

# Left or Right?: The Competing Politics of Europe's Radical Party Families

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## **Abstract**

Both radical right and left parties are on the rise across Europe. Previous research has shown similarities between voters of radical parties. However, prior analyses have focused on voters of one radical party, while ignoring the other. In turn, differences between radical party voters are inferred rather than proven through qualitative evidence. In this study, I examine support for radical right and left parties across the same years and nine European countries, in order to understand why voters prone to radicalism support either the left or right. I find that while voters of both parties share commonalities, they differ in their main motivations. Radical right supporters can be characterized as individual's upset with their current socioeconomic status and immigration. In contrast, supporters of the radical left tend to be driven by a strong ideological perspective and less so by issue grievances.

## **Keywords**

Radical Left, Radical Right, Vote Choice, Europe

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## Introduction

In recent years, radical left and right parties have gained significant electoral support across Europe. The rise of the radical right has made global headlines and sent shockwaves throughout European governments. In the last French Presidential election, Marine Le Pen, leader of the far-right Front National Party, came in second place with over a third of the votes, the highest ever for a Front National candidate. Similarly, radical right parties in the Netherlands (PVV), Germany (AfD), Italy (Lega Nord), and many other European countries vote share has surged. In addition, radical right parties have developed into prominent political forces, causing headaches for establishment parties. However, while most attention has focused on the rise of the radical right there has been a quite emergence of successful radical left parties. Parties such as Syriza in Greece have also gained significant electoral success in recent years. In the 2009 National elections, Syriza received a meager 4.6% of the vote, however, by 2015 Syriza had increased its vote share to 36%, winning more seats than any other party and becoming the leader of the coalition government. In addition, radical left parties in Finland, Denmark, and Norway have become relevant coalition partners within the last decade.

The rise of both radical party families presents uncertainties and obstacles for the future of Europe and the current political status-quo, which is why it's important to understand what motivates voters of radical parties. Support for the radical right, and to a smaller extent the radical left, has been investigated, however, significantly less is known about why voters support one radical party as opposed to the other. Previous research has shown both radical parties to be Eurosceptic (Hooghe 2002), populist (March and Mudde 2005), and draw support from voters of lower economic classes (Visser and Lubbers 2014; Werts and Scheepers 2012). However, previous research has focused solely on support for either the radical left or right. As a result, explanations for understanding why voters support one radical party in contrast to the other are speculative. The purpose of this study is to understand what drives voters to support the radical left or radical right when they are presented with both options.

First, I discuss the background and characteristics of both radical parties. Next, I outline existing explanations for support of both radical parties and develop theoretical

explanations for what the distinguishing factors motivating voters of both radical parties are. In my analysis, I will compare radical right and left support across the same countries and set of years to understand what is driving voters towards one radical party over the other. I argue that while both parties share similarities in appealing to young people, the non-religious, eurosceptics, and the economically vulnerable radical party voters differ in their main motivations. Individuals who vote for the radical right do so in order to express discontent with their current socioeconomic status and grievances towards immigration. Radical right supporters are not ideological voters, compared to the radical left, but individuals of lower social strata who wish to voice their resentment by voting for the radical right. In contrast, radical left voters are not as motivated by socioeconomic characteristics and grievances but are true believers in the ideological doctrine of the radical left.

### **Radical Backgrounds**

Both radical party families have increasingly gained electoral success across Europe, however, they differ drastically in their underlying ideologies and message they convey to voters. Radical left parties emphasize equality in social and economic life, which includes tolerance towards immigrants and a fearless rejection of capitalism. In contrast, radical right parties articulate strong nationalist rhetoric and hold anti-immigrant beliefs. While both parties hold relatively distinct principles they have also been shown to appeal to similar voters. In turn, it's important to understand why voters find these parties compelling.

Much is already known of the radical right, as it has been studied extensively by previous scholars (Coffé, 2007; Rydgren, 2008; Golder, 2003). However, it is still important to understand the key features of radical right parties. Radical right parties are commonly labeled as nationalist, meaning they emphasize the needs of the nation-state (Mudde 2007, Rydgen 2007). Additionally, radical right parties embrace a racist and xenophobic form of nationalism that can be classified as nativism (Burgoon and Rooduijn 2017). Nativists believe a state should be inhabited solely by individuals of the same native group and other non-native groups should be prohibited from society (Mudde 2007). In recent years, the radical rights nativists beliefs have been on full display with their stark opposition to the large influx of Muslim migrants fleeing conflicts in the Middle East. In addition to being nationalist, radical

right parties are populist in that they represent ‘the people’ against the ‘corrupt elites’ (March and Mudde 2005; Zaslove 2009). One way the radical right deploys its populist rhetoric is through criticism of the EU. Radical right parties label the EU as a collection elites disinterested in addressing the needs of the common people (Rooduijn 2014). While there has been debate regarding consistency across radical right parties scholars, for the most part, agree the radical right can be characterized as a homogeneous party family (Mudde 2007).

The radical left as we know it today emerged from the breakup up of the communist party family after the fall of the Soviet Union. While the collapse of the USSR was disastrous for Communist parties across Europe, it was beneficial in that it allowed these parties to adapt their ideologies and policies. After 1989, these parties were no longer under the influence of the Soviet Union or adherent to extreme Marxist values. As a result, their message became more inclusive than their communist relatives as they attempted to represent working class individuals and middle-class intellectuals, in comparison to just the lower tier wage-earning class (March and Mudde 2005). Radical left parties formed after the fall of the USSR have shifted away from teleological concepts and collectivist attitudes indicative of the former communist party family and have moved toward a greater emphasis on individualization and a specific anti-capitalist message. These parties also benefited from the fall of the USSR as it created a more fertile environment for new radical left parties to grow as communist parties were allowed as national coalition partners, since they were no longer seen as a Soviet threat (March 2011). In addition, new radical left parties have broadened their ideological message to appeal to a larger constituency by supporting environmentalism, feminism, immigrant rights, rights for sexual minorities, and other egalitarian principles. For example, Syriza’s official party emblem is three different colored flags: red, green, and purple, against a white backdrop. The red intends to represent the class struggle, the green support for environmentalism, and the purple support the anti-patriarchy movement, while the white background represents commitment and unity between each of these struggles (Spourdalakis 2013).

While new radical left parties share similar legacies and basic ideological structure there are specific subsets and distinctions in the party family. Radical left parties differ in the strength of a communist identity and organizational structure. Parties such as VAS, a radical

left party in Finland, are what scholars have classified as 'red-greens' (Escalona and Viera 2013). Red-greens are common across Scandinavia and typically consists of communist parties joining forces with green parties because of the strong electoral position of social-democrats across the region. Red-green radical left parties adhere to anti-capitalist values; however, they have also adopted strong pro-environmental and democracy stances, which help them compete electorally with social democrats. In contrast to red-green parties, orthodox communist parties such as the Greek Communist Party (KKE) maintain a traditional conservative communist ideology similar to the former communist party family (Handl 2002; March 2002; Curry and Urban 2003). The KKE supports a 'revolutionary' overthrow of capitalism, in addition to the rejection of liberal democracy. However, radical left parties maintaining traditional communist values, such as the KKE, are not common throughout Western Europe.

While among the radical left there is a certain degree of nuance and differing principles scholars have identified a common ideological framework to justify being thought of as a single party family (Bale and Dunphy 2011; Dunphy 2004; March 2011; March and Mudde 2005). According to March and Mudde, radical left parties are 'radical' in the sense that they reject the underlying socio-economic structure of capitalism. Next, they propose a major redistribution of wealth from existing elites and support alternative economic and political power structures. Lastly, the radical left is 'left' because they identify economic inequality as the underlying feature in all political and social arrangement, and base their principal agenda on support for economic and social rights (March and Mudde 2005).

## **Existing Explanations**

### *Economics*

The role of economic conditions in influencing electoral outcomes has been well established in previous studies. Both radical-left and radical-right parties have been shown to flourish during periods of economic distress. Radical left parties tend to prioritize economic security through social benefits, targeting those of lower economic status. Therefore, it makes sense the radical-left would thrive during economic downturns when those of lower status are hit the hardest. Very little has been done to understand the role macroeconomic

conditions have on radical-left wing party success. Two scholars, March and Rommerskirchen (2012), however, speak now of how the radical left thrives in poor macroeconomic conditions. The authors find radical left-wing parties do better in worse economic climates and benefit from 'globalization anxiety.' However, their research looks at radical left parties from 1990 to 2008, meaning it predates the effect the global economic and eurozone crisis potentially could have had on radical left-wing parties.

At the individual level, unemployed workers, manual workers, and those of lower economic status are more likely to support the radical left (Bell 1997; Visser and Lubbers 2014). Voters typically view parties on the left side of the ideological spectrum as better equipped to deal with unemployment because of their skepticism towards capitalism, so it is intuitive to assume radical left-wing parties are in a position to benefit from high unemployment (Bell 1997; Golder, 2003). Scholars, such as Bell (1997), find that there is a strong relationship between unemployment and support for the radical left in Poland. In addition, Bell (1997) finds that vote shares decreased for candidates who supported neoliberal market-oriented reform policies. Those who are less well-off naturally feel threatened by high levels of unemployment and, as a result, vote for the party that emphasizes the need for job and economic security for those of lower status and higher economic vulnerability. Traditionally, radical left-wing parties are supported by those belonging to the working class because it is to their economic advantage that income differences be reduced (Nieuwbeerta 1995). Support for income redistribution is a key characteristic of radical-left wing parties. However, what differentiates the radical left from typical social democratic parties across Europe is their rejection of capitalism as the underlying economic system (Dunphy 2004). Manual workers are more likely to vote for radical left-wing parties because their professions are commonly displaced because of increases in efficiency and modernization that result from a capitalist system (Visser and Lubbers 2014; Rooduijn 2017). In order to save their job, manual workers turn towards radical left parties who reject capitalism. Additionally, people who are jobless lack basic resources in order to survive, which makes them more likely to support the redistribution of income and additional social benefits, and the choice of voting for the radical left more compelling (Bowyer & Vail 2011; Ooijevaar & Kraaykamp 2005). According to Bowyer & Vail (2011),

radical left voters share similar socioeconomic conditions and lack resources needed to provide for themselves and make a living. In addition, the authors find radical-left voters are not necessarily motivated by ideological extremism, but fundamental attitudes regarding income redistribution and government measures to combat the problem. In summary, those who are unemployed workers, manual workers, and of lower economic status are more likely to support income redistribution and reject capitalism because it is in their own economic interest. As a result, these people should, in theory, support radical-left parties who hold those same views.

While voters tend to associate radical left-wing parties as best fitted to addresses economic concerns, such as inequality and unemployment, previous studies have shown that those of lower economic status are disproportionately represented among voters of the radical-right as well (Norris 2005; Rydgren 2007). However, the underlying reasoning for why voters of lower socioeconomic strata choose radical left versus radical right parties differ. Those who support radical left parties on the basis of economic concerns do so because it is in their economic interest to vote for a party that supports income redistribution and dismisses capitalism as an economic system. However, radical right parties do not hold the same fundamental views regarding capitalism and income redistribution as the radical left. It has been well-established in the literature that immigration and a perceived ethnic threat is a large contributor to the success of the radical right in worse economic conditions. However, scholars have gone beyond immigration and studied how globalization, local economic conditions, and macroeconomic conditions affect radical right support. Previous research has shown that globalization, or the international integration of trade, immigrants, and capital, has contributed to the electoral success of far-right parties in Europe. Swank and Betz (2003) found that the increase of globalization in recent decades has contributed to radical right success. However, globalization's effect on the success of far-right parties is depressed in countries with stronger welfare states because they promote greater economic and political stability for citizens (Swank and Betz 2003). Similarly, other authors have found factors which create a favorable environment for radical right parties to gain support, such as high rates of unemployment can be negated through policy (Jackman and Volpert 1996). In addition, looking at macro-level economic conditions using unemployment data scholars have found a



positive relationship between higher unemployment and greater electoral support for the radical right (Betz, 1994; Givens, 2005). Scholars have also studied how macroeconomic events, such as the 2009 economic crisis, impacted radical right support. Stockemer (2017) found that the crisis had very little influence radical right support and the radical right actually had the strongest gains in areas not affected by the crisis

### *Immigration*

The effect of immigration and anti-immigration sentiments on radical-right party support has been studied extensively. The recent migration crisis and influx of Muslim migrants into Europe has only expanded this branch of literature. Radical right wing parties have capitalized on the migration crisis by using strong anti-immigrant rhetoric to mobilize voters who are skeptical of immigration. Those who have studied immigration and radical-right support universally agree that anti-immigrant attitudes and increases in migration are essential for the electoral success of the radical-right across Europe (Coffé 2007; Rydgren 2008; Ivarsflaten 2008; Golder 2003; Jesuit 2009). Jesuit (2009) finds that as immigration into an area increases, the effect unemployment has on radical-right support becomes positive. According to Jesuit, this result indicates that unemployment is an issue that can be exploited by the radical-right only when a large number of immigrants are present. Jesuit and other authors mostly attributed the relationship between immigration and unemployment to ethnic competition theory. Ethnic competition theory assumes that ethnic groups, who share common economic situations are in direct competition with others for scarce resources and opportunities, which promotes conflict and intergroup antagonistic attitudes (Levine and Campbell 1972). Ethnic group populations typically look for employment in the manual and unskilled labor market areas, which tend to have higher unemployment levels (Kiehl and Werner, 1999). In turn, individuals who hold similar socioeconomic status as ethnic groups feel threatened by ethnic minorities and vote for anti-immigrant radical right parties. Scholars have found that while it is common for radical right parties to use economic and political elitism grievances to mobilize voters, immigration is the only grievance that is mobilized by all successful right-wing populist parties across Europe, indicating immigration is instrumental to radical right success (Ivarsflaten 2008). Unemployed people and unskilled workers are

frequently forced to compete with immigrants for jobs in the labor market. In turn, these voters become more likely to adopt anti-immigrant views and vote for radical right parties which promise to protect the economic interests and jobs of domestic workers (Lucassen & Lubbers 2012).

Scholars have yet to analyze the effect immigration has on radical-left support. Because large immigrants' populations tend to lead to strong support for radical right wing parties it would make intuitive sense that a lack of immigrants would lead to strong radical left wing parties. In addition, studies have shown radical left voters tend to hold egalitarian and altruistic views (Burgoon and Rooduijn 2017; March and Mudde 2005), meaning it is more likely they may be more likely sympathetic towards immigrants. However, radical left voters may hold conflicting attitudes towards immigration. Radical left voters typically share a similar socioeconomic status as immigrants, meaning they will have to compete with immigrants in the job market. In addition, radical left voters desire to reduce economic inequality and their belief that intervention in the economy is necessary to reduce these inequalities means they might have be supportive of limited immigration flows (Mansfield and Mutz 2009). However, while radical left voters' economic views may lead them to adopt anti-immigrant attitudes their beliefs about individuals receiving equal treatment and rights may force them to embrace pro-immigrant beliefs.

### *Euroscepticism*

One of the most salient issues in European politics today is the current performance and function of the European Union (EU). Both the radical left and radical right oppose the current structure of the EU to some extent. Previously, studies have shown that the extreme left and extreme right attitudes towards Euroscepticism can be depicted in U shape (Lubbers and Scheepers 2007). Radical right-wing parties inherently have a distrust of outsiders not living within the sovereign state, for this reason, they oppose the EU on the basis of an invasion of sovereignty and loss of national identity (De Vries and Edwards 2009). In addition, the radical right denounces the democratic legitimacy of the EU and believes democracy lies within the sovereign states, not the European continent as a whole (Rodrigues 2015). Nearly all radical right parties across Europe are in stark opposition to the current structure of the

European Union and believe it should either be transformed or abolished entirely (Mudde 2007). The role Euroscepticism has support for radical right-wing parties has been studied extensively and is thought to be a key component of far-right success. Previous case studies have found a positive relationship between anti-EU views and radical right-wing support (Van der Brug, 2005; Ivarsflaten, 2008). However, other studies have found that while Euroscepticism does contribute to radical right support, it is less significant than other social-political factors such as immigration (Lubbers and Scheepers, 2007; Ivarsflaten, 2008).

While Euroscepticism is typically thought to be a feature of radical right parties, it has also become increasingly common of the left. In contrast to the radical right, radical left parties do not reject the cultural aspects of the EU but oppose the EU on the basis of economic concerns. Radical right parties frequently emphasize the need to “dismantle the EU” while the radical left believes the EU needs a radical transformation (Cavallaro and Flacher 2018). Radical left parties are in opposition to neoliberal integration policies promoted by the EU, which they believe negatively affect the domestic welfare state (De Vries and Edwards 2009). Studies showing the impact Euroscepticism has on radical left support are rather scarce; however, authors who have looked at the relationship have found that while it does positively correlate with radical left support it is a less significant indicator than economic factors, such as unemployment (March and Rommerskirchen 2012). While it is accurate to label all radical right parties as Eurosceptic, the same classification cannot be applied to the radical left. Classifying all radical left parties under the term Eurosceptic is a rather simplified characterization of radical left attitudes. Instead, radical left parties do not share uniform beliefs and values about the exciting nature of the EU, some advocate for complete withdrawal while others support minor institutional reforms (March and Mudde 2005). The radical left generally is supportive of the European project and believes the EU should have some supranational responsibilities; however, they should be limited in scope (Conti and Memoli 2011). In sum, both the radical left and radical right are similar in that they share skeptical views regarding European integration. However, they differ in that the left’s Euroscepticism can be linked to economic security, while the right’s Euroscepticism is driven by a loss of cultural identity, in addition to a supranational assault on national sovereignty.

## *Ideology*

Both radical left and radical right parties historically have a reputation of appealing to disadvantaged socio-economic groups, however, a distinguishing factor between the radical left and radical right is the importance of an ideological framework in their messaging. Voters of both political parties share commonalities in terms of societal and economic status and distrust of political elites. Yet, radical left and radical right voters share very different beliefs regarding social and economic attitudes (Rooduijn and Burgood 2017). In comparison to the radical right, the radical left has been known to emphasize egalitarian and altruistic beliefs in their underlying perspective of the economic and social life (March and Mudde 2005). Nearly all radical left parties share deep-rooted beliefs about economic inequality and attitudes towards capitalism. These parties dismiss the basic economic structure of capitalism and its values and practices. In addition, radical left parties support major redistribution of resources from the current economic and political elites (March and Mudde 2005). Previous research has shown ideological constituency across radical left voters. In Germany, voters of the radical left were found to share common concerns regarding economic inequality and supported government intervention to diminish these inequalities (Ramiro 2014).

In contrast to the radical left, scholars have had a more difficult time finding ideological consistency across radical right parties and voters. Unlike the radical left, the radical right does not conform to a specific foundational doctrine or intellectual tradition (Zaslave 2009). However, one key feature scholars argue is common across all radical right parties is nationalist attitudes. Scholars, such as Mudde (2007), argue that the core concept associated with radical right ideologies is nationalism. However, Mudde classifying nationalism as a political ideology is rather simplistic since it is closer to an emotion than an ideology (Koizumi 1994). The experiences of an individual are shaped by the traditions and doctrines of the group they were born into, in turn, these traditions and doctrines become embedded in one's mental make-up (Handman 1921). Those who hold nationalistic sentiments do so because their ordinary emotions and instincts become attached to a group's culture and heritage, and as these attachments become stronger individuals become more

nationalist (Handman 1921). Nationalism is not a set of values and beliefs, but a connection to a certain place and group of people.

## **Theoretical Explanations**

### *Economics*

Much of the previous research surrounding poor economic conditions and support for radical parties has focused specifically on either the right or left. Previous studies have found that both the radical left and right electoral support increases during periods of economic distress (Bell 1997; Bowyer & Vail 2011; Golder, 2003; March and Rommerskirchen 2012). However, previous works have failed to explain which radical party family benefits the most from poor economic conditions. Radical right-wing parties gather support from those in worse economic predicaments when they blame their poor economic status on immigrants, who they are often forced to compete with for jobs (Lucassen & Lubbers 2012). In turn, voters support radical-right parties to protect their livelihoods. In contrast, radical left voters blame their economic state as a result of a capitalist economic system which creates wealth inequalities. In theory, radical left wing parties should be more appealing to individuals belonging to lower socioeconomic strata (i.e. the unemployed and people of lower incomes). The two main principles of the radical left are reducing income inequality and the rejection of capitalism, which is the factor that causes economic inequality (March and Mudde 2005). In order to reduce wealth disparities, radical left parties propose income redistribution and publicly funded social programs which benefit the working class. For individuals who are unemployed and of lower economic status it is in their direct interests that income inequality is decreased, and income is redistributed. In contrast, many radical right-wing parties do not support income redistribution and reductions in income inequality, and those that do are not nearly as extreme on the issue as the radical left. For these reasons, unemployed persons and those of low incomes should be more supportive of the radical left than the radical right.

*H1: Unemployed people are more likely to vote for radical parties; however, the effect will be large for the radical left, in comparison to the radical right.*

*H2: People who perceive their income as worse are more likely to vote for radical parties; however, the effect will be large for the radical left, in comparison to the radical right.*

### *Euroscepticism*

Of all the factors that contribute to radical left and radical right success, support for the European Union is perhaps the most electorally salient. Both radical left and radical right parties express some degree of dissatisfaction with the current state of the European Union in their rhetoric, and scholars have found elements of Euroscepticism within both party families. Previous studies have found that Eurosceptic attitudes lead to greater radical right support (Lubbers and Scheepers 2007; Ford and Goodwin 2014). However, while the role Euroscepticism has on radical right support has been widely studied little has been to understand the effect of Eurosceptic attitudes on radical left support, particularly at the individual level. March and Rommerskirchen (2012) found Euroscepticism to have a positive effect on radical left electoral success using the country as the level of the analysis. In addition, individuals of lower socioeconomic status, a key consistency for radical left parties, are more likely to be 'globalization losers' (Akkerman and Zaslove 2017). Individuals losing out from globalization may push them away from European Union policies that emphasize increased globalization. Radical left parties have been known to oppose the neoliberal integration policies promoted by the EU and, in turn, this may influence individuals hurt by neoliberal EU economic policies towards the radical left. Historically, the left has also been associated with internationalism and anti-nationalism (March 2011; Minkenberg 1995), this means anti-EU sentiments among radical left voters should be moderated to an extent. In contrast, nationalism and anti-globalization are key characteristics of radical right parties. Since the radical left and radical right parties oppose the current state of the EU to an extent both parties should be an attractive option to those dissatisfied with the EU. However, because the radical rights anti-EU rhetoric is stronger and more nationalist than the radical lefts, I expect Euroscepticism to be a bigger factor for the radical right.

*H3: Individuals who are more skeptical of the EU are more likely to vote for radical parties however, the effect will be large for the radical right, in comparison to the radical left.*

### *Immigration*

Many previous studies have concluded immigration is a key factor in the success of the radical right, however, very little research has been done to understand how the issue of immigration impacts the radical left. Similar to the radical right, many radical left parties hold anti-globalization attitudes, which may mean radical left voters could be skeptical of immigration. However, the radical left doesn't necessarily oppose the social element of globalization, but the neoliberal aspect. In addition, radical left voters typically hold values of equality, equal treatment, and the inclusion of immigrants (Rooduijn and Burgood 2017). Lastly, the left historically has ties to internationalism and anti-nationalism (March 2011; Minkenberg 1995). In contrast, anti-immigrant attitudes are a common characteristic of all successful radical right parties (Ivarsflaten 2008). Furthermore, radical right parties have strong nationalist and anti-internationalist beliefs and have very different attitudes towards newcomers and equality than the radical left. While the radical left and right both share anti-globalization attitudes, they are likely to hold differing beliefs regarding the immigration aspect of globalization.

*H4: (a) Voters who hold anti-immigrant attitudes are more likely to vote for the radical right.  
(b) Voters who hold pro-immigrant attitudes are more likely to vote for the radical left.*

### *Political Dissatisfaction*

Political dissatisfaction and protest are commonly associated as reasons the radical right gains electoral support (Norris 2005, Ivarsflaten 2008, Schumacher and Rooduijn 2012). Instead of voting for radical right parties on the basis of anti-immigrant attitudes, individuals vote for these parties because of distrust in political institutions (Kitschelt 1995). Voters cast protest votes not to achieve policy outcomes, but because of a lack of trust in institutions and politicians to enact solutions to fix problems (van der Brug et. al 2000). These voters look to voice their political dissatisfaction with mainstream politics by voting for an outsider party. While political dissatisfaction has frequently been studied in regard to the radical right, there

has yet to be a study determining how political dissatisfaction contributes to radical left support. Similar to the radical right, the radical left is an outsider party that voices strong discontent with the current political establishment. Protest voters are typically frustrated that in the face of economic modernization and globalization current political elites lack solutions to face these challenges (Betz 1994). The radical left has been known to be a harsh critic of mainstream social democratic parties who support increased globalization and neoliberal economic policies (March and Mudde 2005). The radical left's critique of the mainstream party's pro-globalization policies should make the radical left an attractive option as a protest vote for those who are dissatisfied with the current political establishment and increased globalization. In sum, both radical parties should be intriguing protest vote options because of their status as outsiders, this should allow them to take advantage of dissatisfaction with the current political establishment.

*H5: Voters who are more dissatisfied of political institutions are more likely to vote for radical parties.*

### *Ideology*

The radical left and radical right are similar in that they appeal to population segments of lower socioeconomic status. However, a key difference between parties is a strong ideological foundation in their messaging to these individuals. Scholars universally agree the radical left has an ideological basis which emphasizes equality, equal treatment, and altruistic values in both economic and social life (Burgoon and Rooduijn 2017; March and Mudde 2005). In addition, scholars have found ideological consistency across voters of the radical left (Ramiro 2013). In contrast, scholars have had a difficult time identifying a common ideology of radical right parties. Scholars, such as Mudde (2007), argue that nationalism is the common ideology linking radical right parties together. However, scholars have debated whether nationalism is actually an ideology or just an emotional connection to a certain place (Handman 1921; Koizumi 1994). Radical right parties also lack consistent ideological positions in regard to economic policy. For example, Marine Le Pen, the leader of the National Front, the radical right party in France, has voiced support for a larger welfare state and protectionist



trade policies. However, it is traditional of conservative parties to support smaller welfare states and less government intervention in the economy. In addition, radical right voters have been known to support increased regulation and taxation, but also object to the dismantling of the welfare state (Zaslove 2009). In contrast, radical left voters consistently embrace government intervention in the economy in order to promote egalitarianism and economic security for the poor. Lastly, higher education has been shown to be associated with more ideological views and radical left voters are typically more educated than radical right voters (Rooduijn and Burgood 2017). Because radical left parties have a stronger ideological foundation than the radical right, and radical left voters are more educated than radical right voters I expect ideology to matter more for voters of the radical left.

*H6: Voters of the radical left are more motivated by ideology than radical right voters.*

## **Data and Measurement**

In order to test the hypotheses listed above, I analyze data from eight rounds of the European Social Survey (ESS) from 2002 to 2016. The ESS is a cross-national survey of 32 European countries that is done every two years. The survey is conducted using face to face interviews and respondents are individuals living in European countries that are 15 years or older. For my analysis, I focused on individuals living in counties with both an electorally relevant radical left and radical right party. I define 'electoral relevance' as receiving at least 0.5% vote share, as other scholars have done (Werts and Scheepers 2012). The intent of this study is to understand what factors motivate individuals to vote for a radical left party, instead of a radical right party and vice versa. For this reason, I exclude countries where individuals did not have a choice in voting for both radical parties. Of the countries surveyed in the ESS, nine have electorally relevant radical left and radical right parties, which are summarized in Table 1. Next, I selected individuals who indicated in the survey they voted for either a radical left party or radical right party in the last election.

The selection of radical right parties in this analysis is primarily based on Mudde (2007) classifications. However, in addition, I included the AfD from Germany because it fulfills the criteria outlined by Mudde in his classification of radical right parties, yet was not formed until

after he published. Muddle identifies the core characteristics of a radical right party to be populism, native nationalism, and authoritarianism. The classification of radical left parties is based on March (2011). March defines the radical left as radical in that it rejects capitalism and its underlying values in addition to opposition to any kind of capitalistic profit. Next, these parties are 'left' because they identify wealth inequalities as the foundation of all social and economic arrangements (March 2011).

The outcome variables, vote choice for a radical left or radical right party, are based upon answers from survey respondents<sup>1</sup>. The ESS asks respondents if they voted in the last national election if they answer yes respondents are then asked which party they voted for. Through this question on vote-choice, I created two dichotomous dependent variables representing a vote for either a radical left or a radical right party.

First, in order to ensure my models are not biased, I included several control variables: Age, Gender, Education level, and Religion. In addition, I also used models that included country and year fixed effects. By using the fixed effect model, I am able to control for time-constant omitted variables, such as the institutional structure that may affect vote choice in a given Country. By incorporating these variables into my models not only am I ensuring that my results are unbiased, but I am also able to account for differing structures across countries and years. First, I included the variable gender (0=female; 1=male). Previous research has shown that men are more likely than women to hold radical views, in turn, I control for it in my model. I also control for the education level of the respondent. Respondents are asked what the highest education level is they have received and consist of five possible categories: less than lower secondary education, lower secondary education, upper secondary education, post-secondary non-tertiary education, and tertiary education. Next, my models include a measure of religion. Respondents are asked the question 'Do you consider yourself belonging to any particular religion or denomination?'(no=0; yes=1). Prior studies have shown less religious people to be more likely to support the radical left and right (Rooduijn and Burgoon 2017; Werts and Scheepers 2012). Lastly, I control for age because previous research has

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<sup>1</sup> Respondents were asked 'Did you vote in the last [country] national election in [month/year]'. If they answered 'yes', there were then 'Which party did you vote for in that election [Country-specific codes]'

shown that younger people are more likely to vote for radical parties on both sides of the ideological spectrum. In order to more easily interpret age, I divided it by ten.

The independent variables present in my models are intended to address the hypotheses listed above. The first set of independent variables are employment status and subjective income. The unemployed variable represents whether an individual was either unemployed or employed (0=employed; 1=unemployed), and was created through a combination of two ESS question. The ESS asks respondents two employment-related questions: 'Are you unemployed and actively looking for a job?' and 'Are you unemployed and not actively looking for a job?' If respondents indicated in either question that they were unemployed they were coded as unemployed. The next variable I included is subjective income, which measures how respondents feel about their household present income (1= 'Living comfortably on present income'; 5= 'Very difficult on present income'). In order to measure Political Dissatisfaction in domestic institutions, I used three ESS questions where respondents indicated their trust for parliament, politicians, and political parties on an 11 point scale. I combined these three questions into a domestic institutions trust scale, which ranged from 'no trust' (0) to 'complete trust (10) (Cronbach's Alpha=.91).

Next, in order to measure Euroscepticism, I use the degree to which respondents trust the European Parliament. This measure of Euroscepticism certainly has limitations, however, the ESS does not contain more extensive measurements of attitudes towards to European Union. An additional question the ESS has relating to Euroscepticism is 'European unification go further or gone too far' which is an 11 point scale ranging from 'Unification already gone too far' (0) to 'Unification go further' (10). The reason this question was not merged with trust in the European Parliament to create a Euroscepticism measure, as was done with Political Dissatisfaction, is because the correlation between trust in the European Parliament and European unification was only 0.25. In addition, the question regarding European unification was only included in three ESS survey rounds which would severely decrease the number of observations in the analysis. However, to be certain of the effect Euroscepticism has on radical party support I will also create an additional model which uses the question regarding European unification as a measure of Euroscepticism.

To measure perceived ethnic threat I used a combination of three ESS question relating to individuals attitudes in towards how immigrants affect the economy, culture, and country as a whole<sup>2</sup>. I compute an average score for these three questions (Cronbach's Alpha=.85). The last two individual variables in my models are ideology and support for income redistribution. In order to measure support for income redistribution, I use the ESS question 'Government should reduce differences in income levels' (1= 'Strongly agree; 5= Strongly disagree'). For ideology, I use the ESS question 'Placement on the left-right scale' which allows respondents to place their ideology on a zero to ten scale (0= left; 10=right). Respondents could only indicate there response using whole numbers. The estimations are obtained using logistic regression models and Models 5 and 10 included country and year fixed effects to control for the fact individuals surveyed by the ESS are from different countries and years.

*Table 1. Selected Countries and Parties*

| Country     | Radical Right Party    | Radical Left Party    |
|-------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Denmark     | DFP                    | EL, SF                |
| Finland     | PS                     | VAS                   |
| France      | National Front         | PCF                   |
| Germany     | Republikaner, NPD, AfD | LP, PDS               |
| Greece      | Golden Dawn, LAOS      | SYN/SYRIZA,KKE, DIKKI |
| Italy       | Lega Nord, MS-FT       | PRC, PdCI             |
| Netherlands | LPF, PVV               | SP                    |
| Norway      | FrP                    | SV                    |
| Sweden      | SD                     | V                     |

<sup>2</sup> ESS Questions: Would you say it is generally bad or good for [country]'s economy that people come to live here from other countries? [0] bad for economy; [10] good for the economy. And, using this card, would you say that [country]'s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries? [0] Cultural life undermined; Cultural life Enriched. Is [country] made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries? [0] worse place to live; [10] better place to live.

## Results

Table 2 displays the results of the logistic regression analysis. In my analysis, I ran several different models, each progressively adding variables. Models 1 through 5 represent the relevant factors that contribute to an individual voting for a radical right party versus any other party (radical right is coded as '1' and all other parties are coded as '0'). Model 1 is a minimalist model that only includes individuals social background characteristics (Education, Age, Religion, and Gender); Model 2 adds variables relating to a respondents economic status (Unemployment and Subjective income); Model 3 adds Anti-EU, Anti-immigration, and Political Dissatisfaction; Model 4 adds Support for Income Redistribution and Ideology; Model 5 includes all variables previously listed, but with country and year fixed-effects. Models 6 through 10 repeat the same steps as 1 through 5, however, estimate radical left votes in comparison to a vote for any other party (radical left is coded as '1' and all other parties are coded as '0'). All models cover countries where both radical party families are present. That is, if a country does not have both a radical left and radical right party it is not included from the analysis, this is to ensure that including different countries for each party does not lead to biased results.

Table 2. Logistic regression models for estimating *radical right* support. Entries are odds ratios.

Radical right vote (1); any another party (0)

| VARIABLES                    | Model 1               | Model 2               | Model 3               | Model 4               | Model 5              |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Education Level              | 0.713***<br>(0.00820) | 0.709***<br>(0.00867) | 0.829***<br>(0.0123)  | 0.834***<br>(0.0127)  | 0.826***<br>(0.0132) |
| Male                         | 1.632***<br>(0.0491)  | 1.637***<br>(0.0495)  | 1.631***<br>(0.0579)  | 1.541***<br>(0.0571)  | 1.594***<br>(0.0615) |
| Age                          | 0.904***<br>(0.00834) | 0.906***<br>(0.00842) | 0.888***<br>(0.00976) | 0.879***<br>(0.00999) | 0.860***<br>(0.0104) |
| Non-religious                | 0.712***<br>(0.0216)  | 0.711***<br>(0.0217)  | 0.661***<br>(0.0234)  | 0.583***<br>(0.0217)  | 0.725***<br>(0.0285) |
| Unemployed                   |                       | 1.184**<br>(0.0784)   | 1.154*<br>(0.0910)    | 1.255***<br>(0.103)   | 1.239**<br>(0.108)   |
| Subjective Income            |                       | 1.018<br>(0.0210)     | 0.845***<br>(0.0210)  | 0.904***<br>(0.0236)  | 1.129***<br>(0.0308) |
| Political<br>Dissatisfaction |                       |                       | 0.988<br>(0.0116)     | 1.025**<br>(0.0125)   | 1.199***<br>(0.0162) |
| Pro-EU                       |                       |                       | 0.891***<br>(0.00915) | 0.886***<br>(0.00935) | 0.939***<br>(0.0107) |
| Anti-immigration             |                       |                       | 1.406***<br>(0.0127)  | 1.335***<br>(0.0128)  | 1.434***<br>(0.0157) |
| Support<br>economic redist.  |                       |                       |                       | 0.958**<br>(0.0164)   | 0.890***<br>(0.0170) |
| Ideology                     |                       |                       |                       | 1.314***<br>(0.0114)  | 1.285***<br>(0.0120) |
| Constant                     | 0.336***<br>(0.0248)  | 0.336***<br>(0.0304)  | 2.510***<br>(0.287)   | 0.549***<br>(0.0725)  | 0.109***<br>(0.0181) |
| Observations                 | 73,757                | 71,705                | 58,018                | 56,939                | 56,939               |

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Note: Model 5 includes country and year fixed effects.

Clustered standard errors; entries are odds ratios.

Table 2 cont. Logistic regression models for estimating *radical left* support. Entries are odds ratios. Radical left vote (1); any another party (0)

| VARIABLES                    | Model 6               | Model 7                | Model 8                | Model 9               | Model 10              |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Education Level              | 1.063***<br>(0.0115)  | 1.117***<br>(0.0126)   | 1.061***<br>(0.0138)   | 1.066***<br>(0.0151)  | 1.068***<br>(0.0153)  |
| Male                         | 0.830***<br>(0.0220)  | 0.838***<br>(0.0225)   | 0.852***<br>(0.0255)   | 0.951<br>(0.0305)     | 0.968<br>(0.0319)     |
| Age                          | 0.957***<br>(0.00782) | 0.971***<br>(0.00814)  | 0.964***<br>(0.00938)  | 0.932***<br>(0.00977) | 0.957***<br>(0.0104)  |
| Non-religious                | 0.451***<br>(0.0125)  | 0.445***<br>(0.0124)   | 0.510***<br>(0.0157)   | 0.686***<br>(0.0227)  | 0.570***<br>(0.0205)  |
| Unemployed                   |                       | 1.202***<br>(0.0694)   | 1.157**<br>(0.0749)    | 1.016<br>(0.0720)     | 0.958<br>(0.0693)     |
| Subjective Income            |                       | 1.350***<br>(0.0242)   | 1.357***<br>(0.0274)   | 1.182***<br>(0.0266)  | 1.200***<br>(0.0281)  |
| Political<br>Dissatisfaction |                       |                        | 1.055***<br>(0.0108)   | 0.973**<br>(0.0087)   | 1.045***<br>(0.0125)  |
| Pro-EU                       |                       |                        | 0.903***<br>(0.00836)  | 0.908***<br>(0.00877) | 0.922***<br>(0.00916) |
| Anti-immigration             |                       |                        | 0.862***<br>(0.0072)   | 0.982**<br>(0.0087)   | 0.945***<br>(0.0089)  |
| Support<br>economic redist.  |                       |                        |                        | 0.796***<br>(0.0147)  | 0.718***<br>(0.0142)  |
| Ideology                     |                       |                        |                        | 0.615***<br>(0.00551) | 0.604***<br>(0.00599) |
| Constant                     | 0.152***<br>(0.00990) | 0.0707***<br>(0.00577) | 0.0708***<br>(0.00727) | 1.522***<br>(0.182)   | 1.347**<br>(0.182)    |
| Observations                 | 73,757                | 71,705                 | 58,018                 | 56,939                | 56,939                |

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Note: Model 10 includes country and year fixed effects.

Clustered standard errors; entries are odds ratios.

The results of the baseline models (1 and 6) for the radical left and right largely confirm prior studies. The non-religious and young people are more likely to support both radical parties. Additionally, women and the highly educated are more likely to support the radical left while men and the less-educated have a higher probability of supporting the radical right. However, the effect education has on supporting a radical right party becomes less negative as additional variables are included in the model. In comparison, the effect of education on supporting a radical left party becomes slightly more positive as additional variables are included in the model, indicating education is a robust predictor of radical left support.

Models 2 and 7 consider how an individual's subjective income and employment status affect the radical left and radical right support. I find individuals who are unemployed are more likely to vote for both radical parties, however, the effect of unemployment on support for the radical left loses statistical significance with additional control variables but stays significant for the radical right. This result leads me to partially reject H1, which stated unemployed people are more likely to vote for the radical left. These results demonstrate that economically disenfranchised individuals are drawn to the radical right over the left, which indicates there are additional factors contributing to radical left support besides economic vulnerabilities. In addition to unemployment, I also add the variable subjective income to understand how economic factors contribute to radical party support. I find individuals who have a worse feeling about their income households present income are more likely to support radical left parties, confirming H2. However, as additional variables are added the coefficient for subjective income becomes smaller, once again indicating there are other factors influencing radical left voters besides low economic status. The effect of subjective income on radical right support is more ambiguous. In model 2 the effect is insignificant, in models 3 and 4 the effect is significant and negative, meaning as people feel better about their income, they become more likely to vote for the radical right, lastly in model 5 the effect is positive and statistically significant. This result indicates that while the final model is positive and statistically significant, it is not a robust finding as the result varies across different models.

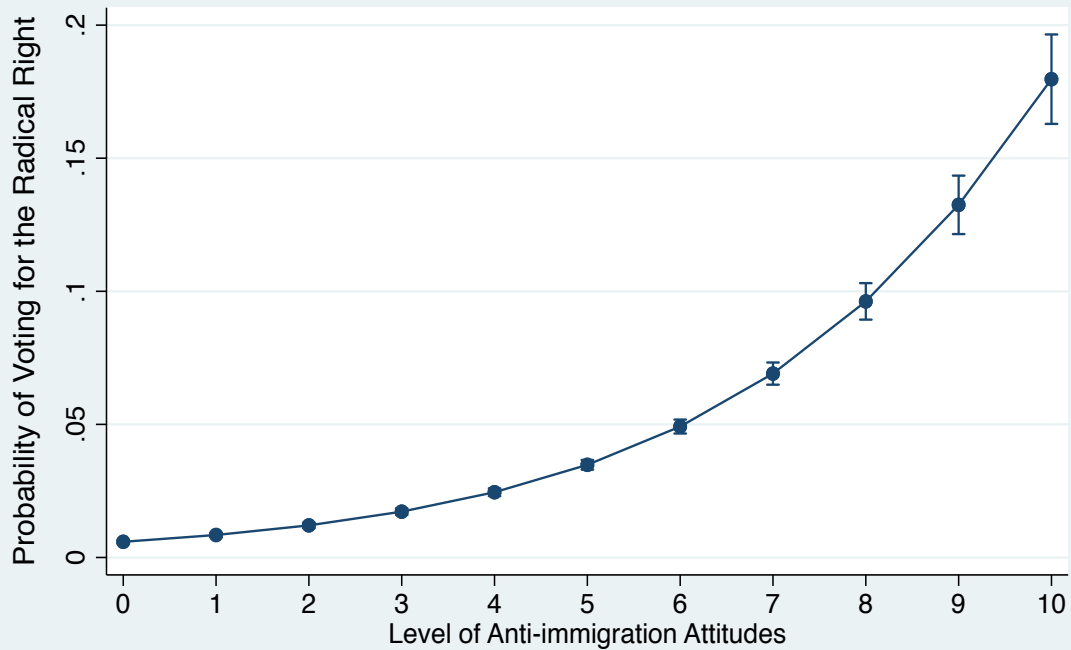
In Models 3 and 8, I consider how Political Dissatisfaction, Anti-EU, and Anti-immigration attitudes affect radical left and the right support. Individuals who hold stronger



Anti-EU views are more likely to support both radical parties. However, when country and year fixed effects are added to the models (models 5 and 10), the effect is slightly stronger for the radical left. This result seems to refute H3, which stated the effect would be larger for the radical right, in comparison to the radical left. However, since my measure of Euroscepticism only contains one survey question, level of trust in the European Parliament, I repeated the same analysis but used the ESS question whether European unification has gone too far or not far enough. Using this measure of Euroscepticism, I once again find respondents who hold anti-EU attitudes are more likely to support both radical parties, but the effect is now slightly stronger for the radical right, in contrast to the left. Based on these results, anti-EU attitudes are clearly a predictor of support for both radical parties, however, it is not clear which party benefits the most. Next, I consider the role of Political Dissatisfaction (H5) in radical party support. The effect of Political Dissatisfaction on radical party support is unclear. For the radical right, Model 3 shows Political Dissatisfaction to be a negative predictor of radical right support, however, the coefficient is insignificant. In contrast, Models 4 and 5 show higher levels of Political Dissatisfaction to be a statistically significant predictor of radical right support. Similarly, for the radical left, Model 9 shows higher levels of Political Dissatisfaction to be a statistically significant predictor of radical left support, however, Models 8 and 10 show lower levels of Political Dissatisfaction to increase the probability of voting for the radical left. Because of the lack of consistency across models I cannot confirm H5, that voters who have greater dissatisfaction with domestic political institutions are more likely to support radical parties.

The most meaningful social-political attitude was Anti-immigration. I find that individuals who hold strong Anti-immigration attitudes are far more likely to support the radical right, while individuals who hold pro-immigration attitudes are more likely to support the radical left. The results show that a one-unit increase in Anti-immigrant attitudes (10-point scale; 10=strongly anti-immigrant) is associated with a 43% increase in the probability of voting for a radical right party and a 6% decrease in the probability of voting for a radical left party. In order to increase comprehension of this result, Figure 1 shows the predicted probability of an individual voting for radical right party for each value of Anti-immigration, ranging from (0) pro-immigrant to (10) anti-immigrant. Figure 1 also reveals interesting

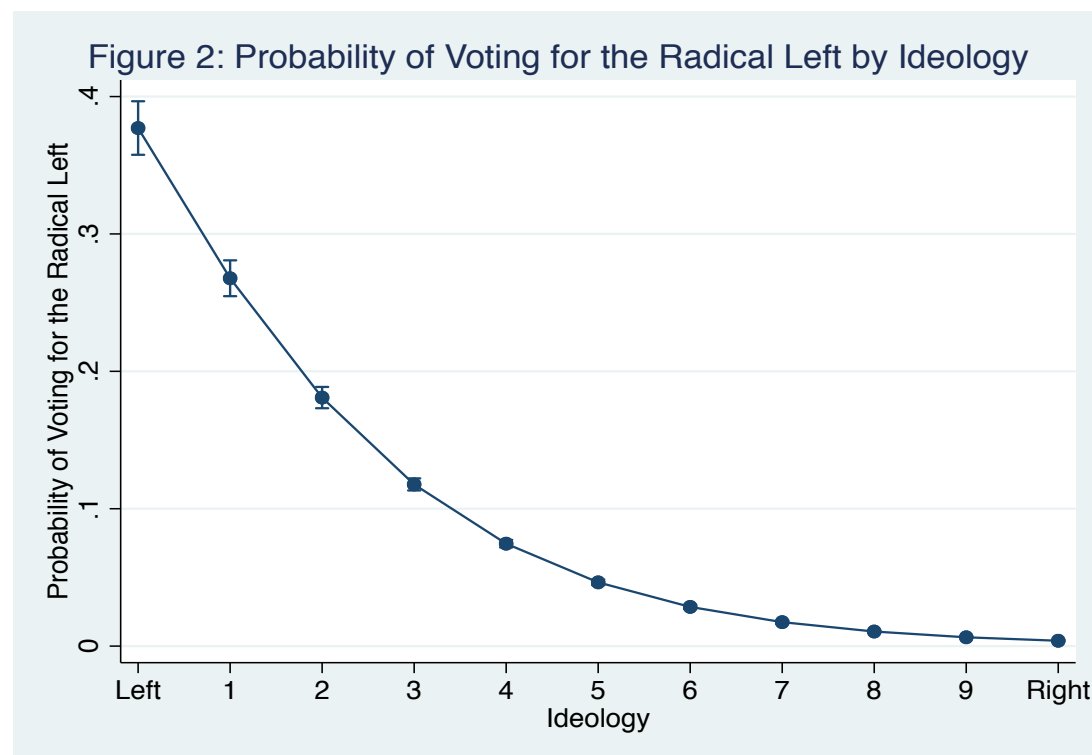
Figure 1: Probability of Voting for the Radical Right by Immigrant Attitudes

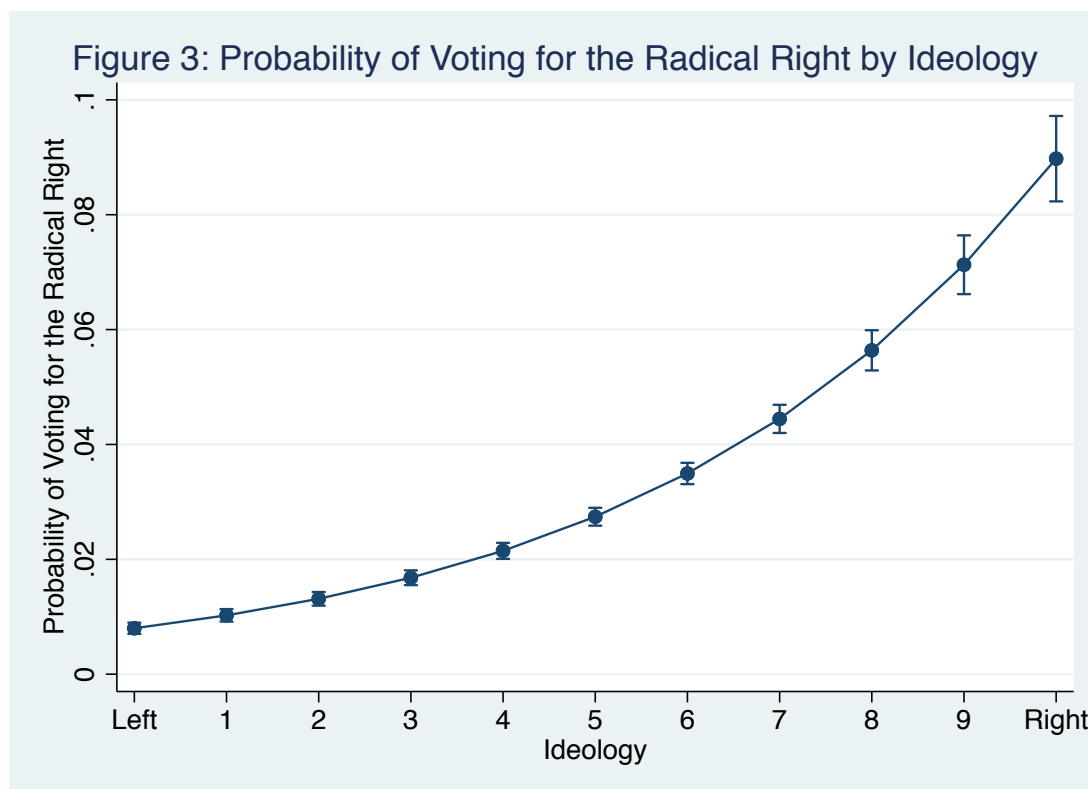


marginal effects anti-immigrant attitudes have. As individuals become more anti-immigrant the marginal effect of voting for a radical right party becomes much stronger. These results confirm H4 that voters who hold anti-immigrant attitudes are more likely to vote for the radical right and voters who hold pro-immigrant attitudes are more likely to vote for the radical left.

Finally, Models 4 and 9 consider the effect of ideological parameters on radical left and radical right support. These results substantiate H6 that voters of the radical left are more motivated by ideology than radical right voters. According to the results in models 5 and 10, (models that include year and country fixed effects), a one-unit movement towards a liberal ideology on the 10-point scale (10=conservative; 0=liberal) is associated with a 65% increase in the odds of voting for a radical left party. Similarly, a one-unit movement towards a conservative ideology is associated with a 28% increase in the odds of voting for a radical right party. Figures 2 and 3 show that marginal effects of these results. Individuals who categorize themselves as moderate (equal to 5 on the 10-point scale) have a 2.7% probability of voting for a radical right party and a 5.6% probability of voting for a radical left party, a difference of 2.9%. However, the probability that individuals who consider themselves as far left (equal to 0 on the 10 point scale) vote for a radical left party is nearly 40%, while the probability that individuals who consider themselves as far right (equal to 10 on the 10 point scale) vote for a radical right party is only 9%. Another striking result is the effect on the coefficients religion, gender, and unemployment when ideology is added to the model. In the radical left model,

when ideological parameters are added, gender and unemployment become insignificant, in addition, the effect of religion is substantially reduced ( $B = -0.67$  to  $B = -0.37$ ). In contrast, when ideology is added to the radical right model the coefficient for unemployment becomes substantively (and statistically) stronger ( $B = 0.14$  and  $B = 0.23$ ), the coefficient for gender remains statistically significant, and the effect of religion is increased and remains significant ( $B = -0.41$  to  $B = -0.54$ ). These results indicate that ideology substantially mediates the effect of social-background characteristics and unemployment have on radical left support. In comparison, ideology has little impact on suppressing the effect of social-background characteristics and unemployment on radical right support. Lastly, when country and year-fixed effects are included in the model ideology becomes a stronger predictor of radical left support and a weaker predictor of radical right support. The results of these models confirm H6 that voters of the radical left are more motivated by ideology than radical right voters.





Note: Predicted probabilities for models 2 and 3 are calculated using results from Models 5 and 10, which included country and year fixed-effects.

The results of the analysis bring about a greater understanding of why individuals, presented with the choice of voting for a radical left and right party, support one radical party family over the other. My analysis confirms previous research that young people and the non-religious have a greater probability of supporting both radical parties. In addition, women and the highly-educated are more likely to support the radical left while radical right supporters tend to be males and less-educated. My results also reveal key distinctions between radical parties. Radical right voters were more likely to be unemployed in comparison to radical left voters, leading me to reject H1. However, I also found voters who had a worse perception of their current income were more likely to vote for the radical left. Voters of both radical parties were also more likely to be dissatisfied with the EU, however, dissatisfaction with domestic political institutions had a more ambiguous effect. Lastly, I found radical parties differ in attitudes towards immigrants and the importance of ideology. The odds of voting for a radical right party among individuals who held the strongest anti-immigrant beliefs were nearly 20%, while individuals who held the strongest pro-immigrant beliefs odds of voting for a radical

right party were 0.5%. The second largest component of radical right support was ideology. Individuals who were strongly right-wing odds of voting for a radical right party were 9%, however, this is half the size of the effect of anti-immigrant attitudes. In contrast, the most influential factor for radical left voters was ideology. Individuals who were far-left had a 38% probability of voting for a radical left party. In comparison, the next largest predictor of radical left support was subjective income, where individuals who had the worst perception of their household's current income odds of voting for a radical left party were 6.4%. Additionally, when ideology is introduced in the radical left model the effect of social-background characteristics and economic status are removed or are greatly diminished, providing further evidence that ideological beliefs are influencing radical left voters. However, for the radical right, the introduction of ideology does not diminish the effect of these variables, suggesting social-background characteristics and issue grievances are robust components of radical right support.

## **Implications**

Previous studies of radical left and right support have found both parties attract votes from people of lower socioeconomic status and those who hold economic and modernization grievances (Visser and Lubbers 2014; Werts and Scheepers 2012). However, previous research has failed to identify why voters choose one radical party over the other. The result of this study lends support to previous findings that voters of both radical parties do share commonalities such as appealing to young people, the non-religious, the economically vulnerable, and eurosceptics. However, radical left and right party voters differ in several key aspects. Individuals who were less-educated, male, unemployed, young people and held anti-immigrant beliefs were more likely to support the radical right than radical left. These results imply radical right supporters are driven more by social-background characteristics and economic and immigration grievances than radical left supporters. In comparison, while ideology was also an important factor for voters of both radical parties, the effect of ideology was significantly stronger for the radical left than the radical right.

While radical left and right supporters do share similarities, there are several differences. The first glaring distinction between support for radical left and right parties is

the importance of ideology. Ideology is shown as the biggest predictor of radical left support and second biggest predictor of radical right support, which confirms prior research that voters of radical parties are indeed ideological voters, similar to voters of mainstream political parties (Skenderovic 2007; Zaslove 2006; Rooduijn and Burgoon 2017). However, previous research has not revealed the vast distinctions in the importance of ideology between supporters of radical parties. The results of this analysis imply that while ideology does play a role in determining an individual's support for the radical right the effect is much less extensive compared to the radical left. A potential reason the effect of ideology is smaller for the radical right is that unlike the radical left, radical right parties do not adhere to a specific intellectual tradition or ideological doctrine (Zaslove 2009). While radical right parties lack a solid ideological foundation, scholars have still attempted to identify a common ideology linking radical right parties. Previous scholars have argued that populism and nationalism are the prevailing ideologies linking radical right parties (Mudde 2007; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008). However, scholars have also argued populism is a thin ideology because "it lacks the capacity to put forward a wide-ranging and coherent programme for the solution to crucial political questions" (Stanley 2008). Similarly, scholars have argued nationalism is not so much a set of values and beliefs, but an emotional connection to a certain place and group of people (Koizumi 1994). Because radical right parties lack a sound ideological basis it is intuitive that voters of radical right parties are not strongly motivated by ideology. In contrast, nearly all radical left parties conform to the same ideological perspective, which emphasizes the need to promote egalitarian and altruistic principles in markets and society (March and Mudde 2005; Rooduijn and Burgoon 2017). Radical left parties have a deep-rooted and distinct ideological core meaning they become more appealing to ideological purists, which could explain why ideology is the strongest component of radical left support.

Additionally, these results showed the effects of social background characteristics and immigration attitudes on radical left and radical right support. Supporters of radical right parties were shown to harbor strong anti-immigrant attitudes, confirming the results of many prior studies (Coffé 2007; Rydgren 2008; Ivarsflaten 2008; Golder 2003; Jesuit 2009). In addition, voters of radical left parties were more likely to hold pro-immigrant attitudes, also supporting findings of previous studies (Rooduijn and Burgoon 2017; Visser and Lubbers

2014). An interesting result from the analysis is the role of social background characteristics such as education, gender, employment status, and age play in support for both radical parties. Individuals who were less-educated, male, unemployed and young people were more likely to support the radical right than the radical left. Additionally, unemployment was not a statistically significant factor for determining radical left support, however, it was significant for the radical right. Unemployment being a positive predictor of radical right support, but not radical left support is somewhat counter-intuitive. Traditionally, radical left parties strongly prioritize economic security through social benefits, which should be appealing to the jobless. In contrast, radical right parties typically oppose government intervention in the economy and do not support social welfare near to the extent of radical left parties (Klingermann 2006). This result suggests that unemployed people vote for radical right parties not out of logical considerations, but other factors. One potential explanation for unemployment being a stronger predictor of radical right support than radical left support relates to how each party frames their message. Radical left parties economic message depicts a capitalist economic system as the source of all social and economic problems (March and Mudde 2005). However, this message is relatively abstract and may be hard for voters to understand and relate to. In contrast, the radical right has a clear identifiable reason for why people are unemployed: immigration. Unemployed individuals may be more drawn to the radical right because it's easier for voters to explain their poor economic status as the fault of something they can easily understand and identify, not a theological explanation about how capitalism is failing. In addition, previous research has found radical right parties are better able to exploit unemployment when a large number of immigrants are present (Jesuit 2009). This result supports the theory that voters are more likely support radical right parties out issue grievances and displeasure with their current socioeconomic status, while supporters out of the radical left are more inclined do so out of strong ideological beliefs. The result showing unemployment to be a non-significant parameter in radical left support seems to contradict findings of previous studies, which showed the jobless to be more likely to support the radical left (Bell 1997; Bowyer & Vail 2011; Visser and Lubbers 2014). However, my results do not rebut previous studies but instead provide a greater understanding of radical left support. In my analysis of the radical left, Models 7 and 8 showed unemployment to be a

positive and statistically significant indicator of radical left support, however, it was only after ideology was introduced that unemployment became insignificant. In comparison, previous studies have not included ideology as a variable of interest in their models. This result implies that while unemployment is a reason individuals support the radical left the effect is strongly mediated by ideology.

Supporters of radical right and radical left parties also differ in regard to education. Voters of the radical right were more likely to be less-educated, while radical left voters had a greater probability of being highly educated, which substantiates results of previous studies (Visser and Lubbers 2014; Werts and Scheepers 2012). However, previous research has not directly compared differences in education across radical parties using the same selection of countries and parties as this analysis did. Studies such as my own consistently finding that as an individual's education level increases so does their probability of voting for a radical left party is striking. Higher educated individuals typically have high socioeconomic status and better skills to combat globalization and a changing economy, which should make radical left parties who support higher taxation and socialist economic policies less appealing. Highly educated individuals being more likely to support the radical left, even when it runs counter to their economic interests, supports the theory radical left voters are strongly motivated by ideological preferences, not necessarily socioeconomic characteristics. Previous research has shown education to foster egalitarian and altruistic beliefs (Rooduijn and Burgood 2017), which are also the basis of the radical left's ideological foundation (March and Mudde 2005). Similarly, low-educated voters being drawn more to the radical right supports the claim an individual's socioeconomic background is a key determinant in which radical party they vote for.

Supporters of both radical parties share some common characteristics, however, there are also key distinctions. Supporters of the radical right were more likely to be unemployed, less-educated, less-ideological, and have strong anti-immigrant attitudes. In comparison, radical left voters were shown to be highly-educated, more ideological, and not as much influenced by economic grievances such as unemployment. These results suggest that voters of the radical right are more strongly motivated by issue grievances and low social status. Radical right supporters do not necessarily vote for radical right parties because of a



firm ideological alignment, but displeasure with their current social and economic status. Radical right parties present the best option for voters who wish to voice their discontent potentially because the radical rights message is based on identifiable factors, such as immigration, not abstract ideas about capitalism that may be hard for voters to understand. In contrast, radical left supporters are influenced more by ideology and less by social background characteristics and unemployment. These results indicate radical left supporters are not necessarily individuals economically left behind but true believers in the ideological doctrine of the radical left.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to understand what distinguishes radical left voters from radical right voters. Previous research has neglected this, instead focusing on why voters support a specific party family. In turn, explanations regarding similarities and differences between radical party voters rely on inferences, not qualitative evidence. In this study, I compared the radical right and left parties across the same countries and set of years to understand what is driving voters towards one radical party over the other. Both parties share similarities in appealing to young people, the non-religious, and eurosceptics, however, radical party voters differ in their main motivations. I argue the radical right gains support from individuals who are expressing discontent with their current social and economic status and immigration. In contrast, radical left voters are motivated by a powerful ideological perspective and less by economic and social grievances. Radical right voters can be characterized as individuals of low socioeconomic status who wish to demonstrate dissatisfaction with their current state by voting for a radical party. In contrast, radical left voters are not as much expressing discontent with their current socioeconomic status, but genuinely support the ideological doctrine of the radical left.

The distinctions in the effect ideology has on radical right and left support is important as scholars continue to study both radical parties. Previous empirical studies have largely neglected the role of ideology in radical right and left vote choice, instead focusing on parameters such as socioeconomic status, immigrant attitudes, political distrust, and opinions of the European Union. Past quantitative studies of radical parties potentially have ignored

the influence of ideology because radical parties' platforms are often characterized as being extreme and incoherent. In turn, it's irrational to assume supporters of these parties may hold principled ideological beliefs, however, as this study showed ideology is an important component of radical party support, especially for the radical left. In the future academics should be more mindful of the effect of political ideology may have on radical vote choice.

While this study did uncover important differences between radical parties there were limitations that can be approved upon by future research. First, this study only included countries with an electorally relevant radical left and radical right parties, in turn, not including counties which only had one radical party family. Therefore, why this analysis is important for understanding why voters choose one radical parry over the other, it does not paint a complete picture of understanding support for specifically the radical left or right. For example, Podemos, a radical left party in Spain, is one of the most successful radical left parties in Europe, however, Spain was not included in the analysis because it does have an electorally relevant radical right party. As radical left and radical rights continue to grow across Europe scholars should continue to study why voters support one radical party in comparison to the other. In addition, future studies should investigate the relationship between ideology and radical party voting in greater detail. My study just examines the impact ideology has on radical vote choice. Future research should look deeper at the relationship between ideology and parameters such as economic status, education, immigration, and political attitudes. For example, it would be interesting to explore the significance of ideology in predicting radical vote choice for the unemployed versus employed. Furthermore, this analysis focused on the individual level. Future studies should use a multilevel analysis to understand the effect of macro-level variables such as GDP and inequality have.

Despite limitations, this study still provides a strong foundation for understanding what drives radical voters to the left or to the right. The findings imply that while voters of both radical parties do share similarities, they differ in key aspects. Voters of the radical left can be characterized as true believers of an ideological doctrine, while radical right voters seek to voice displeasure with immigration and their current socioeconomic status. Understanding what motives radical voters is important as recent years have seen the rise of

electorally successful radical parties across Europe. The rise of both radical left and right parties have changed the political and social fabric of Europe and present a challenge to the mainstream parties and the status-quo. For these reasons, it's important to try to begin to fill the existing gap in the literature surrounding explanations of why voters choose the radical left or right.

## Appendix

Table 3. Logistic regression models for estimating *radical right (model 1)* and *radical left (model 2)* support.

| VARIABLES                    | Radical Right<br>Model 1 | Radical Left<br>Model 2  |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Education Level              | -0.186***<br>(0.0173)    | 0.0768***<br>(0.0156)    |
| Male                         | 0.472***<br>(0.0411)     | -0.0386<br>(0.0353)      |
| Age                          | -0.0127***<br>(0.00128)  | -0.00307***<br>(0.00116) |
| Non-religious                | -0.347***<br>(0.0420)    | -0.569***<br>(0.0382)    |
| Unemployed                   | 0.145<br>(0.0947)        | -0.0747<br>(0.0798)      |
| Subjective Income            | 0.125***<br>(0.0293)     | 0.180***<br>(0.0256)     |
| Political<br>Dissatisfaction | -0.220***<br>(0.0116)    | -0.101***<br>(0.0104)    |
| Euroscepticism               | -0.0942***<br>(0.00900)  | -0.0775***<br>(0.00766)  |
| Support economic<br>redist.  | -0.102***<br>(0.0204)    | -0.330***<br>(0.0213)    |
| Ideology                     | 0.248***<br>(0.00989)    | -0.481***<br>(0.0105)    |
| Anti-immigration             | -0.328***<br>(0.0122)    | 0.0867***<br>(0.0107)    |
| Constant                     | -2.005***<br>(0.175)     | 0.266*<br>(0.144)        |
| Observations                 | 49,242                   | 49,242                   |

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

| Item       | Obs    | Sign | item-test<br>Correlation | item-rest<br>correlation | average<br>interitem<br>Covariance | alpha |
|------------|--------|------|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|-------|
| imwbcnt    | 355129 | +    | 0.8847                   | 0.7391                   | 3.991937                           |       |
|            | 0.7718 |      |                          |                          |                                    |       |
| imbgeco    | 355129 | +    | 0.8691                   | 0.6918                   | 4.140513                           |       |
|            | 0.8151 |      |                          |                          |                                    |       |
| imueclt    | 355129 | +    | 0.8883                   | 0.7205                   | 3.761835                           |       |
|            | 0.7889 |      |                          |                          |                                    |       |
| Test scale |        |      |                          |                          | 3.96502                            |       |
|            | 0.8509 |      |                          |                          |                                    |       |

| Item       | Obs    | Sign | item-test<br>correlation | item-rest<br>correlation | covariance | alpha    |
|------------|--------|------|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------|----------|
| trstprl    | 366533 | +    | 0.8950                   | 0.7368                   | 4.994424   | 0.9317   |
| trstplt    | 366533 | +    |                          | 0.9379                   | 0.8415     | 4.381909 |
|            |        |      |                          |                          |            | 0.8240   |
| trstprr    | 366533 | +    | 0.9296                   | 0.8423                   | 4.555685   | 0.8412   |
| Test Scale |        |      |                          |                          | 4.64       | 0.9058   |

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