(Water) bottles and (street) barricades: the politicisation of lifestyle-centred action in youth climate strike participation

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ABSTRACT

In resisting climate change, to what extent can lifestyle forms of activism be considered to be political? What are their determinants and to what extent do they differ from the determinants of other forms of action? What role do generational factors play? Does the centrality of lifestyle changes for young participants translate into a disaffection towards more traditional forms of action? This article explores the forms of action adopted by participants in two Fridays For Future (FFF) strikes, focusing on the repertoires of action of (young) climate justice protesters. We draw on protest survey data covering the FFF demonstrations held in 15 European countries in March and September 2019. Starting from a sharp generational contrast between the importance given to individual lifestyle changes in addressing the climate emergency, we investigate whether this results in significant generational differences in the choice of the repertoires of action. Challenging the vision of young people as 'disaffected citizens', it is demonstrated that young protesters do not participate less in claim-based action than older cohorts. Furthermore, a process of politicisation can be seen to be unfolding that leads to increased commitment in both lifestyle and political forms of participation – at least among active milieus.

Young activists fighting climate change: an introduction

Climate change and global warming have created an unprecedented global environmental threat, which has become the greatest challenge of our times. In August 2018, a 15-year-old Swedish girl named Greta Thunberg stood in front of the Swedish Parliament with a sign reading *Skolstrejk for klimatet* (School Strike for Climate) in what would eventually become a regular school strike every Friday. As the initiative attracted public attention and quickly spread across the globe, high school students, as well as hundreds of additional sympathisers, decided to go on strike every Friday in different countries throughout the world. Alongside these street protests Greta Thunberg also took part in important international meetings, beginning with the United Nations

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Climate Change Conference (December 2018, in Katowice) and the World Economic Forum (January 2019, in Davos). The visibility provided by these summits, along with the participation of Thunberg in several demonstrations organised by other climate organisations between the end of 2018 and the beginning of 2019, led to the launch of the first 'global climate strike' on 15 March 2019, which involved 1.6 million participants worldwide (Wahlström et al. 2019). Three other global events were held that year, with a third of them taking place in September, bringing 7.6 million people out onto the streets, at 6,000 protest events across 185 countries in what is considered the largest climate protest in world history (de Moor et al. 2020; Pickard, Bowman, and Arya 2020). According to Hagedorn et al. (2019, 139−140), 'the enormous grassroots mobilisation of the youth climate movement […] shows that young people understand' the urgent need to protest in the defence of climate and other foundations of human well-being. Although it does not only involve young people, FFF is a movement in which the youngest generation plays a most important role, and consequently an analysis of the participants in the FFF strikes is particularly promising in helping us to understand the specific characteristics of political participation of young people.

Drawing on a unique protest survey, with data collected by an international collaborative network of scholars (see Wahlström et al. 2019; de Moor et al. 2020), this article explores the generational dimension of the mobilisation of participants in the Fridays For Future (FFF) strikes, and the broader political involvement of young climate activists. Our protest survey data cover demonstrations in 23 different cities, across 15 European countries, and was carried out in two rounds of fieldwork, during the March 2019 and September 2019 FFF global strikes ($N = 4699$).

One of the first results to note is that the younger cohorts of FFF protesters disproportionately believe that climate change should be primarily fought through the adoption of changes in lifestyle choices. This observation could be seen as confirming the idea of an inexorable individualisation of political action in younger generations, as they gradually drift away from claim-based politics.[1] However, it is argued here that attention to lifestyle choices does not translate into a lower commitment to traditional forms of political action. In fact, it has been found that young protesters are far from inactive. While the very youngest cohort of FFF participants (i.e. respondents aged from 14 to 25 years old) does not have a high level of engagement in political activities, such as contacting politicians, signing petitions, using social media for political purposes or taking part in demonstrations (aside from the particular FFF event at which the survey was carried out), there is little difference in the participation in political forms of action of young adults aged 26−35 years old and older cohorts. Furthermore, older generations of activists present at FFF climate strikes are even more engaged in lifestyle repertoires of action than younger cohorts. Finally, a dynamic of politicisation can also be observed, which might lead to increased political commitment: participants in the September 2019 event are significantly more committed to both lifestyle and political forms of participation than protesters in the March 2019 strike, suggesting that learning processes in social movements might be at play.

In short, our analysis points to a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between different repertoires of action, at least among mobilised milieus. The analysis goes beyond the dichotomy between individual lifestyle changes and collective claim-based political action to demonstrate that reusable water bottles and street barricades are far from reciprocally exclusive.

In what is to follow, we will begin by addressing debates around youth agency for political mobilisation in general, and protest in particular. We will then turn to look specifically at mobilisations around environmental challenges and climate change, noting how activists involved in the latter have progressively abandoned the focus on intermediary institutions, i.e. advocacy and institutional politics, and gradually embraced grassroots politics. We will also undertake a review of the evolution of mobilisations for climate justice in the decades leading up to the emergence of FFF, which underlines both the great capacity for mobilisation and the key role played by young people in this process. Attention will subsequently turn to our protest survey data and methodological design, followed by a discussion of the empirical findings. The article will conclude by reflecting upon the main implications of this work for social movement scholarship, youth studies and environmental politics, as well as its limitations and the avenues for further inquiry it contributes to opening up.

The political engagement and lifestyle politics of young people

There have been a number of studies that have depicted younger generations as being mostly apolitical, indifferent and apathetic towards politics, describing the majority of young people as 'disaffected citizens' (Cammaerts et al. 2014; Earl, Maher, and Elliott 2017). However, this pessimistic observation, which it must be noted is mainly based on party politics and electoral turnout, is contrasted by research on alternative forms of political participation (Cammaerts et al. 2014; Earl, Maher and Elliott 2017; Harris, Wyn, and Younes 2010; Loader, Vromen, and Xenos 2014; Gozzo and Sampugnaro 2016; Grasso 2016, 2018; della Porta 2019; Pickard 2019). This literature has highlighted the fact that young people today − who are suffering from high levels of unemployment, precarisation, a decrease in access to credit, cuts to social services, changes in consumption patterns, and a grim future outlook as a result of the economic crisis − are, generally speaking, not apathetic, disengaged, anti-political, or removed from political participation (della Porta 2019). On the contrary, from the Arab Spring to the Indignados, from the mobilisations for global justice to the anti-austerity protests, from anti-racist movements such as Black Lives Matter to feminist and LGBTQI mobilisations such as *Ni Una Menos* (Not One Less), a new generation has become engaged in contentious politics, in some cases even developing creative ideas for a more just and inclusive society. Empirical research indicates that, especially in those countries which have been hardest hit by the financial crisis, a substantial number of young citizens are reacting to events with increased political and social mobilisation, choosing to adopt predominantly intermittent, non-institutionalised, horizontal forms of political participation, performed across hybrid public spaces. Comparative research indicates that while young people might be less engaged via conventional means than older citizens, they are engaged in politics through more confrontational and unconventional repertoires and online activism (Earl, Maher, and Elliott 2017; Grasso 2018; della Porta 2019; Pickard 2019). While not completely disengaging from institutional politics, young people are developing alternative forms of social commitment, which enhance their engagement in public life and form part of a strategy for social change.

Social movement scholars have explained the distance that has built up between citizens and representative politics as a reaction towards unpopular public policies

(especially to cuts to the welfare state) and political corruption (della Porta et al. 2016; Henn and Foard 2013). Young people, in particular, have emerged as one of the groups most heavily affected by the 2008 global financial crisis (Grasso 2016; Pickard and Bessant 2017). Media scholars have interpreted the rejection of institutional politics by young people as 'the beginnings of a legitimate opposition' (Loader 2007, 10), while at the same time indicating the potential presented by the Internet and network communication technologies in favouring new forms of youth civic engagement (Cohen et al. 2012; Loader, Vromen, and Xenos 2014; Xenos, Vromen, and Loader 2014). Both streams of literature have proven that the 'indignation' and distrust towards mainstream parties and national governments was pivotal in triggering a new wave of mass protest to swell up in the shadow of the Great Recession, in which there was a significant presence of young people who played a fundamental role (Loader, Vromen, and Xenos 2014; Roberts 2015; della Porta et al. 2016).

Some preliminary evidence indicates that young people are particularly sensitive to issues that have become increasingly salient in recent years, including conditions for women and migrants, as well as the state of the environment and climate change (Bertuzzi 2019; Chironi 2019; Portos 2019). As a consequence, there has been a significant presence of young activists in contemporary feminist, anti-racist, and environmental movements (della Porta 2019). While in the post-2008 global economic downturn, young people had prioritised economic concerns, employment opportunities and access to education, in recent years, there has been an increase in their awareness of the catastrophic consequences of climate change (Corner et al. 2015; McAdam 2017). Scholars have linked the receptivity of young people to their specific vulnerability and exposure to the longer-term social and economic effects of environmental shocks and climate change, at both a global and a local level (O'Brien, Selboe, and Hayward 2018). Overall, a significant proportion of young people are involved in environmental and climate struggles, both in cross-national movements such as FFF and local struggles, where they often play a strategic role (Bertuzzi 2019).

Research on political participation has not only proven that it is inaccurate to describe young people as apathetic, but it has also highlighted the fact that they adopt a variety of forms of action that go well beyond street protest. As democracies are faced with a crisis of political representation (Mair 2013), opportunities for young people to influence institutional politics by enrolling in traditional representative organisations are limited. What is more, their social world is characterised by great uncertainty, acceleration and fragmentation (Leccardi 2005; Furlong and Cartmel 2007). In this context, lifestyle choices provide an alternative means to engage in politics (Micheletti and Stolle 2010). According to de Moor, the term lifestyle politics refers to 'the politicisation of everyday life choices, including ethically, morally or politically inspired decisions about, for example, consumption, transportation or modes of living' (2017, 181). Politicisation derives from the realisation that one's everyday behaviour has global implications and political considerations should therefore affect one's lifestyle. This encompasses a wide range of activities: some are individually performed, such as adopting a vegetarian or a vegan diet; others are part of a collective strategy, such as joining a campaign to boycott specific products or becoming members of alternative food networks (Pickard 2019). In general, these activities are all aimed at advancing social change by fostering politically inspired lifestyle choices, which often rely on everyday, localised, and relational networks, and at the same

time help to reconstruct links of solidarity between citizens who share similar problems and visions (Forno and Graziano 2014; Baczewska et al. 2018).

Lifestyle politics have been analysed as being particularly relevant in the context of environmentalism (Schlosberg and Coles 2016; Henn, Oldfield, and Hart 2018). Various strands of politicisation taking place within climate activism have sparked research on the 'climate justice' framing of protest (Hadden 2014; Schlosberg and Collins 2014), and tension has been identified between system-critical framings and those oriented around individual action (Wahlström, Wennerhag, and Rootes 2013). Engaging in everyday environmentally friendly behaviour, even at the collective level, has been interpreted by some scholars as a form of depoliticisation (Thörn and Svenberg 2016; Blühdorn 2017), while others have stressed the deeply political nature of such actions (Schlosberg 2019). The debate surrounding the individualisation of responsibility as an effect of neoliberalism and as a threat to successful environmental action (Maniates 2001) has echoes in the climate justice movement itself (de Moor, Catney and Doherty 2021).

Although this is not a new phenomenon, comparative research has shown that lifestyle politics, and political consumerism, in particular, are on the rise (Stolle and Micheletti 2013; Forno and Graziano 2014; Wahlen and Laamanen 2015; Zamponi and Bosi 2018; Kyroglou and Henn 2020). In many Western European countries, more than half the population regularly makes consumer choices on the basis of political, ethical, or environmental considerations (de Moor and Balsiger 2019). Notably, lifestyle politics are increasingly important among younger cohorts (Stolle, Hooghe, and Micheletti 2005; Micheletti and McFarland 2015; Alteri, Leccardi, and Raffini 2017), and have mainly been used to address environmental concerns. As governments appear unable or unwilling to address the main environmental challenges, individuals try to compensate for policy shortcomings with 'do-it-yourself' lifestyle politics (de Moor, Marien, and Hooghe 2017) or 'do-it-ourselves politics' (Pickard 2019). Several studies have documented how environmental considerations inspire ethical retail behaviour, vegan or vegetarian lifestyles, efforts to save energy, changes to more sustainable modes of transport, and individual or collective projects aimed at producing one's own energy or food (Dobson 2007; Micheletti and Stolle 2010; Whitmarsh and O'Neill 2010; Schlosberg and Craven 2019; Kyroglou and Henn 2020). In this context, young people embracing political consumerism have been described as more distrustful of political institutions than the wider population but also more trustful of other citizens and more confident in their ability to produce political outcomes (Stolle, Hooghe, and Micheletti 2005).

Direct social actions, understood as forms of action that do not address power-holders but instead aim at directly transforming society through the very action itself, have been interpreted as opportunities for politicisation at a time of increasing individualisation: it is possible to 'reposition individuals in the collective sphere through a pragmatic participation' that allows individuals to act freely and creatively 'without having to subordinate the aspirations and personal interests in the name of solidarity with certain social groups' (Bosi and Zamponi 2020, 865). As Alteri and colleagues (2017, 718) posit, 'individualisation and presentification do not equate with depoliticisation'. On the contrary, mobilised young people seem to be bringing about a 'reinvention of participation' (Pickard and Bessant 2017), which includes both protest and new 'personally meaningful and individually oriented' practices (Alteri, Leccardi, and Raffini 2017). In order to contribute further to this literature, in the remainder of this article, it is our intention to assess whether young

people who have mobilised for climate justice are more convinced of the utility of − and committed to − lifestyle forms of action than older activists involved in the same cause. We will also shed light on the potential for the politicisation and mobilisation of lifestyle choices among young activists. In the following section, we will introduce some recent developments in climate activism, and how the agency of young people came to play a key role in this field in recent years.

The struggle around climate change

Fridays For Future must be located within a transformation in the manner in which climate and environmental conflicts are expressed. Research on the NGO-isation of environmental conflicts has noted that organisational bureaucratisation went hand in hand with a moderation of goals and a move to conventional forms of action (Rootes 2003; Diani 2005). Environmental organisations increasingly tended to prefer consensual aims, accepting market solutions according to the gospel of a green economy and collaborating with for-profit industries (Dryzek 2013; Klein 2014; Wanner 2014). Conversely, studies on struggles against Locally Unwanted Land Use (LULU) have highlighted the adoption of highly contentious forms of action, promoting a sort of SMO (Social Movement Organisation)-isation of environmental mobilisations (della Porta et al. 2019). Within this process, grassroots actors have often shifted the scale of their claims, bridging local issues with social, economic and political issues (della Porta and Piazza 2007), and attempting to prefigure different forms of democracy (Bertuzzi 2020). At an international level, NGOs from the Global North began to engage more with groups from the Global South, leading the so called 'environmentalism of the poor' to become more visible through the spread of information about the negative effects of large dams, chemical pollution, pesticides, and other such activities (Martinez-Alier 2014). Environmental justice has subsequently developed as a frame that combines social and environmental issues (Schlosberg and Collins 2014; Pickard, Bowman, and Arya 2020).

These transformations are all the more visible in the specific articulation of environmental contentious politics surrounding climate change (Hadden 2015). Collective action against climate change was initially led by large environmental organisations that targeted their lobbying activities at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change process. However, at the Conference of Parties (COP) organised in the context of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Copenhagen in 2009, the dominance of environmental NGOs was increasingly challenged as more radical groups converged at the counter-summit to the event and even attempted to penetrate the 'red zone' drawn up around the conference venue (Hadden 2015). The climate justice movement stressed grassroots, polycentric participation as rooted in the search for participatory forms of democracy (de Moor 2021). As the network of organisations extended beyond strictly environmental groups, climate justice became a master frame for different types of progressive social movements, who began to incorporate into their discourses a critique of capitalism as a cause of the many injustices that brought about the destruction of nature (Schlosberg and Collins 2014).

A new wave of protest for climate justice developed globally with the FFF strikes, which represented a historical turn in climate activism (Wahlström et al. 2019; Pickard, Bowman, and Arya 2020; de Moor et al. 2021). The FFF mobilisations engaged high

numbers of participants worldwide, transforming the regular Friday school strikes into a new wave of international protests, which were no longer tied to key events such as international summits. While there are a number of elements of continuity in the composition, action forms and motivations of climate activism (e.g. the predominance of protesters with a high level of formal education), according to the initial comparative studies on FFF, a number of novel characteristics stand out, such as the involvement of schoolchildren and students as initiators, organisers and participants in climate activism on a large scale (Wahlström et al. 2019; de Moor et al. 2020; de Moor et al. 2021; Sommer et al. 2019). Similarly, young activists have been found to be the core groups in territorial struggles, such as in the case of the No TAV movement in Northern Italy against the construction of the high-speed railway between Turin and Lyon (Piazza and Frazzetta 2018; della Porta and Piazza 2007), or in the occupation of the Hambach Forest in the North Rhine-Westphalia region against the destruction of the forest by an opencast coal mine (Ruser 2020, 812; Kaufer and Lein 2018, 4). Moreover, a number of civil society organisations that advocate for climate action are entirely youth-based, such as the cross-national Youth Climate Movement NGO (YouNGO), which has branches in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom. Even grassroots environmental groups that were not started by young people, including the UK founded Extinction Rebellion (XR), have increasingly addressed and involved younger cohorts of activists (Richardson 2020).[2]

By framing climate change as a major problem of generational justice, which sees children bear the brunt of climate change and environmental pollution caused by older generations (UNICEF 2010), FFF has introduced a new radical and emergency discourse into the wider debate on climate change, advocating for deep systemic transformations (von Zabern and Tulloch 2021), while at the same time contributing to the inclusion of young people in contemporary environmental protests (O'Brien, Selboe, and Hayward 2018; von Zabern and Tulloch 2021). It can be expected that the FFF strikes and the wider engagement of young people in environmental issues will have an effect beyond exerting pressure on climate policy, as they might foster a willingness in young people to continue their active engagement with democracy (Fisher 2019). Empirical evidence on the effectiveness of climate change education in schools collected on 14-year-old students from Austria and Germany during the 2018/2019 school year suggests that participation in the FFF protests might have a positive impact on the climate change awareness and climate-friendly consumption of young people: it was found that only the students who participated in the FFF mobilisation showed significant changes in personal concern about climate change, an enhanced feeling of self-efficacy and increased action-related components of climate change awareness (Deisenrieder et al. 2020; on adolescents' concerns about environment, see Ojala 2005). Despite the limited time span in which FFF has been active, it has already had a sizeable influence on the climate justice discourse, adding to the demand for a globally coordinated climate policy to focus on the effects of climate change, the disparities, injustice and on-going processes of exclusion, and, crucially for this paper, the generational dimension (Neuber, Kocyba and Gardner 2020). It should be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has represented a considerable challenge for FFF: throughout 2020 and 2021, the activity of the movement mainly took place online, while a fifth physical global strike was called for 24 September 2021.

Having looked at the historical transformations in climate action performed from below, in the following section, the FFF protest survey database that this article relies upon will be presented. There will then be a discussion on the extent to which young people have engaged in lifestyle politics and political participation compared to other age cohorts among those who are already mobilised on climate action.

Surveying protesters in the Fridays for future strikes

The present study draws on original protest survey data, following a standardised method of sampling respondents in moving crowds, which is well-established within the field (van Aelst and Walgrave 2001; van Stekelenburg et al. 2012; Giugni and Grasso 2019). The questionnaires were designed by a team of social scientists from universities across Europe, who were also involved in gathering the data (Wahlström et al. 2019; de Moor et al. 2020). Researchers surveyed the largest demonstration under the FFF banner taking place in each city in March 2019 and subsequently during the 'Global Week for Future' in September of the same year. While the March 2019 survey covered demonstrations in 13 European cities (in 9 countries), 'approaching over 10,000 demonstrators and providing us with 1905 responses of a systematic random sample of protesters' (Wahlström et al. 2019, 5), the September 2019 survey broadened the network and regional scope beyond Europe, surveying in total 'over 13,000 demonstrators, resulting in 3154 responses from a random sample of protesters' (de Moor et al. 2020, 8).

In order to ensure the representativeness of the data, a probabilistic sample was generated for each demonstration (de Moor et al. 2020, 8). Following the lead of the Caught in the Act of Protest: Contextualising Contestation (CCC) project,[3] evidence gathered from these demonstrators was standardised through the use of identical questionnaires, content-analysis protocols and fact sheets; representativeness was ensured through systematic sampling procedures and a strict division of labour; data validity was enhanced through the presence of pointers (who selected the demonstrators to be surveyed) and by running on-the-spot, face-to-face screening interviews (van Stekelenburg et al. 2012, 256−260; see also Wahlström et al. 2019; de Moor et al. 2020). Furthermore, surveyed interviewees were provided 'flyers with basic information about the survey and a QR-code, as well as a token taking the individual to an online survey' (Wahlström et al. 2019, 5−6), which respondents could fill out (only once) at any time during a two to three week period following the event.

In order to address a (relatively) more homogeneous macro-region, in this article, the analysis is restricted to the European cities covered in either of the two waves; Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of valid responses per country and per round of fieldwork (N = 4,699, with 1905 cases coming from the first round of fieldwork in March 2019 and 2,794 cases from the second wave in September 2019; for the relative weight of each country per wave, see Figure A1 in the Appendix). Response rates varied across the cities involved, ranging from 12% in Amsterdam (Netherlands) to 30% in Stockholm (Sweden) in March 2019 and from 12% in Florence (Italy) to 34% in Helsinki (Finland) in September events. This was largely in line with CCC data, where, for example, Swedish respondents were much more responsive than Italians.

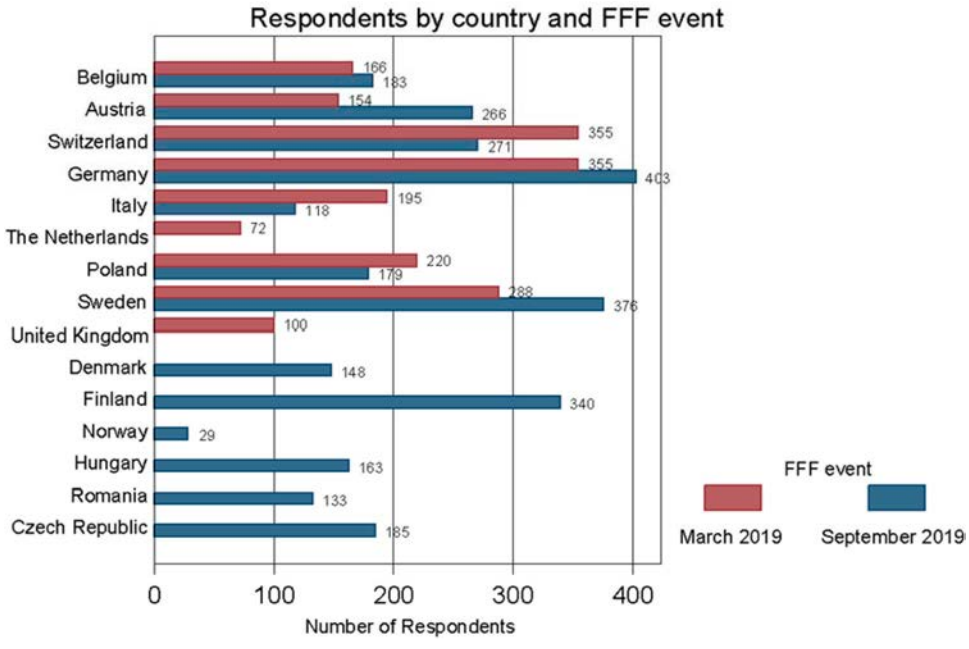

Figure 1. Count of respondents by country and 2019 FFF event.

The generational impact on repertoires of contention among FFF activists

In order to examine the relationship between age and lifestyle and political participation among FFF protesters, firstly, a 5-point interval variable was built that measures the age group of the respondent, singling out the following cohorts: 14–25, 26–35, 36–45, 46–55, 56+. As Figure 2 shows, younger cohorts were clearly overrepresented among climate strikers. In the March 2019 FFF event, for example, 14–25 year-olds amounted to 60% of surveyed participants in European cities. However, as Sommer et al.'s (2019) analysis with this dataset shows, there is a strong variation across countries, with those aged 19 years old and younger accounting for nearly 90% of participants in Poland and over 95% in the Netherlands, but only around 50% in Germany and less than one third in Italy, Switzerland, Great Britain and Belgium (Sommer et al. 2019, 32; see Figure A2 in the Appendix). Moreover, as Figure 2 illustrates, the relative presence of the younger cohort (25 years old or less) decreased in the September 2019 event in comparison to the March 2019 strike in all countries except Italy, with an increase in the overall median age from 21 to 28 (de Moor et al. 2020, 11).

As is clearly illustrated by our data, younger people not only argue for but are also more convinced of the importance of adopting changes in lifestyle choices (Figure 3). In the two 2019 FFF protest events staged across European cities, only 21% of survey respondents aged 14–25 declared that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that climate change should be 'primarily' fought through a change in lifestyle choices. In contrast, the level of (strong) disagreement rises to 44% among the subset of 26–35 year-olds (Figure 3). This marked generational peculiarity in identifying individual lifestyle choices as the primary means of addressing climate change strongly resonates

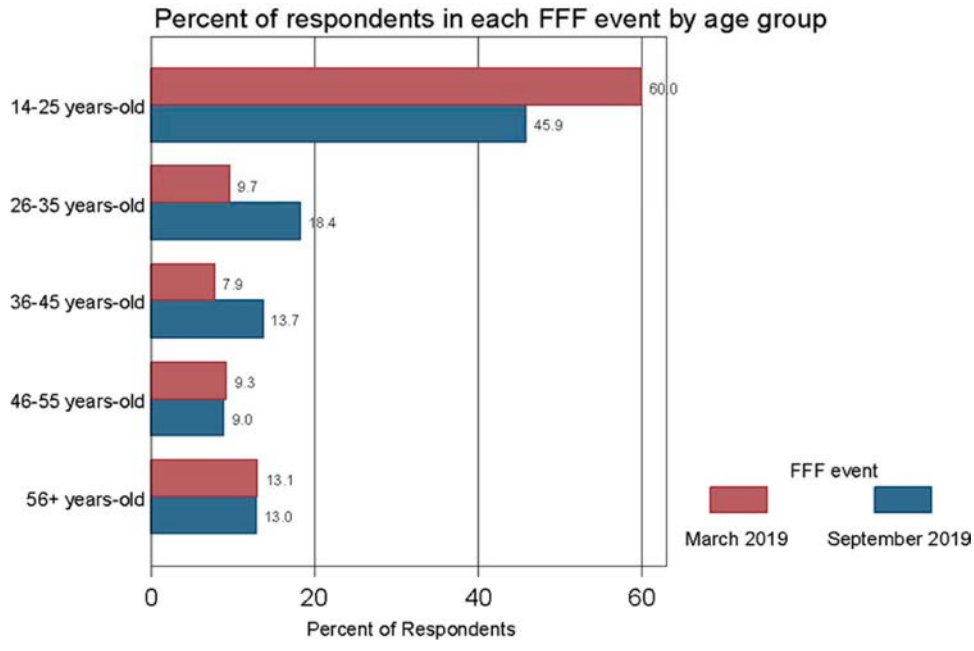

Figure 2. Per cent of respondents in each of the two surveyed 2019 FFF events by age groups.

with research on individualisation. As has been mentioned above, young people who have grown up in an era of individualisation (Furlong and Cartmel 2007) are often described as disenchanted and unengaged. However, the literature on social movements

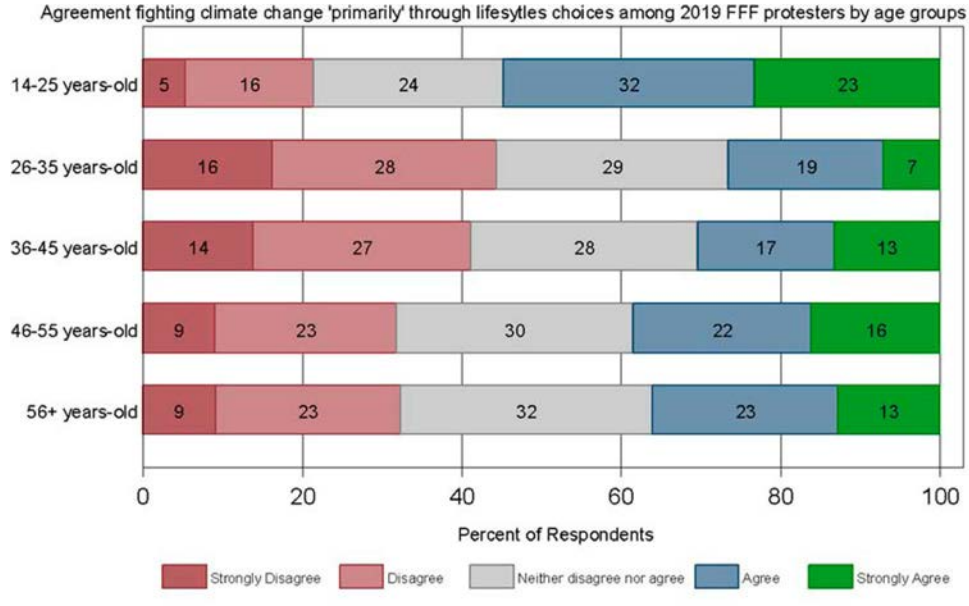

Figure 3. Per cent of participants in the two 2019 FFF events that agree with the statement that fighting climate change is to be done primarily through lifestyle choices by age groups.

and youth participation has pointed out that individualisation does not have homogeneous effects (Gozzo and Sampugnaro 2016) and, particularly, that it does not necessarily entail depoliticisation (Alteri, Leccardi, and Raffini 2017) but rather triggers the transformation of collective action towards new forms of participation that are less challenging for individual identities than traditional ideologies (Bosi and Zamponi 2020; Juris and Pleyers 2009; Loader, Vromen, and Xenos 2014; Micheletti and McFarland 2011), thus establishing a different relationship between individual and collective identities (Leccardi 2014; Pirni and Raffini 2016; Pleyers 2010).

In light of this debate, the aim here is to understand whether the centrality of individual lifestyle choices for young people implies depoliticisation and a renouncement of other forms of action. To what extent does this commitment translate into actual involvement in lifestyle-based forms of action? Are young protesters at FFF events more engaged in lifestyle-oriented forms of action than older activists? And to what extent are young protesters involved in more political repertoires of action?

In our FFF questionnaire, respondents were asked whether they had engaged in any of the activities presented in a list during the previous 12 months. As the values and levels of intercorrelation between the binary items are not constant, the sample was split into two groups of either political or lifestyle activities (see Tables A1−A2 in the Appendix for summary statistics and a tetrachoric correlation matrix). Factor Analyses were carried out (with varimax rotation), which made it possible to construct two weighted additive indices. Each index consists of eight items,[4] which measured political forms of action and lifestyle repertoires, respectively.[5] The scales are reliable, with the factor analyses offering a one single-factor solution for each (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.64$ and 0.67; histograms are reported in Figures A3−A4 in the Appendix). As a result, two weighted additive indices of forms of participation among surveyed activists were built, covering political[6] and lifestyle forms of participation, in which the higher the value, the more the respondent has participated in the eight items that measure forms of lifestyle and political participation, respectively. The level of correlation between the indices is only moderate (Pearson's $r = 0.33$).

At first glance, participation across political/lifestyle forms of action would seem to be fairly constant across all age groups. Nevertheless, a small difference can be observed, as the mean value in the political participation index is 1.56 for people aged 14−25 and 1.86 for those between 26 and 35. This difference amounts to 3.16 and 3.64 on the lifestyle participation scale for these age groups (Figure 4). If we take a more in-depth look at the specific forms of action (i.e. at each item that is included in the index), it can be observed that there are only small differences across age groups, which to some extent is unsurprising given the fact that FFF activists generally engage in lifestyle choices to a greater extent than in political forms of action (see Figures A5 and A6 in the Appendix).

In order to further explore the relationship between age and participation in political and lifestyle forms of action by FFF protesters, an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis was run with robust standard errors. We alternatively took the participation in lifestyle (in models 1−2−3, Table 2) and political forms of action (in models 4−5−6, Table 2) as dependent variables and age groups as the main predictor. A number of control variables were also included. In models 1 and 4, only contextual controls were included (country fixed effects and March/September 2019 FFF event).[7] On top of these, in models 2 and 5, controls related to socio-demographic aspects were also added (gender, job status),[8]

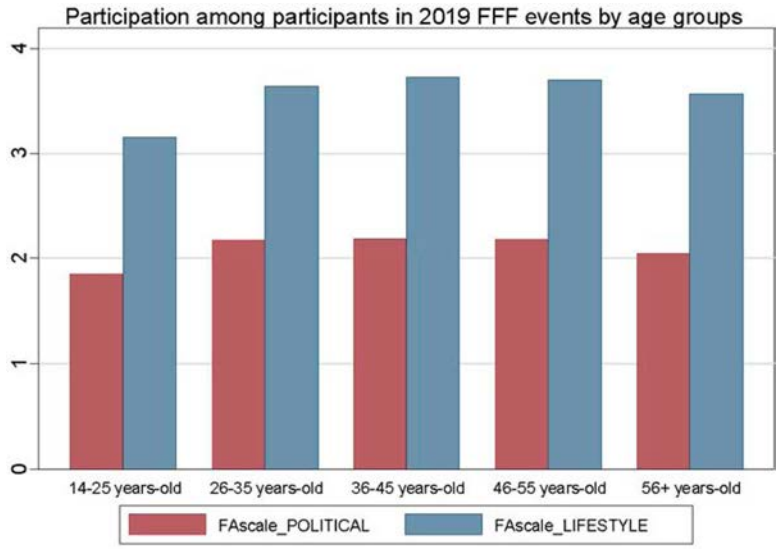

Figure 4. Level of participation in political and lifestyle forms of action among participants in the two 2019 FFF events across age groups.

as well as political attitudes and values (libertarian-authoritarian, socioeconomic ideology, political empowerment/internal efficacy) in the main model specifications 3 and 6 (regression coefficients of these baseline model specifications are plotted in Figures A7 and A8 reported in the Appendix).[9] For summary statistics, see Tables 1 and 2.

Overall, the analysis shows that, while age has a positive impact on lifestyle participation, it does not affect political engagement. One could rush to conclude that young activists are as engaged in political action repertoires as older FFF participants; however, the marginal effects, which tell us how a dependent variable (outcome) varies when an explanatory variable changes, add some nuance, as it can actually be observed that the predicted values of political participation for the youngest age group (14−25 year-olds) is lower than for any of the other age intervals (see Figure 5). Importantly, the attitudes observed in Figure 3 (i.e. the opinion of young people that climate change should be fought primarily through changing lifestyle choices) do not

Table 1. Summary statistics of dependent variables, predictors and control variables.

	Mean	S.D.	*N*	Min.	Max.
Political part. index	2.00	1.06	3793	0	4.25
Lifestyle index	3.41	1.06	3948	0	4.54
Age groups	2.17	1.46	4641	1	5
Gender (female)	.59	0.49	3957	0	1
Efficacy/empowerment	3.82	0.87	4030	1	5
Left-right socioecc. ideol.	3.79	1.05	4059	1	5
Libertarian-auth. values	2.67	0.99	4058	1	5
Job status (ref. full-time job)					
I_part-time job	.10	.30	3971	0	1
I_student	.40	.40	3971	0	1
I_unemployed	.04	.04	3971	0	1
I_other	.19	.19	3971	0	1
FFF event (Sept. 2019)	1.59	.49	4699	0	1

Table 2. OLS regressions with robust standard errors. DV: lifestyle participation additive index (models 1−2−3) and political participation weighted additive index (models 4−5−6).

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	Coeff	S.E.	Coeff	S.E.	Coeff	S.E.	Coeff	S.E.	Coeff	S.E.	Coeff	S.E.
Age groups	0.07***	0.01	0.05**	0.01	0.04*	0.01	0.03*	0.01	−0.00	0.02	−0.02	0.01
Gender (female)			0.37***	0.04	0.39***	0.03			0.09*	0.04	0.14***	0.04
Efficacy/empowerment					0.13***	0.02					0.16***	0.02
Left-right socioecc. ideol.					0.09***	0.02					0.20***	0.02
Libertarian-auth. values					−0.07***	0.02					−0.13***	0.02
Job status (ref. full-time job)												
I_part-time job			−0.02	0.05	−0.03	0.05			0.02	0.06	0.01	0.06
I_student			−0.22***	0.05	−0.21***	0.05			−0.20***	0.05	−0.15**	0.05
I_unemployed			−0.02	.008	−0.03	0.08			−0.13	0.09	−0.15	0.09
I_other			−0.15	0.05	−0.14**	0.05			−0.09	0.05	−0.06	0.05
FFF event (Sept. 2019)	0.18***	0.04	0.17***	0.04	0.16***	0.04	0.30***	0.04	0.27***	0.04	0.25***	0.04
Constant	3.10***	0.08	2.74***	0.11	2.04***	0.16	1.78***	0.09	1.84***	0.12	0.71***	0.16
R-squared	0.1086		0.1363		0.1584		0.0710		0.0722		0.1458	
Country dummies	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
N	3920		3705		3672		3764		3557		3525	

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

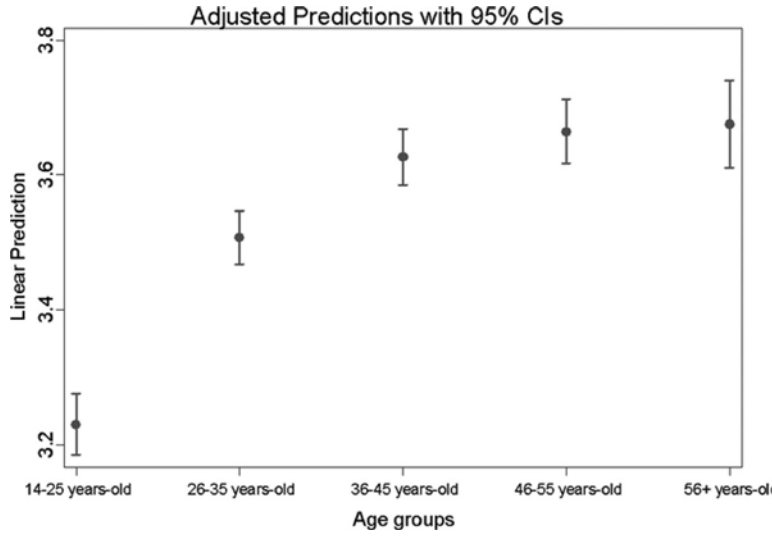

Figure 5. Marginal effects of age groups on the level of lifestyle participation among FFF protesters (model 3, Table 2).

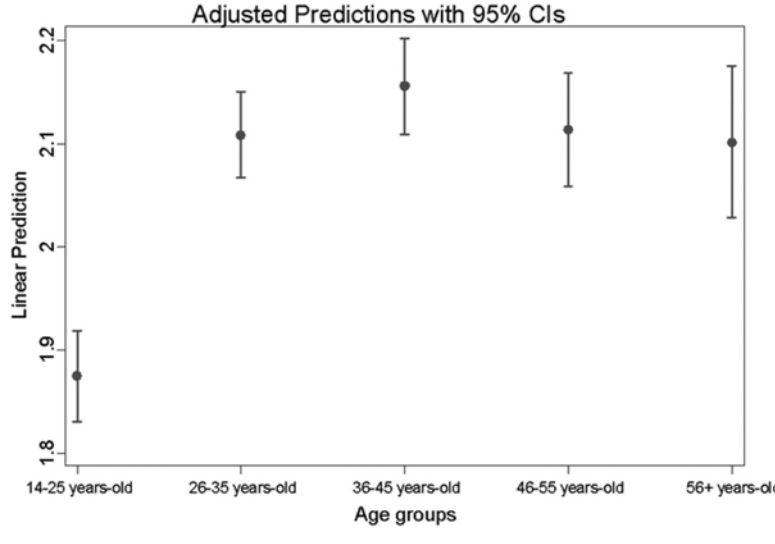

Figure 6. Marginal effects of age groups on the level of political participation among FFF protesters (model 6, Table 2).

automatically translate into actual lifestyle action. This implies that young participants in climate strikes do not participate in political action less than older participants. Not only does the hypothesis of a depoliticised and disengaged youth not apply to FFF activists (and this might seem obvious, given that this subset is actively engaging in collective action), but nor is the idea of an exclusive focus on individual lifestyle choices among young participants in FFF events backed up by the data: young people do use political forms of action, especially those in the 26- to 35-year-old age range (see Figure 6).

Indeed, values of lifestyle participation for the youngest age group (14–25 year-olds) are lower than for any of the other age cohorts. The result is similar when we treat the age variable as continuous (see Table A3 and Figures A9 and A10 in the Appendix). This could at least in part be explained by the lower purchasing power and financial autonomy of this group – although it is not possible to further explore this hypothesis with the data at hand. All attitudinal variables (empowerment/efficacy, socioeconomic ideology, libertarian values), as well as whether or not the respondent is female, are associated with a greater level of political and lifestyle participation among FFF activists. It can also be seen that student activists engage less in both political and lifestyle activities than activists in a full-time job, which was to some extent at odds with our expectations. Importantly, protesters surveyed during the September 2019 strike are much more committed to political and lifestyle participation than participants in the March 2019 event. This seems to confirm what we know about learning processes in social movements: there is path-dependency between participation and prior records of activism. In other words, movement engagement is eventful and tends to shape future action. It is likely that many people that took part in FFF for the first time in the March 2019 climate strike spent the following months participating in assemblies and discussions, and by September 2019, were more committed to both political and lifestyle forms of activism than they had been a few months previously.

Conclusion

In summary, protesters for climate justice link various axes of injustice related to climate change: social, economic, geographical and intergenerational. The young activists participating in the FFF events broaden the picture by framing climate change in terms of the rights of children and young people, demanding long-term strategies for the root causes of global warming to be addressed (Zabern and Tulloch 2021, 26–27). The emergence of young people as agents of transformation in the global climate change arena poses the question of their inclusion in climate change governance and policymaking (Han and Ahn 2020) and, more broadly, of the building of an ecological democracy (Dryzek 2013; Bertuzzi 2020). Meanwhile, in addition to Greta Thunberg herself, several FFF activists have entered into direct dialogue with politicians, while some have run for political office, as seen in the German parliamentary election in September 2021, all of which have pushed the FFF movement into a debate on its relationship with party politics. Furthermore, members of FFF have participated as delegates at the first-ever Youth COP, which was organised by the UN and held in Milan in September 2021, immediately prior the Pre-COP event in preparation for COP26.

The analysis of the FFF protests in March and September 2019 has shown a strong commitment of participants in these events to both political and lifestyle forms of action, a finding that hints towards the development of a new, radical understanding of environmentalism, which has the potential to overcome the divisions between politics versus lifestyle changes that had bogged down (some) earlier environmental movements. Indeed, the relationship between lifestyle changes and political action needs to be addressed in a more nuanced way. On the one hand, attributing a primary role to one of the two forms of action does not exclude the use of the other but rather the different forms of action are often considered as reciprocally complementary, within a

complex repertoire. On the other hand, the recognition of the need to change individual lifestyles might actually imply more, rather than less, commitment to political action.

In addition, lifestyle change as a goal does not automatically correspond to lifestyle change as a form of action. For example, climate strikers might think that climate change will only be mitigated when people stop using cars and planes, but at the same time, they might also be convinced that individual lifestyle changes depend on policy choices, such as investment in public transport. Furthermore, FFF participants are also often active in other social movement organisations and social movements. Research on social movements has noted that collective action is increasingly structured around multiple belongings (della Porta 2005). Young climate strikers might think that climate change should be primarily addressed through individual lifestyle choices but still consider political claim-making unavoidable when dealing with other issues, such as class, race or gender.

Of particular interest for research on youth activism is that for youngpeople climate strikes are not an ephemeral episode of political participation in a pathway geared towards the exclusive expression of lifestyle-centred action. Rather, they go hand in hand with other forms of conventional and unconventional politics and may prove to be an entry point into the realm of political participation for a generation of young people, or at least for its most politically engaged component, as is also demonstrated by the changes that took place between the March and September 2019 demonstrations documented in this study. Climate strikers do act in a depoliticised context, which inevitably influences their choices; yet, within this context, they do participate in politics, beyond the strike itself.

Further investigation is needed in order to understand why the youngest cohort of the FFF protesters surveyed as part of this research considered lifestyle changes to be crucial but had not (yet?) fully embraced them. Research on the process of socialisation to the movements' values through the participation of young people, which most often takes place during their first experience with protest, is particularly important in order to understand the contentious politics of the new generation. In this direction, it is essential to combine surveys with research based on qualitative methods that examine young activists, their attitudes and their behaviours. Discontinuities across countries and context-specific dynamics should also be further explored. In addition, protestors are quite a particular sub-population; to what extent our arguments about the age and participation of FFF activists translate to the general population remains an open empirical question.

These caveats notwithstanding, our results have contributed to a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between different repertoires of action: it would indeed seem that reusable water bottles and street barricades are much more mutually compatible than expected among (young) climate strike participants.

Notes

1. 'Repertoire of collective action' is the expression used to describe the toolbox on which collective actors draw. From the French Revolution onwards, it has essentially been based on the expression of claims in public events that address public authorities (Tilly 1978).
2. In order to acknowledge the relevance of young people in climate governance and following on from the United Nations Youth Climate Summit held in New York in 2019, the UN launched the first COP-related event specifically dedicated to young activists from September 28th to 30th 2021. The event took place in Milan with the title 'Youth4Climate: Driving Ambition' and

consisted of working group activities and a final debate involving all 400 young delegates and ministers attending the Pre-COP26.

3. Caught in the Act of Protest: Contextualising Contestation (CCC) was an international collaborative research project that surveyed 12,049 participants in 61 demonstrations in seven Western European countries (Belgium, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom) between 2009 and 2012. https://protestsurvey.eu
4. The eight items in the political participation scale were: 'contacted a politician, government, or local government official', 'signed a petition/public letter', 'donated money to a political organisation or group', 'worn or displayed a campaign badge/sticker', 'raised awareness for a political issue via social media', 'joined a strike (other than today's Climate Strike)', 'taken part in direct action (such as: blockade, occupation, civil disobedience)' 'taken part in a demonstration (other than today's Climate Strike)'. The eight items included in the lifestyle participation index were: 'boycotted certain products', 'gave up a trip by plane for political, ethical or environmental reasons', 'deliberately bought products for political, ethical or environmental reasons', 'changed your diet for political, ethical or environmental reasons', 'consumed less products altogether for political, ethical or environmental reasons', 'reused products like bottles and plastic bags for political, ethical or environmental reasons', 'reduced energy use in your household for political, ethical or environmental reasons', 'bought second-hand goods (such as clothes, bikes, phones, etc.) for political, ethical or environmental reasons'.
5. The choice of items for the political scale was based on consolidated literature (Vráblíková 2014; Quaranta 2013; Hooghe and Marien 2013; Bazurli and Portos 2021; Pirro and Portos 2021). To build the lifestyle scale a similar logic was replicated, partially relying on the extant literature (Vitell and Muncy 2005; Stolle, Hooghe, and Micheletti 2005).
6. As addressed in the second section of the article, the politicisation and de-politicisation of lifestyle-centred forms of action is an object of debate and analysis in social science. The distinction between 'political' and 'lifestyle' forms of action that are used in the empirical section of this article does not imply denying the politicisation of lifestyle action that is, indeed, at the core of this work. For reasons of simplicity and brevity, the word 'political' is used here to identify collective claim-based forms of action, that fit the definition of politicisation as a process in which people mark something as political, moving an issue from the status of an individual private concern, which calls for individual private solutions, to that of a matter of a shared polity, which implies contention and deliberation (Luhtakallio 2012), in a more straightforward sense than individual lifestyle-centred forms of action.
7. Dummy values were also created for each European country where the event could have taken place as well as for the FFF event (March 2019 = 0; September 2019 = 1).
8. A dummy value was created for gender (1 = female, 0 = male). A categorical variable was created that measures job status (1 = full-time job; 2 = part-time job, 3 = student, 4 = unemployed, 5 = other), with being in a full-time job as the baseline category.
9. Three different five-point Likert scales were used to measure agreement (from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree') with the following items: 'children should be taught to obey authority' 'Government should redistribute income from the better off to those worse off' 'my participation can have an impact on public policy'.

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