared to allochthone women. Because gender equality is a central Dutch value, allochthones are expected to integrate and understand the value of gender equality (Roggeband and Verloo 2007, p. 272). Thus, Van der Veer’s 1996 book states that wearing a headscarf is seen as a complete rejection of the Dutch way of life (p. 120). These thought processes have not completely changed with the spread of intersectionality theory and its approach to feminism, which is evident given the return of liberal feminist values in the PVV. The PVV targets Islam by emphasizing their party’s commitment to gender equality and condemning Islam for its supposed repression of women (Akkerman, 2015, p. 40). The PVV uses liberal feminist terms of ‘gender equality’ without considering the unique intersections of Muslim culture (i.e., why particular practices exist and what they may mean to Muslim women). Further, gender equality is seen as an accomplishment that is threatened by Muslim practices (Korteweg and Yurdakul, 2009; Yurdakul and Korteweg, 2013). Thus, when the PVV forwards anti-headscarf rhetoric in Dutch public life, it masks the incompleteness of women’s emancipation in the Netherlands (Bracke, 2011). Instead of focusing on intersectional interpretations of equality, feminist discourse must focus on undoing the supposed inequality of Muslim practices. The PVV, in forwarding regressive policies such as the headscarf tax that assume gender equality has been achieved, disrupt feminist approaches to achieving true gender equality.

Conclusion

The exclusion of migrant women of colour in the Netherlands is unique as compared to the experiences of migrant men of colour. The exclusion that allochthone women encounter in their lives has not been mitigated by Dutch feminism. In fact, the PVV has created a division in feminist efforts through their instrumentalization of ‘gender equality.’ The paper presented Muslim migrants as the key targets of the PVV’s anti-immigration programme, which was demonstrated using an analysis of the headscarf tax. This tax, which targets women who choose to wear a headscarf, will be returned as a donation to Dutch women’s shelters, augmenting an autochthone-allochthone divide. By operationalizing the headscarf as a threat to ‘Dutch culture,’ the PVV has been successful in dividing feminist discourse and empowering their anti-immigration sentiment. If the Netherlands is to overcome the autochthone/allochthone division, concerted efforts toward consciousness raising must take place. The PVV has enjoyed success by suggesting that migrants are problematic for Dutch culture. However, Dutch culture is never presented as problematic for migrants (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007, p. 281). If migrant women of colour are to have enriched participation in Dutch public life, both civil society groups and government must launch a multi-faceted approach to redesign the power structures that subordinate migrant women of colour in the Netherlands. Civil society groups can play a key role in changing general public discourse, while government can ensure that official policy embraces anti-discriminatory language and appropriate media campaigns follow. Working toward inclusion for migrant women of colour requires a consciousness raising of migrant exclusion by government and non-government actors alike. However, raising consciousness to recognize the level of exclusion experienced by migrant women of colour is only a first step in solving the problems of exclusion in the Netherlands, and must be explored further as popular political opinion continues to evolve.

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