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Youth and crime related political claims in comparative perspective

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Abstract

This article analyses youth collective activism in relation to crime and violence in the context of long-term dominance of “moral panics” discourse, where young people are often framed as a “threat” and “problem”. While many prior studies focus on media presentation of youth in single countries, we investigate how youth actors themselves make political claims related to crime and violence, and take a comparative perspective on this question. Based on a unique data on youth related political claims from the newspapers of nine European countries – France, Greece, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden and the UK, we demonstrate that youth are rarely present in the public discussions about crime and violence, especially in the countries where youth actors face restricted discursive opportunities in the print media. The dominant “adult view” in claims about crime and violence often connect youth to diverse social problems and attribute blame to youth more often than to adults; the claims made by youth do not make such a difference in blame attribution.

Keywords: moral panics, blame attribution, discursive opportunities

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Introduction

Since the 1980s, there has been a significant discussion about the increasing levels of youth criminality and violence in the U.S. and in Western Europe (Estrada et al. 2001; Dorfman and Schiraldi 2001). The alarm in media and the discourse of political actors continued even after the real numbers of youth crime actually dropped, contributing to a situation labelled as a “moral panics” (Cohen 1972[2011]). Amongst many different ways to understand the term (see Krinsky 2016), it refers to a trend of dehumanizing youth, arguing that young people are a threat and their deviant behaviour should be disciplined by adults and police (Thurlow 2007). The biased media reporting of youth crime and violence did not just lead to exaggerated fear for (youth)crime among adults, but it also resulted in moves towards more restrictive juvenile justice systems (Best 1999; Benekos and Merlo 2008), and has been disempowering young people. Interestingly, however, the majority of studies investigating the overreporting of youth crime in the newspapers also tend to neglect youth actors and only focus on media actors – journalists and editors (Altheide 2009, Devlin 2006, Gordon 2018, Lepianka 2015, Hawdon et al. 2016, Ruigrok et al. 2017). This is in contrast to Cohen’s ground-breaking study “Folk Devils and Moral Panics” (1972[2011]), where he looked at the roles of the journalists, politicians, criminal justice officials, as well as youth organizations in fuelling moral panics over British youth subcultures in the media.

While media’s narratives of youth might not have changed, and there still is disproportional reporting of crime and violence, we argue that by looking only at the adult’s perspectives in the media we get the distorted picture of public discussion. There is increasing scholarship of emerging youth justice movement that mobilizes particularly against the structural and cultural practices which oppress youth (Peterson 2009, Warren and Kupscznk 2016). There is also evidence for youth political, often in protest form, activism is increasing (Grasso 2018). Thus, we suggest that the analysis of public discourse about youth related crime and violence should

include both the adult actors, as well as youth actors such as youth organizations, student movements and other youth led groups. Certainly, all these groups might not have an equal opportunity for participating in the construction of public narrative of youth related crime and violence. Prior studies on social movements have shown, that groups facing restricted discursive opportunities, such as unemployed or religious minorities, participate less in the public sphere (Giugni 2008, Cinalli & Giugni 2013). This happens because the dominant mass media discourse indicates that political actions of these groups would have little public impact. Prior studies about youth related media presentation, specially in relation to crime and violence, refer to relatively few discursive opportunities for young people in the mainstream print media, but do not provide a comparative analysis. Thus, we ask how much space youth actors making the crime and violence related claims get in different European countries, and whether their claims reflect the adults' "moral panics" kind of narrative of blaming (other) young people.

Today, little is known about the space the youth movements are given to express their views in the European public sphere, because media studies usually focus on framing of the story rather than the actors behind it. Political claim analysis¹ which does pay attention to diverse groups making claims in public sphere have not either distinguished youth and adults nor focused much on issues of crime and violence. We aim to fill this research gap by investigating how different adult and youth actors are in making political claims about youth related crime and violence in the mainstream newspapers of the European public sphere.

For better understanding the youth related "moral panics", it is also important to know which actors actually attribute blame to youth in the context of crime and violence – adults or other

¹ Political claim-making, here, refers to strategic interventions, either verbal or non-verbal, in the public space made by a given actor on behalf of a group and which bears on the interests or rights of other groups (Koopmans and Statham 1999).

young people, and which actors rather raise the issue of police violence against youth. After years of dominant image of youth as “the problem” and adults (especially state actors) always blaming youth (Wellman et al. 2017), many youth organizations might have adopted the same narrative when condemning the violent/criminal events (Cohen (1972[2011])). On the other hand, youth specific studies have shown that youth perspective of violence can also differ from the one of adults (Chonody et al. 2013).

To investigate youth presence and which actors predominantly blame youth in the public discussion about youth related crime and violence, we analyse the content and blame attribution of political claims made by adult and youth actors in five major newspapers of nine European countries: France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK. Although it is known that the negative picture of youth in European public sphere prevails (Aldridge and Cross 2008, Gordon 2018, Levinsen and Wien 2011, Wayne et al. 2008), we test if youth actors’ claims on crime and violence are more present in the countries with less restricted discursive opportunities or more positive public discourse towards young people.

The article is set up as follows. First, we introduce prior research about perspectives of youth related crime and youth activism regarding crime and violence. Second, we describe the data collection and coding of the most important variables, and finally analyse the material by paying attention to the differences between young activists and adults - state actors and civil society activists, as well as the cross-country differences. Out of the studied 4 500 claims, about 15% focused on issues related to crime and violence, and we show that there are clear cross-national variations.² However, the analysis demonstrates the clear dominance of “adult views”

² Further details about data collection, included newspapers and the descriptive details of this data are provided in the EYRYKA Work Package 2 Integrated Report (2018) Political Claims Analysis, see <https://www.unige.ch/sciences-societe/euryka/files/4515/3854/9194/WP2Report-1.pdf>

and tendency to attribute blame to young people when adult actors make crime and violence related political claims.

Framing youth related crime and violence

Youth violence and juvenile crime have been part of many political and public debates, especially during the time of “crisis” rates of these crimes in many countries (Welch et al. 2002). Even though *juvenile crime* actually declined, the number of *convicted juveniles* increased and intensive discussions about youth violence continued in the media (Estrada 2001, Gordon 2018, Devlin 2006). Choen’s study (1972 [2011]) related negative media reporting about specific youth subculture and the following exaggerated reaction by politicians to a term “moral panics”. Other scholars add that there is a kind of “vicious circle” where the media’s over-reporting of crime feeds fear among public, that in turn is used by politicians to argue for further punitive regulations which eventually “increase” youth crime (e.g., Hall et al. 1978, Estrada 2001). One example of this process are the opinion polls from the early 2000s in the U.S., where public expressed increasing fear over juvenile crime despite the fact that the actual crime rate among youth had declined (Dorfman and Schiraldi 2001).

On the other hand, the media picture and logic have changed since the early studies of “moral panics” in the 1960s-70s (Hier 2019). Some studies have found evidence for positive framing of youth, although this often applies for other issues than crime and violence (Levinson and Wien 2011, Liepanka 2015). This change has encouraged scholars to call for revisions in “moral panics” approach, paying special attention on a broader set of actors than journalists and editors, and particularly including the perspectives of youth themselves (McRobbie and Thornton 1995). While there are not many studies which actually include youth perspective in terms of examining what youth actors say in the media, a few existing ones have shown that young people lack voice in such context and are not able to influence the image of themselves

(Liepanka 2015). The consequences of this trend are broad – not only in terms of policies and public perceptions, but also the self-esteem and perceived empowerment of youth (Gordon 2018). Therefore, all reports about low perceived political efficacy and declined participation in politics among young people (e.g., Dalton 2000) should not come as a surprise.

However, the recent empirical evidence demonstrates that youth is not disengaged. Young people are just more active in contentious politics, that is in protests, rather than in conventional politics like elections and political parties (Toole et al. 2003, Fisher 2012, Grasso 2018). Youth mobilize also in emerging youth justice movements, paying particular attention to the mobilization against police violence and school-shootings in the U.S. (Goddard and Myers 2017) or juvenile crime in more general (Peterson 2009). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that in addition to adults – journalists, politicians, bureaucrats, and police, organized youth are also gaining visibility and space to express their opinion in the media. We do not know yet whether the claims of these youth actors reflect more positive visions of youth.

Actually, Cohen (1972[2011]) already gave some evidence against it, when reporting that some youth organizations in the UK denounced the use of violence by other youth groups in their letters sent to the newspaper by using the following words: ‘Just what sort of corkscrew mind finds enjoyment from such a twisted activity as smashing up shop windows, car windows, scooters and such? It’s almost unbelievable, isn’t it?’ (p.72). This reaction resembles rather the discourse of the adults, but it is also likely that these youth actors had some other interventions and here we are particularly interested in the interventions which are defined as political claims. That is the “strategic action in the public sphere that consists of the purposive and public articulation of political demands, calls to action, proposals, criticism, or physical attacks, which actually or potentially affect the interests or integrity of the claimants and/or other collective actors” (Koopmans et al. 2005: 24). More specifically, we focus on the political claims about

youth related crime and violence, as these are the most typical claims in the “moral panics” discourse.

Certainly, a diverse set of adult and youth actors are making numerous such claims and only some of them receive media attention, because the access to regular media is controlled by gatekeepers (Schoemaker and Vos 2009). For example, in the case of Northern Ireland it has been shown that journalists, politicians and youth themselves note in the focus group interviews that youth actors have little access to the exposure in newspapers (Gordon 2018). Hence, youth actors have low visibility in the media and face restricted *discursive opportunities*, that is, low chances that their messages will influence public discourse (Koopmans & Olzak 2004). These discursive opportunities in turn influence the making of political claims. For example, Giugni (2008) showed that claim making by unemployed was more frequent in the context of less restrictive discursive opportunities. Thus, we expect something similar to be present for young people: while in general we hypothesize that youth actors will be much less present in the making of crime and violence related political claims than adults, this “imbalance” would be more visible in the countries where youth has restricted discursive opportunities (Hypothesis 1).³ The nine countries under observation – France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK – have diverse media systems and varying traditions of news reporting (Boomgarden et al. 2013). However, prior studies have not measured discursive

³ Scholars of social movements often note that grievances play an important role for mobilization (Buechler 2004). If we assume that juvenile crime is a grievance, then one could argue that in the countries with higher juvenile crime rates youth mobilization or claim making about crime and violence would also be more active than in the countries with little juvenile crime. Such a hypothesis, however, cannot be tested because there is no sufficient empirical comparative data about juvenile crime rates in Europe (Campistol & Aebi 2018).

opportunities available for youth actors and here we will apply the same method as used by Giugni (2008) for unemployed, that is, we will measure the restrictiveness of discursive opportunities by evaluating the position (negative, neutral, positive) of political claims towards youth. This is further explained in the method's section below.

Naming and blaming

The proportion of crime and violence related political claims that are made by youth actors do not, however, provide us the full picture of “moral panics” discourse in the European public sphere. For example, “[Y]outh may be regarded as both at risk and a source of risk in many moral panics” (Thompson 1998:43). Thus, one needs to look at the content of the claims made by different youth and adult actors. The focus group interviews by Gordon (2018) showed that, while adults – journalists and politicians - often diagnose the problem of crime and violence via problematic youth, focusing primarily on *crimes committed by youth*, youth actors raise the issue of *crime committed against youth* (e.g., police violence). The recent studies about youth justice movements and its reactions to police violence show that crime committed against youth has really become part of public discussions in some countries (Pickard 2018). McRobbie and Thornton (1995) even suggest that “folk devils” (here youth) might even find support from other, for example adults dominated civil society, groups. In the empirical analysis, we expect to find that political claims about youth related crime and violence focus on crime committed *by*, as well as *against*, youth, and that youth actors make more frequently claims about crimes and violence committed against youth than by youth (Hypothesis 2).

In addition to the specific by and against antagonism, much of the media reporting and political claims focus also on related themes where youth or children are described *as victims as well as offenders*. Gordon's (2018) content analysis of Northern Ireland's newspapers shows that much of such discussion focuses on drugs, underage alcohol consumption, and various forms of anti-

social behaviour (including terrorism). In most of these cases the blame was attributed to youth by journalists (Ibid.). Thus, even if political claim makers do not clearly focus on crime committed by youth, they still can feed into the “moral panics” discourse by drawing attention to the situations which are “problematic” for youth. We will account for this option in the analysis too and expect to find that adult actors raise such political claims more frequently than youth actors (Hypothesis 3).

Finally, the main part of the “moral panics” process is, however, the allocation of blame; some actors blame society – schools and social workers - for not providing youth some proper opportunities to avoid criminal behaviour, while other actors blame youth themselves – their laziness or selfishness (Cohen (1972 [2011])). Gordon (2018) showed that youth actors set blame for negative media framing of youth on adults – to media and politicians, while journalists and politicians often raised the issues of responsibility of youth themselves and the community, but they also blamed some other adult actors such as tabloid media. Based on this prior knowledge, we expect to find that youth actors are more likely to blame different sets of adult actors (for example police), while adult actors who make crime and violence related political claims would be more likely to blame youth (Hypothesis 4).

Due to the general negative media framing of youth related crime and violence, the cross-country differences in respect of the content and blame attribution are expected to be rather small. Most likely, in the countries with less restricted discursive opportunities, youth-friendly claims i.e. these which rather refer to crime committed against youth than by youth will be more dominant, and blame attribution on youth actors would be less frequent than in countries with more restricted discursive opportunities for youth.

Data on youth related political claims

In order to describe the discussions of youth related crime and violence in the European public sphere and test our hypotheses, we have conducted a systematic content analysis of five newspapers in the above mentioned nine countries over the period of 2010-2016 (details in EYRYKA Work Package 2 Integrated Report 2018). The method of data-collection and coding follows the best practice of political claims-making analysis (Koopmans and Statham 1999), where in contrast to media studies the focus is on the strategic intervention of the actor (as presented in the media). Hence, we do not look at the discourse or dominant narratives in the news-reporting, but pay attention to the authors and content, as well as the targets of political claims. The specific interest of political claim analysis is the collective actor making the claim, so our investigation deals with youth as a group. This might be a limitation, as Levinsen and Wien (2011) show, on basis of media analysis, that youth in contemporary media is addressed more as individuals than groups. Additionally, one could argue that fewer people read newspapers today and youth actors in particular would rather consume on-line media. On the other hand, for the case of Netherlands, Liepanka (2015) has shown that established newspapers are less likely to provide biased reporting about youth related crime and violence than tabloids or on-line media. It is also likely that political decision-makers in charge of making changes in juvenile justice systems still read newspapers and therefore this channel of information would still be politically relevant.

Data collection took place in two phases. First, we searched for all articles which mentioned the words “youth”, “young people”, “students” and “teenagers” in the respective languages of the nine countries. This means that we *only* looked for political claims in the articles that mention young people. Second, a random sample of articles which were listed after keyword search was taken by each country team and political claims were coded until we reached to 100 political claims per newspaper in each country. This generated 4500 political claims in total,

though after excluding some unclear cases, our dataset includes 4491 youth related political claims. All claims were coded on basis of their primary issue of concern and the dominant issues raised by different actors: education (33%), welfare and social benefits (14%), and employment and socio-economic issues (13%).

In order to extract *the crime and violence related claims*, we have looked for the claims that were coded as referring to the issues of violence and abuse (e.g., claims about verbal abuse and bullying) claims about drug trafficking, substance use and misuse, claims referring to law and order (e.g., juvenile crime, policing youth) and claims about human trafficking, extremism and terrorism. All together, these make 669 crime and violence related claims, which form **15%** of all claims and the percentages range from 4% in Greece to 24% in the UK. We turn to country comparisons below (examples are listed in the Appendix).

We also indicated which actors made each political claim, differencing primarily between youth and adults. The category *youth actors* involve all young people, students and youth related civil society organizations, and the coding relies on the formulation of the newspapers. Thus, if the newspaper article which included the claim states that the actor was young without giving any age reference, we have coded the actor as young. The *adult actors*, refer to state actors such as the ones with executive and legislative powers, this also include political parties, police and judicial actors. Here we also add civil society actors that are not directly related to youth (e.g., trade unions), and actors from the education sector (e.g., schools, teachers). In the whole dataset, 21% of the claims were made by youth actors and the rest of the political claims were made by adults; about half of these were made by state actors. In respect the crime and violence related claims, there is also a significant difference between youth and non-youth, as young people make 17% of such political claims and the rest is made by adult actors. We turn to country differences and content of these claims below.

Measuring discursive opportunities

We follow Giugni's (2008) approach to measure the restrictiveness of discursive opportunities with the help of the same political claim data, but use now all kinds of claims that had youth as an object. Object refer to the group possibly affected by the realisation of claim and 60% of all the claims had youth as the object (details in EYRYKA Work Package 2 Integrated Report 2018). For each claim we also coded the position of the claim towards its object – here it refers to the policy position of claims towards youth. All claims which implied some deterioration of the rights, position or opportunities for youth received the code -1, the claims which were neutral got the code 0, and the claims which enlarged the benefits, position or opportunities of youth received the code +1 (details in appendix, Table A1).

Figure 1 demonstrates that in the country with generally more open discursive opportunities for youth, that is the larger measure for position variable, the proportion of crime and violence related political claims is smaller (correlation -0.68). Making youth related political claims about crime and violence is more common in the countries, where political claim making in the mainstream print media has a more negative discourse towards youth in general. While this correlation is driven by the extreme cases of the UK and Greece, it fits with the results of many media studies which report about the negative framing of youth in the UK (e.g., Wayne et al. 2008).

[Insert Figure 1 somewhere here]

Varying claim making by youth and adults

Our first hypothesis proposed that youth are generally making fewer political claims about crime and violence than adult actors, and that this difference is more visible in the countries where youth face more restricted discursive opportunities. Indeed, while youth actors make

about 21% of all claims, they make only 17% of the crime and violence related claims and adult actors' dominance is clear. The cross-national variations is also significant: Figure 2 shows how more open discursive opportunities are related to the larger presence of youth actors in making crime and violence related claims (correlation 0.72).

[Inset Figure 2 somewhere here]

Partially this relationship is driven by a few (only 22) crime and violence related political claims made in Greece, where also the difference between the proportion of claims made by youth and adult actors do not significantly differ from each other. Still, there is a clear dominance of adult made claims, suggesting that the years-long discourse of “moral panics” have resulted in the situation where youth actors either do not mobilize much in respect of the crime and violence or that the existing youth activism does not find its way to the mainstream print media. Considering the demonstrated correlation between claim making and discursive opportunities, as well as the general protest activism of youth during the observed period in many European countries (Sloam 2014), it is likely that gatekeeping (by adults) explains much of this difference and future studies focusing on other media platforms, such as social media, would find different results.

Content and blame attribution

The content analysis of political claims about crime and violence is based on the categorization of these claims into four: (1) focusing on crime or violence *committed by* young people, (2) focusing on crime and violence *committed against* young people, (3) claims which relate youth to issues of homelessness, substance (ab)use, extremism, addiction to gaming and carelessness in traffic but that do not clearly state whether it is *by or against youth* – and finally (4) *other* law and order related topics which did not fall into any category above. The last could be, for

example a claim referring to the police's positive comments about protesting youth, statements about lack of security in some city, comments in respect of school bullying or young girls stating that they do not want to participate in a beauty competition because of the threat to be treated "instrumentally".

Of the examined 669 crime and violence related claims, 30% are about crime and violence *committed against youth*, and 28% about crime and violence *committed by youth*, while quarter (25%) of the claims focused on issues which related youth to addiction, radicalization or homelessness or crime committed both by and against youth. The remaining 16% of the claims did not fall into any of these categories. If we consider that the claims raising the issues of crime and violence committed by youth as well as the ones relating youth to diverse social problems, there is a slight majority (53%) of the claims focusing on "problematic youth". This confirms the continued presence of "moral panics" discourse and Table 1 shows that this is particularly used by adult actors.

[Insert Table 1 somewhere here]

The results in Table 1 do not provide, however, support to our second hypothesis which expected that youth actors make more claims about crime against than by minors. Without relevant statistics about crimes committed against or by minors, it is hard to assess the lack of claims referring to crimes committed against youth, but one could also expect that the lacking discursive opportunities discourage such claim making. We find more support for the hypothesis 3, as adult actors refer more frequently to problematic issues such as drug abuse or terrorism (27% versus 15% of claims made by youth). There are also some cross/country differences, but these are not significant enough due to small number of cases in each category. Finally, we look at blame attribution. Although adults often take up the issue of violence committed by minors in their political claims, it does not necessarily mean that youth is always

blamed for crimes. Blame attribution is examined by analysing which actors have been targeted by the claims about crime and violence, and whether the claim maker actually attributes any blame to this target. For example, there could be a claim which addresses young people and blames them for increasing crime rates or general instability in the city or a claim where youth actors target police and blame them for violence against asylum seekers. Our results show that claim making in the newspapers is not used for “talking to” youth, as 78% of all crime and violence related claims addressed adult actors and the rest addressed youth (the proportions are the same for all kinds of claims). Even youth actors themselves only address young people in 15% of their crime and violence related claims.

Blame attribution was present only in one third of the claims in our total sample (34% of 4491 claims), but expectedly, blaming was much more common in the case of crime and violence related claims (42%, examples of such blame attribution are given in appendix). Moreover, different actors - youth or adult actors, attribute blame to the targeted youth or adult groups differently (see Figure 3). Adult actors who make crime and violence related claims which target youth attribute blame on these youth actors in almost half of the cases (49%), while when they target other adults the blame is attributed only in 35% of the cases. Youth actors, on the other hand, attribute blame more frequently and particularly on adults – 60% of the claims that address adults also attribute blame to them; targeted youth is blamed less frequently (53%).

[Insert Figure 3 somewhere here]

This provides support to hypothesis 4, and the situation would be even more clear when one compares the claims which do and do not focus on crime and violence. Only 16% of the claims which do not focus on crime and violence (e.g., education, health-care, political activism) that are made by adults and address youth attribute blame, while this ratio is almost *triple* (49%) in the case of crime and violence related claims. State actors – those representing government,

parliament, political parties, or bureaucracy and police – attribute blame on youth in their crime and violence related claims more often (57%) than other adult actors (33%). This all is clear evidence of continued “moral panics” discourse and confirm the findings of Gordon (2018:214) “children and young people are convenient scapegoats”. There are too few cases in specific countries for making statistically significant country comparisons, **so we suggest future studies to look at this issue more specifically.**

Conclusions

Despite many studies about “moral panics” and negative framing of youth in the context of news about crime and violence, the frequent mobilization of youth protests in relation to the recent economic crisis and the emerging youth justice movements, motivated our investigation of how different adult and youth actors make youth related political claims about crime and violence. While prior research tends to focus on single case studies and analyse the framing used by journalists and editors, we contribute to the research by providing a comparative analysis of claims made by adults as well as youth in the print media in nine European countries. We expected that in the countries where mainstream media provides more discursive opportunities for young people – where youth can expect that their mobilization has a public impact, youth actors would also be more visible in making crime and violence related political claims. Our empirical analysis of a random sample of political claims made in the mainstream print media in nine European countries during the period of 2010 to 2016 did find evidence for such a relationship. Youth actors make political claims about crime and violence more frequently in Germany and Poland – countries where the general youth related political claims are rather positive, than in the UK, Sweden or Switzerland, where discursive opportunities for youth in the mainstream media were more restricted.

However, our other expectations about youth actors raising more the issues of crimes committed against minors did not find support. Furthermore, the major findings of the presented study confirm the results of many critical media analysis which argue for the continued dominance of youth related “moral panics”. Youth actors are very little represented in political claim making about crime and violence in the mainstream media, and the content of their claims are often similar to the ones made by adult actors - both focus rather equally on crimes committed by as well as against minors. Although there is somewhat stronger tendency for adult actors to make their youth related political claims about issues such as drugs, alcohol, bullying or terrorism, the major difference between youth and adult actors appears in the case of blame attribution. Adults, especially those representing different state institutions, attribute blame to youth significantly more frequently than other adult actors and this is particularly the case in crime and violence related claims. Similar claims made by youth actors, on the other hand, tend to attribute blame to adults only a bit more frequently than to other youth actors.

The findings that youth and adult actors raise relatively similar political claims about crime and violence via mainstream print media suggest that even the increased youth activism might not change much the general media framing of youth. Even though youth in many examined countries were politically active and did face police violence in the context of protests related to economic crisis, only a few claims made by youth actors about police violence were visible in our data from Spain or the UK. Moreover, regardless some cross-national variations, the “adult view” and their blaming of youth in relation to crime and violence in the print media appeared rather universal. Although we have not examined the political consequences of this process, prior studies relate such a biased media reporting of youth related crime to the adoption of more punitive measures and increased numbers of convicted young people (see e.g., Gordon 2018). In a long run, this process further restricts discursive opportunities for youth and it is likely to hinder rather than promote youth political activism.

Still, it must be noted that the caveat of our analysis is the focus on mainstream newspapers, where youth mobilization is probably not as much present as we could find in the digital public sphere, especially social media. Future research should pay more attention to this. It might be that claims about crime and violence in social media would also focus more frequently on crimes committed against youth than we have shown in the case of claims collected from the newspapers. Hence, while the “moral panics” tendencies or the biased focus on youth and crime still dominates the European mainstream print media, the picture might change due to the opened opportunities for young people via social media.

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Figures and Tables

Figure 1. The proportion of all crime and violence related claims and the mean position of claims with youth as an object

Figure 2. The proportion of crime and violence related claims made by *youth* actors and the mean position of claims with youth as an object

Figure 3. Targeted actors and blame attribution in crime related claims over adult and youth actors

Table 1. Content of crime and violence related claims made by youth and adult actors

	Youth actors		Adult actors	
Violence <i>against</i> minors	35	31%	166	30%
Violence <i>by</i> minors	37	33%	153	28%
Connection to substance use, terrorism, homelessness	17	15%	151	27%
Other	25	22%	85	15%
Total / Percentage	114	100%	555	100%

Appendix

Table 1A. Descriptive data of the dataset of youth related political claims

Country	Number of articles found in the search ⁴	Number of coded claims*	Number of <i>crime & violence</i> related claims	Mean position of claims with youth as an object (values -1; 0; +1)
France	332 479	507	100	0.59
Germany	256 636	495	57	0.66
Greece	421 772	490	22	0.63
Italy	531 139	503	87	0.52
Poland	466 441	478	56	0.56
Spain	377 824	502	57	0.60
Sweden	200 228	498	85	0.38
Switzerland	220 264	503	72	0.42
UK	264 544	515	133	0.36
Total	3 071 327	4491	669	N=4102

Note: * we include only claims from the nine countries in the study (initial dataset included 9 claims with unknown country of origin)

A2. Examples of claims about crime and violence

Paula Honkonen-Schoberth, chairwoman of the German Child Protection Association, criticized boarding schools for not dealing with child molestation enough and, for the sake of their reputation, sweeping the topic under the rug (Die Tageszeitung, 2010-03-10).

A representative of the Chancellery of President [in Poland] said to the press that the new law concerning public meetings was introduced to protect peaceful demonstrations from hooligan youth (Gazeta Polska Codziennie, 2012-10-24).

The Ombudsman for Children in Sweden, Fredrik Malmberg, criticized the Swedish Customs Service for their handling of drug trafficking cases and situations where children are being mistreated; said it is necessary that they improve their routines for notifying the social services in these cases (Dagens Nyheter, 2016-09-19).

⁴ Every country team searched for articles that included the words “youth”, “student” and “teenager” in their own language in five national newspapers

A3. Examples of blame attribution in crime and violence related claims

“Chris Hossack, Conservative councillor for Brentwood, said that young girls were putting themselves at risk of sex attacks by wearing "scantily clad" clothes. He blamed the influence of the reality TV show ‘The only way is Essex.’” [UK, 15.08.2013]

“Thomas Andersson, Swedish Road Administration, comments on traffic accidents during the Easter weekend and says in the media that young people and alcohol often are involved in the accidents.” [Sweden, 29.03.2010]

“The student committee of the University of Göttingen criticizes violent behaviour of the police at an event and makes criminal complaints against civil servants” [Germany, 14.01.2012]

“Student activists’ campaign "Plane Stupid" takes legal proceedings against the police, following what they claim were "illegal kettling tactics" by the Metropolitan police against an entirely peaceful protest in the capital.” [UK, 23.03.2011]