Contexts to Exploit Conflicts - Political Opportunity Structures for Radical Right Parties in Western Europe

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in the
Department of Political Science
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Spring 2022

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Abstract

Radical-Right Parties (RRPs) have seen an unprecedented growth in support across the globe, especially in Western Europe, with a great deal of variation in degrees of success. The variety in levels of support and timing are striking. And yet, similar patterns of political behaviour underlie RRP support. This puzzle is the focus of this study. What explains RRP success across countries and over time?

One possible explanation for these differences is the context the parties operate in. Electioneering does not happen in a political vacuum. Every election differs in terms of the core issues that dominate the campaign, how parties navigate these issues, and how firm individuals are in their vote choice. The potential for political parties to establish themselves as electorally viable alternatives is at the very least influenced, if not determined, by these factors. This is especially true for challenger parties like RRPs.

With an interest in the ascent of the RRP family in Europe, the focus of this dissertation is the political opportunity structure for RRPs. More than that, this work goes further by not just describing or measuring the political opportunity structure. Rather, I connect macro-level and micro-level determinants of party support. Overall, the central claim of this work is simple: context matters for the individual processes leading to RRP support. The ideological core of RRPs necessitates a specific political setting for them to gain electoral support in an election.

The three substantive chapters investigate this with different levels in focus. First is emergence: My dissertation shows that over time, political contexts in Western Europe have become more advantageous for RRP success. This RRP-beneficial political opportunity structure can also result from sudden exogenous shocks, such as the sudden increase in salience of an issue due to external events. This establishing phase is the second aspect I study. As third perspective I take is on the maintenance of RRP support, securing the parties' existence. When an RRP has solidified its voter base, individual patterns of support for these challenger parties becomes similar to the voting behaviour for other parties, thus "normalising" the mechanisms underlying RRP support.

Keywords: Radical right parties; Western Europe; Political opportunity structures; Voting behaviour; Contextual factors

Für meine Eltern, ohne die es nie begonnen hätte.

And for Amelia, without whom this wouldn't have had an end.

Acknowledgements

The process that led to this work allowed me to meet, learn from, and collaborate with a number of great people. I feel gratitude for many individuals and contributions.

I thank all the people at the Department of Political Science at Simon Fraser University, the Department itself for providing support through teaching assistantships and research grants, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

At my home department I am indebted to Genevieve Fuji-Johnson, Mark Pickup, Yoshi Kawasaki, Sanjay Jeram, Andrew Heard, Remi Leger, Laurent Dobuzinskis, and Aaron Hofmann. In the wider world of Academia, I thank the European Consortium of Political Research and the University of Essex Summer School, Pablo Barbera, Christopher Fariss, plus many workshops and conferences where the helpful exchanges are too numerous to list.

To my immense benefit I was much in the presence of Marcus Macauley which forged a bond that lasts both on and off the mountain. I also enjoyed mentorship from and friendships with Vince Hopkins and Denver McNeney; the company and support of Claire Peacock and Michael Oram; and all the Superfriends of the Extremism Research Group, with their ideas, suggestions, and feedback they continuously provided. Thank you!

As personal support, I would like to acknowledge Chester for the inspiration he provides by fighting the good fight; Kathy and John for always holding my basic needs and best interests in mind; and my parents, Claudia and Horst, for the support at any time, from everywhere, to just about anywhere.

Particularly grateful I feel for my partner Amelia Duggan -- she scrutinized every draft and many paragraphs, but, more importantly, she kept her sights up when mine weren't. Thank you so very much!

Furthermore, a very big thanks to Emilie van Haute and David Laycock for their diligence, insights, comments, and suggestions -- plus, in the case of the latter, the year-

long, good neighbourhood across the hall. In addition, I am much obliged to Ahmed Al-Rawi and Rens Vliegenthart for their ideas and engagement.

Above all, I thank Steve Weldon for his unwavering support, his generosity, and seemingly endless reservoirs of inspiration. At every step he had my back, and knew when he had to give it a push. By this I am humbled and forever grateful.

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1. Introduction

The idyllic city of Koblenz, at the confluence of Rhine and Mosel rivers, is one of Germany's major tourist attractions. Every year, millions of visitors travel from across Europe and around the globe to get lost in the beauty of a river cruise or get found after a tour through the region's many vineyards. On January 21, 2017, a group of people with a different purpose could be found in the city's convention centre. Standing before their respective national flags and waving cheerily into the cameras, the leaders of radical right, nationalist parties from across Europe came together to proclaim 2017 to be "The Year of the Patriots." On this shared stage, Marine Le Pen, Frauke Petry, Matteo Salvini, Geert Wilders, Harald Vilimsky, and several others put aside their usual core messaging of pride in one's nation and exclusivity of one's heritage. One after the other, the speakers went through great lengths to explain that their parties shared a vision and how they would work together towards that vision – without actual transnational collaboration. Each leader also expressed common cause and their admiration for Donald Trump who just the day before had been inaugurated as the 45th president of the United States.

The mood was cheery on this sunny Saturday in Koblenz. Nonetheless, this only partly covered the paradox of this alliance in which the leaders and representatives of these largest European radical-right parties (RRPs) had notably little programmatic overlap. The largest common denominator on stage was anti-immigration stances and propagation of a different Union within Europe, with —surprisingly — only some calling for the EU's abolition.

Still, the proclaimed "year of the patriot" held notable successes for these RRPs: the AfD received 12.9% of the vote in Germany's 2017 election and became the largest opposition party in parliament; Le Pen advanced to the second round of the French presidential runoff-voting and doubled her party's vote share compared to its last runoff performance in 2002; both the Austrian FPÖ and Italian Lega joined government coalitions. Ultimately however, and perhaps not too surprising given their national orientation, the pan-European alliance was short-lived. After the 2019 European Parliament elections, the faction "Europe of Nations and Freedom" split in two.

Regardless, radical right parties are here to stay and their influence on politics across Europe and other democracies is undeniable — at the time of writing in the fall of

2021, 21 of the 27 EU member countries have an anti-immigrant party in parliament and, according to polling numbers, this number appears as set to increase over time. Yet, there still is a great deal of variation in degrees of success for RRPs. For some, like the AfD, gaining entry to parliament and official opposition status was a seminal success, as no RRP had achieved this in post-war Germany before. For RRPS in Italy and Austria, taking up government responsibility forms the pinnacle of success. RRPs in Norway and France have seen high electoral support for decades, while others saw their electoral breakthrough only within the 2010s or 2020s.

These differences in levels of success and timing are striking. While it is true that there are differences between these parties (as the leaders at their meeting in Koblenz did not tire to emphasize), comparative analysis reveals there are large degrees of overlap between them as well. These commonalities form a party family, a distinct subgroup in the overall category of “far-right” and discernible from other extreme right-wing parties (like neo- and post-fascist parties). Still, despite the commonalities, RRPs’ electoral success and support base sizes are very heterogeneous throughout Europe. This puzzle is the central focus of this study. That is, what explains RRP success across countries and over time?

One possible explanation for these differences is the context the parties operate in. Electioneering does not happen in a political vacuum, political parties do not vie for electoral support in an empty space. Attracting supporters is a dynamic process in which multiple actors compete over a finite number of votes. Every election differs in terms of the core issues that dominate the campaign, how parties navigate these issues, and how firm individuals are in their vote choice. The potential for parties to establish themselves as electorally viable alternatives is at the very least influenced, if not determined, by these factors — this is especially true for challenger parties like RRPs.

With an interest in the ascent of a party family in Europe, the focus of this dissertation is the political opportunity structure for RRPs. More than that, this work goes further by not just describing or measuring the political opportunity structure. Rather, I connect context and micro-level determinants of party support. Overall, the central claim of this work is simple: context matters for the individual processes leading to RRP support. The shared ideological core of RRPs necessitates a specific political setting for

them to gain electoral support in an election. The three chapters that follow illustrate this on different levels of focus. Over the course of this study, I will show that:

Over time, political contexts in Western Europe have become more advantageous for RRP success. In addition, apart from slowly changing over time, an RRP-beneficial political opportunity structure can result from sudden exogenous shocks, such as the sudden increase in salience of an issue due to external events. Finally, when an RRP has solidified its voter base, individual patterns of support for these challenger parties becomes similar to the voting behaviour for other parties, thus "normalising" the mechanisms underlying RRP support.

The three parts of this dissertation focus on different time frames to examine how context shapes citizen support for RRPs. The first part, chapter 2, takes a long-term timeframe to illustrate that the hypothesized ascent of RRPs is indeed a shared pattern between countries, based on similar individual voting models. Through a detailed case study of the AfD in Germany, chapter 3 investigates whether RRPs 'find' their electoral base rooted in issue-voting. Finally, chapter 4, which focuses on the formation of government in Italy after the 2018 federal election, illustrates that once RRPs are established, this voter-alignment becomes issue-independent and gives the party positional leeway to re-frame conclusions derived from its master concept of exclusive nationalism.

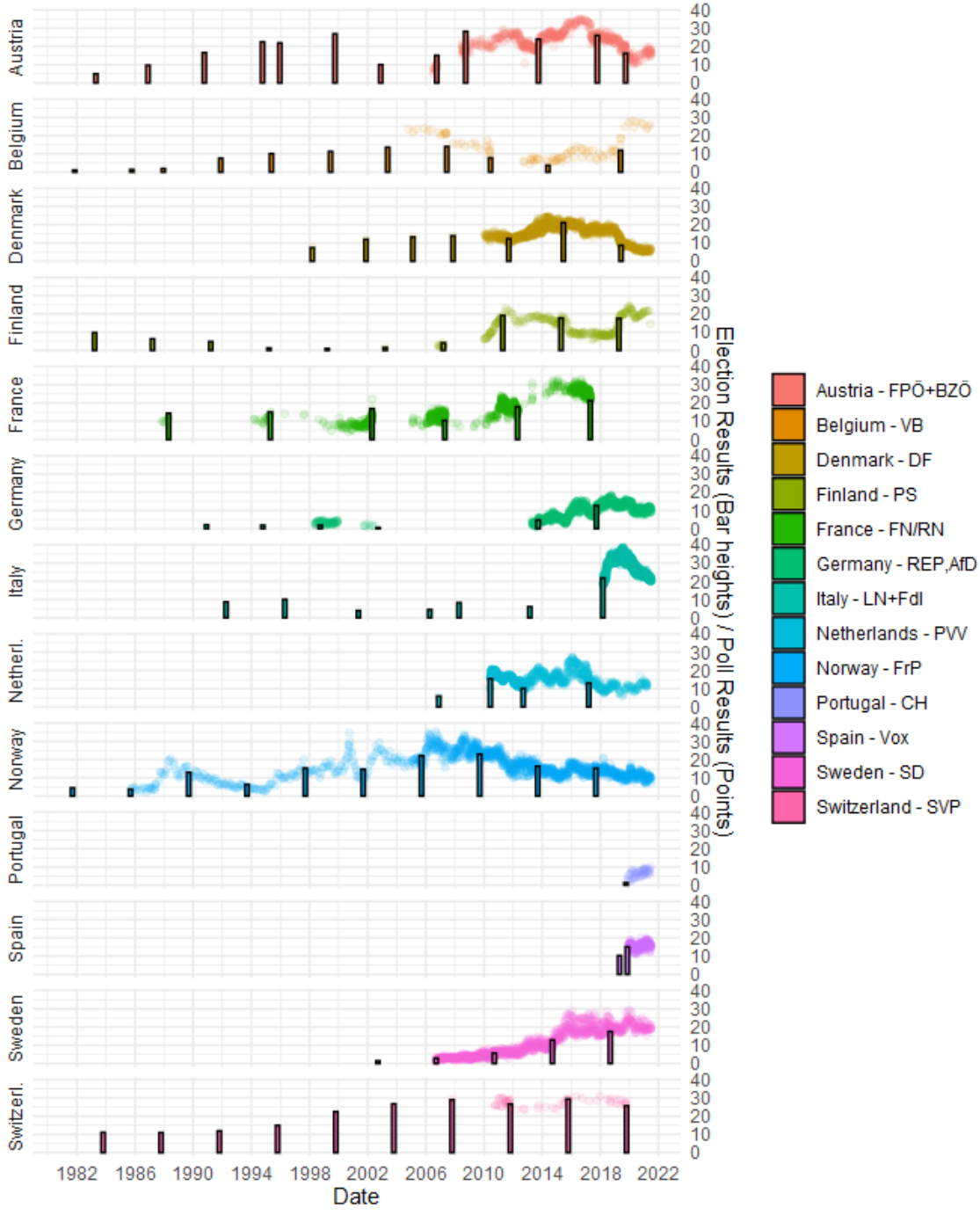
Before turning to political context as the underlying reason for variation in RRP support, this introduction provides empirical groundwork. As a first step, I review the different levels of success these parties have received over the past 40 years in Western Europe. Following this, I provide a definition of the parties in question to parse out central programmatical elements to establish the range of RRPs as part of the same party family, which makes them reliant on similar patterns for individual-level support. After showing how RRPs are substantively different from other kinds of parties, the last section investigates the three core principles that shape their politics: Exclusionary nationalism, a specific exclusionary conception of democracy, and an authoritarian style of politics. This empirical groundwork feeds into development of hypotheses to be tested in the separate chapters, the foundation on which the scholarship of this dissertation is built.

1.1. Variation in support for RRPs across Western Europe

This first part of analysis quantifies RRP success across Western Europe. To do so, I focus on the central indicator of party politics: public support. Figure 1.1 the standing of RRPs over time. In addition to election results (bars), the graph provides polling numbers (points) where available. This results in a larger number of time points for which information is available, instead of just one point for each electoral cycle every four or five years. This combination of polling numbers and election results provides a higher resolution to assess variance over time.

Countries in Western Europe have seen a large degree of difference in successes for RRPs. These differences are evident in both timing and magnitude. Norway's *Fremskrittspartiet* (FrP), as one of the moderate members of the party family, forms the old stock of RRPs in Europe. Founded in 1973, it began to gain traction among voters in the late 1980s and 1990s. Support took off in the early 2000s, before waning through the 2010s until today. A similar picture shows for the *Danish Folkeparti* (DF), with initial growth and peak in the mid-2010s, followed by a drop in support. This is a contrast to France's *Rassemblement National* (*Front National* until 2018) which has maintained growth and steady levels of public support from its start as a right-wing extremist party through its 'taming' to become a RRP in the early 2010s.

Cases like Belgium's *Vlaams Belang* (reorganised in 2004 from the regionalist *Vlaams Bloc*) and *Perussuomalaiset* (the Finns Party, in the graph with their agrarian predecessor) illustrate how steadily dropping levels of electoral support and polling numbers (2007-2018) can rebound to reach previously unseen levels (2019 onwards). The timing between countries differs markedly, and not all contexts have had RRPs in national contexts for long. Spain's *Vox*, Portugal's *Chega* ("Enough!"), and Germany's *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) are recent entries, with the first two rapidly gaining backers in polls, while the latter has steadily gained to become stable at a rate of support of around 10%. This is not the first time a RRP in Germany ascended on a national stage – as the polling data shows, the *Republikaner* stood around the 2%-mark in the late 1990s but failed to establish themselves electorally. As a contrast to these fluctuations, the *Schweizerische Volkspartei* (SVP) has remained at steady levels in support since the early 2000s.



Notes:
Data from ParlGov (election results), Jennings & Wlezien (2015), polling institutes, and polling aggregators (wahlrecht.de, novus.se, Peilingwijzer); lower house elections, except for presidential elections in France; sums of results used for cases with multiple RRPs in the same election (Austria, Italy); numbers as published in each poll except for the Netherlands (aggregate projections from Peilingwijzer).

Figure 1.1. Variations in success for RRPs in Western Europe - Polling and election results by country

While this variation in electoral and polling support for RRPs throughout Western Europe is striking over time, there is another aspect to consider. Electoral performance is but one indicator of political success. A second indicator to assess the impact of political parties is their role in policy-capability, which translates to government participation. Out of the given set of countries, three have seen RRPs ascend to government roles: Multiple coalitions in Austria, one coalition in Italy (plus membership in one crisis-induced wide alliance), and seven heads of the Swiss state council were stemming from RRPs since the 1980s. In the case of Denmark, the DF held an indirect thumb on the scale of power, with two minority governments having relied on the tacit support of the RRP. A similar arrangement was formed for the formation of a minority government thanks to the Dutch *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV).

In France, the RN/FN got close to the highest position of the state three times: Both Marine Le Pen (2017 and 2022) as well as her father, Jean-Marie (2002), have progressed to the second round of run-off voting for the Republic's presidency. Both were ultimately defeated by a rally of voter support around the non-RRP candidate (Jacques Chirac and Emmanuel Macron respectively). While this is the upper echelon for RRP-activity in Western Europe, other parties in the family have lower expectations to consider their showing a success: For the AfD, clearing the 5%-hurdle to gain representation in the lower house in 2017 was a major milestone, and the subsequent status as largest opposition party a resounding success. For Belgium's VB, it was a success that its strong showing in the 2019 election brought the other parties close to breaking the decades-old agreement on principled non-cooperation. This 'cordon sanitaire' has effectively held the party away from government decisions, despite its recent electoral resurgence and strong polling numbers in 2020.

Table 1.1. Overview of RRPs in Western Europe

Country	Party Name			History			
	Local	English	Short	Origin	From	Year	Government Role
Austria	*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*	Freedom Party of Austria	FPÖ	Transition (late 1980s)	Moderate Right	1955	In Government (1983-1986, 2000-2005, 2017-2019)
	Bündnis Zukunft Österreich	Alliance for Austria's Future	BZÖ	Split	Radical Right	2005	
Belgium	*Vlaams Blok/ Vlaams Belang*	Flemish Bloc/ Flemish Interest	VB	Transition	Extreme Right	2004	Cordon Sanitaire
Denmark	*Dansk Folkeparti*	Danish People's Party	DF	Split	Anti-Tax	1995	Support for minority government (2)
Finland	*Perussuomalaiset*	Finns Party	PS	Succession	Agrarian (Finnish Rural Party)	1995	
France	*Front National/ Rassemblement National*	National Front/ National Rally	FN/RN	Transition (early 2010s)	Extreme Right	1972	Presidential Runoff (3)
Germany	*Die Republikaner*	The Republicans	REP	Founding/Split	Moderate Right (Christian Social Union)	1983	
	Alternative für Deutschland	Alternative for Germany	AfD	Founding/ Transition	Anti-Fiscal Control	2013	
Italy	*Lega Nord/Lega*	Northern League/ League	LN/ Lega	Merger	Regional	1991	In Government (2018-2020)
	Fratelli d'Italia	Italy's Brothers	FdI	Split	Extreme Right	2012	
Netherlands	*Partij voor de Vrijheid*	Freedom Party	PVV	Transition	Moderate Right	2005	Support for Minority Government
Norway	*Fremskrittspartiet*	Progress Party	FrP	Founding	-	1973	
Portugal	*Chega*	Enough	C	Founding	-	2019	
Spain	*Vox*	-	Vox	Split	Moderate Right	2013	
Sweden	*Sverigedemokraterna*	Sweden Democrats	SD	Transition	Extreme Right	1988	
Switzerland	*Schweizerische Volkspartei*	Swiss People's Party	SVP	Transition	Moderate Right	1971	Part of Governing Council

To be clear, not all parties in this list have been RRPs throughout their existence. Austria's FPÖ (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*) and the Swiss SVP initially started as conservative liberal and conservative agrarian party respectively, while the Finns Party was formed from an agrarian populist party in 1995. The Norwegian FrP has meandered in its positioning, sometimes advocating typical RRP stances, other times trending towards what would qualify it as centre-right in other contexts. The Brothers of Italy (FdI), founded in 2012 as a split from a post-fascist faction of a conservative movement, are led by the former secretary of youth of a conservative government. Only after 2017, in local cooperations with Lega, did FdI adopted programmatic elements typical of RRPs.

Many RRPs across Europe underwent similar transitions. Table 1.1 provides a structured overview of their origins. For some parties in this list, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact moment of 'becoming' RRPs, because it is difficult to determine their true ideological positions and dominating policy emphases within the organisational apparatus. Some remain at the fringes of RRPs due to their closeness with neo-fascism and murky positioning towards liberal democracy (Italy's FdI). To help clarify how a conservative party radicalizes to become an RRP, or an extremist party moderates to be part of this party family, the next sections focus on the shared attributes of RRPs. Following that, I will develop the argument of how and why context matters specifically for the individual-level processes determining RRP support. Crucially, the typical positions of RRPs necessitate a specific political opportunity structure to lead to RRP success.

1.2. Populism, Extremism, and the evolving party family of RRPs

One of the most common attributes mentioned in relation to RRPs and probably the most-discussed political phenomenon in the twenty-first century is populism. Politicians both use it to denounce political opponents and their arguments, as well as proudly claim it for oneself to be "one of the common people." As subject of many academic studies, several authors claim that the question of classifying parties as left or right is irrelevant once these parties claim to be populist, that both ends of the spectrum are a danger to liberal democracies (Urbinati 1998; Abts and Rummens 2007; J.-W. Müller 2016; Mansbridge and Mancedo 2019).

In this study, I take a more nuanced view. It is important to delineate clearly between extremes on the left and right, for reasons that build on normative arguments about the nature of human existence. Thus, I take a perspective on the question "Populism – is it always bad?" that discourages blanket statements. Following recent scholarship from the mushrooming literature on the topic, I understand populism not as distinctive for certain party families or others, but instead see it as a style of politics. Indeed, my dissertation does not focus on parties because they are populist, but rather establishes that the most successful RRPs deploy populist tactics as a tool in synergy with their political foundations. Other parties do so as well, but for them it is less instrumental and critical to their success.

1.2.1. Left and Right and Threats to Liberal Democracies

Before diving deeper into these ideological waters, it is useful to clearly establish which side of the political aisle is central for the parties of interest. The point is quick to make. Following the now common way laid out in Bobbio's classic "Left and Right" (1994), the distinction between both is about stances towards egalitarianism. Notwithstanding the definition's focus on relativity towards each other, the differentiation is useful to orient analysis. Generally, the "left" is pro-egalitarian, working towards mitigating differences and power imbalances between groups of individuals. The "right" is non-egalitarian, and tolerant towards divisions and social hierarchies within the social order.

For a period of time this was mostly considered in regard to the economic orientation between left and right. Yet, taken with its generalizability, it projects well onto dimensions of social conflict and RRPs' key issues. This is the foundation on which all of the following builds, and the reason why radicals on the right are their own distinct threat to liberal values: the conviction that hierarchies between individuals are natural and should determine policy instruments. While historically mapped primarily on to class-divisions in Western Europe (Lipset and Rokkan 1967), we see it today increasingly mapped on to the divisions between ethnic majority and visible minority groups, including many new immigrants. As elaborated below, it is the politicization of this division and ideology that has largely paved the way for emergence and successes of RRPs.

1.2.2. Subgroups and categorization of the Far-Right

Before diving into further detail on RRPs, this section specifies which subgroups on the politically right end of the scale exist, and where the difference lies for RRPs. Generally, “far-right” is the broadest, most encompassing term to describe actors beyond moderate. This umbrella term identifies parties in relation to the political spectrum they maneuver in. Most important to the far right are ethnocultural issues, especially anything related to national identity. Two different subtypes of far-right actors must be distinguished.

One is the extreme-right, or right-wing extremist, with (neo-)fascist movements among them. Common among them is the emphasis on a natural hierarchy between individuals, based on descent, along with a highly authoritarian conception of society. Until recently, none of these (neo-)fascist parties ever gained lasting electoral traction, and current examples (like the Fratelli d’Italia) have not remodeled social orders to their preference.

The second broad group within the far-right are RRPs. While RRPs share a preference for ethnic nationalism with old and new fascists, they lack the open rejection of parliamentary democracy as their raison d’être (Fennema 2005, 11). This makes them a delineated subgroup. Still, the influence of one on the other is not to be underestimated, since the influence of neofascist theorists has added a large degree of sophistication to RRPs’ populism, especially visible through the adoption of ethnopluralist discourse. What this means is that open hostility and xenophobia has made way for a seemingly more nuanced culturally protective stance, particularly directed against Islam (Fennema 2005). The main driver of messaging and policy for RRPs is protecting a specific “way of life” that is incompatible with heterogeneous populations. Unveiled and anti-Semitic sloganeering of a Jean-Marie Le Pen or Jörg Haider are things of the past; the dog-whistles have since matured. Current RRPs frame their claim in line with the former EP-parliamentary group’s name “Europe of Nations” – the intellectual foundation for RRP discourse sees homogenous, but separate Judaeo-Christian peoples facing a “Muslim invasion” and in need of a stalwart partisan defender.

Language like that is a departure from ideas in the late 20th century, during which even immigration from other EU-countries was seen as detrimental for a national

“racial corpus.” Still, the mechanisms of constructing an “other” threating the nation persist. Hence, for the parties in question in this dissertation, “radical-right” is the most fitting generic term to mark the departure from fascist national superiority. It has been superseded by exclusive nationalism that does not stress hierarchy but distinctiveness. The sections below add more nuance to this ideological footing, along with discussions of two other elements central to RRPs.

1.3. Ideological foundations of RRPs

1.3.1. The anchor-concept of RRPs — exclusionary nationalism and xenophobia

Nationalism is at the heart of politics of the far-right and forms the ideological anchor for RRPs. To understand how it informs every aspect of political activity for these parties, this section provides a definition of the term and introduces the conceptual differentiation between two kinds of nationalism.

As one of the first modern authors, Kohn (1944) provides a perspective on the origins of the concept that could be labelled as constructivist in hindsight: “Nationalism is a state of mind, permeating the large majority of a people and claiming to permeate all its members; it recognizes the nation-state as the ideal form of political organisation and the nationality as the source of all creative cultural energy and of economic well-being. The supreme loyalty of man is therefore due to his nationality, as his own life is supposedly rooted in and made possible by its welfare.” (2017, 16)

His treatment theorizes the nation as an “imagined community” (Anderson 2006) and introduces a distinction between ethnic and civic nationalism. This differentiation identifies the fundamental line along which these two are distinguished. Civic nationalism builds on the liberal ideal of personal freedoms and conceives the nation as a result of a constitutional treatises to organise communal living. As such, Kohn implies it to be rational and informed by respect for human rights. At its core it is inclusive, as this collective sovereignty is built upon common political participation, which presupposes shared values. An institutionalized example case for this is the Republic of France, in which the internalization of the revolutionary values “liberté, equalité, fraternité” is key to its inclusive citizenship regime (Brubaker 1992).

In contrast, ethnic nationalism implies that national borders denote nations, where each state is to be congruent with the dominant ethnic group. As Mudde puts it "The idea of the nation-state holds that each nation should have its own state and, although this is often left implicit, each state should have only one nation." (2010, 1173) This idealizes the homogeneous nation-state, and ultimately calls for an ethnocratic political order which excludes enemy out-groups from decision-making processes. Therefore, Dunn (2015) labels this conception of the nation-state "exclusive nationalism." He contends that "[a]n ethnic/cultural conceptualization of nationalism largely follows from a 'primordial' belief regarding the nature of the nation—the belief that nations have existed since the dawn of human history. This sense of nationalism is narrow, traditional and unchanging." (369) As such, it is deeply nostalgic and the demarcation between in- and out-groups is lasting and fixed. This has far-reaching consequences for the lived realities of minorities (Weldon 2006).

Mudde (2007) calls a combination of this ethnic/cultural nationalism with xenophobia *nativism* and defines it as "an ideology, which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ('the nation') and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state." (19) He also sees a general consensus in the literature that exclusive nationalism is the master concept for RRPs. Despite early research by Kitschelt and McGann (1995) claimed that the winning formula for RRPs is to combine neo-liberal economics with social authoritarianism, the party family's focus on exclusive nationalism predates any other programs.

Williams (2006) takes a more abstract view and argues that actions of RRPs are fundamentally steered by identification and instrumentalization of threat: "What people fear perhaps more than the economic conditions that confront them is the loss of their identity. It is not that people do not fear poor conditions, but perhaps that they view these as more easily reversed than loss of identity, culture, and values." (4-5) Indeed, this reverberates with the earlier claim by Betz (1993) about how FN, VB, and FPÖ were the first RRPs "to draw a connection between falling birthrates and foreign immigration." (417)

RRPs have combined two unrelated facts of life in post-industrial democracies, and by the evoking fear of an "enemy other" via exclusive nationalism, have conjured it

to be a threat to national identity. The narrative has prevailed and has manifested itself in political discourses as the conspiracy myth of a “great replacement” (Bracke and Hernández Aguilar 2020; Feola 2021). Overall, diffuse anxiety about supposedly mortal dangers to the nation is the core instrument with which RRPs warrant their political visions — and these alleged dangers are personified by immigrants, asylum seekers, Muslims, and, in some contexts, Jewish as well as Romani people (Rydgren 2018). Over the course of time, the categories between which nativism alleges a hierarchy have changed and turned from blunt and crude to versatile, increasingly shape-shifting instruments. The following section provides details to this development.

Shifting images of enemies — from ethnicity to religion

RRPs across Europe have shifted the conceptual foundation over time to a more adaptable form of nationalism. Still, ethnicity is seen as culturally deterministic and uniform, so separation is crucial to “fend off” the otherwise occurring cultural extinction. Yet, in a distinctive departure from “old,” colonial racism, this new form of exclusivity does not explicitly see cultural hierarchy. RRPs now avoid presenting their national cultures and customs as better than all others, and assimilation of “foreigners” into a cultural area is not grounded in a sense of superiority. Instead, distinction is “merely” necessary for survival of one’s own culture (Fennema 2005). Indeed, according to RRPs, the threats to the nationally distinct, cultural “Völker” continue to be manifold, primary is the “invasion” of immigrants.

Hence the vast majority of policy proposals continue to be anti-immigration. Migration is presented as the major source for national problems, especially for unemployment, abuse of the welfare state, and, crucially, criminal activity. In general, emphasizing the connection between immigration and crime is at the core of RRP discourse (Rydgren 2008), and, as Smith (2010) claims, there are countries in which RRPs own the crime issue.

What is striking is that after the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 the rhetoric of RRPs increasingly channeled their xenophobic worldview into Islamophobia. By and large, RRPs have now adopted a perception of Muslims constituting the out-group. Immigrants from primarily Muslim countries are repeatedly pointed out to be particularly threatening due to alleged incompatible social norms and religious practices, presumed unwillingness to integrate, as well as perceived closeness to Islamic terrorism. This

shifts the focus away from individual signifiers of integration (like language skills and family ties) onto a collective condemnation based on a sweeping, yet diffuse classifier of "otherness."

1.3.2. RRPs and the people — Populism and democratic self-concept

Another -ism apart from nativism has developed to be attributed with radical-right politics. Many commentators consider populism as virtually fused with RRPs, so much so that often it is assumed to be implied with the label. And while it is true that the phenomenon itself has seen a global renaissance, it often seems to be considered a cause for the success of RRPs overall. As this section will demonstrate, my work does not assume this link, and rather sees it as an expression of an exclusionary democratic self-concept of RRPs overall. So many parties and politicians have been called or described themselves as "populist" that the label has become a hollow vessel; without substantive filling, it can mean a range of things. Indeed, the label alone gives no indication of the ideology it describes. Very different parties are unified under the common banners "of the people" or "for the people," ranging from the far-left to the far-right.

Yet most commentators seem to agree that to be populist is somehow problematic. To understand why, the short and concise description of J.-W. Müller (2016) provides a useful start. He establishes that "for a political actor or movement to be populist, it must claim that a part of the people is the people – and that only the populist authentically identifies and represents this real or true people." (22) Fundamentally, populists perceive politics as an antagonism between a corrupt elite and the pure people, where the latter is only represented by themselves (Arzheimer 2018; Mudde 2007; J.-W. Müller 2016).

Influential works by Mudde (2004) and Stanley (2008) follow conceptualization by Freeden (1996) to describe "populism" as a thin-centered ideology. He characterises thin-centred ideologies by their lack of a vision of policies about things like social justice or conditions for individual development. Either they restrict themselves to a narrow core, focus on a single or at most two issues in their advocacy discourse, or borrow from, and/or project themselves onto, other ideologies to thicken.

In a later piece, Freeden (2017) clarifies why a perspective of populism as a thin ideology is incorrect. Among other properties, he stresses that thin-centered ideologies have "a positive, self-aware, drive whose transformative alternatives are not predicated on resurrecting primordial social intuitions but on future-oriented change. [In addition], thin-centred ideologies have the potential to become full if they incorporate existing elements of other ideologies[.]" (3) Due to its lack of either such aspirations or potential, describing populism as ideology (thin-centered or otherwise) is overstretching the concept.

A more adept definition perceives populism as a discursive style of politics (Aslanidis 2015; Moffitt 2016). In this way, both RRPs and other parties employ populism, to distance themselves from whatever they denounce as established parties and, more generally, the establishment. The centerpiece is the rhetorical ruse to pitch common sense and the peoples' will against out-of-touch elites.

This code-switching is useful to reduce political space from many possible dimensions of conflict to just one: the political caste against the voice of the people. In the case of RRPs, critiquing "those up there" often employs its own language, rich in dog whistling against minorities. For example, the description of a global network of financial elites, or globalists, is often employed in a way that it implies anti-Semitic stereotypes. Other populist appeals take a regionalist stance, where a territorial community is presented as dominated by a center to politicize the us-them-chasm (Haute, Pauwels, and Sinardet 2018). Then there are examples of market-populist discourse where parties pursuing conservative anti-statist goals superimpose the populist antagonism towards elites and special interests on opponents of wide open capitalism (Sawer and Laycock 2009). As such, populism weaves itself into the ideological foundation. In the present case, the parties that fall in this analysis were not selected because they are populist. Rather, all successful RRPs employ elements from populist discourse as a tool to narrow the in-group they are appealing to. If elites are out of touch with the people, RRPs can swoop in to replace those elites.

Meanwhile, RRPs embody a specific attitude towards democracy — they are not inherently anti-democratic. This differentiates them from right-wing extremists, which reject anything other than a "strong-leader" form of government (Mudde 2010). For RRPs, the positioning is more nuanced. Principally, they are not opposed to

representative democracy itself. The “will of the people” can be fulfilled by ways of electing representatives. Their opposition is directed at the way representative democracy currently works, both for a populist critique — elites portrayed as out-of-touch — and a conceptual critique — the system of liberal democracy disenfranchises the majority group, as most of them claim to represent the true voices of this hidden majority. The RRP reading is that universal suffrage annuls the peoples’ right to determine who is and who is not part of the entitled community. Liberal, equal status voting regimes undermine this majority right. The ideological anchor of exclusionary nationalism plus the acceptance of procedural democracy makes ethnocracy their ideal form of society.

Nevertheless, RRPs are often outspoken supporters of direct democratic instruments and referenda: in their conception of democracy nothing is more important than the general will of the population, which supersedes individual rights and constitutional guarantees (Mudde 2007). Generally speaking, plebiscites allow political outsiders a way to circumvent legislatures (Bowler, Donovan, and Karp 2002), especially if they aim to galvanize support around a purported representation gap on issues ranging anywhere from allegedly freedom killing taxation (Laycock 2019) to presence of minarets (Moeckli 2011). There is concern that plebiscites are tools for authoritarian, illiberal forces to elude elected bodies of government and instrumentalize them for their purposes (Qvortrup 2017). This makes them attractive instruments for marginalized actors in politics. Indeed, RRP voters favour direct democracy more than supporters of moderate parties (Pauwels 2014), and levels of support for referenda decrease slightly, as electoral share of RRPs grows (Rojon and Rijken 2020).

1.3.3. RRPs and authoritarianism — issue agenda, leadership style, and personality trait

The last of the three tenets of RRPs to review is authoritarianism. Its role in shaping support for RRPs has three aspects: Not only does it determine the issue agenda of RRPs, it also describes the leadership style most of these parties embody or call for, and it is an personality trait of persons who feel drawn towards radical-right politics. Its role as instrumental on the individual level of politics, the voters, makes it central for any investigation into why people support RRPs.

So, in addition to exclusionary nationalism and an illiberal view of democratic instruments, RRPs advance the idea of authoritarian leadership. At the bottom of all three is a conviction that "order is the basis of freedom." (Mudde 2007, 145) The parties' call for strong leadership and a strong state is most often epitomized by law-and-order politics, which has been traditionally a domain of both the moderate right and RRPs (Bale 2003). In the case of RRPs, illegal activities within the population are framed as linked to minority status and origin of perpetrators. This is how the hardline law-and-order stances are framed as connected to immigration. The particularistic-authoritarian preferences of RRP voters radiate in other policy domains, for example the welfare state. As Busemeyer, Rathgeb, and Sahm (2022) show, RRP supporters are less likely to altogether oppose generous social transfers, but they differentiate between 'deserving' benefit recipients (i.e. the elderly), which they moderately support and 'lazy' free-riders – namely the unemployed and poor. For those RRP voters strongly prefer restrictive benefit policies and welfare cuts. Norms on 'hard work' and 'workfare' form part of an authoritarian ideology.

As a leadership style authoritarianism has a more subtle instrumental function. The populist conception of pitching "the people" versus "those up there" alone cannot be exploited for RRP political gain. The consequence of electioneering for one specific actor (rather than, say, a government by civil council) only follows through a combination with 'trust me as the strong leader to defend you.' The addition of this authoritarian claim not only undermines the RRPs' populist pretense. Furthermore, it ties in with blaming "the other" (whoever it is so constructed) for whatever demise; more importantly, it plays to a specific individual personality trait, which is the third aspect of authoritarianism in RRP support. This third part is on the voter side.

Generally speaking, for scholars of political psychology, authoritarianism is, generally speaking, one pole of a specific sociopolitical attitude dimension. Other labels for the same phenomenon include traditionalism or social conservatism with openness or liberalism at the other endpoint of the same social conflict dimension. It is expressed through individual beliefs in coercive social control, obedience, and conforming to traditional moral values and religious norm. Altemeyer's concept of Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA, 1981) was instrumental for the study of authoritarianism. He developed this scale to measure authoritarian attitudes. Unlike its predecessor, the F-Scale developed by Adorno et al. (1950), measures of RWA are unidimensional and

feature high levels of internal consistency. The F-Scale (the F stands for Fascism) featured nine content clusters, each constituting one personality variable, measured by a total of 30, unidirectionally coded questions. High scores were supposed to determine high fascist receptivity at a personal level. Altemeyer narrowed the nine original content clusters down to three – conventionalism, authoritarian submission, and authoritarian aggression.

Individuals with high degrees of RWA show strong preferences for order and tradition, as well as individual propensity to follow. This makes it a powerful predictor for political behaviour. While initially mostly explored in the United States, the concept caught on in Europe and connected to individual support for RRPs. More recently, and after some additional refinement from work in the field of political psychology, the roles of personality traits for political behaviour are increasingly investigated (Stenner 2005; Hetherington and Weiler 2009). This is reflected in membership structures of the far-right party family. The respective party leaders are formally given comparatively large degrees of power (Poguntke et al. 2016).

Authoritarianism takes a central role for RRP politicking overall, both for party strategies, as well as for individual attraction to RRPs. Yet for individuals' voting decisions, there are other weighty influences. Prime among them, in the case of RRP support, are individual attitudes towards immigration.

1.4. The demand-side for ethnic nationalism — voters' preference toward immigration

As exclusive nationalism is the anchor concept for RRP, immigration is the most important issue for these parties to campaign against and build their voter base on. In addition, it is the central issue that shapes political conflict and dominates electioneering in the late twentieth and early twenty first century in Western Europe. As issue attitudes systematically influence political behaviour, public opinion on immigration is worth an investigation to assess the rise of RRPs. Figure 1.2 presents country averages of a composite score on immigration support by country. The underlying data comes from three questions in the biennial European Social Survey (Waves 1-9). The presented measure is the sum of individual responses to three survey questions: Is immigration bad or good for the country's economy, is the country's cultural life undermined or

enriched by immigrants, and make immigrants the country a worse or a better place to live? It ranges from -5 (fully negative responses) to 5 (fully positive responses). Colored lines denote the country means, while the solid black line denotes the overall mean.

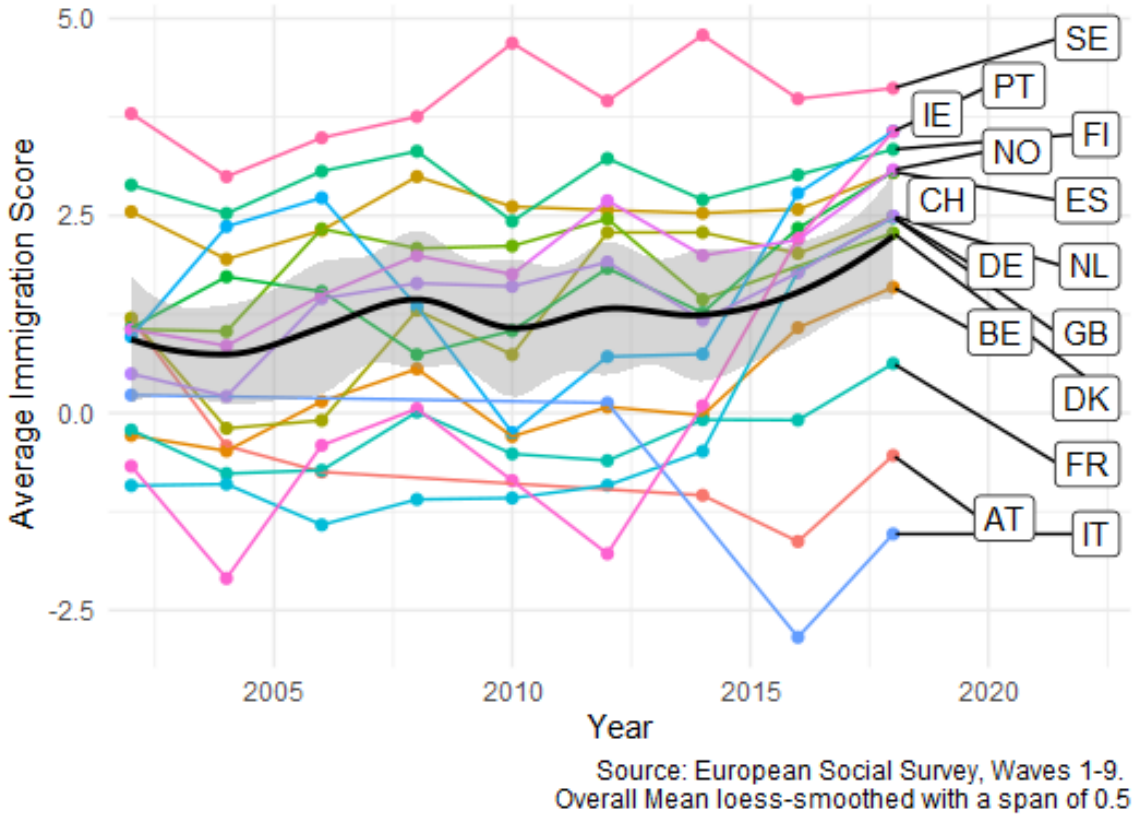


Figure 1.2. Aggregate levels of immigration assessment - by country

During the early 21st century, electorates' positions towards immigration has been positive overall in Western Europe. Notably, on aggregate, perception remained at favourable levels in the public throughout 2015-2017 when both immigration levels and issue salience were at high levels (chapter 2). During that time, Italy, Austria, and Sweden saw a drop in their public's disposition towards the merits of immigration. Towards the end of the surveyed period, aggregate levels show an upward trend.

Thus, from an issue-voting perspective, mass-public opinions have not become more advantageous for anti-immigrant parties to garner support. The top-two and bottom-two countries on the scale are illustrations of this: In Austria and Italy, comparatively immigration-critical electorates go hand in hand with long-term successes for RRPs and their anti-immigrant emphasis. Yet, while the public in Sweden holds a

very favourable view of immigration, an RRP still gained electoral footing in the country over the last 15 years. Nonetheless, RRPs have not seen successes in every country in Western Europe. Their electoral shares have differed, even though anti-immigration stances as an expression of outgroup intolerance are among the best predictors of RRP voting (Allen 2017).

1.5. The contexts to exploit conflicts for RRP-Success

This study aims to explain this variation in RRP-success by examining how the political context shapes the foundations of support for RRPs. Voting behaviour is by definition instrumental for electoral performance, while electoral contexts also appear to have crucial effects beneficial to RRPs. What remains unclear is exactly how these two levels interact, and what kind of role this interaction plays in the political affirmation of far-right movements. Concretely, I study how the effects of different political contexts influence individual-level factors for supporting RRPs. My work looks into the interaction of voter-centric and system-level explanators for RRP-support, namely how individual propensities to support RRPs depend on the political opportunity structure given through the electoral context.

The concept of political opportunity structure initially explained the fortunes of social movements. It describes the accessibility and openness of political contexts to new political entrepreneurs. The seminal study by Kitschelt (1986) defines it as “specific configurations of resources, institutional arrangements and historical precedents for social mobilization, which facilitate the development of protest movements in some instances and constrain them in others.” (58) These configurations form the structural context of social movements and have an impact on their performance overall. Such context-focused study on the success of political groups is contrasted by actor-centered approaches (cf. Tarrow 1998).

The underlying reason why context matters for RRPs (just like for all parties and political movements) is simple. Parties have to compete for votes with other parties. This competition happens within a specific national context. Three layers form this context: 1) the institutional setting; 2) issue emphases and strategies of competing parties; 3) socio-economic characteristics and developments, like unemployment and immigration levels.

Arzheimer and Carter (2006) call these long-term institutional variables, medium-term party system variables, and short-term contextual variables respectively.

The core of electioneering for RRPs is a construction of "the other." Political conflict overall relies on the existence of "us" and "them." RRPs only thrive if the political opportunity structures in their national elections align in a way that leads to high salience of issues which are projectable on to nativism, and other parties do two things: One, fail to steer political discourse away from RRP core issues. Two, not sufficiently cover socially exclusionary positions. These are the two necessary conditions for RRP success. The three parts of this dissertation investigate how these conditions affect RRP support with both a general as well as a specific focus.

Part 1 (chapter 2) concerns context determined by political conflict: In line with theories on the political opportunity structure for RRPs electioneering, this part tests hypotheses on the activation and polarisation of social and economic cleavages within party systems. Assuming that RRPs profit in elections for which social-identity issues are high on the agenda, I combine data on issue positions of parties, individual voter preference on immigration, and individual voting behaviour to study their effects and interactions for electoral successes of RRPs. Relying on multi-level models with interaction terms produces results which suggest that non-economic polarisation by itself does not sufficiently explain RRP success, but that activation of economic conflict, indeed, has a deterring function on RRP support. In addition, considering theories on individual voting behaviour, I find that political conflict in the social arena and aggregate-levels of issue salience of immigration interact to comprise an effect of social political conflict for RRP voting. Across my analyses, statistical models that accounts for variation on all three levels possess more explanatory power than separate models for each level. Based on these results, I argue that the conflictual context for each election substantially influences the electoral fortunes for RRPs.

Part 2 (chapter 3) is about the underlying mechanisms to this aggregate level view. Having established that different levels of contextual political conflict modify the individual effects of issue position and salience for individual acts of voting, I focus on one case study to further investigate effect sizes. Relying on data from Germany's 2017 federal election, this part investigates the role of individuals' attitudes towards immigration for RRP support. The theoretical framework for this chapter sees issue

priming as a central mechanism for issue proximity voting to occur. Measuring issue salience and using panel data to determine individual issue as well as party preferences, this chapter investigates "what causes which" in the case of an incipient RRP. Are voters more likely to bring their party support in line with their attitudes, or – as previous work suggests – is the mechanism upside down, with party support causing attitudes to switch when immigration becomes important as an issue? And, most of all, how important is this to the sources of support for a newly formed RRP, like the German AfD? My results suggest that the radicalization of a RRP does not lead to better voter alignment based on issue preferences. Instead, most voters switch to a more moderate party that might not align as well with the individual's opinion on immigration but is less extreme. Ultimately, this adds nuance to the study of RRP vote choice and the question of how rationality and/or affective behaviour guide vote choice.

Part 3 (chapter 4) examines the capacity of RRPs to retain their supporters after an election. Assuming that ideological congruency is essential for a party's electoral support, I investigate how a RRP's behaviour affects its base, to, again, study the tension between rational and affective judgement. This is done in another in-depth case study, this time the 2018 national elections in Italy. In the aftermath of the election there, a coalition between an RRP and a leftist, populist movement formed to comprise the first 'fully' populist government in Western Europe. I use this as a test case on party supporters on either side. My data and approach come from computational social science, as I rely on social media data and item response theory. In a first step, I model ideological closeness of voters and party elites to generate an ideological scale for every social media user who participated in the discourse surrounding this election. In a second step, I investigate user behaviour – both over time as well as in relation to separate political groups on the far-left and far-right. On one hand, this chapter draws from literature on voting behaviour, albeit at a much higher time resolution than monthly polls or election studies do, and focuses on the durability of party identification as the strongest predictor for party support, in light of inconsistent messaging by RRP-elites. On the other hand, at a larger scale, this chapter touches on the study of social movements and their capacity to galvanize support by contrasting party supporters and their behaviour on the left with those on the right.

Cases for this study were selected based on few premises. Part 1 with its large-n approach across national cases focuses on 16 countries in Western Europe to compare

differences in outcomes under regional similarities at the time of writing. Unlike previous studies, my criteria to not include a country is not having no electorally successful RRP. Since I am looking for explanations of heterogeneity in rising RRP support, this inclusion criterion would introduce confirmation bias. Yet for the puzzle I am trying to solve, country-to-country similarities (as discussed in more detail in part 1/chapter 2) are useful to build hypotheses on the question of "why?" In addition, the selection of cases features not just diverse levels of RRP support, but also differing lengths of substantial support. This allows both to focus on a recently established RRP (part 2/chapter 3) as well as one of the longest established RRPs (part 3/chapter 4) among the cases.

This study fits in a causal framework on RRP-support in the area of context and elite messaging. A central tenet in my work is that political opportunity structure, as well as behaviour of party actors and media, substantially shape how individual predispositions and attitudes manifest as political behaviour. These elements provide a context in which RRPs can exploit political conflicts to their gain. All three parts of my dissertation offer a synthesis of two levels of research (the macro context with micro individual) where effects are dynamically linked. Each chapter offers a perspective in which cause and effect are conditionally coupled. The effect and strength of this coupling is determined through a moderator. I study three of these moderators: each election's national political conflicts, issue salience over time, and the effect of elite messaging and party identification.

2. Arenas that Shape Altercations — Change of Political Conflict and Electoral Success for Radical Right Parties in Western Europe

Over four decades radical right parties (RRPs) have been established as enduring forces shaping party competition through electoral success in most western democracies. This development, starting in the 1980s, is pervasive in two respects: Critical for political systems is that many of these parties openly challenge liberal values and democratic equality. Critical for the study of politics is that this transnational rise undermines Lipset and Rokkan's influential "freezing hypothesis" (1967) on the rigid consolidation of party systems and suggests that momentous realignments are possible.

Firm establishment of immigration as an issue on political agendas throughout Europe has accompanied the ascent of RRPs (Kriesi et al. 2012). This suggests RRP support and attitudes towards immigration have a straightforward connection. Likewise, studies of the underlying individual attitudes related to RRP support show strong correlation with attitudes on immigration.

However, attitudes towards immigration are an insufficient explanation for the success of RRPs, failing to fully explain the variance in the rise of these xenophobic parties across Europe. Nor do structural contexts like unemployment, GDP-growth (or lack thereof), number of immigrants, and change in immigration levels reliably predict RRPs' successes. At the same time the rise of RRPs has weakened the long-standing congruency of voters and parties across divisions like social class, religion, urban-rural divide, and language (Budge, Crewe, and Farlie 1976). The combination of these developments makes political conflict itself a possible factor shaping the political opportunity structure of RRPs and influencing their success.

This study tests how changing arenas of political conflict affect the individual bases for RRP success. Combining country-level and individual-level data, I show that individual issue positions on immigration are most strongly correlated to RRP support if activation of social dimensions of political conflict is low, while immigration salience is high. In addition, high activation of political conflicts generally — given high salience of immigration — also increases association between immigration position and RRP support.

To quantify the political opportunity structure for each election, I rely on data derived from party manifestos to measure the “fault lines” along which political conflict unfolds. Seminal scholarship by Budge (1983) has acknowledged that few voters read manifestos front to back but they ‘nevertheless do constitute the major indirect influence on what parties are seen standing for. This is because they form the basis of comment in the mass media and provide the cues for questions raised with party candidates at all levels, as well as staple issues for their campaigns.’ (18) Human-coded manifesto texts are an appropriate source to determine the issues parties fight over. Furthermore, this approach projects politics into two separate dimensions of political conflict. Hence, it allows me to investigate, as past research rarely has, spatial evolution of political conflict over time. As I will show, the activation of conflicts, reflected in rising polarization of party positions on specific issues, differs substantially between countries and elections.

The results indicate that this activation of different areas of issue arenas has differing effects on RRP support. Moreover, saliency of immigration as a political issue impacts the relationship between political conflicts and RRP support. If many voters during the run-up to an election see immigration as an important issue, activation of social conflict instead of economic conflict reverses the effect of individual immigration positions on vote choice.

The contributions of this study are threefold: First and foremost, my work introduces a longitudinal perspective. Previous work has always captured a moment in time. While it has produced valuable insights about how polarization over specific political issues aids RRP success, static data fail to account for interactions and interdependencies in the political opportunity structure for RRPs.

Second, my approach offers an interaction between micro-level attitudinal data and macro-level party data. Thus it connects the mechanisms undergirding RRP electoral success with the political opportunity structure for each election. This gives it the potential to link the literature on attitudinal characteristics of RRP supporters with an understanding of country-specific contexts. This way the conclusions will be able to reconcile two competing narratives on the rise of RRPs: that it depends primarily on nativism, and that it is the reasonable outcry of those modernization has left behind.

Third, this study contributes to the ongoing debate about the multi-dimensionality of political conflict. Since my approach allows for differences in space and time, it shows how the dimensions of conflict differ systematically between cases. This further helps to explain differing degrees of RRP success between countries and within countries over time.

2.1. RRP support in Europe and the changing character of political conflict

To investigate how political conflict can shape political opportunity structures to favor RRPs, it useful to review the individual-level influences for RRP support. Initially, scholars investigated deeply seated, psychological dispositions. Later, with increased insights about political behaviour in general, the focus shifted towards individual attitudes and policy preferences, with a particular emphasis on the role of immigration.

Early examinations of RRP support were born out of the ascent of fascism in Europe during the first half of the 20th century. The F-scale (f stands for fascism) developed by Adorno et al. (1950) was highly influential for decades. This personality test used a questionnaire with a battery of Likert-scale questions to measure respondents' tendencies to harbor prejudice, with the test's question wording contending to hide its intention. The claim was that such prejudices revealed dimensions of authoritarianism, which translate to pro-fascist proclivities. Noting methodological and theoretical problems with the F-scale, political psychologist Altemeyer (1981) specified a theory of authoritarian personalities and developed a scale measuring right-wing authoritarianism. Individuals scoring high in this measure are willing to submit to accepted authorities, exert aggression in the name of these legitimate, established authorities, and display high degrees of conventionalism. These individuals, preferring uniformity over diversity, are prone to display attitudes — especially regarding immigration — typically associated with RRP support. More recently, two trajectories of research on individual-level support for RRPs has emerged: the "losers of modernization" hypothesis and the nativism hypothesis. The first is focused on sociodemographic characteristics, the other on attitudes.

Betz (1998) typifies the first camp. This perspective proposes that members of lower socio economic strata tend to support RRPs because they are suffering under

modernization and globalization. Increased market integration and competition over redistributive resources due to immigration have exerted increased economic pressures on such citizens. Comparative researchers Scheuch and Klingemann (1967) went further by pointing out that economic inequality is endemic to free market societies, and thus early research on RRP-parties has identified their support as a “normal pathology to economic developments.” More recently research indeed shows that the average RRP voter is male, with lower levels of education and under 30 years old, is non-religious and has few social ties, works in manual or low-skill jobs, and is self-employed or a small business owner. Rooduijn (2017)

Minkenberg (2000) refines the idea that individual economic threat determines RRP support by claiming that, regardless of their actual socio-economic status, these modernization losers subjectively feel like they have something to lose. Global differentiation processes, that make education and language skills increasingly important, diminishes their social and cultural capital. This plays into a feeling of relative deprivation, or receiving less than what one thinks is owed. Hence, this perspective focused on modernization’s losers as RRP supporters does not necessarily claim that these voters are more likely to rely on social welfare programs and monetary redistribution, while voting for RRPs to not lose their portion from finite resources. Instead, their political interests are to limit others from gaining access to life chances that are beyond reach for them. They seek to limit this competition by limiting immigration.

The second camp attributes RRP support to a more diffuse perception of cultural conflict. This is best encapsulated by a fear of “ethnic threat” (Mudde 2010, 210); the narrative suggests the arrival of immigrants with incompatible value orientations undermines one’s own way of life. Thus, disdain for immigrants is not primarily rooted in individual economic concern, but rather a perceived threat to national identity and cultural values. Empirical evidence shows such concerns are a much stronger predictor of RRP support than competing over jobs with immigrants or welfare chauvinism (Kriesi et al. 2012; Oesch 2008).

Still, both schools of thought contend that attitudes towards immigration are the best predictor for a RRP vote. In an attempt to clarify the relationship, Rydgren (2008) differentiates among xenophobes, racists, and immigration sceptics to account for variety in RRP-voting motivations. According to his classification “xenophobes” have a

latent tendency to react to perceived outsiders with fear and contempt. This personality trait becomes activated only if the number of strangers in geographical or social proximity surpasses a certain threshold, triggering the perception that they pose a threat to the in-group. “Racists” always perceive outsiders negatively, regardless of numbers or contacts, as they adhere to an ideological construct rooted in notions of biological hierarchy (for “classical” racism) or cultural incompatibility (“modern” racism) between at least nominally equal cultures. Finally, “immigration skeptics” wish to generally reduce immigration to their country, while not necessarily holding xenophobic or racist attitudes. The most plausible structure for the three is that they are nested: Racists are a subgroup of xenophobes who are a subgroup of immigration skeptics. Rydgren shows that this distinction is useful since not all RRP-voters always perceive outsiders negatively and thus are not necessarily racists. The hierarchical relationship between these different attitudinal characteristics helps to explain different effects of structural determinants (e. g. number of immigrants or yearly change in immigration) for RRP support (ibid.). In addition to resentment of immigration, RRP supporters also exhibit Euroskeptic attitudes and general dissatisfaction with political elites (Werts, Scheepers, and Lubbers 2012).

Yet, at the same time, there is also a large variation on immigration resentment (Brug, Fennema, and Tillie 2005) and Euroskepticism (Vasilopoulou 2011) among RRP supporters. Anti-immigrant sentiment increased across Europe in the 1980s and 1990s (Semyonov, Raijman, and Gorodzeisky 2006), but RRPs have had varied degrees of success across the continent, with different timing and trajectories to their ascent. A study comparing immigrant resentment in the 1990s and 2000s in Sweden and Denmark found significant parts of the populations were critical of further immigration, but no Swedish RRPs found success while the anti-immigrant Progress Party and RRP Dansk Folkiparti in Denmark did (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup 2008). Coffé (2005) finds a significantly higher degree of unfavorable attitudes towards immigrants among Walloon citizens than their Flemish counterparts. Yet the Vlaams Bloc in Flanders has garnered far more electoral success than the Front National in Wallonia. In this specific case, historical reasons, a stricter *cordon sanitaire* in Wallonia, and RRP supporter networks drawn from the Flemish independence movement have been put forward to explain the discrepancies (De Jonge 2021), but these do not generalize well across other cases. In addition, RRP supporters are less well aligned with party stances on issues related to Euroskepticism since the years following the 2008 financial crisis, and Euroskeptic

attitudes predict RRP support less well than anti-immigration positions (McDonnell and Werner 2019).

One explanation for the puzzle of micro-level causes for RRP support is that RRPs are not single-issue parties focused on immigration or Euroskepticism, as a party-strategic perspective would predict. Another perspective suggests that structural determinants like unemployment levels and growth (Sipma and Lubbers 2020), number of immigrants (Edo et al. 2019), demise of local socio-cultural hubs (Bolet 2021), rising income inequality (Engler and Weisstanner 2021), and redistributive mechanisms of national welfare states play roles (Vlandas and Halikiopoulou 2022). Idiosyncrasies of electoral systems do as well (Givens 2005; Abou-Chadi and Krause 2018). Effects of these contextual factors, however, appear to differ across space and time; their impacts are dependent on complex sets of determinants and interactions. And, above all, residual effects remain within the national contexts (Arzheimer 2009; Arzheimer and Carter 2006; Norris 2005).

Consequently, something more than attitudes and structural determinants seem to matter for RRP success. A country's current political opportunity structure for RRPs also depends on a crucial element for their lifecycle: the makeup of political conflict. Spatial issue competition between parties determines the areas over which each election is contested. Shifts in these issue arenas may explain variance in RRP electoral results. The current study focuses on such shifts, on party competition as a possible influence on RRP support. Thus, it adds a systemic perspective on the paradox between micro-level mechanisms undergirding RRP voting and the differing electoral successes of these parties: where success depends on the party-conflict component of the national political opportunity structure.

Concretely, this paper examines the role of partisan spatial competition over a new dimension of conflict for RRP support: Over the last three decades, political conflict in Europe underwent a transformation. Formerly, the dominating conception of party competition was that of a general 'super-issue' (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976, 244) with the policy contents of the scale changing over time (J. D. Huber and Powell 1994). And, indeed, voters in a number of countries adopted terms of 'left' and 'right' when considering their positions vis-a-vis political stances and parties (Downs 1957; Sani and Sartori 1983). But in the meantime, the left/right scale has spread as political conflicts

have diversified. Now they contested over (at least) two spatial dimensions (Dalton, McAllister, and Farrell 2011; Kriesi et al. 2008, 2012; Sani and Sartori 1983). This added dynamic to political competition allows for a larger reactionary component to RRP electioneering, in that political parties can move on two scales relative to their electoral competition. This development adds a facet to the question of why RRPs have been riding the wave of a regressive counterwave after decades of socially progressive expansion.

2.2. The rise in RRP support as an increasingly visible counterrevolution?

To study lines of political conflict and their effects, it is useful to trace them back to their origins. For party competition in Europe, research has the idea of cleavages and associated social groups well established. The perspective was long dominated by party alignments brought about by the economic arena of conflict. More recently, focus has shifted back to social and cultural conflicts, more akin to the initial formulation of the concept.

For most of the 20th century, long-lasting political cleavages systematically organised political action in Europe. Lipset and Rokkan (1967) described the alignment between social groups and political parties based on this focus on political conflicts. Critical events served to crystallize a total of four structural cleavages. National revolutions led to the corroboration of both a centre/periphery, and a state/church cleavage, while the Industrial Revolution resulted in an urban/rural, and an owner/worker cleavage. Each of these culminated in the organisation of interest around the respective conflict, which ultimately led to the formation of political parties in Western Europe, and the development of specific party families.

According to this perspective, supporters of each party are ‘tied’ to it based on the conflict in which their defining feature (e.g. social class) involves them. These individual features are persistent, just like the underlying societal tensions, which leads to durability of voter-party-alignment (the “freezing hypothesis”) of party support. Bartolini and Mair (1990) offer a detailed and widely accepted conceptualization of political cleavage; according to their definition, a durable social conflict structuring political identity requires three dimensions: First, a socio-structural element as a defining feature

to differentiate each social group from another (e.g. class, religion, age cohort, or education). The second necessary element to constitute a cleavage is a sense of collective identity. This is usually provided by ways of shared values and beliefs amongst this social group. The third component is an organisational structure manifested in collective behaviour or institutions, for example political parties as institutionalized social groups, that galvanize actors based on this cleavage.

Bartolini and Mair suggest that while durable social conflicts were key for the *establishment* of political parties, the binding power of these four traditional cleavages has declined. Structural developments from the mid-20th century onwards have made the underlying conflicts less prominent: The economic shift towards modernisation, with its increased focus on specialisation, high-skill employees, and move away from industrial workforces, produced a new middle class of employees for whom the foundational cleavage tensions were less important (Betz 1993). In addition, secularisation, the expansion of welfare states, and increased access to education made these 'classic' cleavages less relevant to modern day party substantification (Oesch and Rennwald 2018).

Instead, conflicts surrounding value systems (Inglehart 1997; Dalton 2020) and new, supranational issues like European integration (Hooghe and Marks 2018) became increasingly instrumental for structuring political affiliation in the late 20th century.

This aggregate perspective focused on cleavages and cultural change suggests that successes of RRPs in Europe since the 1980s are a form of backlash. Ignazi (1992) argues that the rise of these parties are a reaction to the ascent of postmaterialism and New Left Politics, and that it constitutes a "silent counter revolution."

Similarly, Kitschelt and McGann's seminal work on RRP success (1995) connects it to economic globalisation as the opposite pole of the new political left of the 1960s. The transition to post-industrial economies has led to the rise of a new social group constituted by manual workers with authoritarian outlooks. This social transformation occurred simultaneously with a transformation of political conflict dimensions. Political spaces used to be organised in one dimension, contested over economic issues, with redistribution vs free-market policies reflecting a classic left/right schematic. Over the previous three decades, however, political competition has become

two-dimensional through the ascent of a non-economic line of conflict. Issues on this "new" axis revolve around "themes of authority, nation, and race" (295) and appeal to mostly "young and insecure workers." Kitschelt and McGann describe a "winning formula" for RRPs in combining "a resolutely market-liberal stance on economic issues [with] an authoritarian and particularist stance on political questions of participatory democracy, of individual autonomy of lifestyles and cultural expressions, and of citizenship status" (ibid.).

Ten years later, McGann and Kitschelt (2005) provided a refreshed look at their earlier postulation of the "winning formula" for RRPs. Here, again, they stress the RRP strategy to maximise votes is "to appeal to a cross-class alliance of small business owners, labor market inactives, and blue-collar workers" (150), but contend that the appropriate strategy to do so has changed. They no longer felt that RRPs had to advocate for radical free-market economies without any government intervention. Because different parts of an RRP's policy appeals are aimed at different parts of their supporter base, a hybrid of differing appeals relevant to supporter factions are more important than internal consistency of the party program. Xenophobia and authoritarianism are of class-crossing attraction to nativist individuals. In addition, this new winning formula combined economic liberalism to bind the petty bourgeois voters, while sparing the welfare state from overt attacks so as to not alienate working-class voters, and promote protectionism that is promising for both groups. These mixed economic appeals condense to an overall centrist economic position. McGann and Kitschelts' conclusions on this new winning formula are based on the strength of the RRPs in Austria and Switzerland during the late 1990s. Both were once socially centrist parties that became increasingly authoritarian and nativist at the behest of internal policy entrepreneurs aiming for cross-class attraction. Both garnered support by shifting their messaging over the course of the 1990s to be more nativist and less supportive of the free-market. In line with the idea of a counter-revolution, these more centrist stances on economic issues by RRPs seem to be the result of changing political preferences in post-industrial societies overall.

De Lange (2007) puts McGann and Kitschelt's assertion of a changing winning formula to further test by analysing rises in RRP support in France, the Netherlands, and Belgium. For all three surveyed parties, authoritarianism was an ideological foundation but economic positions moderated over the surveyed timeframe, relative to the positions

of other parties. De Lange argues that the specific position of the RRP on economic issues has little impact, as long as they maintain the “winning” positions — that is, authoritarianism and economic centrism — vis-a-vis competing parties in the policy space.

Bornschier (2010) focuses on this transformation of political conflict. Extending the perspective of McGann and Kitschelt (2005), Bornschier argues that for RRP success the parties’ economic stances are insignificant. Understanding the New Left and RRPs as polar opposites, he bases his arguments on the expansion of education in Western Europe since the 1960s and thus a new political divide which positions communitarian, progressive, universalistic conceptions of society in the New Left against traditionalistic, nativist ones in RRPs. Central to Bornschier’s argument is the continued relevance of cleavages for electoral support, which is the consequence of the continued existence of a socio-structural basis of political behaviour — specific social groups feel attached to specific political parties. As Bornschier shows, overall capacities of RRPs to mobilize and bind voters are only contingent on activating conflict along a libertarian versus traditionalist dimension of conflict, while RRPs’ positioning along economic conflictual lines has little relevance for their success.

These works on the reshaping of political conflict convincingly argue that political conflict has, indeed, become multi-dimensional and that RRPs do disproportionally profit from this development. In these studies, evidence for this claim is based on country-level investigations. Empirical tests using data on electoral behaviour across countries have correspondingly supported the argument.

Spies and Franzmann (2011) investigate three elements of party competition and their effect on political opportunity structure for RRPs: the convergence of the two mainstream left and right parties, the role of the position of the largest center-right party, and the polarization of party systems as a whole. Party-system polarization captures conflict intensities of the economic and the non-economic issue dimensions, and the authors demonstrate an interaction effect between both. The core issues for RRPs, they argue, are clearly non-economic. Yet only when polarization over economic questions is low do RRPs face an opportunity structure that allows for their electoral success. Conversely, if economic issues are highly contested (i.e. polarized) and salient, the electoral success of RRPs diminishes.

Pardos-Prado (2015) criticizes the premise that only economic or conversely only non-economic dimensions affect RRP success. He challenges the assumption of both issue dimensions being orthogonal and independent of each other. His study tests the differences of links between economic and authoritative cleavages, based on cross-sectional data from an expert survey on party positions. At the centre of his analysis lies the idea of issue constraints, defined as the strength of association between a single-issue position and more general ideological attitude. The stronger this association with respect to an issue, the more tightly it is connected to a more general conflict dimension, and the more likely it is to have an electoral impact. By applying this framework to individual-level data he shows that proximity between personal attitudes towards immigration and party positions regarding immigration matter more for RRP-voting if the issue is not well-embedded in other conflict spaces. In other words, if the established (primarily centre-right) parties in a political system lack clear ideological ordering on dimensions of competition — especially a lack of alignment on immigration and economic issues — RRPs tend to succeed. They are more likely to attract high turnout of individuals whose own immigration position is close to that of the RRPs. His findings show the central role that higher degrees of issue constraints in a space of political conflict takes on for political behaviour.

In the spirit of Kitschelt and McGann's (1995) assertion that "issues that divide the Left and the Right are linked in ways contingent upon time and space" (44), I build on these previous findings and add an individual-level focus to the role of the political opportunity structure for RRP success. More concretely, I focus on the effect of cleavages that structure political conflict for political behaviour and RRP voting. My study complements previous studies in that I intend to clarify how the effect of non-economic conflicts changes the impact of an individual's immigration position on RRP support. To do so, I combine two kinds of data: For political behaviour, I use micro-level data taken from the nine available waves of the European Social Survey (ESS). This long-running biannual survey features both questions on electoral support as well as questions on issue attitudes required for my investigation. To determine party positions and generate measures of political conflict for each election I use data collected by the Manifesto Project.

2.3. Electoral competition for and against RRPs.

Opposition to immigration is the best predictor of RRP-supportive voting (Rydgren 2008). However, the effects of this individual policy position on the electoral success of RRPs varies between countries and between elections. I argue that this is due to differences in activation of political conflict between elections. In this analysis I focus on the makeup and fault lines of the active political conflicts as moderators. To determine the relationship exists individual-level policy positions and system-level political conflict for RRP support, I investigate the influence of two measures from the electorate, and two measures at the party level.

At the level of the electorate, a Downsian framework of party choice is useful to gauge the impact of individual positions on immigration. According to this spatial theory of issue voting, it is the issue distance between voters and parties that matters for vote choice. So, rather than empirically connecting individuals based on their policy preferences with parties based on party position, my approach focuses on absolute distance between voter and party to make inferences. This is enabled by a measure of distance between a voter's scaled openness to immigration and a political party's scaled position towards immigration. Both are scaled to a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. Finally, the absolute distance between voter and party is included in the model. This measure should be negatively related to party-support, both for RRPs and other political actors.

The second measure from the electorate is salience of immigration. Issue salience theory posits that systematic effects of issue position on vote choice only manifest if the issue in question is perceived to be important (Bélanger and Meguid 2008). Increased salience of an issue should boost the influence of immigration distance, in that it nudges voters to align their party support (i.e. vote) with their issue position. I introduce it into my analysis to capture effects for different degrees of issue intensity between elections. Previous research has shown that salience of immigration as political issue increases RRP support on an aggregate level (Dennison and Geddes 2019). The underlying individual level mechanisms make a direct systematic effect of salience on RRP support implausible. In conjunction with immigration distance, however, I expect issue salience to strengthen the effect of a voter's position towards immigration

on RRP support. This leads me to posit the following three hypotheses for the individual-level roots for RRP voting:

H1a: Distance between party and voter on immigration policy has a negative effect on voting likelihood.

H1b: The negative relationship between immigration distance and voting likelihood is stronger for RRPs than for parties overall.

H1c: Immigration distance is more strongly related to RRP support if immigration salience is high. The coefficient of the interaction between both should be negative.

The focus of the following analysis is on two measures at the party system level. Both are created to capture the make-up of two dimensions of political conflict for a given election. Each measures the intensity of contestation over distinct political fault lines. Consequently, the following models estimate both effects for the intensity over an economic conflict arena, and effects for the intensity of a non-economic, social conflict arena.

With societal conflicts separating into two dimensions over the last 40 years, I argue that a country's party system reflecting this change results in a pluralistic party system with high conflict intensity on both conflictual dimensions. I expect both measures to be negatively related to RRP support, albeit for different reasons.

The vast majority of voters do not take a careful survey of available options and opinions into account when deciding who to vote for. Instead, their attention is most likely to be fixed to a small number of core issues, and vote choice will be most dependent on these. At the same time voters' attention capacity is limited, and high interest in one topic means lowered capacity for deep engagement with other topics. In this setting, intense conflict over economic issues means that no central domains of cultural conflict are activated. If economic conflicts are the major political fault line — if this arena is activated properly — an RRP will have a difficult time gaining support based on its anti-immigration policy — the area of their central political claims, attention to which is instrumental for RRP success. Consequently, high polarization over economic stances should be associated with low RRP support.

For the social, non-economic conflict arena the direction of effect is the same, but the underlying mechanism is slightly different: If the social issue space is the main setting in which political conflict unfolds, it does not offer programmatically unoccupied territory for an RRP to take hold, as long as an issue other than immigration dominates the issue space (see below).

In both contexts of polarization the political opportunity structure for RRPs is unfavourable. Since RRPs' defining issue contestations are rooted in the non-economic conflict dimension, I expect that intensity in this social arena more strongly affects RRP support than economic conflict intensity. This leads me to two hypotheses:

H2a: A party system's intensity of economic conflict is negatively related to the likelihood of RRP support.

H2b: A party system's intensity of social conflict is negatively related to the likelihood of RRP support, more strongly than economic conflict intensity.

Immigration is a central policy item in the non-economic conflict arena, and the most important issue complex for RRPs and their supporters. The direction of effect for this measure is dependent on a third variable: the election's activation of immigration as an issue, equivalent to the salience of the issue. Under different contextual combinations, the cumulative effects of these three variables will differ in direction and magnitude. Consequently, I expect conflict intensity to have moderating effects on the role of immigration policy distance and issue salience. Table 2.1 visualizes the expected effects of all combinations between conflict intensity, immigration salience, and immigration distance on the likelihood of an individual voting for an RRP. The eight boxes in the middle denote conmmtain the central information, the magnitude of RRP voting likelihood. Each of the eight boxes represents a combination of the separate factors conflict intensity, immigration salience, and immigration distance. Each factor can be high (+) or low (-) for any given election. RRP voting likelihood in this model ranges from 'lowest' to 'highest,' with an intermediate level of null-effects (0). As described above, I expect the direction of effects for both kinds of political conflicts — social as well as economic — to be similar for RRP voting, given similar degrees of immigration salience and immigration distance.

Table 2.1. Expected Effects of Conflict Intensities on RRP success

		Conflict Intensity				
		-		+		
Immigration Salience	-	higher	lower	0	0	RRP Voting Likelihood
	+	highest	lowest	high	high	
		-	+	-	+	
		Immigration Distance				

Higher degrees of intensity of both non-economic and economic conflicts mean contestation over a wider range of conflicts. Consequently, for elections during which immigration plays a minor role (i.e. low salience) as one of many issues, immigration distance should have little effect on RRP voting likelihood. The table denotes this with '0.' If immigration salience is high while conflict intensity is high, immigration distance will play a role for voters, among other policy placements, and thus the expected RRP voting likelihood is higher if voter and party are closer on this policy issue.

The association between intensity and range of conflict is considerably strengthened in situations where conflict intensities are low. This is the political context in which the political opportunity structure is most conducive to RRP electioneering. In this context of positional congruency between most parties, immigration distance is negatively associated with RRP support, regardless of immigration salience in the wider population. Low conflict intensity means a small number of issues are contested between parties, which gives RRPs the leeway to garner votes based on their opposition to immigration. This is especially true for elections in which immigration is a topic of heightened interest, which has been common in Europe in the last two decades. Consequently, the role of immigration distance is the highest given low intensity of social conflict and high salience of the issue. In these elections, RRP-vote choice is likely to be about policy voting, making the likelihood of support for an RRP more closely contingent on a voter's immigration distance. Transferred into statistical models, this means that the triple interaction between social conflict intensity, immigration salience, and immigration distance should feature a negative coefficient. Based on this I test the following two hypotheses:

H3a: During elections with high intensity of social conflict, immigration distance does not affect RRP-vote likelihood. The coefficient should not clear conventional hurdles of statistical significance.

H3b: Elections with high intensity of social conflict and high immigration salience increase the effect of immigration distance on RRP-voting. The closer voter and party are to each other in their absolute policy distance, the higher the likelihood of support will be. The coefficient should be negative.

2.4. Methods, measures, and data

Individual immigration position. To calculate each respondent's immigration issue position, I generate a composite scale adding up replies to three questions across the nine waves of the European Social Survey. Each wave features the same battery of questions interrogating the respondent's perception of immigration in their country: Is immigration good or bad for the economy? Is cultural life enriched or undermined by immigrants? Do immigrants make the country a better or worse place to live? The questions use a numerical scale of 0 to 10 as possible answers, with 10 being maximum of bad, undermined to the greatest degree, and worse to the greatest extent, respectively. Responses from all three replies are then summed and scaled to a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1 to generate the measure.

Immigration salience. Instead of relying on respondents to indicate the importance of the issue, I construct an aggregate measure from the Eurobarometer series. My measure is the proportion of individuals indicating that immigration is one of the two "most important issues" the country is currently facing. To avoid inferential problems of election campaigns influencing issue salience, I calculate the measure from data that is between one year and three months before each election date.

Party Immigration Position (Imm_p). Imm_p is based on statements in a party's electoral program. To determine a party's position on immigration, I add the number of all quasi-sentences in favour of immigration Imm_{pro} and multiculturalism $Multiculti_{pro}$, and divide by the sum of all quasi-sentences disapproving of immigration and multiculturalism $Imm_{anti} + Multiculti_{anti}$. To adjust for the decreasing importance of additional utterances on the topic, I add 0.5 to both dividend and divisor, and log the resulting quotient (Lowe et al. 2011). In the models below, this is included as distance between individual and party.

$$Imm_p = log(\frac{Imm_{pro} + Multiculti_{pro} + 0.5}{Imm_{anti} + Multiculti_{anti} + 0.5})$$

The resulting score for immigration position is scaled to feature a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1.

Conflict intensity. My measure of conflict intensity is derived from Dalton (2008). This polarization index is comparable to a measure of standard deviation for any distribution, as it relates each party's position to the overall mean of the respective conflictual space.

As a first step, I calculate for each party the position on the economic (social) conflict scale, treating all topical quasi-sentences as indicative of its respective issue position. Then I take a log of the quotient of the sum of all statements in favour plus 0.5, which I divide by the sum of all statements against plus 0.5. The appendix provides a list of the topics categorized in either conflict arena (economic and social).

The actual measure for polarization is generated by the following formulas:

$$CI_{econ} = \sqrt{\sum p_{econ} \sigma^2_{econ}}$$

$$CI_{social} = \sqrt{\sum p_{social} \sigma^2_{social}}$$

where

$$p_{econ} = \frac{\sum econ_p}{\sum econ_p + \sum social_p}$$

$$p_{social} = \frac{\sum social_p}{\sum econ_p + \sum social_p}$$

and

$\sum econ_p$ = the sum of all quasi sentences on economic issues for party p

$\sum social_p$ = the sum of all quasi sentences on social issues for party p

while

$$\sigma_{econ} = econ_p - \overline{econ_w}$$

$$\sigma_{social} = social_p - \overline{social_w}$$

with

$$\overline{econ_w} = \frac{\overline{econ_p} P_{econ}}{\sum P_{econ}}$$

$$\overline{social_w} = \frac{\overline{social_p} P_{social}}{\sum P_{social}}$$

The resulting values provide two separate polarization indices per election.

2.4.1. Data structure

All models below are based on generalised logistic regression, applied to a stacked dataset of respondents. There are multiple rows for each individual survey respondent, so each potential party/voter combination for each election is represented as its own observation. This results in a data structure defined at the level of interaction between individuals and parties. The unit of analysis is each respondent's (hypothetical and actual) party choice (Eijk et al. 2006). The dependent variable in the models below is a binary indicator for vote choice. It is 1 for the party an individual voted for, and 0 for all other observations for said individual.

Since the units of analysis are not independent and structured hierarchically, I employ multilevel regression models, with respondents being nested in elections. This setup allows estimation of clustered standard errors for each voter and group-level predictors for each of the 14 elections across the 12 countries in my data. The coefficients in the statistical output below are logged odds. Models 1 through 4 use vote choice across all parties as the dependent variable, whereas models 5 through 8 predict voting for RRPs only.

2.5. Analysis

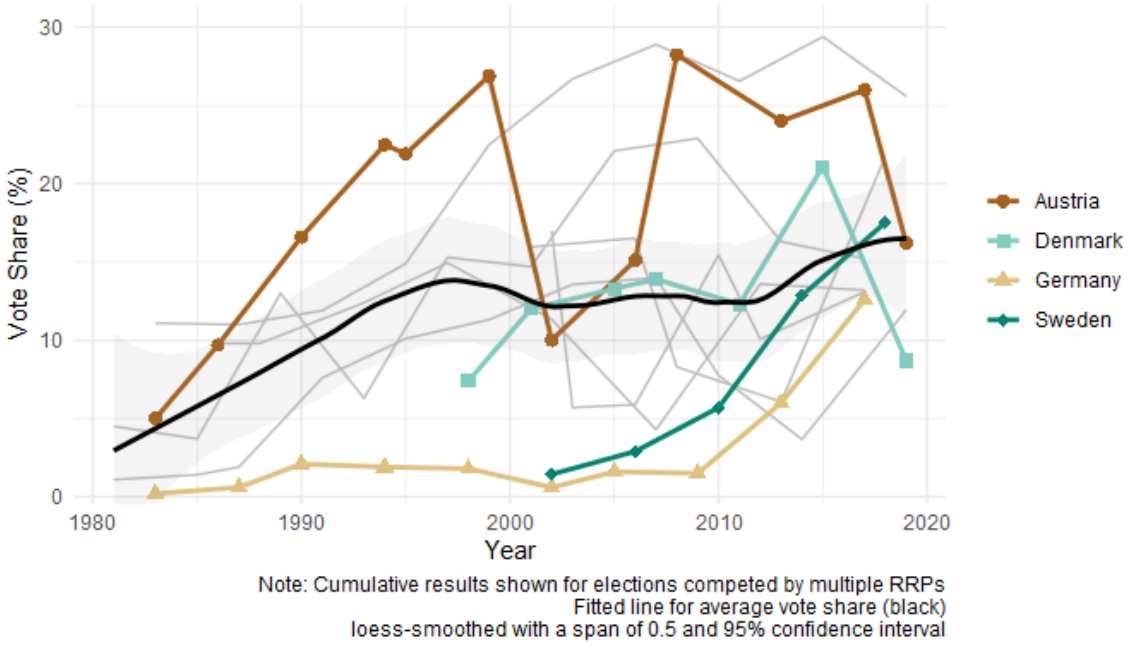


Figure 2.1. Electoral Results of RRPs in Western Europe over time

Figure 2.1 charts RRP electoral results in Western Europe, with a smoothed average across all cases. The trend over almost 40 years of RRP competition is positive. A steady rise defines the first 15 years of data, between 1981 and 1996, at which point the curve levels at slightly-below-maximum. This stagnation lasts until 2012, when average RRP vote share continues to rise again. Of note is the slouch in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This reflects several incidents in different countries around the turn of the century.

In Austria, the *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ, Freedom Party of Austria) fell out of favour. It had experienced a steady surge in support from the beginning of the study period. But in 1999 the parliamentary election led to the formation of a coalition government between FPÖ and the centre-right *Österreichische Volkspartei* (ÖVP, Austrian People's Party). By 2000 internal party tensions and conflicts between moderate and extreme wings rose in the FPÖ. This led to the resignation of several members of government in 2002. In addition, the party became involved in a digital-economy scandal. For the national election in 2002 their rate of support shrunk to around a third of what it had been during the previous election. This slump of one of the early and most electorally successful RRPs dampens the overall mean.

Around the same time, new RRPs emerged in Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands (where the *Partij voor de Vrijheid* — PVV, or Party for Freedom — superseded the *List Pim Fortuyn*). All started with low rates of support. This stunted the growth of aggregate vote share for RRPs overall. After about a decade of stagnation RRP support rose overall, continuing upwards from the mid to late 2010s.

Apart from the average trend, figure 2.1 visualizes the changing electoral fortunes of RRPs in four separate national contexts. The situation in Austria stands out: Its FPÖ is a relatively old, well-established RRP, with high peaks in support followed by electoral busts.

The FPÖ has been an RRP since the 1980s. Before that time, it saw internal struggles between liberal and radical wings (McGann and Kitschelt 2005). It supported a minority government in 1970/71 and participated in a coalition government from 1983 until 1986. Under the leadership of Jörg Haider, the party's ideological turn towards right-wing extremism persisted. For a period, both centre-left *Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs* (SPÖ, Austria's Social Democratic Party) and ÖVP considered it a pariah with principled non-cooperation — a cordon sanitaire — preventing any government role. Still, from 2000 through 2009 and 2017 through 2019 Austria had government coalitions with the participation of FPÖ and radical right wing elected officials. Both of these collapsed and ended in FPÖ-scandal and internal strife, leading to the break-away of central party figures into separate parties, among them the newly founded *Bündnis Zukunft Österreich* (BZÖ, Alliance for the Future of Austria). These divisions came at great cost in support for the RRPs at the national level. The FPÖ has been repeatedly censured by its coalition partner ÖVP for political misconduct and corruption, but it maintains strong support in specific regions of Austria and holds power at low levels of government.

Germany's RRPs have had a decidedly different trajectory than Austria's, in spite of similarities between both political systems. Among *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NPD, National Democratic Party of Germany), *Die Republikaner* (REP, The Republicans), and *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD, Alternative for Germany), no RRP has been able to garner enough support to achieve government participation in Germany since 1945. At the same time, all other democratically legitimized parties have maintained a regime of principled non-cooperation around them. As a consequence they

failed to cross the electoral threshold of 5% to gain any seats in parliament in all national elections until 2017. That year, the AfD gained over 12 % of the popular vote. Still, all other parties continue to refuse to collaborate with them, even the centre-right *Christlich-Demokratische Union* and *Christlich-Soziale Union* (CDU/CSU, Christian Democratic Union and Christian Social Union).

Another contrast analogous to that between Austria and Germany appears between Denmark and Sweden. Like Austria and Germany, their political cultures are similar. These similarities go beyond the comparable levels of anti-immigration sentiment (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup 2008), including secularism, a history of social democratic dominance, and strong welfare regimes. Yet, there is a discrepancy in RRP success. The *Dansk Folkeparti* (DFP, Danish People's Party) has been around since the late 1990s, when it established itself as an offshoot of the libertarian *Fremskridtspartiet* and quickly garnered electoral support. The DFP played a key role in Danish politics after the election in 2001, as its mandate was strong enough for it to be a kingmaker for the Danish prime ministry. It maintained this instrumental role until 2011, and again between 2015 and 2019, when the DFP supported another minority government in exchange for key demands to become policy. The party's electoral support waned in 2019, when the Danish Social Democrats ran on a succesful economic-left, immigration-restrictive platform. The rise of the Swedish equivalent of the DFP, the *Sverigedemokraterna* (SD, Swedendemocrats), set in later and at much lower levels than the DFP. The hard-line stances of both the DFP and the SD on immigration in their respective countries pulled other parties that had been moderate on immigration policy to support greater restrictions.

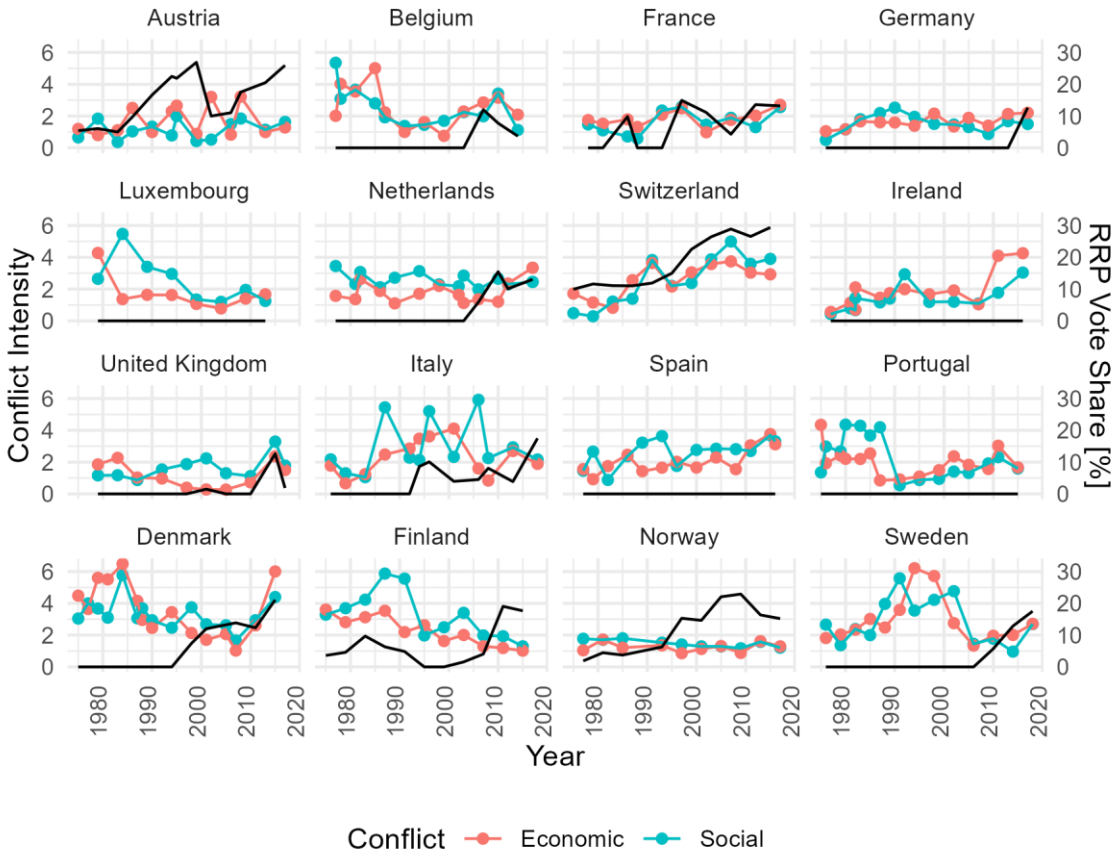


Figure 2.2. Conflict intensities and RRP vote share over time

To provide a sense of the differences in political conflict as background for the following regression results, figure 2.2 provides an overview of conflict intensities and RRP vote share over time (black line) for each country in the sample. No clear dynamic is apparent from this comparison. Austria, France, and Germany, for example, have seen electoral successes of their respective RRPs during times when the intensity of social conflict was lower than that of economic conflict. On the other hand, when RRPs across Scandinavian countries began to garner support during the mid-1990s (Norway and Denmark) and mid-noughts (Finland), social conflict was more polarized than economic political conflict. Further, Norway saw large variation in RRP vote share despite a comparatively constant activation of political conflict across elections. In Belgium, *Vlaams Belang* (VB) saw its biggest successes with low intensity of social conflict but flagging social conflict intensity later on coincided with a drop in RRP vote share. In the Netherlands, a seemingly stable party polarization over social conflict coincided with a sharp rise in RRP voting, whereas a steady rise in non-economic conflict was accompanied by increasing successes for the *Schweizerische Volkspartei*

(SVP, Swiss People's Party) in Switzerland. Overall, the variation in developments of both conflict intensities as well as RRP vote shares do not appear to follow a systematic pattern over time. Variation remains within the national contexts.

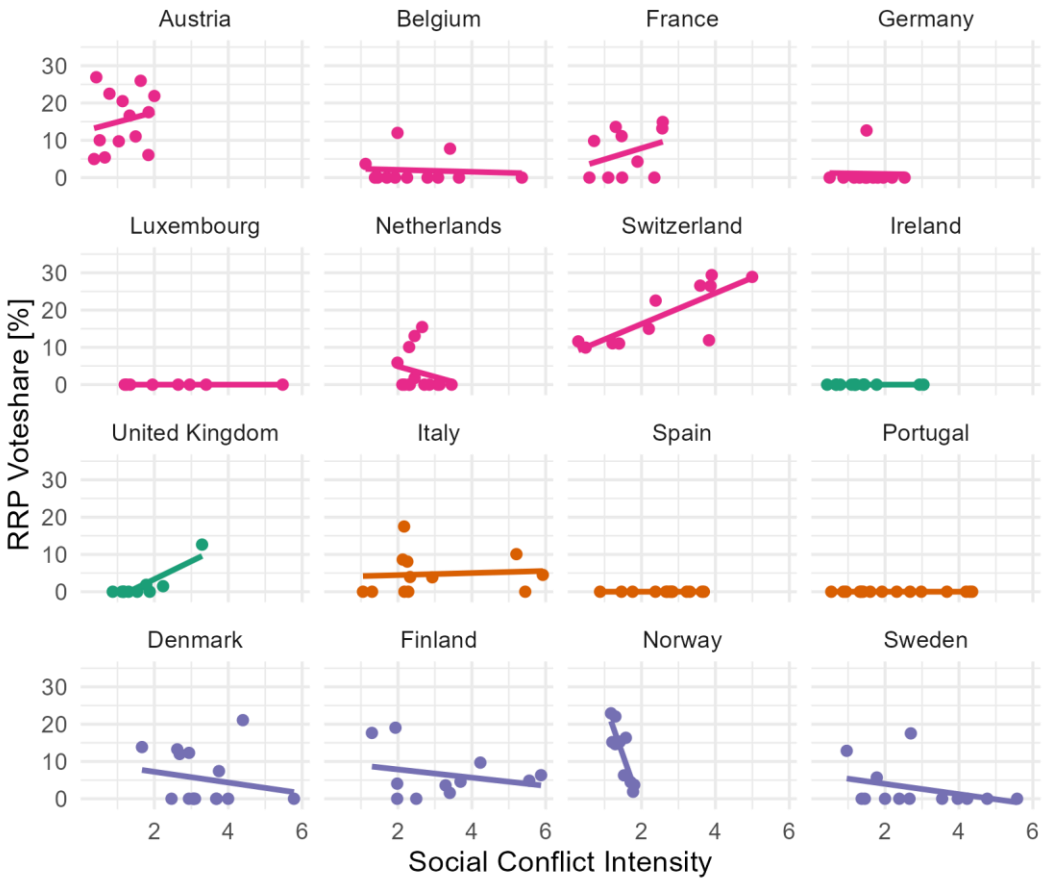


Figure 2.3. Social conflict intensities and RRP vote share

Figure 2.3 attempts to visualize country-level variation by connecting degrees of social conflict intensity with RRP electoral share. Again, a large degree of variance between cases is apparent. For almost half of the selected countries there is no clear linear relationship detectable, either for the low level of RRP voting during the considered timeframe (e.g. Spain, Portugal, Germany), or the inconsistent relationship between both measures (Italy, Belgium). Four countries show a positive relationship between both variables (Austria, France, Switzerland, and Great Britain) which is the opposite of what the core hypothesis posits for the role of social conflict intensity for RRP success. Dynamics in the four Scandinavian countries and Netherlands support the argument that low levels of social conflict activation increase political opportunities for

RRPs, in that the fitted regression lines feature a negative slope. Of these five cases, the relationship between both is only significant at conventional levels in Norway.

This bivariate evidence does not provide conclusive evidence for the role of political conflict for RRP support. Instead, variations seem to occur at multiple levels; country-by-country differences are central. Switzerland, France, and Austria have entrenched RRPs, whereas the RRPs in Germany, Denmark, and the UK emerged recently. There are no apparent patterns of political conflict preceding electoral gains for RRPs.

Furthermore, region does not overall predict patterns, except among Nordic countries. Scandinavia features similar dynamics across countries, with heightened social conflict intensity co-occurring with low RRP vote share. Continental western Europe shows no distinctive patterns in the relationship between RRPs and political conflict, as the different slopes to the line of best fit for different cases make clear. Likewise, southern Europe as well as the United Kingdom and Ireland show no detectable structuring order for the timeframe in the data.

Moreover, the only clear trend over time is an upward trend of RRP vote share. Since the state of political conflicts alone does not explain this trend, other mechanisms on other levels should be considered. My analysis acknowledges this country-level variance, and includes it in the regression models.

Looking at the data on an individual level, it becomes clear that conflict intensity might impact the role of attitudes for RRP voting. While the analysis above showed an absence of first-order effects for the state of political conflict, the following regressions test for this second-order effect. Models 1 through 4 quantify the impact of immigration attitudes on voting overall, while models 5 through 8 focus on RRP votes.

Table 2.2. Regression model results

	Dependent variable:							
	Vote (any party)				**RRP vote**			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Age	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	**-0.01 *** (0.00)**	**-0.01 *** (0.00)**	**-0.01 *** (0.00)**	**-0.01 *** (0.00)**
Unempl.	-0.50 (0.60)	-0.68 (0.74)	-0.68 (0.74)	-0.69 (0.74)	0.43 (1.02)	0.30 (1.04)	0.32 (1.04)	0.32 (1.04)
Educ.	**-0.12 *** (0.03)**	-0.04 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)	**-1.44 *** (0.09)**	**-1.59 *** (0.11)**	**-1.59 *** (0.11)**	**-1.59 *** (0.11)**
Imm. dist. (ID)	**-0.34 *** (0.01)**	**-0.35 *** (0.01)**	**-0.87 *** (0.05)**	**-1.23 *** (0.07)**	**-0.18 *** (0.03)**	**-0.26 *** (0.04)**	**-1.01 *** (0.14)**	**-0.81 * (0.38)**
Soc. confl. int. (SCI)		-0.10 (0.10)	0.17 (0.21)	0.30 (0.22)		-0.67 (0.59)	-1.50 (1.35)	-2.37 (1.47)
Econ.confl. int. (ECI)		-0.11 (0.16)	**-1.21 ** (0.40)**	**-1.56 *** (0.41)**		**-2.28 * (0.96)**	**-4.97 * (2.32)**	-3.93 (2.46)
Imm. sal. (IS)		0.13 (0.31)	-2.15 (1.39)	**-3.45 * (1.42)**		**4.18 ** (1.46)**	-7.54 (6.20)	-6.74 (6.41)
SCI * IS			-1.40 (0.72)	**-1.90 * (0.74)**			0.63 (3.46)	2.40 (3.66)
ECI * IS			**3.14 * (1.36)**	**4.45 ** (1.40)**			6.41 (6.34)	3.88 (6.60)
ID * IS			**-0.37 *** (0.04)**	**0.95 *** (0.21)**			**-1.10 *** (0.17)**	**-1.92 *** (0.58)**
SCI * ID			**0.10 *** (0.01)**	-0.03 (0.03)			**0.32 ** (0.10)**	**0.82 ** (0.28)**
ECI * ID			**0.24 *** (0.02)**	**0.60 *** (0.06)**			**0.43 ** (0.14)**	-0.35 (0.35)
SCI * ID * IS				**0.51 *** (0.11)**				**-1.17 * (0.56)**
ECI * ID * IS				**-1.33 *** (0.21)**				**1.88 * (0.77)**
N	125105	104004	104004	104004	125105	104004	104004	104004
logLik	-46562.51	-38301.70	-38059.10	-38036.34	-8944.24	-6316.74	-6275.50	-6272.34
AIC	93137.03	76623.40	76148.19	76106.68	17900.49	12653.47	12581.01	12578.68

*** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05.

Across all but one model, immigration distance has a negative impact on the likelihood that respondents will vote for both RRPs and parties overall. The greater the distance between voter and party, the lower the probability the voter will cast a vote for said party. For every increase in distance by one, the log likelihood decreases by between 0.18 (model 5) and 1.23 (model 4). With every hypothetical 1 unit increase in immigration distance, every individual voter is between 0.84 (= $e^{-0.18}$; model 5) and 0.29 (= $e^{-1.23}$; model 4) times as likely to cast a vote for a RRP during the same election, holding all other variables at their mean. This confirms H1a and is in line with a Downsian perspective of issue voting — the closer the potential voter's issue positions are to those of a party, the more likely the voter is to cast a ballot.

Once the contextual variables for political conflict and their two-way interactions are included (models 3 and 7), the effect of proximity on issues is stronger for voters who support RRPs than for voters overall. This is in line with previous work showing the importance of the immigration issue for RRP support and supports H1b. Individual immigration position has an important role in structuring vote choice, even when accounting for contextual influences per election.

My analysis focuses on the impact of electoral contexts on RRP voting. The systemic measures I use are introduced in models 7 and 8. One of these variables stands out due to its strength of association with likelihood of RRP voting: the intensity of economic conflict. A high degree of positional pluralism in this arena makes voting for an RRP very unlikely, in both models 6 and 7. At its maximum value (model 7) the log likelihood of the same voter supporting an RRP decreases by 5 with every 1 unit increase in economic conflict intensity. In other words, the probability that the same individual will vote for an RRP shrinks to 0.007 times its previous value if economic polarization grows by 1 standard deviation (= 1 unit). This supports H2a.

Aside from the magnitude of this effect, economic conflict stands apart from non-economic conflict intensity by its statistical significance at conventional levels. Social conflict by itself does not appear as a systematic predictor of RRP success. These findings do not support H2b. The intensity of social conflict does not play a larger role in RRP support than economic conflict, with activation of the latter solidly predicting RRP voting when accounting for country-variation of immigration salience separately from immigration distance (models 6 and 7).

The second strongest influence on RRP voting (by effect magnitude) is salience of immigration (m = 0.49, SD= 0.33). It has a very strong positive association with likelihood of RRP support, but only when the varied contextual constellations are not controlled for (model 6)[1]. As expected, the interaction between issue salience and immigration distance produces a solid negative effect, which is significant at conventional levels of confidence. This suggests that immigration salience increases the deterrent effect of immigration distance on RRP vote choice. During elections with high immigration issue salience, distance between voter and RRP reduces likelihood of support more intensely. Figure 2.4 shows predicted probabilities for RRP-voting at different levels of immigration distance, given different levels of immigration salience. For elections during which salience is at or one standard deviation below its mean, the model predicts no significant effects of policy distance on RRP support. If issue salience is one standard deviation above its mean, distance on immigration policy has a statistically significant negative effect. The magnitude of 0.02 at a distance of 0 is a sizable effect, given that the overall likelihood of RRP-voting is relatively low at 0.013. Hence, H1c is confirmed.

Immigration salience has a null effect during elections with high intensity of social conflict (*social conflict * immigration salience*). When immigration distance and other constellations of contextual variables are held at their means, polarization over the non-economic conflict arena has neither a moderating nor amplifying effect for salience's relationship with RRP-voting for each individual. This adds nuance to previous findings on the correlation between immigration salience and RRP electoral success at an aggregate level. Once individual level influences and systemic contexts are controlled for, issue salience alone does not affect RRP support, even in politically opportune contexts with low levels of social conflict activity.

[1] Effect magnitude of immigration salience is considerably inflated, as the measure is scaled to be 0 at its minimum and 1 at its maximum value. Interpreting the log likelihood of 4.6 as a 99.5-times increase in RRP voting likelihood represents the change in likelihood between the election with minimal RRP vote share, and the election with maximum RRP votes.

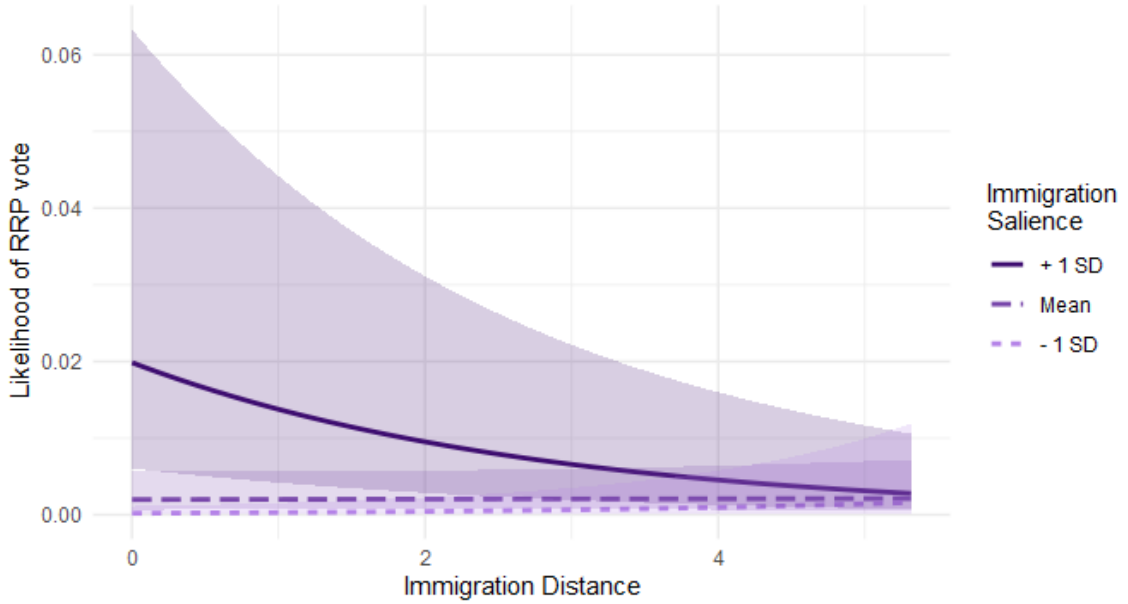


Figure 2.4. Predicted Probabilities of RRP vote, given different levels of immigration distance and issue salience

The activation of social conflict does appear to have an effect on the relationship between immigration distance and RRP support (models 7 and 8). Predicted probabilities derived from the negative positive terms suggest that immigration closeness leads to an increased likelihood of RRP voting only when the social arena is weakly contested. When conflict intensity is medium or high, larger distance between voter and party does not appear to impact voting likelihood at all. This is in line with H3a. However, the hypothesis postulated no systematic relationship, while the analysis reveals an opposite effect, albeit a very small one. The activation of the economic conflict arena has a similar small opposite effect, when not accounting for the combined moderating effects of conflict intensities and salience (model 7), where larger distance between voter and party increases the probability of RRP support.

Table 2.3. Predicted correlation slopes for three-way interaction for different magnitudes of immigration salience, and social conflict

	Correlation: RRP Vote ~ Immigration Distance		
	Social Conflict Intensity - 1 SD	Social Conflict Intensity (Mean)	Social Conflict Intensity + 1 SD
Immigration Salience - 1 SD	-0.38 (0.25)	**0.40 (0.16)****	**1.18 (0.33)****
Immigration Salience (Mean)	**-0.29 (0.14)****	0.01 (0.09)	0.32 (0.18)
Immigration Salience + 1 SD	-0.20 (0.23)	**-0.37 (0.07)****	-0.54 (0.34)

Finally, investigating the three-way interaction between the central measures displays which constellation leads to the largest effect of immigration distance on RRP voting. Table 2.3 shows calculated slopes for the effect of immigration distance on RRP voting likelihood for different political contexts.

The theory on political opportunity structures leads us to expect no statistically significant correlations in high salience/low conflict intensity elections. In these circumstances, voting for RRPs should be less dependent on policy positions, since the overall context of conflict allows RRP turnout across the whole range of voters. And, indeed, during these elections with RRP-friendly conditions, policy distance shows no statistically significant relationship with likelihood of RRP support if salience is low or high — the uncertainty around the estimates is too high to determine a direction of the effect. Under low conflict intensity, immigration distance maintains a moderately negative effect on RRP voting likelihood when immigration salience is at its mean.

When conflict intensity is average, issue salience determines the direction of influence of immigration distance on RRP voting. Given low salience, the negative influence of issue distance is reduced, as the positive coefficient in the correlation signifies. If issue salience is high, the deterring effect of issue distance between voter and party is increased. This, in part, confirms H3b.

The interaction term also predicts a positive correlation for elections with high conflict intensity and low issue salience, but the underlying voting likelihood is very small. The full set of effects of immigration distance, immigration salience, intensity of social conflict, and their interactions confirm overall theoretical expectations. The political opportunity structure is overall favourable to RRPs if social dimensions of conflict are not

highly polarized. In these circumstances, immigration-issue closeness is a strong predictor of RRP voting likelihood, and high salience of immigration strengthens this relationship. It is in these contexts that RRPs can draw supporters by focusing on their core issue.

The impact of a three-way interaction among immigration distance, immigration salience, and intensity of political conflict on economic matters reveals a counterintuitive dynamic: The positive coefficient fits with a relationship in which immigration distance matters more for voters during an election with low economic polarization and high immigration salience. This is in line with the hypothesized role of economic conflict intensity for RRP vote choice. A close analysis of predicted effects shows that the coefficient is partly a result of stronger effects of issue closeness on RRP voting likelihood, given high issue salience, during elections with low conflict intensity.

There is, however, another side to this relationship. During high economic conflict intensity and given high immigration salience, the model predicts an increase in voting likelihood for higher immigration distance for each individual. Given the small number of elections for which this is true (only two elections show both economic conflict intensity and immigration salience higher than the respective means — the Dutch election 2017, and Italy's 2018 election), these effects should be considered with great caution as they are predictions for rare events. More importantly, the findings for elections with low- and mid-levels of conflict intensity are in line with expectations for high levels of issue salience as a necessary condition for issue closeness to have a statistically significant effect on the likelihood of RRP support.

The comparison of models predicting vote choice for RRP (model 8) and parties overall (model 4) provides a robustness check. Different levels of issue salience effect the impact of immigration distance on voting likelihood for RRPs. Null-effects of salience during low- to mid-levels of issue importance stand in contrast to the negative effect of distance during elections when immigration plays an important role on the agenda. Comparing predicted probabilities for the same model across all parties shows that the difference in effects between levels of salience (= slopes of the fitted lines) is stronger for RRPs than for parties overall. In a sense, immigration salience activates the Downsian mechanisms of voting for RRPs.

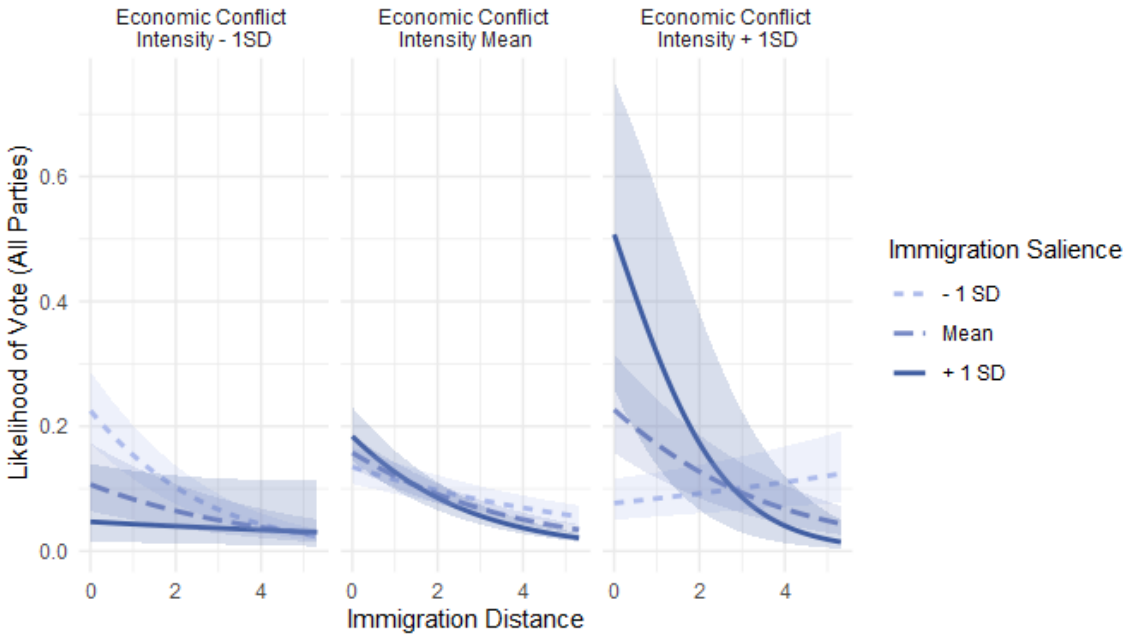


Figure 2.5. Economic conflict intensity and effect of immigration distance for an individual's vote for any party

Comparing the differences in effects of immigration distance and intensity of either conflict confirms the central role context plays in the impact of immigration position on voters. Plots of predicted probabilities aid the interpretation of coefficients. For parties on the whole, immigration distance is a less informative predictor of support, given a high intensity of social or low activation of economic conflict. In turn, the association between policy distance and vote choice is stronger when conflict intensities are high on economic (figure 2.5) and low on social aspects (figure 2.6). This is markedly different from the pattern of the same indicators for RRP support where the variance in likelihood of voting is lower across the range of policy distance, and at any level of social conflict intensity.

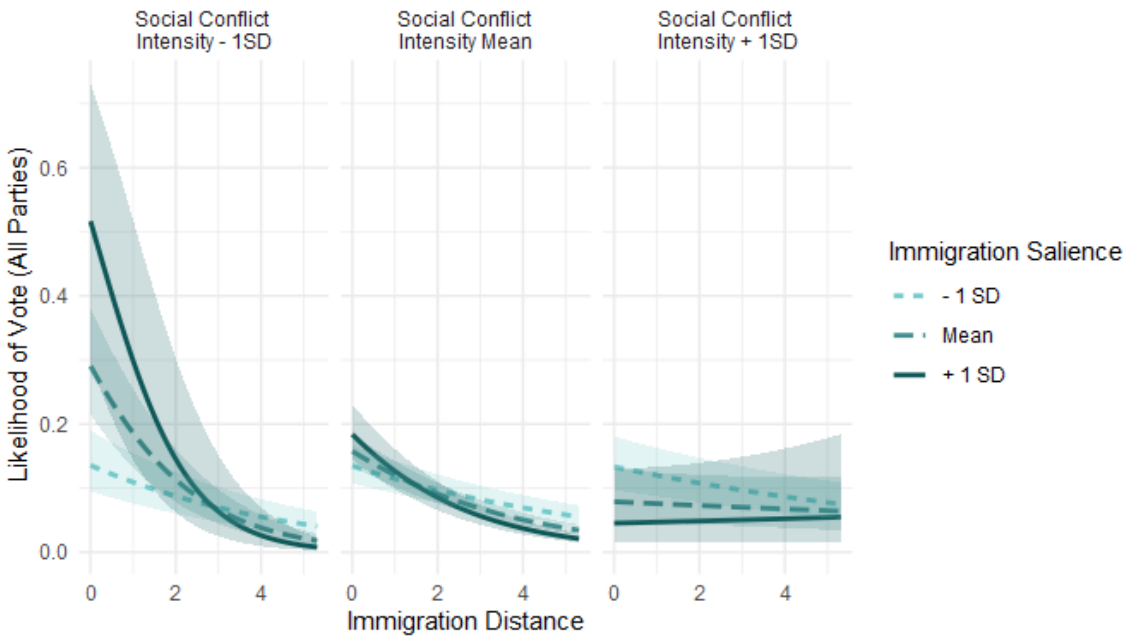


Figure 2.6. Social conflict intensity and effect of immigration distance for an individual's vote for any party

Overall, the dynamics around conflict intensities and voting likelihoods markedly differ between RRPs and political parties. Immigration preferences matter for the vote choice of supporters of RRPs, regardless of the state of political conflict during each election. In contexts where the issue is salient and social conflict intensity is low, the mechanisms underlying vote choice for RRPs resemble issue-voting more than in other situations. These findings illustrate both the importance of the issue of immigration for RRPs and the influence of political contexts for each election. Strong negative coefficients for individual level variables —policy distance, as well as interaction between immigration salience and distance— plus the strong effects of conflict intensities show the usefulness of disentangling influences on vote choice from both levels.

2.6. Discussion: the role of political context for RRP support

This study's analysis shows that electoral context moderates the role of individual influences on RRP voting in systematic ways. The two primary kinds of political conflict affect electoral successes for RRPs in similar ways for different reasons. The activation of social political conflict weakens the role immigration closeness plays for RRP support. The activation of economic political conflict both reduces the role immigration distance

plays for RRP voting, but also dampens RRP voting likelihood overall. Individual issue positions on RRPs' core policy subject are at their most powerful for RRP support when 'immigration' dominates political conflict overall. This is the case when its salience in the population is high and polarization over other social and/or economic issues is low.

These mechanisms confirm the value of focusing on political opportunity structure when investigating individual-level predictors of voting for an RRP. In addition, my analysis confirms hypotheses derived from issue saliency theory, which posits activation of an opinion as an important influence on vote choice.

These findings can help to explain the observed variation in RRP success in Europe. Depending on the political conditions surrounding an election, similar structural conditions (unemployment rate, GDP development, net migration), as well as individual attitudinal characteristics (opinion on immigration) can have differing impacts on RRP vote likelihood. This study provides a possible systematic link to investigate differing timing and strengths of rising RRPs. Italy's *Lega Nord*, and Germany's AfD arose in different time windows, accounting for the differences in their relative success, as neither structural determinants nor individual attitudes (as tested here) are per se sufficient for surges in RRP support. This analytical perspective supplies the burgeoning behavioural literature on RRP voting with crucial additional details. The idiosyncrasies of attitudinal effects that remain between countries can be informed by a consideration of the political opportunity structure for RRPs. These can differ from election to election. Hence, static data fail to account for dynamics and interdependencies in the political opportunity structure for RRPs and have difficulties to explain the different time frames in which RRPs become successful. My contribution overcomes this shortcoming with an over-time perspective.

Three pathways for future research arise from these findings. First and foremost, my analysis invites a more detailed investigation into what kinds of political conflicts lead to changing impacts of individual positions. Central to this are questions addressing which kinds of conflictual items and which attitudes matter. Attitudes towards immigration? Individual positions in a broader, sociocultural "culture war?" What is the role of Euroscepticism, an earlier explanation for RRPs, and how has it changed over time?

Second, the impact of political opportunity structure warrants inquiry into which kinds of campaigning styles and central campaign issues are associated with conflict activation. Does the context for RRP success arise dynamically from the political system itself? Or can different kinds of issue entrepreneurs cause or influence different degrees of conflict activation?

A third potential pathway to further inquiry focuses on the parties generating the political opportunity structure for RRP support. How does party competition matter in RRP-beneficial electoral contexts? Are strategies of cooptation or isolation efficient in curbing RRP voting, if the levels of conflict activation are adjusted? This last larger question puts the ball into the yard of parties other than those of the radical right party family. This study has combined different levels of influences on RRP support into one analysis and showed how context matters for the individual bases of RRP support. Longevity and variety of RRP support in Western Europe overall make it necessary to broaden the focus on sources and causes for RRP voting.

3. Prime and Prejudice – Are Priming Effects of Immigration behind the AfD's Rise to Success?

The functioning of representative democracy crucially depends on how voters make choices. Why they support one politician or party over another and how they come to this decision has far-reaching consequences for the kind and quality of any political system. A rational, well-informed voter who carefully weighs competing arguments to come to a well-developed decision on election day is the ideal, but as decades of research have shown, few voters measure up to this ideal. Many voters make choices based on the habit of their party identification, others seem to favor better looking or taller candidates, and still others seem to be easily influenced in the short-term as the saliency of different issues wax and wane with the news cycle.

Indeed, we increasingly understand that the link between voters and politics is not immediate or direct. Instead, it is facilitated through mass communications, and the media, as the key linkage between elites and the public, plays a special role in this process. Most information that is potentially available to voters is disseminated through the media. This includes legacy media, such as the nightly news or traditional newspapers, and new media, such as blogs and social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Increasingly scholars and pundits alike have raised the alarm about the threat of such new media to rational discourse and decision-making as well as to democracy more broadly.

Theories on agenda-setting and on political opinion formation point to the power of elite messaging and cues. This suggests a top-down flow of voting behaviour that turns the traditional view of bottom-up, citizen driven democracy on its head. But, even for subscribers to this view, there remain several unanswered and important questions: How exactly does media influence political behaviour? Which mechanisms are responsible for voters to change their minds and to change their votes? What are the limits of elite and media influence on voters?

The emergence and rise of Radical Right Parties (RRPs) especially invites these questions and serves as an important case study for understanding the link among elites, the media, and voters. This is because their electoral gains have been swift, with a velocity that is not well explained by the classics of voting literature. The advent and

success of these parties has reshaped party competition across western democracies and upended the existing cleavage structure in Europe. The long-time alignment of voters and parties on social class, religion, urban-rural divide, and language (Budge, Crewe, and Farlie 1976) has become less relevant. Initially, this weakening of cleavages and voter dealignment led to the expectation of an increase in more well-informed, rational voters and a rise in issue-voting (Dalton, Flanagan, and Beck 1984). And, from the 1980s to the early 2000s that seemed to be the case, but starting in the mid-2000s and accelerating with the global financial crisis in 2008 we have seen in Western Europe that tension over immigration and diversity has worked to realign voters and create a new political conflict space [see previous chapter; Kriesi et al. (2012)]. These developments and softening of potential voting allegiances give grounds for considering a different model of voting decisions. With mass media being the link between public and politics, studying the dynamic in saliency of issues and coverage is a promising way to investigate the dynamics at play.

In terms of RRPs, the conceptualisation of populism as a style of politics makes it particularly well-suited to connect their rise with the mediatization of politics (Moffitt 2016). High visibility of charismatic leaders caters to a journalistic drive for personalisation. The parties' focus on conflict and contention – often pushing beyond earlier normative boundaries – are in line with reporters' interest in controversy. Agitating rhetorical style leads to outrage, both of which carry high news value. This mutually beneficial interdependence between RRP and profit-oriented media conglomerates has been called out as making the media complicit for RRP-success by spreading their messaging, increasing their visibility, and thus facilitating large parts of their electioneering (Mazzoleni 2008).

To investigate the underlying effects of this interdependence between media and politics, I focus on the recent experience of the radical right, openly anti-immigrant *Alternative für Deutschland* ("Alternative for Germany," AfD). The 2017 Bundestag federal election was a pivotal moment in German politics. The AfD entered parliament for the first time and did so by using inflammatory and divisive campaign tactics that pushed beyond the boundaries of what were long considered acceptable tenets of German political discourse. Like other RRPs across Europe in recent years, the AfD appears to have ridden a wave of anti-immigrant attitudes, rejection of the political establishment, and a growing backlash against European integration to capture nearly

13 percent of the vote. It became the third largest party in the Bundestag and as such formed the largest opposition faction.

The party's growth of electoral support – from failing to clear the 5% hurdle in 2013 to nearly tripling its vote share and becoming third largest party in 2017 – was especially sudden and unprecedented in the history of German electoral politics. Furthermore, this election happened amidst growing controversy and concern surrounding the role media coverage played in enabling the AfD's success. My study contributes to an emerging literature that tries to make sense of the AfD's sudden rise to electoral success and the changing foundations of voting behaviour in general.

One of the most important mechanisms behind media effects on political opinion is *media priming* (Roskos-Ewoldsen, Roskos-Ewoldsen, and Carpentier 2009). At its core, priming works by making an issue or topic more salient for individuals, which, subsequently, leads to related opinions being brought in line with the primed attitude. More concretely, this means an issue that rises in prominence (for example environmental protection) leads individuals' evaluations of politicians to be more closely tied to that issue. A key assumption here is that media does not actually play a role in changing voters' opinions or positions on issues; it simply changes the importance of different issues in the voting calculus. Even though some scholars are skeptical of priming effects (Lenz 2012), it is still among the primary suspects for political opinion formation (Matthews 2017).

In the context of this study priming likely plays a role since the AfD's unprecedented rise in support was paralleled by a massive influx of refugees into Europe, starting in the fall of 2015. A comparatively young party seized an issue (immigration) by directing most of their attention to it. Subsequently, this issue saw an explosion in public attention through an exogenous shock (sharp increase in asylum seekers and refugees arriving). Such a situation should make priming prevalent, which invites the hypothesis that priming is what was behind the AfD's rise in support. Thus, I use this context to test the causal relationship between media-primes and public opinion. The yearly panel from the German Longitudinal Election Study between 2013 and 2017 offers the necessary individual-level data to test for these priming effects and their impact on political opinion. In line with previous research I focus on one particular influence: issue predispositions – as in previously held attitudes – for each individual.

My findings suggest that issue priming on immigration alone does not explain the rise in RRP-support between 2013 and 2017 in Germany. Despite the AfD's efforts to capitalize on the growing controversy surrounding the influx of refugees into Europe during and after the fall of 2015, their issue-positioning had limited influence – most notably, not even among the previously staunch immigration critics! This suggests that priming effects were not the primary source for attracting new AfD supporters in 2017. In addition, I do not find strong evidence for two potential alternative explanations for the rise in support in support after the influx of refugees - performance priming and persuasion.

Overall, the AfD's strong anti-immigration positioning seems to have mostly deterred individuals with differing positions from supporting it. Individuals with similarly negative issue positions maintained their levels of RRP-sympathy. This dynamic is a variety of the proposed media effect - negative priming. In closing, I hypothesize three potential reasons why this specific kind of priming evidence occurs, which invites further research. Most important is the changing character of the AfD, switching from a right-wing populist, eurocritical party to an openly racist and xenophobic RRP between the *before* and *after*. This process is likely to override any priming in its deterring effect. Furthermore, I consider what this finding means for our understanding of democracy. Lastly, I specify directions for further research on priming effects and understanding the rise of the radical right in Western European countries.

To appropriately embed the effects of media coverage on RRP-voting, I begin with an overview of the trajectory of general studies on voting behaviour. Subsequently, I describe in more detail the previous works on priming, and thirdly, current paths of research on RRP-voting.

3.1. The foundations of electoral choice research

I start with a review of conventional models of voting, to provide a sense of context in which the swift rise of RRPs is situated. As I will show, these approaches are mostly either static or assume a rational voter. In addition, they fail to effectively incorporate findings on RRP-specific factors. In that, these approaches fail to explain the mechanisms behind the sudden rise in support for RRPs. This warrants a more detailed investigation of media priming effects, as suggested below.

Research has long focused on the power of using static, unchanging influences to predict electoral behaviour among individuals. Classical work by the Columbia School identified the importance of partisan loyalty, mainly imprinted through family upbringing, as central to vote choice (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954). The social-psychological perspective of the so-called Michigan School built on this work, with large-n surveys of representative samples, and subsequently identified the central "role of enduring partisan commitments in shaping attitudes toward political objects" (Campbell et al. 1960, 135). This established one of the most durable predictors for voting decision research, which still informs the study of political behaviour today: the role of party identification.

Party ID continues to be the most powerful force determining not just vote choice, but also political attitudes. It shapes policy preferences as well as political attitudes, and does so with great stability and durability. Party ID acts as an "unmoved mover." It remains largely unchanged over time, and acts as a "filter" through which political realities are perceived in a way compatible to an individual's partisan orientation. More recent findings largely produce support for this mechanism (Ron Johnston et al. 2005; Evans and Andersen 2006; Evans and Pickup 2010).

While this focus on party ID continues to be pervasive in its own right, its emphasis on exogenous influences inhibits consideration of two crucial processes. For one, it bars the information environment from having any impact on voting. Secondly, a strict application of this logic prohibits an individual change of preferences. Based on this latter aspect, the Michigan School was challenged by a 'revisionist' perspective from a rational-choice perspective derived from economics research. Here, a particular focus lies on the expected utility a voter perceives to be associated with their ballot (cf. Downs 1957). This makes retrospective evaluations instrumental for party ID and vote choice. Consequently, work in this tradition introduces a new, important component to the earlier static model of the "unmoved mover" party ID (Fiorina 1981). That is, voters keep a "running tally" of retrospective evaluations of party promises and government performance. Thus, while individuals might start out with political socialization determining their party identification (by ways of family and upbringing), over time their attachment to a party becomes more and more a reflection of individual perceptions and evaluations of political events.

Achen (1992) formalized this perspective and fit it into a multi-model framework of Bayesian Updating. Simply put, this perspective demonstrates that voters learn from previous experience. Party ID is a result of aggregated previous influencers. Overall, the revisionist perspective adds a crucial dimension to voting behaviour. Not only can it explain why political opinion may be stable, but, more importantly, it speaks to why political opinion changes over time. Most importantly for my purposes here, this perspective allows for the impact of exogenous information and different degrees of effectiveness, with news items being the most likely sources of information for voter evaluation. In this specific case, I propose that the priming event changed the information environment, stressing the importance of "immigration" as an issue, thus fundamentally affecting the evaluation criteria German voters put to work when evaluating political parties for this election.

3.1.1. Three ideal types of vote choice and media influence

For democracy to function as a normative ideal, such a 'rational' process of vote choice is the best-case scenario: Issues are the most central, and most desirable item on which voters evaluate politicians. For the optimal transfer of collective interests into political action, every member of the electorate has to consider their own, specific policy preferences and cast their ballot for the candidate closest to their own position. This candidate then should forward their constituents' policy preferences in a process of substantive representation (Pitkin 1967). Since the future actions of representatives cannot be known, aforementioned retrospective evaluations serve as a point of departure for voters. Many expectations must be met for this system to apply. Most foundational, voters need to know about their own policy preferences. An issue has to be important enough for them to make up their mind and take a position. Second, voters need to know the politicians' or parties' positions. Third, voters need to be able to connect the issues they take a position on with the parties on the voting list.

This process is hard, likely too hard. Research has shown again and again that voters are indifferent about a lot of issues, often hold inconsistent views that change over time (Converse 1964; Converse and Markus 1979), and, even more troubling, fail to correctly recall the positions of parties and politicians on these issues. This alone makes pure, stand alone issue voting a rare, almost impossible, occurrence. The fact that voters also often act irrationally, have their retrospection conditioned by partisanship

(Evans and Pickup 2010), can be manipulated by rhetoric (G. A. Huber, Hill, and Lenz 2012), evaluate politicians only on short-term bases, and on random, uncorrelated events (Achen and Bartels 2016) further challenge the retrospective voting perspective. Yet, we know that voters do not make up their minds randomly to decide by a coin-flip on election day, but with at least some coherence, as public opinion and election outcomes generally respond to political events to some degree (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 1995; Soroka and Wlezien 2009).

Overall, these perspectives on vote choice and underlying processes assume different tenets for decision making. At its core, vote choice is a result of individual issue positions and importance of these issues. Differing perspectives assume divergent characteristics for these tenets. Crucially, it is about flexibility: Are individual issue positions exogenous to the model (fixed) or malleable? And is issue salience for each voter fixed (exogenous) or malleable? The role of issues for voting decisions can be broken down by these two questions. Doing so implies four ideal types of vote choice, each contingent on which principle applies. Table 3.1 illustrates a synthesis of this conceptualisation.

Table 3.1. Four Ideal Types of Media Effects on Vote Choice

	Issue Salience: Fixed	**Issue Salience: Malleable**
Issue Position: Fixed	Downsian Model Spatial Model of Voting	Priming Issue Voting
Issue Position: Malleable	Persuasion Party ID/Cleavage Models	Opinion Manipulation

All spatial models of vote choice assume that the ideological position of any party can be determined in a predefined political space. In Down's ground-breaking "Economic Theory of Democracy" this political space is defined by economic concerns over a free-market vs state-controlled approach (1957). While issue position and issue saliency are fixed for each individual voter, parties are able to move their position freely along the ideological scale. But, as parties are rational power-seeking actors, they have a strong incentive to adjust their positioning in relation to the median voter. In two-party systems, both will converge towards the centre. In multi-party systems, the optimal strategy depends not only on the voters' issue preference distribution, but positioning of all other parties seeking support. This presupposes that voters have clearly pronounced

preferences, of which they are aware, and they make rational choices accordingly – the party they cast a ballot for is the one perceived to provide the voter with the highest policy utility. This framework does not imagine a mechanism for new information – it neither sways rank-ordering, nor policy preference of issues in minds. An election campaign is a pure exercise of information provision, for which mass communications are the facilitator and mechanism.

The upper right cell represents an ideal, pure form of issue voting, in which information leads to priming. Voters' issue positions are endogenous to their voting behaviour, and stay fixed in their position. The importance of each issue, however, can be influenced by external factors, like an exogenous shock or focusing event. The theory posits that once an issue increases in personal relevance, its impact on other evaluations will be higher. In this current example, the influx of refugees sharply increased saliency of immigration as an issue. Consequently, after its rise in importance, any individual evaluation of political actors should be more strongly associated with individual issue positions in immigration. Here, mass media serves as the disseminator of information and has the agency to influence the weights individuals attach to separate areas. New information does not, however, affect issue positions.

If individual issue positions are malleable, exposure to unencountered information does matter for persuasion, as indicated in the lower-left cell in table 3.1. Introducing new information to individuals will not primarily concern the importance of an issue, but rather modify individuals' opinion on it. Just like the Downsian framework, this implies a hyperrational voter, who has a fixed rank order of priorities. Voting decisions are solely based on reasoning, but with the potential to change ones mind when learning about new arguments. Motivated reasoning and affective decision making (Lodge and Taber 2013), where unconscious thought is predominantly influential in the processing of political information, are an extension of the underlying process of electoral choice. This framework fits with voting behaviour structured by social cleavages. Voters' allegiances to certain social groups, given through durable socio-structures, determine the change of opinion, and are instrumental to the subsequent voting decision.

While every one of these three is a normatively acceptable basis for democracy, the lower-right cell in table 3.1 represents something different. The combination of malleable positions and malleable saliency of issues for each individual denies voters

any trace of rational reasoning. New information both determines the importance of topics, and easily convinces recipients to adjust their previously held convictions. This implies a powerful top-down dynamic for electioneering. Whichever elites control the media narrative, pull in voters. In this context individual party ID is instrumental for voting decisions, as individuals in this logic are devoid of principles and ethos, and orient their decision-making flag to whatever wind is predominantly blowing or to which they feel allegiance. Democracy is nothing but a screaming contest and an elite battle to control the messaging and messengers.

These four types of media effects on political behaviour are ideal types. Which one of the proposed mechanisms actually takes place is both dependent on the kind of issue covered, as well as the recipients of said coverage. Previous research indicates that coverage and recipients are likely to be instrumental to understand the swift rise in RRP-support. These influences make one mechanism stand out in particular.

3.1.2. Media priming and mechanisms of vote choice

Of the four potential ideal types of vote choice outlined above, one has long been the lodestar for research on media effects. Media *priming* has sparked a long line of research and is considered as the most central effect of mass communications on political behaviour. The seminal piece on this hypothesized mechanism (Iyengar and Kinder 1987) ended an era of assumed “minimal effects” of media consumption. Iyengar and Kinder demonstrated the influence of television coverage on public opinion through priming, and a large body of additional work presented evidence of the process. Most of this work focuses on the underlying dynamics for candidate preference on a wide range of issues: foreign policy in the US (Krosnick and Kinder 1990; Iyengar and Simon 1993; Pan and Kosicki 1997; Krosnick and Brannon 1993) and Britain (Stevens et al. 2011), racial attitudes (e.g. Valentino and Hutchings 2002), and even appearances in late-night comedy shows (Moy, Xenos, and Hess 2006).

There is an important caveat to these classical studies of media priming, as all of them were guided by the assumption that priming does, in fact, occur. By design, they cannot rule out the alternative explanation that an increase in salience of a topic — after which this issue is considered primed — might lead to an entirely different reaction: an opinion change in the respondent, like persuasion or opinion manipulation in table 3.1. If,

in principle, issue positions are malleable for each individual, measuring both primed issue as well as reaction at the same time is prone to produce false positives for priming effects. Lenz (2012) shows how an increasing correlation between views and votes in cross-sectional statistical models is “observationally equivalent” to this wholly different process.

As an alternative to priming effects, Lenz’ analyses (2009, 2012) strongly suggest that *learning* effects are more likely for a voter. “[R]ather than causing priming, campaign and media attention to an issue led individuals to learn the issue positions of the candidates or parties and then adopt the position of their preferred candidate as their own” (2009, 834). Again, as in the Michigan model of vote choice, previous party or candidate preferences are instrumental for this variety of what I label above as *opinion manipulation*.

The potential for this alternative explanation to account for effects long attributed to priming cannot be overstated. “This alternative potentially indicts almost every published priming study. Their findings could reflect priming, or they could reflect people’s tendency to adopt their party’s or candidate’s issue positions” (p. 830).

But to conclude from these studies that all priming effects are, in fact, learning effects would be premature. As a matter of fact, Lenz acknowledges (2009) and demonstrates (2012) that the occurrence of priming or its alternatives (opinion changes like persuasion or learning) are contingent on the kind of issue being discussed - performance evaluations are more likely to be primed than policy positions. Consequently, which kinds of issues are analyzed matters for the resulting effects.

Moreover, it is not only the kinds of issues that matter; the recipients of the coverage matter as well. Tesler (2015) alleges that media and campaign effects depend on individual propensities. Stable, highly crystallized predispositions are likely to be primed by exposure to political coverage. The importance of these deeply held positions subsequently increases for voting after the prime. The effect is different for topics on which an individual does not have well-developed opinions. In this case the policy-opinion is malleable and more likely to be changed rather than primed, in processes resembling persuasion or opinion manipulation in table 3.1.

The enduring role of party identification for vote choice

Either of these two processes in the bottom of in table 3.1 is even more likely when conditioned by the most central predictor of vote choice - party identification. Consequently, these heterogeneous effects, dependent on kinds of issues and individual predispositions, are not the full set of attributes that determine media effects. As I investigate how media priming fits into the comprehensive literature on vote choice, the "unmoved mover" (Richard Johnston 2006) party ID has, of course, an impact. In our present case this would make it possible that the AfD led a lot of party identifiers within a short time frame to take their own critical position on immigration. These partisan cues then would have been active by ways of media priming.

This "partisan cue taking" (Brader, Tucker, and Duell 2013) makes voters, to a certain degree, 'leadable' by the parties they identify with - not equally so for all issues but at least for some. Issue positions are malleable -the bottom row of the conceptualization in table 3.1- and are especially so for partisan voters following party line. Of note is that research as early as Campbell et al. (1960) noted how deeply held opinions, with high personal importance and strong feelings attached to them, "must exert some pressure on the individual's basic partisan commitment. If this pressure is intense enough, a stable partisan identification may actually be changed" (p. 135), and, thus, vote choice may be changed.

Later research built on this modified Michigan perspective to investigate issue-based party conversion and found that the saliency of the issue is, indeed, relevant. Layman and Carsey (2006) find that both party-based issue change (following) and issue-based party change (leading) take place when awareness of an issue is raised. Once again, as with opinion crystallization, which of the two processes ensues depends on the saliency an individual assigns to the issue in question. On one side, individuals for whom the issue is not particularly salient tend to realign their issue position to be in line with party ID; they are following the parties. On the other, for an issue which is salient, the process mirrors issue-based change in party affiliation. This is the process by which, in aggregate, voters lead political parties. Issue salience is what appears to be a nudge to party ID.

These effects of partisan affiliation for persuasion, however, are heterogeneous themselves and depend on the strength of party ID. As Zaller (1992) finds, it is the most

partisan respondents that are the least likely to change their minds to concur with new information. To capture this counterintuitive diversity, Zaller (1992) devised the *RAS (Receive-Accept-Sample) model*. Opinion formation and the propensity of an individual to be swayed by new information is a two-step process, and conditioned by two influences - political awareness and individual predispositions. The first level concerns the reception of a message; highly political aware individuals will be more likely to receive any political information when compared to a less aware individual. The second level is about acceptance of a message, or the likelihood that a person will accept or reject a message as incompatible with prior beliefs. Here, the politically aware will be more reluctant to be swayed by new information. Increased awareness means availability of a greater pool of information – any new piece to the puzzle is relatively less important – with more material to sample from and determine the importance and applicability of new information.

In addition, and in line with the party-ID focused Michigan perspective, ideological predispositions are a second powerful influence on likelihood of opinion change. Consequently, ideologically more firmly positioned individuals, with high party affiliation, are more resistant to opinion change. In addition, if they are more politically aware, they are also able to more thoroughly justify their position based on previous information, and understand the connection between arguments, actors, and values more thoroughly. Thus, these individuals are much less likely to accept a message that has a potential to substantively alter their beliefs.

3.1.3. The foundations of vote choice and far-right voting in Europe

As with the previous, general literature on vote choice, this part reviews conventional research on RRP voting first. Subsequently, more context specific findings are presented, undergirding the special role media priming should take in this process.

Most work concerning motivations for individuals to back RRPs approach the topic from one of two directions: One approach focuses on the contextual supply side and posits that structural developments in the Western world induce growing support for RRPs. These macro-level explanations for the successes of radical-right populism range from backlashes against modernization and globalization (Betz 1994; Minkenberg 1998), over political and economic crises (Hernández and Kriesi 2016), and the changes in

social compositions of societies caused by migration (Golder 2003; Mudde 2007). Overall, these are based in certain social groups feeling threatened by societal processes, or perceiving a loss of some sort - capital, identity, jobs etc. Tests of these macro-level accounts, however, deliver inconclusive results, and their links to micro-level mechanisms are often murky (Mudde 2007).

The other general approaches to the study of RRP-support focuses on micro-level individual factors, with a special focus on the demand side of voters.

One perspective in this area sees sociodemographic factors as the most important determinants for right-wing extremist support. Both gender (Givens 2004; Lodders and Weldon 2019) and level of education (Elchardus and Spruyt 2010) are found to be central determinants. Another important aspect is the income levels of supporters. Increased RRP-voting by lower socio-economic strata is considered to be evidence for the “losers of modernization” hypothesis, with individuals in these strata feeling increased pressure to compete over scarce jobs and welfare benefits (Brug, Fennema, and Tillie 2005).

This would be a process akin to issue-voting. As previous research noted, however, issue-voting by itself appears to be a weak explanation for party support. The previous discussion of foundational voting-behaviour literature illustrates this shortcoming and presents evidence as to why some cases and parties make issue-voting more likely than others. Following from this, however, we can say that when an issue sees a sudden spike in relevance, it becomes of greater importance for voters, and this issue can be seized by policy entrepreneurs to realign the ‘activated’ policy space to the favour of the policy entrepreneurs’ party.

One profound realignment in Europe and beyond has been the activation of concerns about immigration and diversity over the last three decades (Kriesi et al. 2012). This development mirrored the rise of RRPs, which have rapidly gained popularity. Previous research on the sources of RRP-support has followed a similar trajectory to the general literature on voting, and mostly focused on cross-sectional analyses of static contexts - mostly aggregate-level influences on support like structural sociodemographic and economic circumstances (Rink, Phalet, and Swyngedouw 2009). More recently, an emerging strand of literature considered issue salience and media coverage as

instrumental to RRP-success (Boomgarden and Vliegenthart 2007; Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden, and Spanje 2012; Damstra et al. 2019). All these foci, however, miss attitudinal characteristics at the individual level.

As my discussion below will show, research on the effects of media coverage for the rise of RRP can gain the most by considering heterogeneous effects of priming in line with Zaller (1992) - dynamic effects of priming events given pre-existing attitudes. Drawing from existing theories and experimental evidence on priming and policy-learning leads to an expected influence of such predispositions for the receptiveness of media coverage on RRP-support. This can add to currently existing perspectives explaining RRP-support.

Empirics on RRP voting and sudden rises in support

These perspectives on RRP-support are applications of the Michigan models of vote choice, located in the "Downsian" cell in table 3.1. As such, they consider issue positions and saliency as fixed. This makes them beset with the same failure to explain the sudden change in levels of RRP-voting. Consequently, these static perspectives are contested. For the German AfD, for example, the evidence is ambivalent: Lengfeld (2018) claims that it is not individuals of lower standing that are drawn towards the party. Instead, the effect of economic deprivation is mediated by anti-immigration stances. Bergmann, Diermeier, and Niehues (2017) claim personal socio-economic deprivation does not matter for AfD-voting. Instead, they present evidence that the current personal economic situation matters less for RRP-support compared to the outlook towards the future. Lux (2018) on the other hand finds that an individual's lower socio-economic standing increases the likelihood of AfD-support. Other national contexts feature effects of relative wealth on radical right-wing support (Mols and Jetten 2016), but also relative deprivation appears to be positively correlated (Elchardus and Spruyt 2012). These ambiguous findings suggest either national differences for RRP-support, or, more likely, a deeper foundation for the causal mechanisms on the individual level.

The supply-side argument focuses on this individual level. This second perspective on RRP-support considers voters and their attitudes as the main drivers of radical-right support. Two strands of attitudes primarily lend themselves as explanations (Mudde 2007, 219): nativist, anti-immigrant attitudes and cynical anti-establishment sentiments. Empirical evidence for the first is abundant (Ivarsflaten 2008; Lucassen and

Lubbers 2012; Berning 2016; Berning and Schlueter 2016). In this sense, the attitudinal proximity on 'immigration' between voters and RRPs should be comparable to distances on other issues between voters of other parties (Brug, Fennema, and Tillie 2000). However, for RRPs, the story seems to go deeper and work with different mechanisms, as yet another research focus suggests - the role of mass communications for RRP-voting.

Media complicity in RRP support

A fast-growing strand of research on RRP-support - investigating the role of mass communications, mostly on the aggregate level - focuses on the relationship between media systems and populist politics. Infotainment, superficiality, personalisation of reporting, and increased marketisation define contemporary mass media. In these environments charismatic polarizing, media-savvy politicians -as many heads of populist parties are- are thriving with simple and poignant rhetoric. Esser, Stepińska, and Hopmann (2016) describe the "stylistic" congruence between media logic and political populism as creating a "favourable structure that is susceptible to populist messages and their seamless integration into editorial considerations and news content - without any conscious intention of the journalists themselves." (p. 369) Charismatic leaders, inflammatory rhetoric, and contentious issues are of high news value. As such, populist politicians and movements can count on a sort of "media complicity," since reporting on these actors' politics heightens their visibility and perceived legitimacy (Mazzoleni 2008, 50).

This is where the missing link between the societal context and individual formation of political preference most likely operates. A powerful connection between aggregate and individual levels is public discourse, and especially mass communications through the media. As such, the expression of support for the radical right does not only depend on the presence of personal attitudes. To become efficacious the external environment has to activate these attitudinal dimensions - a likely mechanism to engage is media *priming*. Issue saliency is malleable for this perspective.

In all, these previous findings paint a highly nuanced picture. Citizens take cues from media to determine the importance of an issue. The resulting effect of this prime for political opinion depends on two things. One is previously held issue importance and pre-existing issue position in the individual. A crystallized, firmly held conviction is more

likely to be primed than changed. Secondly, the strength of party affiliation should determine whether the prime leads to a change of party support (leading) or to a switch of individual position to be in line with party position (following). Undecided voters or individuals who have no clear previous issue-preference appear to be more susceptible to campaign priming on a wide range of issues (Matthews 2017).

This present work intends to test the applicability of the vast literature on campaign effects and priming for a growing phenomenon: the support for RRPs in Europe. Previous research suggests that media coverage plays a role for short-term gains in RRP-success, but the individual-level processes responsible for the surge are less well identified. My research aims to fill this gap. To do so, I rely on panel data. Using over-time variation within the same individuals, I perform three tests to identify the media-priming mechanism and rule out one possible alternative.

3.2. Data, methods, and model

My data are taken from the Longterm-Panel 2013 - 2017 gathered by the German Longitudinal Election Study (Roßteutscher et al. 2018). The annual survey waves are collected in the fall and winter of each year. The influx of refugees into Germany - the priming event - reached its peak in the fall of 2015 and remained at high levels, along with the associated media coverage, throughout most of 2016. Therefore, I consider the survey of 2017 to be the wave “after” the prime. Availability of data forces me to employ two different time points to determine “before” the prime, since the question on opposition to immigration was not asked in 2014. Thus, in models requiring a contemporaneous measure of this attitude I use the 2013-wave as “before.” In models in which the lagged individual immigration-opposition is included, I use 2014 as “before.”

In the following models I look for influencers of radical-right support in Germany. To determine my dependent variable (DV), I rely on respondents’ feeling thermometer rating towards the party. Individuals were asked to place the AfD on an 11-point scale, ranging from “completely disapprove of this party” to “completely approve of this party.” Admittedly, this is not the same as considering vote-choice for each individual, but is advantageous for two reasons. First, it allows me to track granular changes in party sympathies, with a more detailed measure than a binary “vote/non-vote.” Second, it indicates an important and critical precursor to the actual act of voting - the generation of

a levels of sympathy for the party in the individual. Third, it is less beset by problems of mis-reporting. An investigation of self-reported vote-choice in 2013 and 2017 (Table 3.2) reveals that voters were reluctant or forgetful when reporting their vote choice in 2017: while the result for 2013 is within 0.5 percentage points of the actual result, it is over 4 percentage points off in 2017. Social desirability bias can strongly impact survey responses, and in this case the radicalization of the AfD appears to have intensified its effect on respondents in the sample. Regardless, more individuals are indicating an AfD-vote in 2017 than in 2013.

Table 3.2. AfD voting -actual and self-reported shares (with absolute counts)

	2013	2017
Self-reported	4.2 % (104)	8.8% (140)
Actual result	4.7 %	12.6 %

Testing for the occurrence of priming effects requires a determination of an individual's issue positions at different points in time, from only one timepoint for a single-wave model, to up to four points in time when considering lags (previous positions) of the relevant variables for a *before* and an *after*. A question in the GLES panel determines positions on immigration at a sufficient number of waves. It asks respondents about "opportunities of influx for foreigners" ("Zuzugmöglichkeiten für Ausländer"). The scale for replies to this question range from 1 ("should be made easier") to 11 ("should be limited"). If the priming hypothesis holds in the case of AfD-support, then the correlation between AfD-support and anti-immigration stance should be higher in the time *after* the priming event than *before*.

The growth in AfD-support could be a result of a large mass-opinion change towards immigration, sparked by the events during the fall of 2015. An inspection of the respondents' distribution before and after the prime, however, does not suggest a mass opinion shift, as the left panel in figure 3.1 shows. The distribution of possible positions on the scale for opposition to immigration is very similar *before* and *after*. The distribution is slightly right-skewed in both cases (median of 0.6), and the means only marginally divergent, being 0.60 *before* and 0.59 *after* the priming event; marginal boxplots depict summaries of each. The right panel in Figure 3.1 investigates whether individual *change* of attitudes towards immigration carries any systematic bias. The plot

charts the distribution of change in immigration-opposition for each individual in the panel between *before* and *after*. The dispersion of values has a Standard deviation of 0.25 and is almost fully symmetrical around a mean and median of 0. No skew or bias determines the dispersion of data. This does suggest that priming, with differences in issue weights at different timepoints, might well be behind the AfD's boost in support. There is no indication of a massive, overall shift towards anti-immigration attitudes.

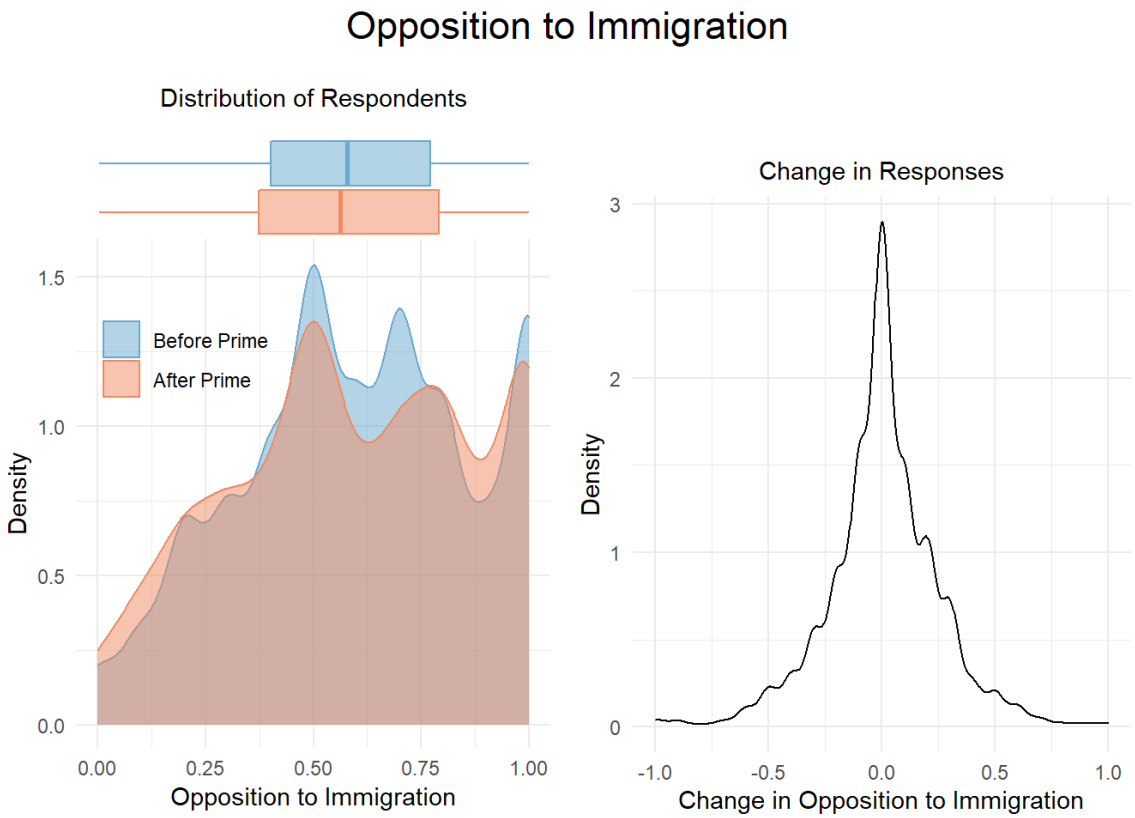


Figure 3.1. Distribution of immigration opposition 'before' and 'after'

The influence on RRP-support I am most interested in is the impact of individual predispositions on immigration. I expect individuals who previously held strong anti-immigrant resentment to react differently to the priming event than others, who might have become *more critical* of immigration during the priming event. Thus, I identify a subgroup of respondents within the panel, whom I call "staunch immigration critics." These individuals expressed negative attitudes towards immigration in 2013 (before the priming event) *and* indicated that immigration was an "important" or "very important" issue for them in the same survey. As such, they should be the most susceptible to displaying priming effects of the migrant-influx on RRP-party sympathies.

Below, four different models and their respective equations are presented which are based on these variables. The first is a 'classical,' but incorrect, test of the priming hypothesis. In it, both issue-position and outcome (RRP-support) are measured at *the same time*. For the reasons discussed above, this is an imprecise way to determine the existence of priming effects and is susceptible to false positives. Nonetheless, it is useful as a baseline to which the other tests can be compared. The specification of the corresponding model is:

$$\text{RRP Support}_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Issue_{i,t} + \beta_2 Post_{i,t} + \beta_3 Issue_{i,t} Post_{i,t} + \epsilon_{i,t}$$

In this equation, i denotes the respondent and t indicates the time of the interview. RRP-Support$_{i,t}$ is the level of RRP-sympathy of respondent i at time t, with $Issue_i, t$ being their position on immigration. $Post_i, t$ is a binary variable indicating if the survey was administered *before* (0) or *after* (1) the prime. The model estimates β_0 through β_3. If β_1 is positive (negative), then this classical test assumes positive (negative) priming effects to occur if $\widehat{\beta_3}$ is positive (negative) and statistically significant.

A more advanced way to establish priming effects and their magnitude is to use panel data and include the lag of the independent variable, its value from a timepoint one wave before the dependent variable. In this setup, priming effects manifest themselves as a different effect size for the lagged independent variable (IV) before and after the priming event. Formally, this is expressed in an interaction term in the following equation:

$$\begin{aligned}&\text{RRP Support}_{i,t}\\ &= \beta_0 + \beta_1 Issue_{i,t-1} + \beta_2 Post_{i,t} + \beta_3 Issue_{i,t-1} Post_{i,t} + \beta_4 \text{RRPSupport}_{i,t-1}\\ &+ \beta_5 \text{RRPSupport}_{i,t-1} Post_{i,t} + \epsilon_{i,t}\end{aligned}$$

This model aims to establish causality by clear temporal ordering of IV and DV. In addition, a control is added for lagged RRP-support. To determine the effect size of issue-position for RRP-affinity, the model accounts for heterogeneous levels of feeling temperature among the respondents. All other notation is equivalent to equation 1. Again, priming occurs if the cumulated effects of influence for immigration-opposition (β_1, β_2 and β_3) are larger after the priming event.

In this present case the AfD shifted from being a eurocritical to an openly xenophobic party between the elections in 2013 and 2017. Knowing this and the results of previous priming studies in which performance was more likely to be primed than policy positions, I conduct a third test to determine the short-term sources of RRP-support. But in this case the test focuses on performance rather than policy. Throughout the short history of the AfD, one central party tenet was a staunch opposition to the Merkel government. This culminated in harsh condemnation of the chancellor's decision to keep borders open during the fall of 2015. With this in mind, the third model tests whether *negative* performance priming led to an increase in RRP-support. Did the influx of immigrants prime government opposition rather than anti-immigration policies to bring about AfD-support? The specification of this model is similar to equation 2 with lagged DV and IV:

$$\begin{aligned}&\text{RRP Support}_{i,t}\\&= \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Gov'tOpposition}_{i,t-1} + \beta_2 Post_{i,t} + \beta_3 \text{Gov'tOpposition}_{i,t-1} Post_{i,t}\\&+ \beta_4 \text{RRPSupport}_{i,t-1} + \beta_5 \text{RRPSupport}_{i,t-1} Post_{i,t} + \epsilon_{i,t}\end{aligned}$$

A final, fourth alternative tests the exact opposite of the previous two models. In line with the linchpin of Lenz (2012) it assumes the causal relationship points the other way. While equations 2 and 3 test whether individuals align their party-sympathies with previous issue/performance assessments, equation 4 assumes party-support to precede policy assessment. In theory, a test for this would be similar to equations 2 and 3 but with IV and DV switched around. However, data limitations in the GLES Panel do not allow for such a test — the lagged value for AfD-sympathies cannot be produced from the data. Instead of relying on a lagged IV, I conduct a test that focuses on change in between waves. In addition to one wave *before* (2014) and a second wave *after* (2017) the priming event, data for this test includes a third survey wave in between both (2015). In this setup the causal link to look for is between differences. This allows us to answer a seemingly simple question with far-reaching consequences: did a change in RRP-sympathy before the influx of migrants lead to a systematic change in position towards migration after the fall of 2015? If it did, then the measurable increase in RRP-support (in polls) *after* was not a result of priming, but instead a manifestation of the party's earlier latent support. In this case, it is advantageous that the measure of AfD-support is the feeling thermometer. This allows me to test whether the situation during the fall of 2015

was a catalyst to previously formed RRP-support in the German population. The specification of this model is in equation 4:

$$\Delta Issue_{i,w2\rightarrow w3} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \Delta \text{RRPSupport}_{i,w1\rightarrow w2} + \beta_2 \text{RRPSupport}_{i,w1} + \beta_3 \Delta \text{Issue}_{i,w1\rightarrow w2} + \beta_4 \text{Issue}_{i,w1} + \epsilon_i$$

$\Delta Issue_{i,w2\rightarrow w3}$ is the change of issue position in individual *i* between waves 2 and 3. If this hypothesis about opinion change is correct, then the DV should be predicted by ΔRRP-Support$_{i,w1\rightarrow w2}$, the change of party sympathies for individual *i* between waves 1 and 2. β_1 indicates the magnitude of the effect. Controlling for the change in issue position between waves 1 and 2 catches variance which might be caused by a trend.

These four approaches all consider different perspectives on the source of RRP-support in Germany. The presentation of results below gives special consideration to individual predispositions about immigrants by applying each equation to three different groups of respondents.

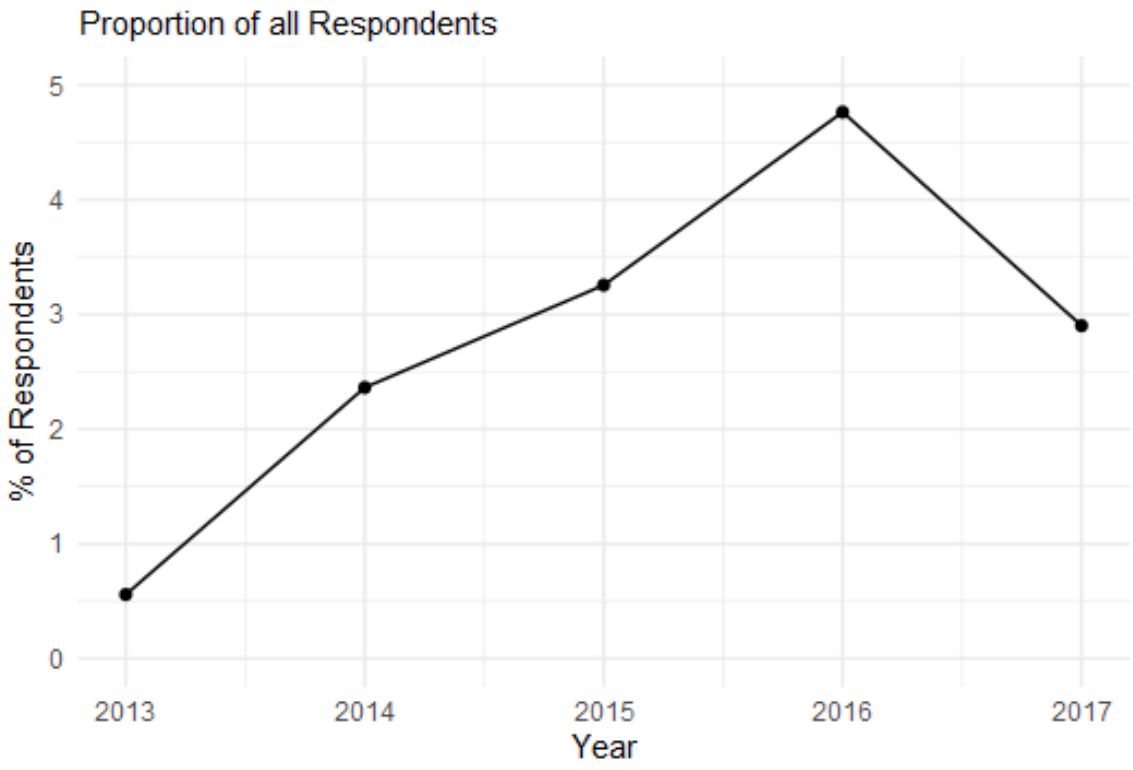


Figure 3.2. AfD-party identifiers

In using this approach, I exclude any potential effect that party identification might have, despite its central role in previous literature. In this case, however, it cannot be central to potential mechanisms. In the whole sample of respondents, only 0.56 % of respondents (27 in total) report AfD-identification in 2013. This number rises considerably throughout 2014 to 2016 but drops down to 2.9 % (48) of respondents for 2017 (figure 3.2). Even if every AfD-identifier voted for the RRP in 2017, it would only account for less than a quarter of their overall vote share when projected onto the sample size of this survey.

Since the underlying data are panel-data, the same individuals get interviewed at different timepoints. Not only does this provide researchers with previous positions and attitudes, it also makes it superfluous to control for any static traits in each individual. Since my focus is on effects at time *t* and their difference to effects at *t+1*, my approach clusters observations and applies models with fixed effects for each individual. Each respondent is considered to be their own unit, with the effects of interest only occurring over time. Any static influence on RRP-support that previous research identified (like sex, education, or assessment of one's own economic situation at t) is hence accounted for by the focus on effects within each individual. This is one of the major advantages of panel data. Accounting for this setup in hypothesis testing requires me to correct the standard errors for said clustering. As such, my models rely on heteroskedasticity-consistent estimations of their covariance matrices by ways of White's estimator.

3.3. Results

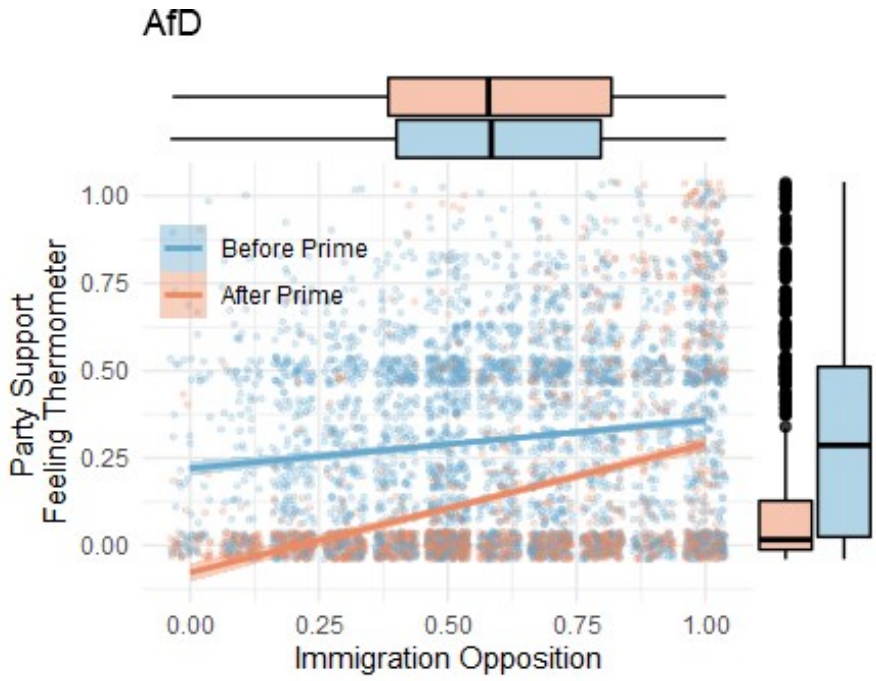


Figure 3.3. Immigration opposition and AfD support

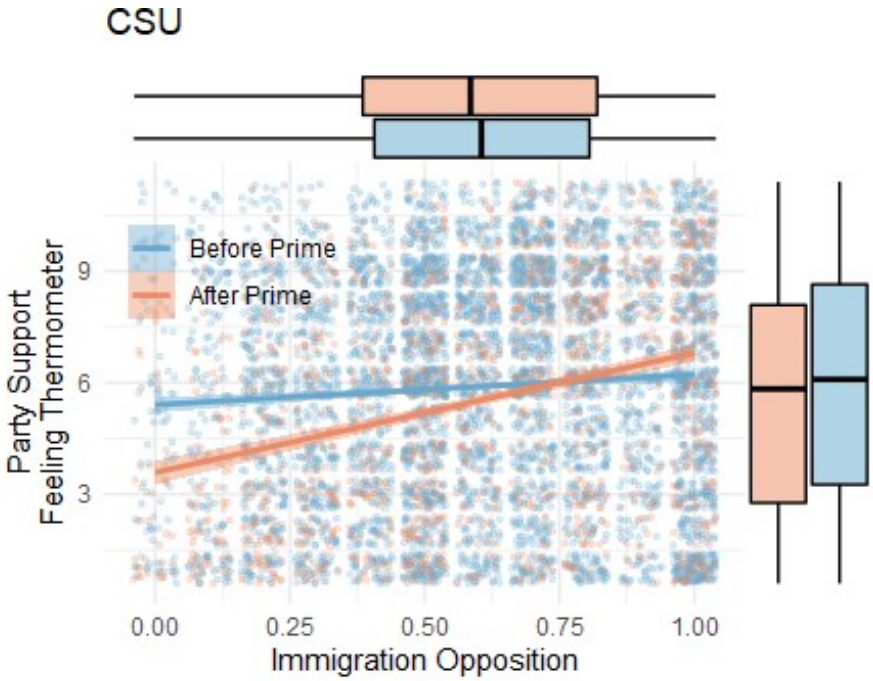


Figure 3.4. Immigration opposition and CSU support

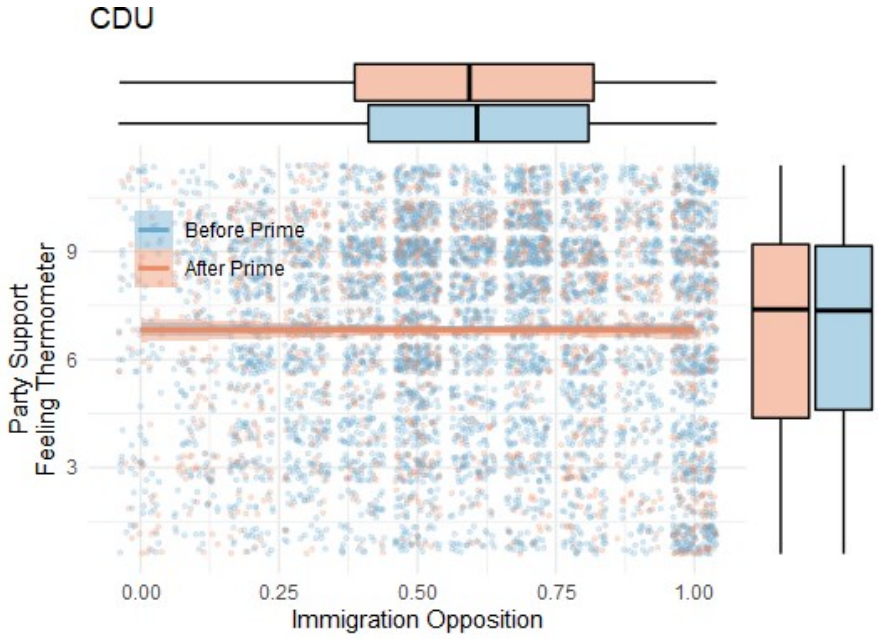


Figure 3.5. Immigration opposition and CDU support

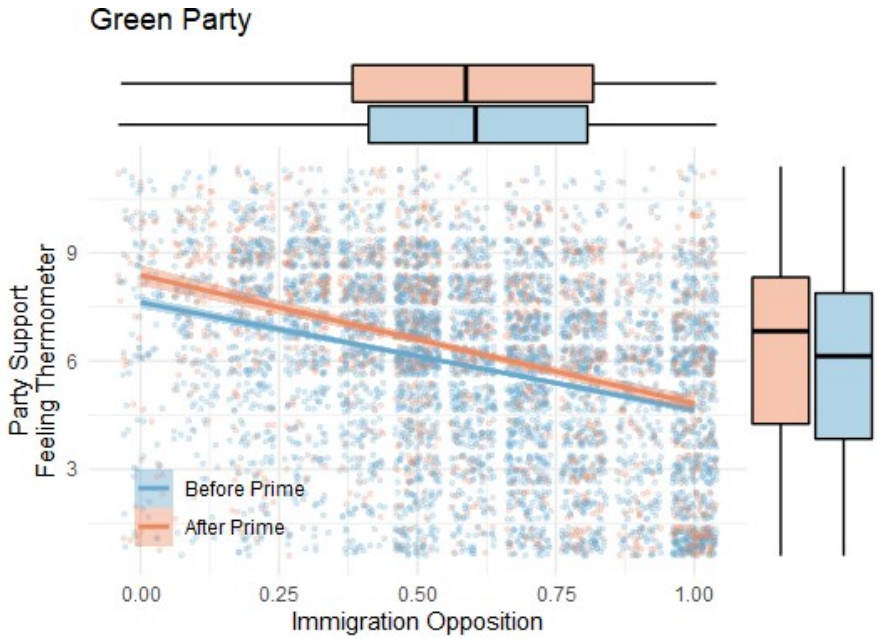


Figure 3.6. Immigration opposition and Green party support

My study begins presenting results for bivariate tests of priming effects for multiple parties. The political situation in the fall of 2015 was unique in that the Christian-Democratic CDU, the largest conservative party, had fully reversed on its previously reserved stance towards immigration to not endanger a domino effect in Southern Europe caused by a "back-up" of migrants further North. The CDU's regional affiliate in Bavaria, the traditionally slightly more conservative CSU, took an increasingly vocal stance against its larger federal sister. Consequently, figures 3.3 through 3.6 presents the presence of priming effects with simple bivariate plots and linear estimators of effects. As expected, support for the AfD became increasingly tied to individual's opposition to immigration after the fall of 2015 (Figure 3.3). The slope of the linear estimator is larger *after*. When only considering the fitted regression line, the effect appears to be similar to that of the CSU (figure 3.4).

The marginal distributions of respondents before and after, however, point towards a central difference in these parties' supporters' behaviour. The AfD sees a sizable drop in support across the whole spectrum of respondents, irrespective of their stances towards immigration. As we would expect, it appears the positive slope of the estimated linear relationship between both variables is largely an effect of less extreme immigration opponents dropping their support, while more extreme immigration critics align their policy attitude with party assessment. For both the CDU (figure 3.5), as well as the Green Party (figure 3.6), as a representation of an expected different dynamic, the associations between either measure are unchanged between before and after. Priming effects of immigration opposition appear to be confirmed both for the AfD, and — less extreme — for the CSU. But the nuances of difference indicate a critical idiosyncrasy of the underlying mechanism, and that crucial difference is indicated through the pivot point of the regression estimation.

This pivot is right where the priming hypothesis would put it for the CSU, in the middle of the spectrum of party supporters. Individuals with more moderate (middling) party-sympathies do not switch their party sympathies much, hence the intersection of both regression lines towards the centre of the attitudinal distribution. For the AfD, a sharp drop in party sympathies across the range of attitudes pulls the predicted party support down. Most of the change in correlation *before* and *after* appears to be due to more staunch xenophobes expressing higher degrees of party support *after*. While this is

not contrary to what classical accounts of priming would suggest, it also is not a pure form of the hypothesised mechanism.

These findings are confirmed by a more advanced two-wave test of priming. This test for priming is the 'classical' approach, measuring policy-position and party-support at the same timepoint. Priming is assumed to occur when the effect of the policy-issue is larger for the *after* than for the *before*. Due to data limitations, the *before*-survey for this model is the panel-wave 2013, while the *after* is 2016. I am interested in the cumulative effect of policy-position after the prime occurs, as expressed in the interaction-term between *Post* and *Opposition to Immigration*. Table 3.3 reports the findings for three different models: The first model presents results obtained for all respondents. Models 2 and 3 are produced through the same specification, but fitted on different subsets of respondents, with model 2 only considering staunch immigration critics, and model 3 for other respondents, not critical of immigration. Of special interest is the interaction term: If it is positive and statistically significant, then issue positions on immigration correlate more strongly with AfD-party support in the time after the fall of 2015 and the large influx of refugees in Germany. As such, the exogenous shock appears to 'activate' previously held positions on this topic for the staunch immigration critics (model 2), which in turn leads to a greater influence of policy-position on RRP-evaluation. A crucial qualification to this finding, however, is signaled through the statistically significant and negative coefficient for the *Post*-dummy in all three models.

Table 3.3. Linear regression results - classical test for Priming

	Dependent variable:		
	AfD Support (Feeling Thermometer)		
	All Respondents	Immigr. Critics '13	Others
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Opposition to immigration	0.013 (0.043)	-0.238 (0.137)	0.093 (0.060)
Post dummy	**-0.244 *** (0.021)**	**-0.468 *** (0.110)**	**-0.209 *** (0.023)**
Imm. opp. * Post	**0.196 *** (0.039)**	**0.498 *** (0.140)**	**0.104 * (0.053)**
N	5092	1570	3326
logLik	4371.394	1297.923	2833.636
AIC	-8734.789	-2587.847	-5659.271
*** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05.			

Significance tests based on panel-corrected standard errors; pre = 2013, post = 2017; all scales harmonized to range from 0 to 1 in their expected directions

Support for the AfD throughout the population subgroups is lower (on average) in the phase after the priming-event. Thus, priming affects individuals differently dependent on their prior position on immigration: for vehement critics of immigration, who express high issue importance and high levels of opposition during the "before," the coefficient of the timing dummy and immigration opposition (the priming-effect) is larger and statistically significant, compared to the rest of the population. As such, findings from this test are in line with previous, classical priming research and with the expected influence of individual predispositions on priming effects - the higher the importance of an issue to an individual, the larger the association between issue position and party evaluation after the prime. But, again, this test carries the caveat that the causal direction of influence cannot be determined.

To examine which precedes what, more advanced testing is necessary. Table 3.4 presents results of a four-wave-test of policy priming. In the models presented above, the 'before' is the year 2014, while 'after' is 2017. The lag of DV and IV for each respondent is, consequently, 2013 for 'before' and 2016 for 'after' the priming event. The results produced by this test suggest that no priming occurred - in the expected direction. In fact, the change in coefficients between before and after indicates the exact opposite of the expected mechanism! Instead of an increase in correlation between RRP-support and lagged opposition to immigration, AfD-support drops for respondents who do not hold strong anti-immigrant views, with the cumulative effects of lagged

immigration opposition and negative interaction terms decreasing the magnitude of effects of immigration position on RRP-support in models 1 and 3.

Before the fall of 2015 previous opposition to immigration was weakly associated with later support for the AfD. This effect is more than compensated by the interaction-term between previous immigration position and post-2015 in model 1, and almost compensated in model 3. In short, these negative interaction terms are the exact opposite of what we would expect if the priming hypothesis holds. Moreover, for vehement immigration critics (model 2) there appears to be no association between lagged immigration position and AfD support at all. These individuals are not only unlikely to change their RRP-support as a reaction to the contextual shift between *before* and *after*, they also do not seem to be more likely to increase their support of the AfD in line with their immigration position overall. What appears in the models is a negative priming effect. The increase of the immigration saliency had an effect on voters' AfD-support, but that effect was negative, illustrating a vehemently deterring effect.

Table 3.4. Linear regression results -- four-wave test for Priming

	Dependent variable:		
	AfD Support (Feeling Thermometer)		
	All Respondents	Immigr. Critics '13	Others
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Lagged opposition to immigration	**0.116 ** (0.044)**	-0.076 (0.140)	**0.179 ** (0.061)**
Post dummy	0.009 (0.018)	-0.104 (0.129)	0.017 (0.019)
Lagged AfD support	**0.283 *** (0.042)**	**0.280 *** (0.082)**	**0.282 *** (0.047)**
L. imm. opp * Post	**-0.127 ** (0.042)**	-0.039 (0.176)	**-0.137 ** (0.050)**
L. AfD sup. * Post	-0.085 (0.051)	0.025 (0.086)	**-0.161 * (0.066)**
N	2941	819	1955
logLik	2236.647	462.272	1627.248
AIC	-4461.295	-912.545	-3242.496
*** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05.			

Significance tests based on panel-corrected standard errors; pre = 2014, post = 2017; all scales harmonized to range from 0 to 1 in their expected directions

What could explain this surprising evidence for a countereffect of positive policy priming? In line with Lenz (2009), Lenz (2012), and (to some extent) Tesler (2015) I conduct one more test of priming, but this time another variety of it. Instead of testing for policy priming, where an increase in issue importance leads to the aforementioned priming effects, the next models focus on performance priming. Apart from a staunch

rejection of immigration and asylum seekers, the AfD built much of its campaign and mustered support around a vehement rejection of Chancellor Angela Merkel. “Merkel muss weg!” (“Merkel must go!”) became a rallying cry for the RRP’s supporters, and a core theme to the party’s electioneering. Thus, I test whether a prime to anti-government sentiment, rather than a prime of anti-immigration position, might be what motivated the spike in support for the AfD between 2013 and 2017.

Table 3.5. Linear regression results -- four-wave test for Performance Priming

	Dependent variable:		
	AfD Support (Feeling Thermometer)		
	All Respondents	Immigr. Critics '13	Others
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Lagged government opposition	0.002 (0.040)	0.142 (0.099)	-0.028 (0.041)
Post dummy	-0.040 (0.026)	-0.149 (0.077)	-0.021 (0.026)
Lagged AfD-support	**0.297 *** (0.040)**	**0.283 *** (0.082)**	**0.298 *** (0.046)**
L. gov. opp * Post	0.014 (0.043)	-0.078 (0.111)	0.027 (0.045)
L. AfD sup. * Post	**-0.131 ** (0.045)**	-0.036 (0.084)	**-0.166 ** (0.059)**
N	2964	821	1961
logLik	2251.523	463.455	1630.752
AIC	-4491.047	-914.909	-3249.504

*** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05.

Significance tests based on panel-corrected standard errors; pre = 2014, post = 2017; all scales harmonized to range from 0 to 1 in their expected directions

Table 3.5 presents the results for this test of performance priming. Again, it is the interaction term between RRP-support and IV (lagged government opposition) that captures the priming effect. Effects of lagged government opposition are not different from Zero in any of the models. The post-dummy lacks statistical significance in models 1 and 3, and only indicates systematically lower support among staunch immigration critics (model 2). Curiously, there appears to be no relationship between government opposition and AfD-support. The clarification of the AfD’s policy position on immigration by the priming event did the opposite of galvanizing support around xenophobia and

racism — instead, support dropped across the whole spectrum of individual positions on immigration.[2]

3.3.1. Robustness check: policy persuasion

So far, these results have failed to indicate policy priming effects on radical-right support in the expected direction. In addition, results in table 3 indicate that there also was no reversed performance priming of government opposition. There is one more possible mechanism that might be behind the misleading findings in the classical tests in table 1: policy persuasion. The increased association between anti-immigration stance and AfD-support might not be a result of individuals aligning their party-sympathy with their policy stance. Indeed, just the opposite might be true. Respondents who harbour previous sympathies for the right-wing populists might realign their policy preference with that of the AfD after the refugee influx in 2015.

[2] The role of policy-crystallization and clarification would be a promising avenue to clarify the changing makeup of AfD-supporters. Which impact did *knowing* about the AfD's xenophobic stances have before vis-a-vis after the fall of 2015? Unfortunately, participants of the GLES-Panel were only asked what they thought the AfD's position on immigration was *after* the priming event. Information about these individual perceptions is missing for the *before*.

Table 3.6. OLS regression results - policy persuasion

	Dependent variable:					
	Change in Imm. Opposition (Wave 2 to 3)			**Change in AfD-Support (Wave 2 to 3)**		
	All Respondents	Immigr. Critics '13	Others	All Respondents	Immigr. Critics '13	Others
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Change in AfD supp (W1 to W2)	**0.140 *** (0.027)**	**0.111 ** (0.042)**	**0.159 *** (0.036)**	**-0.535 *** (0.027)**	**-0.469 *** (0.052)**	**-0.599 *** (0.032)**
AfD support (W1)	**0.156 *** (0.032)**	**0.150 ** (0.049)**	**0.158 *** (0.043)**	**-0.493 *** (0.032)**	**-0.370 *** (0.060)**	**-0.588 *** (0.038)**
Chg. in imm opp (W1 to W2)	**-0.579 *** (0.026)**	**-0.489 *** (0.047)**	**-0.616 *** (0.032)**	**0.102 *** (0.026)**	**0.123 * (0.058)**	**0.096 *** (0.029)**
Imm. opp. (W1)	**-0.394 *** (0.031)**	**-0.437 *** (0.089)**	**-0.361 *** (0.042)**	**0.145 *** (0.031)**	0.178 (0.109)	**0.125 *** (0.037)**
Education - low	**0.048 ** (0.018)**	**0.065 * (0.030)**	0.042 (0.022)	0.025 (0.018)	-0.024 (0.038)	**0.051 * (0.020)**
Education - mid	-0.000 (0.016)	-0.005 (0.027)	0.004 (0.019)	0.008 (0.015)	0.002 (0.034)	0.009 (0.017)
Sex - male	-0.009 (0.014)	0.014 (0.024)	-0.018 (0.016)	**0.041 ** (0.014)**	0.038 (0.030)	**0.041 ** (0.015)**
Year of birth	-0.001 (0.000)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.002 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)
Left-right self '13	**0.088 * (0.034)**	-0.005 (0.057)	**0.129 ** (0.043)**	0.024 (0.034)	0.112 (0.069)	-0.019 (0.039)
Own econ. sit. '13	-0.014 (0.036)	-0.049 (0.064)	-0.010 (0.043)	-0.027 (0.035)	-0.022 (0.079)	-0.036 (0.038)
Constant	1.458 (0.979)	2.411 (1.785)	1.277 (1.169)	-0.297 (0.974)	2.806 (2.222)	-1.523 (1.041)
N	1004	286	717	989	282	706
R2	0.341	0.305	0.362	0.300	0.258	0.353
logLik	170.321	70.555	109.597	177.847	11.585	191.117
AIC	-316.642	-117.110	-195.194	-331.693	0.830	-358.235
*** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05.						

Ordinary least squares regressions; all scales harmonized to range from 0 to 1 in their expected directions

The data do not allow for me to test this in the same way I tested for priming in tables 3.4 and 3.5 with a four wave test. Instead, I have to modify the approach and focus on the *change* in between waves, rather than measuring stances during separate waves. Consequently, the setup considers change in AfD support and policy-stance between 2013 (wave 1) and 2015 (wave 2), as well as between 2015 (wave 2) and 2017 (wave 3). Once again, to be able to determine the causal chain, I am interested in how one change precedes another. Since the setup of the data is different than in the previous, panel-specific approaches, and in line with previous work on RRP-support, these OLS-models include conventional control variables: Gender, education, assessment of one's own economic situation in 2013, year of birth, and individual left-right placement in 2013. Table 3.6 presents the results for the model on policy persuasion. Persuasion effects are contained in the coefficient of preceding change in party support (AfD-Support w1->w2).

The effects for change in AfD-support between wave 1 and wave 2 on change in immigration opposition between wave 2 and wave 3 are statistically significant for all three groups of respondents (models 1-3). Respondents who became more approving of the AfD during the previous timeframe became more critical towards immigration during the latter - not at a large magnitude but noteworthy nonetheless. Staunch immigration critics were affected slightly less than the rest of the respondents, indicating the impact of heightened awareness and interest in the topic matter. Overall, these results are what we would expect to see for persuasive effects of party affiliation.

There are, however, some surprising artifacts in the results. One control is previous change in immigration opposition. Surprisingly, the coefficient for this control is *negative* and relatively large in magnitude, meaning that a respondent who became more open (more critical) towards immigration between 2013 and 2015, became, on average, more critical (more open) between 2015 and 2017 again. This is unexpected and somewhat puzzling. A closer inspection of the underlying data reveals (Table 3.7) that this appears to be a residual effect of individuals becoming more critical of immigration after 2015. Over 37 % of respondents switch from a positive change in immigration attitudes between waves 1 and 2, to a negative shift between waves 2 and 3. As previously shown, however, this did not result in an aggregate shift in anti-immigration resentment overall. Instead, this shift only appears within respondents.

While persuasion effects appear as clear in the models featuring Immigration-Opposition as the dependent variable (models 1-3), an alternative serves as an easy robustness check to this mechanism. Just like before, these models have a different response variable. Instead of opposition to immigration being determined by AfD-support, this robustness check considers support for the AfD to be determined by previous opposition to immigration. The model specifications remain the same, but investigating coefficients with AfD-support as dependent variable gives a sense for the overall plausibility of results. In essence, only one direction can be true. So, instead of *previous* change in party support determining *later* change in issue position (models 1-3), models 4-6 test if *previous* change in opposition to immigration predicts later change in party support. This is an alternative specification for the previously shown four wave test of priming. Curiously, for the central IV (change in RRP-support between waves 1 and 2, indicating *priming*) these models show essentially a similar magnitudes of effects of the IV, indicating *priming*, as the previous models did when testing for *persuasion*. Even the presence of large, counterintuitive effect sizes for the lagged DV occur. All considered, as this test with its focus on change rather than absolute levels of support should be interpreted very carefully, the presence of statistically significant findings for either direction of mechanism leaves us with ambivalent findings.

Table 3.7. Proportional distribution of change in immigration attitudes

	Wave 1->2: Negative	Wave 1->2: Positive
Wave 2->3: Positive	25.88% (351)	9.37% (127)
Wave 2->3: Negative	27.21% (369)	37.54% (509)

3.4. Discussion

The goal of this paper is to investigate the underlying mechanisms behind the AfD's sharp rise in support between 2013 and 2017. In line with previous research I hypothesized that a strong factor behind the increase in RRP-vote was priming, one of the most important media effects on political opinion. In the situation of 2017 Germany, the influx of refugees into Europe during and after the fall of 2015, and the large share of media coverage of this situation, would have made the issue of immigration highly salient for individuals. In turn, this should have led voters to greatly increase evaluation of parties based on the parties' position towards immigration - for the anti-immigration

AfD this should have led to an increase in support from individuals holding anti-immigration views. However, this is not supported by my analyses.

Using modeling strategies that allow for investigation of the causal chain, I find that, overall, AfD support did not systematically shift among the respondents – on average the degree of support before is similar after. But digging deeper in the findings shows nuances indicating that after the priming event AfD support appears to be much lower among individuals without anti-immigrant views, but mostly stayed the same among immigration-critics. This is akin to a negative priming effect. In a similar vein, a possible alternative explanation of performance priming –where anti-government sentiment was primed by the fall of 2015– only shows similarly deterring effects. Lastly, for the causal opposite of priming, in that previous positions on immigration predict later developments of AfD sympathies, I find no evidence but counterintuitive side-effects.

Overall, this paper on RRP-support and effects of media priming leads to a range of wider considerations with impacts for our understanding of representational democracy. Firstly, and most profoundly, electioneering by this RRP does not follow 'regular' rules of party competition. Otherwise, alignment of policy preference and party sympathies would occur to some degree. This profound principle of democratic alignment between voters and parties is squelched by the aggregate drop in AfD-sympathy, across the board of immigration sentiment.

One crucial thing this might indicate is the role of non-normalization of this RRP. During the observed period, the AfD was chastised by the other parties and continuously called out for its illiberal and anti-democratic stances. Surely, media-coverage of the AfD and the refugee crisis were disproportionally high, but the differentiation and contrasting of other parties to the RRP were also given. Voters likely noted and accounted for it in their decisions.

Most central, and the starting point to my paper, is the fact that the correlation between policy position and RRP-support increases for the *after*. Of course, as the epicentre of my analysis shows, this does not imply a clear causation. Regardless, depending on how individual attitudes are shaped, this basic finding of correlation might be — curiously — good for democratic representation. If we assume that elites have no leverage to influence public opinion and attitudes are purely endogenous for an

individual, an increasing connection between policy opinions and party support is desirable. At its core, the fact that this increase in association is detectable in this situation, even though it is mainly due to pro-immigration individuals dropping their support, is a sign of democracy in action.

In this electoral context, the threefold combination of Xenophobia, authoritarianism, and populism, as is typical of RRPs in Western Europe, only caught on with a subset of voters. While hardly any voters systematically swung over to the AfD, this subgroup did not waiver in its support. In line with implications from the two of the three guiding principles of RRPs, xenophobia and authoritarianism, these individuals stuck with the party through its radicalization on immigration issues.

The ambivalent findings overall, with no proposed *causal* mechanism being confirmed by the evidence, hint at a certain kind of democracy as implemented: the negative effects, deterring voters from RRP-support indicate that symbolic considerations might have played a role in Germany's 2017 election. The AfD's radicalization and constant pushing-of-the-envelope of established discursive norms by defaming other politicians, and deploying openly racist and anti-democratic rhetoric between 2013 and 2017, seemingly repelled more voters than it attracted.

From a wider perspective on representation, this finding invites a reflection on the pervasiveness of populism as a political style. The concept of two differing styles of representation comes in useful here. In a "trustee"-type relationship between principal and agent, the agent acts autonomously, deliberating on which of her choices will benefit her principals. The representative is entrusted by her constituents to act on her best judgement. In contrast, a "delegate"-type relationship requires the representative to act on a strict mandate by their voters. The agent enjoys no autonomy, and acts bound by the wishes of the principals. The representative's own judgement of issues is irrelevant (Pitkin 1967).

Bringing this conceptualisation to the present case makes the differing reactions of voters to immigration priming a result of these ideal types of representation. For the immigration-opponents, the delegation of a clear anti-immigration mandate is at the centre of their party-support. Hence the unchanged levels between the *before* and *after* period. For individuals with different preferences (or indifference) towards immigration

policy, the symbolic aspect of a trustee-type relationship of representation weighs heavily. As a consequence, the rhetoric and inciteful messages of the AfD worked as an effective deterrent. In this case, the aggressiveness of populism as a political style backfired in maintaining AfD support among more moderate voters.

This deterring effect points to a limit for RRP electioneering. For individuals without pre-existing anti-immigrant opinions, the inflammatory rhetoric and single-issue emphasis do not pose an appealing electoral alternative. Even in this 'perfect storm,' where the issue shot to the top of agendas through an event unrelated to national politics, no voters became attracted to the RRP *after*, if they did not have a certain set of issue positions *before*. The main outcome of the RRP's electioneering and crossing over normative boundaries in this case appears to backfire. Overall, it loses sympathies across the range of anti-immigration policy preferences. This informs voter and party perspectives on whether representatives should act more as trustees than as delegates. Before solidifying a supporter base, representative issue autonomy can overstretch the issue connection between party as well as potential voters and alienate them.

These findings are interesting in their ambivalence and invite multiple avenues of further research. One possible explanation for the absence of clear priming effects between 2013 and 2017 is the AfD's own development during that time. Starting out as a eurocritical, economically liberal party, it morphed into an openly xenophobic and anti-Islamic party of the radical-right by 2015 (Arzheimer and Berning 2019). For my analysis, this means that AfD-supporters during the *before* and *after* periods were potentially fundamentally different in their underlying motivations and attitudes. To further investigate this with the data available requires different specifications of tests. At its core, this is a question of how *support of* the RRP transforms into *voting for* the RRP. My choice of models represent the former. But what these models do not catch is AfD-voting without AfD-support. With the party veering to the extreme right only after 2013, the anti-system protest voters supportive of the RRP before this shift might have voted for it, despite not being supportive of (i. e. feeling "warmly" towards) the AfD.

This heterogeneity in transforming "support" to "vote" is not untangled by my chosen approach, due to the choice of dependent variable. The feeling thermometer for a RRP is advantageous, since it taps into the building of rapport by a party among voters which usually has to occur before voters cast their ballots for it. In addition, this

operationalisation hints at future potential of a RRP to garner votes. However, in this presented case it might hinder a clear-cut analysis if a substantive extent of AfD votes is based on protest behaviour. If the fall of 2015 primed individuals to cast their ballots to express their opposition to government, the RRP-sympathy score would not indicate this change. An additional analysis of voting behaviour would be useful to investigate the degree to which this was the case.

Another aspect to consider in future work is the ongoing difference in political behaviour between the western and five eastern states in Germany. Election results and polling, especially during the lead-up to state-level elections in the fall of 2019, indicate differences in motivators to support the AfD in East and West Germany. The base of support is, on aggregate, higher in the five states of former East Germany. This indicates different underlying factors as instrumental to party sympathies. Even though the models presented control for this influence by way of their panel structure, a deeper consideration of these regional discrepancies would be crucial to establish different degrees of priming effects.

4. Bella (Tw)Italia and the Least Likely Outcome - What does the Coalition between m5s and Lega tell us about Democracy?

The 2018 Italian election produced one of the most unexpected governing coalitions in democratic electoral history. Two parties, the *Lega Salvini* (Lega) and *Movimento 5 Stelle* (Five Star Movement - m5s), formed a coalition government, despite being at opposite ends of the ideological spectrum. Under the leadership, respectively, of Matteo Salvini and Luigi di Maio, Lega and m5s had consistently denounced each other as out of touch with the will of the Italian people and delivered scathing critiques of each others' candidates throughout the election campaign. However, both had run as anti-establishment actors — each claiming the other was not — and after the election, leaders of both parties were willing to disregard their past differences and govern together. Voters of both parties affirmed this decision in special referenda. The resulting "contract for the government of change" produced the first governing coalition of Italy in which neither left nor right party blocs had a presence. This outcome was certainly unexpected in light of the ideological and policy distance between the two parties (Garzia 2019). While the coalition only held for 18 months, the fact that it emerged at all presents profound challenges for understanding democratic governance in Italy and beyond.

First and foremost, the arrangement between m5s and Lega was highly unlikely from a bargaining theory perspective. Through their agreement, the parties tried to bridge the gaping ideological distance between the policy-flexible, strongly leftist m5s and the staunchly far-right Lega. By doing so they displayed primarily office-seeking behaviour. Research on parliamentary democracies such as Italy suggests ideologically non-connected coalitions are unlikely to form (Mitchell and Nyblade 2008), as they cost participating parties dearly in electoral share later (W. C. Müller and Strøm 1999; Sagarzazu and Klüver 2017). However, the two parties' policy priorities were different and, critically, non-competing: Salvini's Lega almost exclusively campaigned around law and order, overtly linking it to immigration. In contrast, m5s focused on financial redistribution, by way of a universal basic income. Thus, they could emphasize the policy enabling opportunities their contract afforded and may have hoped this would avoid any electoral impact.

The predominant factor limiting chances of this coalition forming in the first place was the fact that the electoral results presented a more likely alternative. A far more ideologically aligned coalition between m5s and *Partido Democratico* (PD) would have reached the necessary legislative majority. And indeed, this politically more coherent coalition, born out of convenience and preserving the political status quo, crystallized between PD and m5s after the collapse of the previous government.

Nonetheless, the short alliance between m5s and Lega provides an opportunity to investigate a fundamental principle of democracy — the idea that political actors represent and are responsive to the demands and preferences of supporters. Representative democracy derives its democratic legitimacy, at least in the eyes of the public, from the assumption that parties represent their supporters in a bottom-up process with citizen preferences driving elite behaviour in parliament and government. The formation of the Lega-m5s government seems to belie that principle. In this study, I examine how the decision of the two parties to form the coalition affected their respective levels of support. Did the association between the two parties, created by party elites, have an effect on these parties' support from their followers? Did the interactions of the most avid social media users with either party change when the leaders announced the coalition? In short, did the voters — despite the fundamental incompatibility between m5s and Lega — support the coalition beyond their votes in the party referenda?

To assess individuals' political behaviour, I analyze retweets taken from a set of over 8.3 million Tweets related to the election. Since these datapoints all carry timestamps and identifiers for specific users, I can analyze them as reactions to specific events. My study examines whether closeness to the Lega or m5s had a systematic effect on Twitter users' party support after the m5s-Lega coalition was announced. I measure closeness by information extracted from the list of accounts each user follows. How did Salvini's and di Maio's backtracking on central campaign claims affect individuals' support for their party? Did party supporters follow their parties into the coalition?

My approach focuses both on party bargaining, party supporters offline, and the electoral campaign as it unfolded on Twitter. My focus of interest is on the formation of the m5s/Lega coalition. I approach the topic from two perspectives. For one, I use

survey data from the corresponding electoral study to gauge m5s and Lega electorates to investigate how this unlikely coalition was forged. Did 'rogue' party elites ignore the will of their supporters? Or was the pragmatic bargaining in line with theories on interest representation? As a second step, my analysis focuses on the retweeting behaviour of users. For my analysis, I assume users engaging in communications on Twitter have a higher-than-average degree of political awareness and as such are more likely to identify with a specific party as well. Following Conover et al. (2012) and Guerrero-Sole (2017), I treat a retweet of an account affiliated with a party as endorsement of this party. That is because the act of *retweeting* (rather than mere following) carries some consequence. A retweet appears in the timelines of followers to a user, and if it conveys an ideological stance it can have social costs (Ceron, Curini, and Iacus 2015). Following only influences one's own information environment, but retweeting sends signals into other users' information environments.

As citizens spend an increasing amount of time online, a growing amount of political opinion formation occurs on the internet. Almost half (45%) of Italian citizens use online social media and networks (Eurostat 2017). Online campaigning played a central role in Italy's 2018 election. According to data from the Italian Election Study (ITANES), online sources virtually tied with television as one of the two most important sources of election coverage for individuals: 33.5% of respondents listed the internet (websites and social media), while 34.1% listed TV (ITANES 2018, see below). Moreover m5s, which had the largest electoral share, has its roots in online activism and blogging culture. Both Salvini and di Maio made extensive use of Twitter and Facebook to conduct highly personalized campaigns, leveraged by the numbers of followers to their personal accounts (Mazzoleni 2018).

My results indicate that, indeed, distance in affinity between party supporters and Lega predicted users' behaviour. Accounts that were close to Lega hardly toned down their support for the party after it announced the coalition with m5s. In contrast, Twitter users close to m5s appeared much less supportive of it in the aftermath of the government contract. Overall, users sitting in between both parties were less affected by the elites' interactions than staunch party supporters. A majority of party supporters followed the party leaders into the coalition, although staunch m5s supporters were less supportive.

This is in line with the expectation that voters to a large extent accept party cues and embed them into their existing cognitive framework, as previous research has recognized party identification as central to an individuals' propensity to follow politicians' positions (Lenz 2012; for an overview: Richard Johnston 2006). Staunch m5s supporters, however, reduced their online support for their party after the coalition announcement. After providing some background on the context of the election, I discuss the role that ideology and party identification play as powerful determinants of party support and public opinion.

4.1. Background: The 2018 election in Italy

The influence of websites and social media on Italian voters in the 2018 election reflected considerable growth compared to Italy's previous election in 2013 (ITANES; figure 4.1); the share of voters listing the internet as one of their two most important sources of political information more than doubled. The change is a testament to the strategic emphases on online electioneering by the two largest parties. Both Salvini and di Maio had highly personalized campaign styles that translated well to social media communication. Ignoring the fact that he had been a fixture of Italian politics for decades, Salvini still ran on a staunchly populist[3], anti-establishment, anti-immigration platform. His campaign was very much focused on him as the party leader. On the other hand, the Eurosceptic, populist di Maio, also ran an anti-elitist but very decentralised campaign. Ultimately, m5s gained the largest vote share, with 33% of the popular vote while Salvini's Lega received 17% of the popular vote, putting it at the top of the largest electoral coalition.

[3] See chapter 1 for a discussion of populism as a political style.

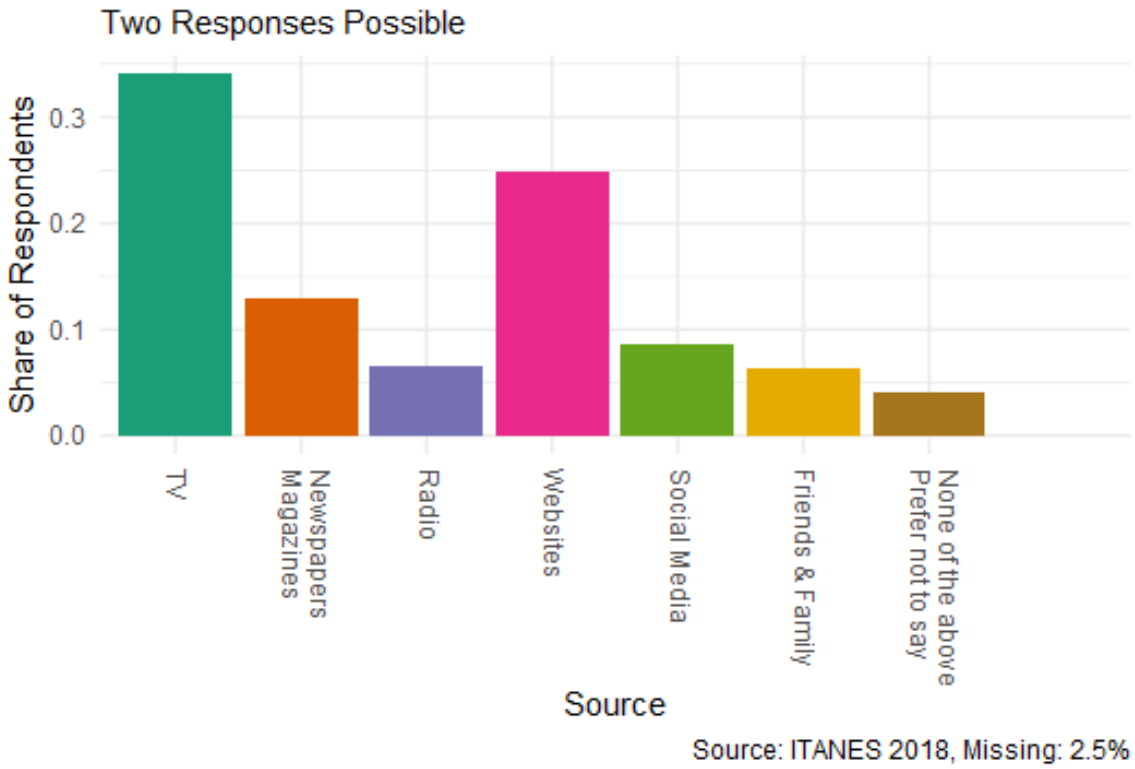


Figure 4.1. Most important sources for news on the Italian Election 2018

Throughout the campaign, Matteo Salvini publicly and vehemently rejected the possibility of a collaboration with the m5s. For example, he told a reporter from centrist newspaper *La Stampa* in an interview that appeared on February 2, 2018 "I exclude any agreement with M5S." A short time before the election Salvini reiterated this rejection by tweeting statements he had made on television talk shows on March 1 and March 2. One was from *Porta a Porta* "I'll never form a government with Renzi, Di Maio, Gentiloni, or Boldrini. [Anyone] in Europe [who suggests otherwise] roots for confusion and hopes for chaos after the election."[4] Then, from *Bersaglio Mobile* : "Plainly stated: the only coalition that can have the votes for GOVERNANCE is the CENTRE-RIGHT. Whoever votes Lega chooses CLARITY, I will NEVER support governments of Renzi, Di Maio,

[4] Original tweet by "matteosalvinimi" on 2018-03-01, 14:59:51 UTC: "Non andrò mai al governo con Renzi, Di Maio, Gentiloni o Boldrini. Qualcuno in Europa tifa per la confusione e spera nel caos dopo le elezioni."

Boschi, Boldrini or anyone else."[5] Even as results were tallied, Salvini was firm. A day after the election, on March 5th, when a reporter asked him about the prospects of a Lega-m5s coalition, Salvini said: "N. O. No, underlined three times."[6]

Nine days later Salvini first indicated openness towards such a coalition. On March 14 a half-sentence by an Italian newswire suggested he had acknowledged considering it. It appeared the election results had sunken in and strategic considerations were underway. Three days later, Lega's official Twitter account posted: 'Salvini: Di Maio will call me? I'll answer [the phone] for anyone, all right.'[7]

At this point di Maio had led a campaign against all politicians, especially from the right-wing bloc. On January 26 he expressed his views in an interview with the newspaper Il Sole-24 Ore: "Those who fear instability for Italy must fear the centre-Right coalition, with Berlusconi [*Forza Italia* leader] and Salvini who don't agree on anything." A cornerstone of m5s' electoral promises was resolute objection to post-election alliances with any other party. The utmost he was willing to concede was to collaborate on a case-by-case basis, negotiating over laws to organise majorities, without formally fixed coalition agreements. Upon hearing from Salvini's change of heart, rather than denouncing the advance per se, di Maio rejected collaboration with *Forza Italia*'s Silvio Berlusconi. In turn, Salvini announced he was unwilling to drop Berlusconi as a member of the centre-right coalition.

There things stood still until May. For almost two months, different combinations of parties failed to negotiate successfully. On the morning of May 9 a news report indicated that Salvini and Di Maio had met for talks. Five days later they had reached an agreement to form a coalition government. Both parties called on their supporters to cast judgement on the prospective agreement. Large majorities of voters from both camps

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[5] Original tweet by "matteosalvinimi"" on 2018-03-02, 14:14:57 UTC: "Realisticamente parlando: l'unica coalizione che può avere i voti per GOVERNARE è il CENTRODESTRA. Chi vota Lega sceglie la CHIAREZZA, non sosterrò MAI governi in cui ci sono Renzi, Di Maio, la Boschi, la Boldrini o chiunque altro."

[6] "Rival populists rule out coalition together as battle begins over right to govern Italy," The Telegraph Online, 2018-03-05. Retrieved from https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/03/05/rival-populists-battle-right-govern-italy-hung-parliament/ on 2019-05-02.

[7] Original tweet by "LegaSalvini" on 2018-03-17 13:50:25 UTC: "Salvini: Di Maio mi chiamerà? Io rispondo a tutti, va bene."

cast their referendum ballots in favour (see below). But then another conflict ensued. The designated Minister for Finance and the Economy, Eurosceptic and anti-Euro Paolo Savona, almost ended the governing coalition before it officially began. Yet they were willing to compromise and allow m5s to appoint Savona Minister of European Affairs on June 1. The coalition was finalized the same day. More than ten weeks had passed since the election.

The confrontational way that the election campaign was conducted and the long timeframe over which it unfolded offer a unique test case to examine the tendency of party supporters to follow party leaders in their attitude changes. Large amounts of campaign communications were exchanged via Twitter, which make them available for researchers. Such a course of events over time allows research to focus on structural breaks to test for differences in effects. The clear positioning of Lega and m5s until shortly before the coalition agreement are clear indicators of the parties' respective positions towards each other. To form the coalition they pivoted to an exact opposite stance. Overall, this election offers an interesting case to analyze the effects of party affiliation and partisan proximity on potential voters and the roles each play for the expression of political opinion.

4.2. Ideological proximity - effects on parties and voters

The central determinant for political opinion and party behaviour I test here is spatial ideological proximity. Two perspectives on the formation of the unlikely governing coalition ultimately come down to a measure of distance. One is focused on the supporters of the parties and the other on the parties themselves. Political parties are the key institutions of representative democracies, as researchers have recognized for decades (Schattschneider 1942). The fundamental principle of most approaches to party behaviour assumes they are homogenous teams, with the primary goal of gaining office. In plurality electoral systems gaining office typically requires parties to forge a coalition with other parties to gain the legislative force required for control over the government apparatus. The strategic tenets on which parties build these coalitions depend on the party's aims once in government.

Rational choice perspectives help to clarify motivations of parties and resulting expectations for their behaviour. For example, the Downsian approach (Downs 1957) is

based on the idea that partisan political actors prioritise winning above any other purpose. Parties organise as unitary teams, aim to maximise electoral support, and thus "formulate policies in order to win elections, rather than win elections in order to formulate policies" (58). Moreover, they are not just vote-seeking, but vote-maximizing. This is at the heart of a spatial perspective of party competition and leads to the assumption that parties' desires to attract the largest possible range of voters impel them to move freely among an ideological scale. The seminal focus on the median mandate stems from this perspective.

While highly influential and appealing in its simplicity, an emphasis on vote-seeking oversimplifies parties' motivations for electioneering. It makes little sense to campaign exclusively for the sake of votes, as it fails to give parties reasons to exert effort other than campaigning. Instead, vote-maximizing is more likely an instrumental goal for the end of gaining office or implementing policy. Riker's seminal work (1962) thus treats parties as fundamentally interested in a different kind of wins. In parliamentary democracies 'winning' means to control as much of the executive branch of government as possible. Following from this, Riker investigates how and when political alliances form. His bargaining theory applies a game-theoretical framework to analyze key aspects of government formation. Riker's most famous contribution predicts the formation of minimal winning coalitions — the smallest possible combination of actors to ensure parties will gain power — which he calls the "size principle" (33). Two further principles complete his study, where the "strategic principle" (211) predicts that undersized ruling coalitions will want to attract new members as to not be at the risk of being ousted by the excluded majority; while oversized governing coalitions will want to increase individual proportions of government benefits by excluding surplus members — the "disequilibrium principle" (ibid.) — leading to the minimum size coalitions as most likely outcomes.

As with most game-theoretical approaches, critics argue that the preconditions overestimate the ability of players in the real world. Coalition bargaining in political settings is hardly done by hyperrational participants in a full information, fixed-sum situation. More importantly, these approaches only consider parties' sizes and the number of possible coalition partners, disregarding programs and policy proposals. Two early analysts to include the role of party policy for government formation are Axelrod (1970) and de Swaan (1973), both of whom explore parties' ideological preferences

behind coalition formation. Axelrod (1970) devises a theory that predicts *minimal connected winning coalitions* which maximize policy coherence between governing partners. The resulting coalitions are *minimal* in the sense that any party leaving leads to coalition defeat, and they are *connected* in that they only comprise parties adjacent to each other on a left-right dimension. This maximizes utility for members of the coalition, as an ideologically connected winning coalition minimizes conflicts of interest and provides greater policy value. In addition, these minimal connected coalitions are ideologically homogenous and should be both easier to form as well as more stable.

De Swaan's approach imposes a more strictly game-theoretical framework and predicts *minimal range coalitions* (1973): in addition to the ordering of parties on an ideological scale, the range of the most extreme parties in a coalition matters as well. The *minimum range coalition* is the *minimum winning coalition* with the smallest ideological range and is the most likely variation to form. Evidently, approaches incorporating parties' policy preferences can still draw on spatial logic derived from a Downsian approach, by specifying which policy areas form the ideological plane for competition.

A last perspective, taking the policy-focus of bargaining theory to its limit, is *viable-policy coalition theory*. If parties truly only care about enacting policy rather than gaining office, legislatures provide the means for such enactment. So instead of quarrels over which party participates in cabinet, the pivotal party in parliament is the centre of attention for this perspective. This core party controls the median member of parliament, given a one-dimensional policy scale, which makes it key to tipping the balance of power. Any such pivotal party can dictate decisions, as without it neither ideologically leaning bloc can enable policy. Ultimately, this renders the question of cabinet formation meaningless, as it does not matter if the pivotal party participates in government, as long as its median member votes in the legislature (Laver and Schofield 1990). This perspective helpfully shifted the focus of power from the executive branch to the legislature, fueling a whole branch of applied political science research (McDonald, Mendes, and Budge 2004; Gerber and Lewis 2004; Martin and Vanberg 2014). However, its ultimate conclusion does not shed light on bargaining results. If cabinet composition does not matter, parties do not have systematic basis for behaviour. No most likely, general prediction emerges from this theory.

The three varieties of bargaining behaviour (vote-seeking, office-seeking, and policy-seeking) are corner points for a conceptual framework of analysis for party behaviour. Empirically, policy-blind perspectives are less successful in accurately predicting coalition outcomes than policy-based ones (de Swaan 1973). Of course, parties are rarely, if ever, purely unitary actors, and very likely to be not purely rational in their decision-making processes. Too many complexities — the will of party members, individual leaders, leadership selection processes — muddle their actions. While this makes the construction of a unified framework of analysis difficult, the simplicity and parsimony of each of the three ideal modes of behaviour provide helpful boundaries. They form a kind of triangle, with each corner representing one pure type, where motivations for bargaining can take any mixed mode from the possible combinations.

Empirical tests of existing coalition predictions are more heterogeneous than expected. Contrary to theoretical expectations, only about one fifth of coalitions are minimal connected winning (Mitchell and Nyblade 2008, 210). Still, minimizing ideological range between parties is an incentive for coalitions, as is including the median party in cabinet (Andeweg, Dumont, and Winter 2011). Thus, the m5s-Lega coalition was highly unusual. It was ideologically incoherent, encompassed a larger policy range than alternative constellations that could have arisen, and did not involve the median party in parliament. Previous work on coalition formation predicts a very low likelihood of it occurring.

As analysis below reveals, voters of either party saw a clear difference between them and shared the resentment displayed by Lega and m5s officials for each other. Yet 90% of the 45,000 m5s members who voted in the referendum (out of around 120.000 members in total) supported the coalition with Lega, and 91% of 215,000 citizens who voted in the Lega-organised public referendum supported the coalition with m5s. In light of this outcome, the unlikely coalition government was sworn in on June 1, 2018. Public opinion data indicate that between coalition formation and collapse *Lega* more than doubled its support in polls, while *m5s*'s polling numbers dwindled. This begs the question as to how party elites could reverse their promise to avoid such alliances without a massive loss of support. Were they not flouting a key basis of their democratic legitimacy?

To investigate the reasons for voters' unwavering backing requires looking at the basis of party support generally, and ideological proximity voting more specifically. Models of ideological proximity voting predict that people cast ballots for parties they agree with. Every individual prefers some government policies over others, and they vote for the parties that advances the preferred proposals. If they lack in-depth knowledge to formulate a position, voters may use *ideology* as an informational short-cut to make their decision. They may not know all details of a tax scheme that a party puts forward, but the individual will know that one party advocates broadly left-wing redistribution over broadly right-wing laissez-faire economics and vote accordingly. As such, the general left-right dimension works as a "super-issue" (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976, 244) when structuring vote choice. Its value for an election can be grasped and applied even by politically unsophisticated voters (Benoit and Laver 2006). Naturally, which specific policy items in this "amorphous vessel" (J. D. Huber and Inglehart 1995, 90) aggregate to form the left-right dimension differs between countries, elections, and even individuals (Dalton 2006; Mair 2007). The number and kinds of constitutive issues affecting a given election are varying and flexible (Sani and Sartori 1983), which creates problems for cross-sectional research and comparison between countries. However, in examining the single case of one election, an aggregate dimension serves as a heuristic for each voter to maximize utility of their electoral choice and support the party that most closely fits their own preferences (Dalton 2011).

The phenomenon of voters aligning their choice based on their own preferences is one possible way democracy should work: a bottom-up process, where individuals select elites they agree with, solely based on an endogenous feeling of programmatic closeness. But that is not the whole story. As research has long noted, there are other powerful influences on vote choice. Classic, early work on political behaviour has long identified partisan identity as the strongest predictor of how people vote. This flips the perspective on the present case. Partisans of either party might have supported the coalition proposition not due to their own preference, but because the party they felt close to argued for it.

4.3. Partisan affiliation - the unmoved mover?

Research has long noted the congruency between party identification and policy preferences among individuals. Early on, the Columbia School identified the importance

of partisan loyalty, mainly imprinted through family upbringing, as central to voting behaviour (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954). Building on this work, researchers developed the social-psychological perspective of the Michigan School, with large-n surveys of representative samples, and quantified the central "role of enduring partisan commitments in shaping attitudes toward political objects" (Campbell et al. 1960, 135).

Proponents of this understanding considered party affiliation as an "unmoved mover": it is largely unchanged over time, yet party ID acts as a "filter" through which voters perceive political realities in a way that reaffirms their partisan affiliation. Policy preferences and political attitudes change in line with the party's, but most voters retain their party affiliation over time.

A revisionist perspective challenged the Michigan School by considering retrospective evaluations as instrumental for party identification (Fiorina 1981). This rational-choice theory adds an important component to the earlier static model of the "unmoved mover." As well as why party affiliation is stable, it explains why party affiliation changes over time. Fiorina argued that voters keep a "a running tally of retrospective evaluations of party promises and performance" (1981, 84). So, while family and upbringing might determine individuals' party identification early on, over time their attachment to a party becomes more and more a reflection of individual perceptions and evaluations of political events. Achen (1992) formalized this perspective and fit it into a framework of Bayesian Updating, suggesting voters learn from previous experience.

In cross-sectional studies the running-tally perspective allows for a very benign interpretation of the democratic process: Democracy works because people identify with (and subsequently vote for) the party that best represents their political beliefs. Following a shift in individual interests, party affiliation and vote choice change. If enough individual shifts are registered within the electorate, party elites take note and adjust policy positioning accordingly. The causal chain in this scenario is considered not just good and desirable, but consistent with rational choice theory: voters lead, politicians follow. Democracy works as it should because citizen principals direct their representative agents.

However, the running-tally perspective poses a challenge for cross-sectional researchers. A statistical test of 'voters lead, politicians follow' is no different in results from 'politicians lead, voters follow,' as both lead to a correlation of citizen views and citizen votes. Yet, they are polar opposites in terms of their implications for democracy. If voters will follow politicians' leads, parties can freely switch positions on policy without voters reassessing their party support. This turns the foundational idea of representative democracy on its head. Indeed, Lenz' (2012) study of panel data from the US show that politicians do shape voters' perspectives, and that they do so most effectively among individuals with higher degrees of partisan attachment. Sloothus's study of a natural experiment arising from a sudden policy shift by the Social Democratic party in Denmark (2010) shows that this dynamic also appears in multi-party democracies.

Still, some parties seem unable to lead voters, even those closely affiliated with them, and on some issues voters are not amenable to leaders' influence. Specifically, niche parties have difficulty retaining voters when they moderate their ideological positioning, while no such effects occur for mainstream parties (Adams et al. 2006). Supporters of niche parties appear to disproportionately monitor and react to elite policy shifts. The relationship does not only appear for individual levels of support, but also for the ideological makeup of supporters on an aggregate level (Adams, Ezrow, and Leiter 2012). A plausible explanation is that niche party supporters are more policy-focused than supporters of catch-all centrist parties.

A second important qualifier for the parties leading public opinion is the saliency of policy issues for which the party repositions itself. Even the Michigan School acknowledged that changes in individuals' partisan loyalties might be based on issues. For example, Campbell et al. (1960) noted how deeply held opinions, with high personal importance and strong feelings attached to them, "must exert some pressure on the individual's basic partisan commitment. If this pressure is intense enough, a stable partisan identification may actually be changed" (135).

Later research built on this modification to the Michigan perspective and investigated issue-based party conversion and found that the saliency of the issue is relevant: Layman and Carsey (2006) find that both party-based issue change (following) and issue-based party change (leading) take place. The saliency an individual assigns to the issue in question determines whether they can be led. When an issue is not

particularly salient for a particular individual, they will tend to realign their issue position to be in line with party affiliation. On the other hand, on a salient issue, voters are difficult to lead, and they may change their party affiliation. Issue salience determines the effect of the "unmoved mover."

When saliency of an issue changes from one period to the next, then the effect of that issue on party identification will change as well. Highton and Kam (2011) found this with respect to issue importance between 1970 and 2000. Their findings suggest that the relationship between an individual's party affiliation and their attitudes, usually measured as issue preferences, is conditioned by the importance ascribed to the issue and appears to be affected by a larger "political context" in the long run. Relying on data from a long-term panel in the US, they construct two broad categories on racial/economic issue orientations and cultural orientations. The salience of related issues for either differ in the two eras the authors identify. While partisanship takes precedence over issue positions between 1973 and 1982, from 1983 until 1997 issue position of an individual predicted partisan affiliation. Political sophistication of the individual had no systematic effect on this causal relationship.

Overall, these previous findings paint a nuanced picture. Citizens take cues from parties to determine their own position on issues of lesser importance to them. Thus, political elites' messaging can be a good heuristic for voters. Following party leaders provides them an effective informational shortcut, if they have strong individual partisanship. Strategic party elites can make use of the heuristic when re-aligning their own positions. Yet they must respond to their voters instead of seeking only to lead them with respect to issues about which voters care a good deal.

Elites can of course be effective at changing the saliency of an issue (Zaller 1992), but doing so carries risk. Emphasizing a topic can lead to a strengthening of party affiliation amongst a party's supporters, but they might lose these same supporters later on should the party see the need to change its position.

I test these dynamics of voter support and elites' positional switching on non-traditional data in the form of tweets. Because campaigning around the Italian Election of 2018 was to a large degree conducted online, Twitter data is highly illuminating. Instead of focusing on the content of specific tweets, I focus on the underlying structure of

connections on the platform. Previous research has found that low-threshold political engagement on social media in Italy is a good predictor of other modes of political activity (Vaccari et al. 2015). Based on this I assume users who engage with politics on Twitter are interested in politics, and, to a large degree, feel aligned with a specific party or electoral alliance.

4.4. How m5s and Lega voters each view the others' party

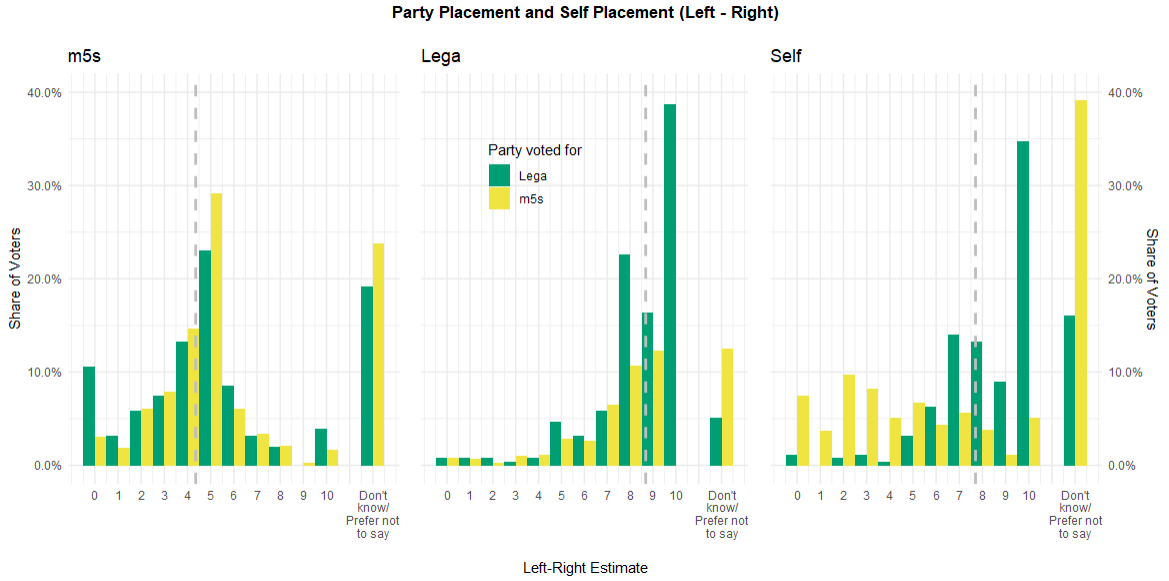

Figure 4.2. Party placement and self placement (left - right)

The attitudes of Italian voters backing one of the two parties towards the other party suggests just how unlikely the m5s-Lega coalition was. The Italian election study, which fielded pre- and post-election surveys in 2018, reveals these attitudes (ITANES 2019). These data supply an individual identifier to connect both survey rounds. Attitudes and ideological placements for the following figures come from the pre-election survey, while information on vote choice comes from post-election interviews.

The first two panels in figure 4.2 depicts the placement of m5s and Lega on a left-right scale, by both voters of the same as well as voters of the other party. The distribution of responses indicates that the 2018 electoral campaign in Italy fulfilled its purpose: voters had sufficient information to meaningfully differentiate between m5s and Lega as there is a marked difference between both parties at an aggregate level. M5s mixed leftist populist landmark priorities, like universal basic income and childcare

reimbursements, with liberal economic policies, like simplifying the tax code and cutting down on bureaucracy. Voters were aware of this ideological hybrid. In the 2018 election, the party turned away from supporting the Italian withdrawal from the European common currency, which had been a core promise since its foundation in 2009. As a result, many voters were unclear where to place m5s ideologically: 23.8% of its own supporters and 19.1% of Lega supporters replied with “Don’t know” or “prefer not to say” when asked to place m5s on a left-right spectrum. Yet most respondents received the ideologically mixed messaging and collectively estimated the party at a centrist position of 4.35 on a scale from 0 to 10. Lega supporters overall tended to place m5s further to the left than m5s’ own voters, with a little over 10% of Lega voters placing m5s at the most extreme left end of the scale.

Salvini’s Lega presented more ideologically consistent proposals as a party, and the lower degree of voters unable to place it on a left/right spectrum reflects this (Figure 4.2). Its overall ideological mean is much higher at 8.68. Its own supporters considered it a bit more moderate than m5s-voters, of which a whopping 48.6% put it at the most extreme right end of the scale. The party’s campaign style and issue positions were unambiguous in the eyes of the voters, as this cumulative estimator suggests. Panel 3 in figure 4.2 indicates voters’ self-placement on a left-right scale. Two major tendencies fit the voter assessment of each party: First, a large number of Lega supporters place themselves at the far right end of the scale, in line with their estimation of the party itself. Second, almost 40% of m5s voters cannot or do not want to identify the scale-position of their own political convictions. Both parties generally match the makeup of their own circle of supporters.

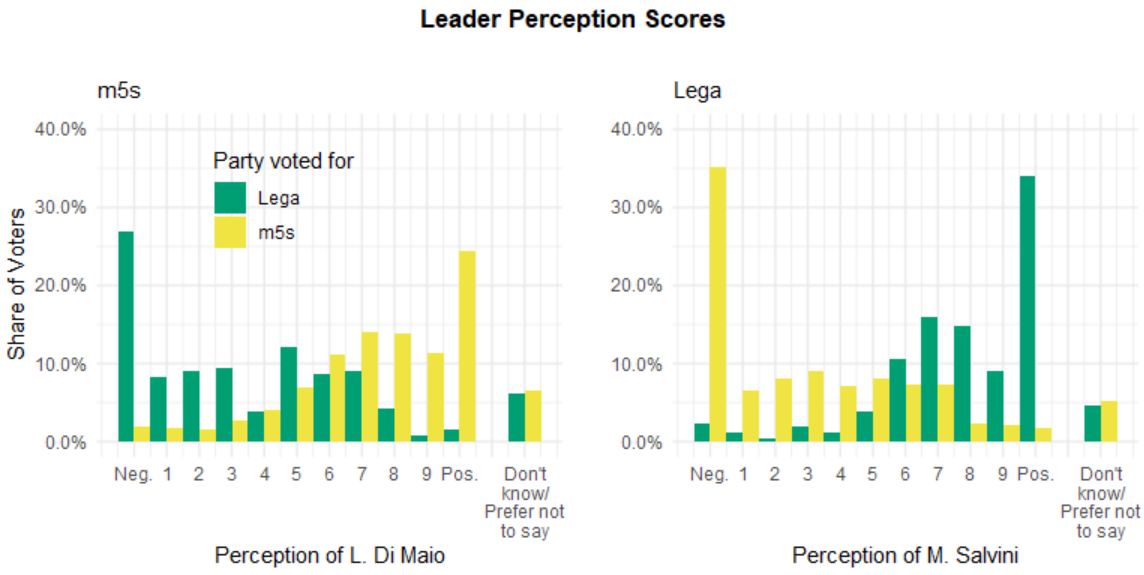

Figure 4.3. Leader perception

However, ideological incongruency does not quite confirm that voters of one party cannot support a program of the other party. As the election campaign centered to a large degree on individuals and party leaders, figure 4.3 illustrates a third indicator of cross-party compatibility — leader-like scores. The underlying survey question asks respondents how they perceive each party's leader, ranging from "completely negative" (0) to "completely positive" (10). The heterogeneity of perceptions is clear from their responses. Voters have a generally high opinion of the leader of the party they support, but most assessments are in a medium-high range, not at extremely positive ratings. Voters' impressions of Salvini are more polarized than their impressions of Di Maio, in that Salvini's party backers like him more fervently than di Maio's and the opposing party's backers in m5s dislike him more fervently than Lega backers dislike the m5s leader. Over 35% of m5s voters have a completely negative image of Salvini, compared to only 26 % of Lega voters' view of di Maio. For both leaders, the share of maximum disapproval by the opposite side is larger than the share of highest supporters from their own voters.

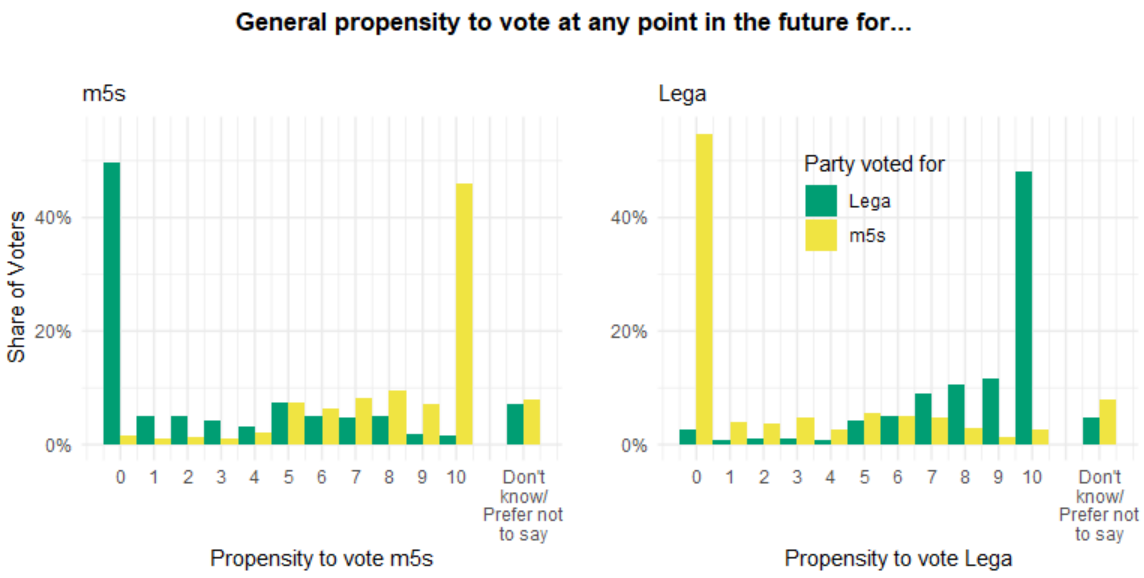

Figure 4.4. Propensity to vote

Figure 4.4 illustrates the vehemence of the supporters of each party in opposing the other. Based on a question asking respondents to indicate just how likely they are vote for a specific party at some point in the future, ranging from 0 ("not likely at all") to 10 ("very likely"), results show mutual disapproval. In both cases about half of Lega and m5s supporters of Lega and m5s consider voting for the other party "very unlikely" at 49.6% and 54.6% respectively. Much as with their disapproval of the other party's leader, the dismissiveness of either supporters towards the other party is so large, it outweighs the share of the parties' own supporter base with maximum propensity to vote. The trenches dividing the parties' bases are deep, with party supporters disapproving more of the other side than they approve of their own.

Yet when asked to cast their ballot in two referenda in late May, a few weeks after the election, opinion seems to have pivoted to the opposite. xxx Of almost 45,000 m5s members who voted in an online poll, over 90% indicated support for the proposed coalition. The Lega organised stands across Italy, at which 91% of 215,000 citizens cast their votes in favour of the agreement between Lega and m5s. In light of this outcome, the unlikely coalition government was sworn in on June 1st, 2018.

4.5. Model and dependent variable

The model I propose tests the effect of party closeness on party support at two different time points: 1) during the electoral campaign and 2) after the announcement of the m5s-Lega coalition was announced. My analysis is based on a discontinuity-regression approach. The outcome variable is the rate-of-retweet by party for each user. It is the number of retweets in one of the timeframes divided by the total number of tweets in the same time frame. Thus, a proportion between 0 and 1 for each user indicates the penchant of this user for her respective party.

My model treats retweeting a message from any account affiliated with the Lega as an act of endorsement. This perspective is not undisputed. Some authors treat retweeting as an ambiguous practice which can serve multiple communicative purposes and cannot explicitly be understood as a message of support (Boyd, Golder, and Lotan 2010; Nagler et al. 2015; Guerra et al. 2017). When seen in context of a political campaign, however, where clear ideological messaging is sent from partisan accounts, a retweet becomes a costly act and it is likely to express party support or even vote intention (Ceron, Curini, and Iacus 2015; Ceron and Adda 2016). I explicitly understand a retweet to be an endorsement, since it ultimately aids visibility and increases reach of an elite message by sharing it to another part of the social network. The more retweets a user sends, the more support she shows for the party that originated the tweet.

4.5.1. Methodological approach

To examine the different reactions to the coalition among party supporters, I use a model based in item-response-theory (Jackman 2012) to place social media users on a scale, with their position determined by which political elites they follow. This non-invasive approach to measurement allows researchers to determine the closeness between any user and any party. I apply a spatial theory of party ID to this case: I consider a Twitter user “close” to a specific party, if the user’s estimated position falls near to this party.

To follow a Twitter account is, for a private individual, about information gathering. It is a personal decision without immediate real-world consequences except

one's experience of Twitter changes. This makes it a valuable tool for determining an individual's underlying dispositions towards a specific party.

Based on this logic, I extract a measure of partisan proximity from Twitter to examine political behaviour. Twitter users provide information when following political accounts. These data on who follows whom can be used to determine latent scaling for every user. Others have developed and used the same measure to infer ideological ideal points for elites and individuals on Twitter (Barberá 2015; Imai, Lo, and Olmsted 2016). Borrowing from these approaches, I consider the resulting ideal points from this as measures of closeness (or distance) to a political party. Closeness of an individual to a party is a continuous measure of partisan affinity. This measure of affinity represents users' party identification.[8]

I test this relationship using non-traditional social science data extracted from Twitter. To determine party support I use tweets, and to identify party affinity I use follower networks. Previous research has shown that the follower networks for political elites on Twitter allow estimation ideological ideal points (Barberá 2015) for both elites and for individual users. Barberá uses a Bayesian Spatial Following model, developed from Item Response Theory modelling, to place political elites in a latent space. At the core of this approach is a probabilistic model for the act of "following." Whether a user follows a member of the political elite is understood as a function of three separate parameters: A) the user's ideological position, B) the elite's ideological placement, and C) the elite's popularity. Using Bayesian simulation and repeated draws from predetermined probabilities, this model places both users and elites in a previously unobserved space. While this allows for robust estimations, it only allows for limited scalability, due to the slow process with which the underlying sampler works.

For the present work, I use an approach Imai, Lo, and Olmsted (2016) proposed, which is optimized for large-scale follower matrices and produces reliable estimates. Unlike a Bayesian Spatial Following model, their proposed expectation-maximization algorithm does not return likelihood distributions, but maximum-likelihood point

[8] Barberá (2015), for example, uses this approach to investigate the ideological composition of the US Twittersphere. In this case of a two-party system this scale can be interpreted as ideology. The same is true for multiparty-cases where the politics is organised between two distinct ideological poles.

estimates. It allows for rapid implementation and for the estimation of latent ideal points for 343 Italian politicians and almost 653,000 Italian Twitter users who were active during the Italian election campaign in 2018. In addition, I collected tweets related to politics in Italy between February 7 and June 4, 2018 and extracted followers of political accounts (details about this process can be found in the appendix).

The resulting dataset contains over 46 million tweets. For the analysis below, I focus on 8.3 million tweets (17.9% of the raw data) which were sent by my sample of ideologically placed politicians and users. This collection includes 5.4 million retweets (comprising 65.3% of tweets by scaled users). To identify the Twitter user handles of Italian politicians I relied on a list compiled by the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* containing all available Twitter-handles of candidates contesting this election.[9] Since I extracted follower lists after the end of the campaign and coalition building, my estimations work from an approximation of follower lists for February 2018, a timespan roughly three weeks before the election of March 6.

4.6. Model Specification

To determine a difference between party supporters' behaviour *before* the election and *after* the coalition announcement I fit a bivariate OLS-regression model. My dependent variable is user rate-of-retweet of a user for a party. The independent variable of my model is the ideological distance between the user and the weighted party mean. I use an interaction term to account for timing in terms of *before* election and *after* the coalition announcement. Moreover, I fit two models for each party, one for users whose ideal points are *above* the weighted party mean for position and a second for users whose ideal points are *below* it.

[9] This list can be found at https://twitter.com/repubblica/lists/politici-italiani

4.6.1. Main independent variable - ideology and partisan affinity

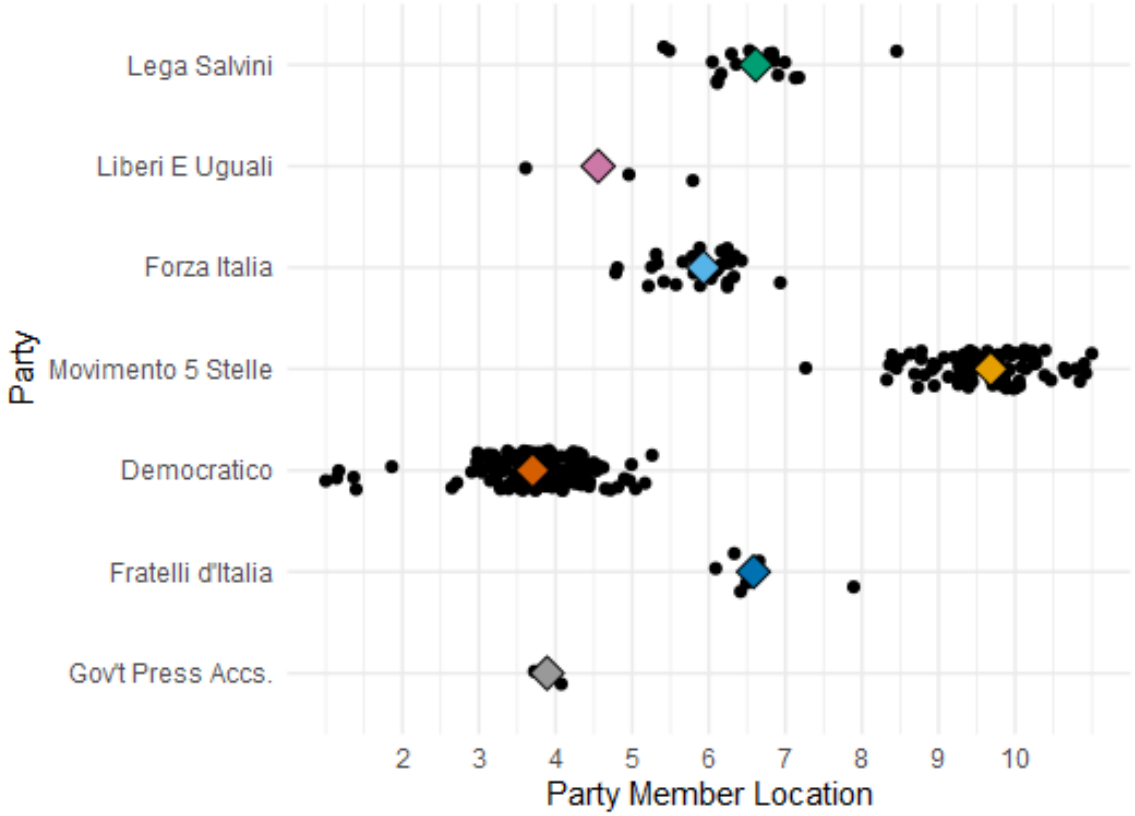

Figure 4.5. Estimated elite ideal points with party means

To assess closeness of users to parties my approach places each user (individuals as well as party elites) on a scale ranging from 1 to 11. For the placement to be informative, a minimal political interest of each user is a prerequisite. To this end, I estimate an ideal point for each user which follows five or more political elites, using the maximum-likelihood estimation approach by Imai, Lo, and Olmsted (2016), as implemented in Imai, Lo, and Olmsted (2017).

Figure 4.5 illustrates the results of the estimation for political elites in Italy. The order of the two major electoral coalitions is in line with their political alignment: the centre-left coalition of PD and *Liberi & Uguali* as a moderate, left-leaning block; the right-wing coalition of *Lega*, *Fratelli d'Italia*, and *Forza* aligned to the right of the leftist government-coalition. The leftist-populist m5s is clearly located on the outer end of the latent space. Party means are indicated within the scattered points of each elite account and weighted by the logged number of followers of each party-affiliated account.

The order of the estimates, if taken at face value, does not make sense. In the common understanding of left-right-ideology, m5s is not more extreme right-wing than the Lega, but in this latent scale it appears to be.

The explanation for this surprising finding is that algorithm employed reduces any *n*-dimensional political space into a one-dimensional scale. Similar to survey questions asking individuals to fit themselves and parties on a left-right spectrum, this estimation procedure simplifies issue positions and reduces dimensionality. It compresses numerous opinions on many issues and projects them to just one scale. It projects well for a one-dimensional or two-dimensional policy space but fails for other multi-dimensional spaces. This is why these ideal points are not in line with prior expectations in this case: multiple axes are being reduced to just one. The underlying latent space has at least two dimensions: one differentiating between government (centre-left) and opposition (centre-right), for which the estimates presented here are what we would expect. But a second axis scales “established” Italian politics (PD, LeU, FdI, Forza, Lega) against “anti-establishment” (m5s) ones.

I propose this clarification since the estimation of ideal points *without* m5s produces ideological rank-ordering that is more in line with typical left-right expectations. Adding m5s into the model (as shown) “tacks” it onto the outer edge. It is of note that m5s is not placed within the centre-left camp (left side of the graph), but instead at the rightward end, in closeness to the Lega. This illustrates the Lega’s curious appeal as an anti-old guard party, despite being around for almost 30 years. For my statistical model I do not rely on users’/elites’ numerical position on this scale. Instead, my analysis rests on users’ distances from the weighted mean of Lega and m5s. By focusing exclusively on this distance between each party, I avoid the complications arising from the multiple dimensions of the underlying scale.

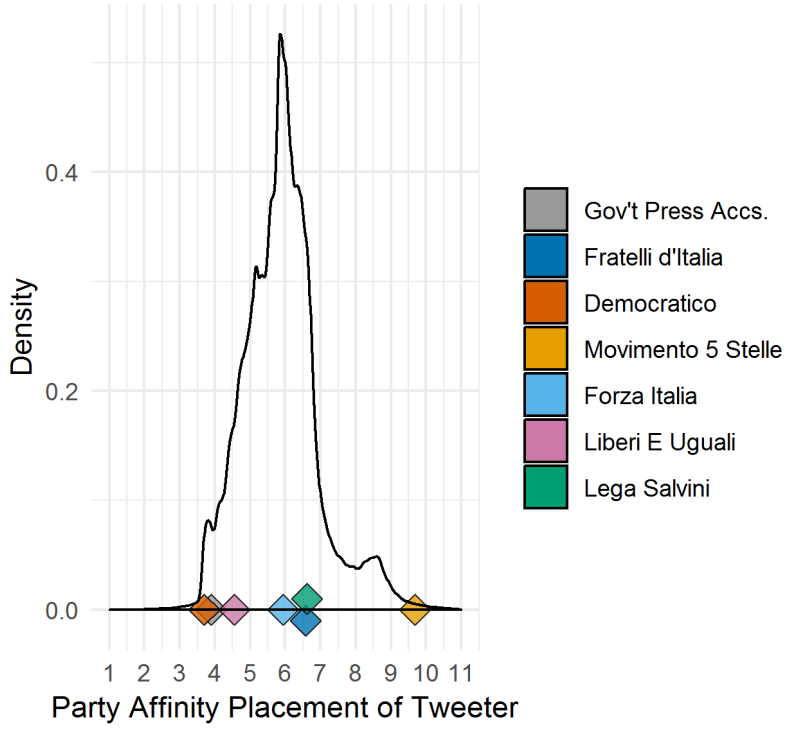

Figure 4.6. Affinity scale position of tweeters, with party means

Figure 4.6 shows the overall distribution of Twitter users' ideal points derived from the estimation. It appears slightly right skewed, but not unlike a normal distribution. The central peak, where most Twitter users fall ideologically, is about 5.7. Overall mean for the ideological position of users is 6.13, and the median is 6.14. 73.9% of Twitter users in the sample are within one standard deviation (1.08) of the mean, with 15% being placed above of this window and 11% below.

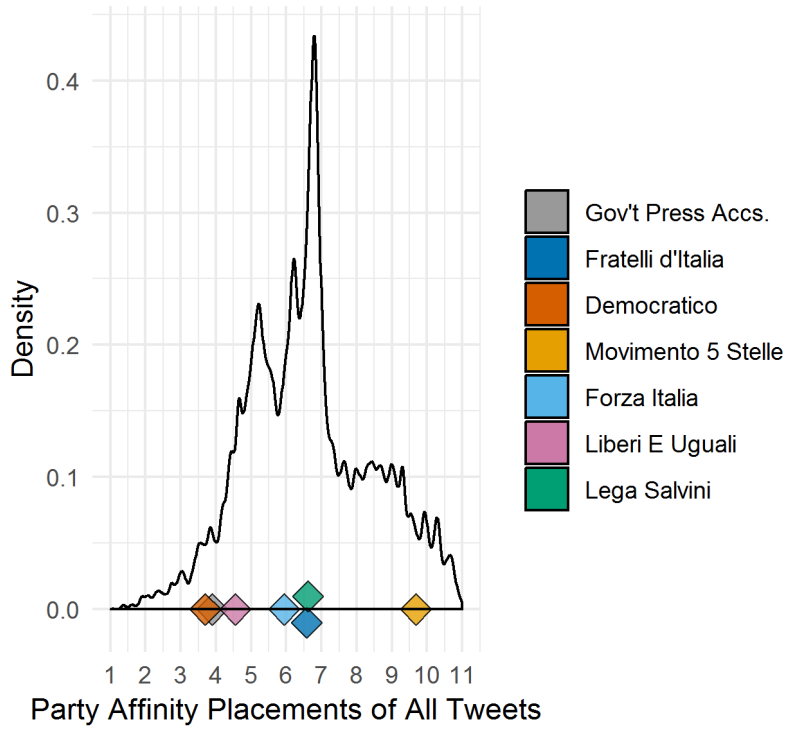

Figure 4.7. Affinity scale position of all Tweets, with party means

Figure 4.7 provides a first link between my central independent variable (ideological ideal points) and individual users' behaviour. The figure shows which areas on the latent scale the most active users occupy by plotting the distribution of tweets over the ideological position of the tweeting accounts. The resulting curve has two distinct peaks, with a distinct right skew – meaning that users on the anti-establishment end of the scale punch slightly outpace others in terms of tweeting volume. Fully two-thirds of tweets, 66.6%, were sent from accounts within one standard deviation (1.79) from the mean (5.39). Another 15% of all tweets were sent from accounts which are more than one standard deviation above the mean. For my regression I calculate the distance between each retweeting user and the weighted party mean.

4.6.2. Dependent variable

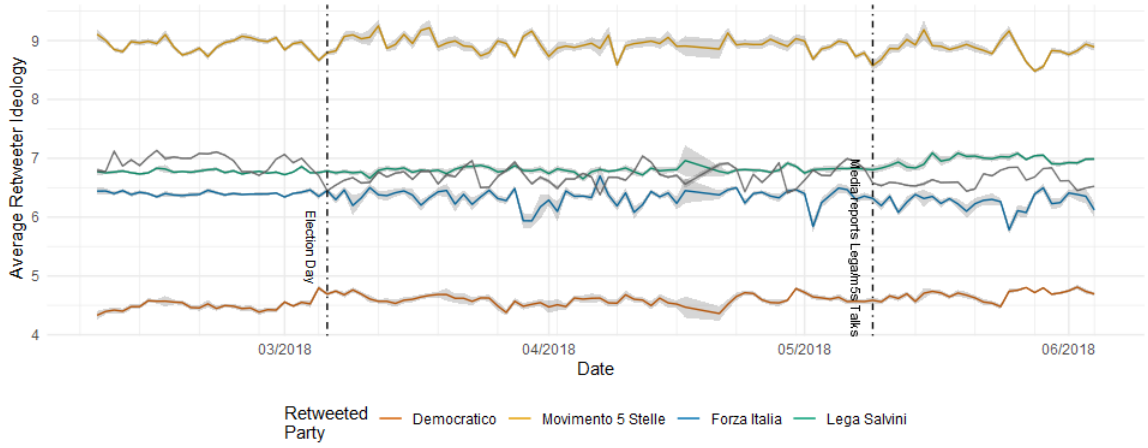

Figure 4.8. Daily mean of retweet ideal points, by party

My focus is on the degree of support from Twitter users closely affiliated with Lega and, to a certain extent, a different set of users affiliated with m5s, during the campaign and after the coalition was announced. Recall that for my purposes retweets are considered as endorsements. Figure 4.8 presents the average ideological score of retweets for each party per day.

Three vertical lines indicate days with central events: The election held on March 6, the first media reports about talks held between Salvini and Di Maio on May 9, and finally the announcement of the coalition between Lega and m5s on May 14. Of special note is the average daily ideology of retweeters of the Lega. It is low in variance, with an aggregate mean of 6.77 before the election, but starts to increase on the day of media reports about coalition talks and remains slightly elevated with a mean of 6.96. This is a first indication of a change in tweeting behaviour amongst supporters of the Lega after the coalition announcement.

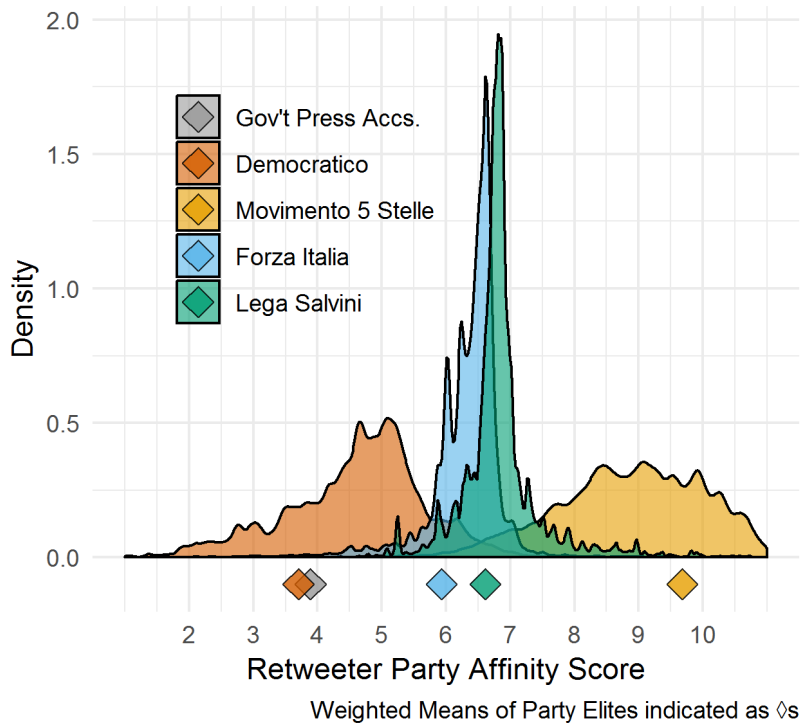

Figure 4.9. Affinity scale position of all retweets, by party

Figure 4.9 presents the overall composition of ideological source position of all retweets by party. Frequent retweeters of Lega (and its previous coalition partner *Forza Italia*) mostly occupy a narrow band in the middle of the ideological scale. These vocal supporters are more concentrated than the supporters of m5s. As a reference for assessing the volume of retweets, the Democratic Party is included in this graph as well. Over the course of the whole timeframe, Lega received the bulk of its support from accounts near the centre of the latent space, yet, as figure 4.8 illustrates, after the coalition announcement the structure of the party's Twitter support appears to change.

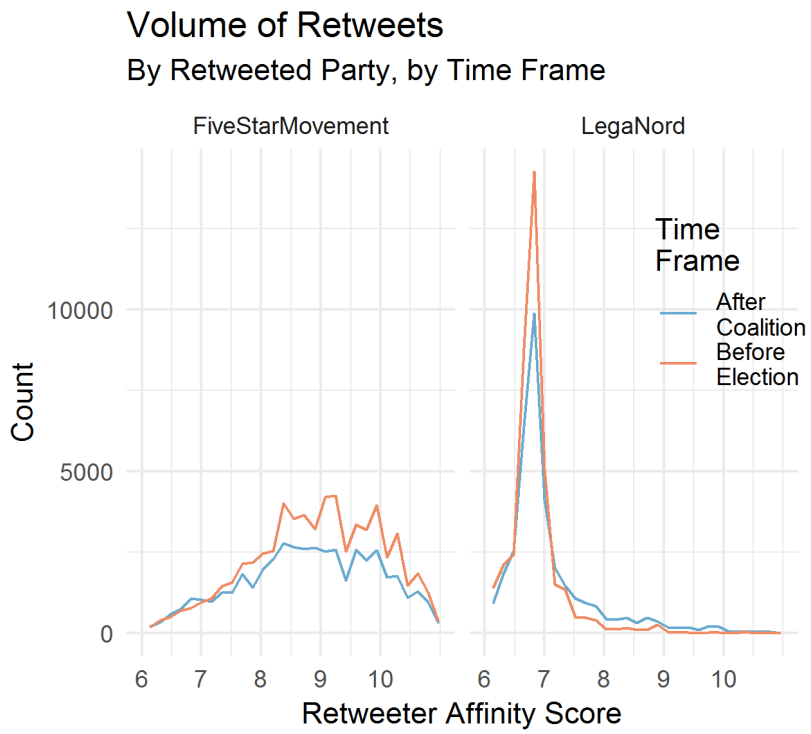

Figure 4.10. Affinity scale position of all retweets for Lega and m5s, by party

Figure 4.10 gives an overview of absolute counts of retweets for both parties of interest. As is to be expected there is a difference in volume of tweets during the campaign and after the coalition announcement. While electioneering was ongoing, the engagement of users with either party is generally larger, with levels dropping after the coalition announcement. After announcing the coalition, Lega received a larger number of tweets from users leaning towards the m5s-end of the scale but this difference is marginal. This does not indicate whether this means that previous Lega-supporters have changed their behaviour. I focus on this is in my analysis below.

To account for a possible change in the rate of activity before the election and after the coalition announcement, the model below considers not absolute counts of retweets, but rate-of-retweet instead. This measure describes which share of all tweets sent by a user during each of the two timeframes were retweets of a party. It is the proportion of party retweets over the total number of tweets.

Having established these descriptive statistics about tweets and retweets around the Italian election and coalition building in 2018, I now investigate the behaviour of party supporters before the election and after the coalition announcement.

4.7. Results

My model predicts a user's rate-of-retweet for each party from their ideological ideal point estimation, both before the election and after the coalition announcement. The analysis rests on two models per party, for a total of four models. The first model for each party tests effects of timing for users whose ideological scores are *below* the party mean. The second model is fitted only on the sample of users whose ideological scores are *above* the respective party mean. My model specification includes interaction terms between "timeframe" and "ideological distance between user and party mean." Full regression results can be found in the appendix; my interpretation here focuses on the plots of predicted values for each model-specification.

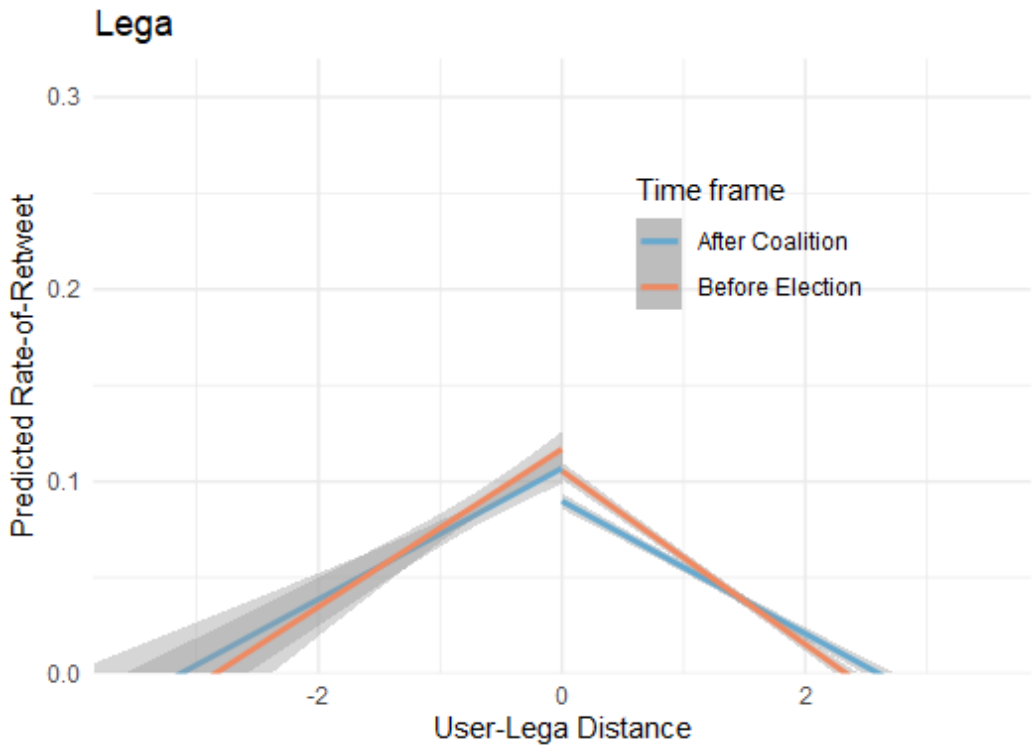

Figure 4.11. Effect sizes and direction for affinity distance on rate-of-retweet for Lega supporters

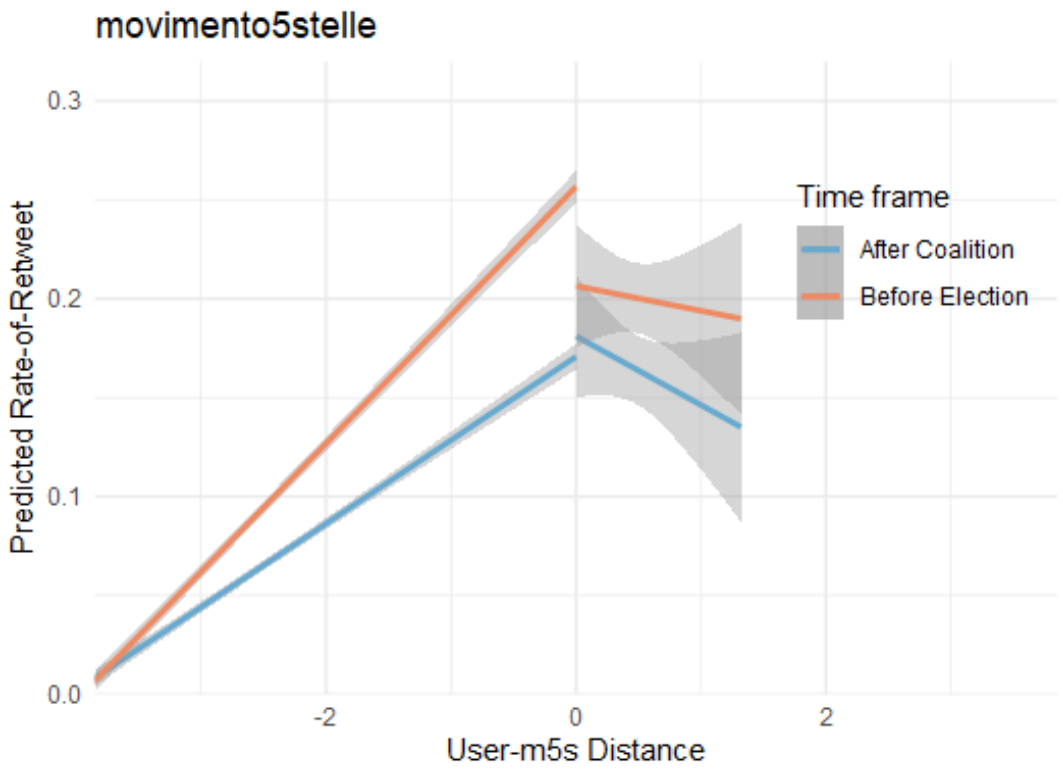

Figure 4.12. Effect sizes and direction for affinity distance on rate-of-retweet for movimento5stelle supporters

Figure 4.11 represents the predictions from the regression model for Lega-supporters only. These are users who retweeted at least one of the messages sent by any Lega-affiliated Twitter account at any point during either of the two timeframes. Overall, differences in rates-of-retweets before and after are not sizeable, but they are systematic. For users whose ideological positions are below the party mean (left side of the panel), no changes in party-supportive behaviour can be inferred between the two timeframes.

For the users in the right panel of figure 4.11, however, the model does predict a change in behaviour. Results suggest the announcement of the coalition had a slightly different impact on these users, who are located between the party means of Lega and m5s. Users closer to the Lega party mean reduce their expressions of support after the coalition announcement. Users further away from Lega (and thus closer to m5s) do so as well but, up to a certain distance, at a lesser extent. Beyond a threshold of about 1.5 points ideological difference their behaviour does not seem to differ between 'before' and 'after.' This is in line with hypothesis H2: The less staunch a party supporter is, the less

likely is party activity affecting her support. Effect sizes are small, but they suggest that voters are more likely to follow their parties than to lead it. The overwhelming support of the party referenda suggest the same.

The behaviour of m5s supporters provides an additional piece of evidence. Figure 4.12 presents the results of a similar analysis as performed for Lega retweeters. Again, the effects are different for users on either side of the party. For individuals scoring *higher* than the weighted party mean (the right half of figure 4.12) the model's standard errors are too high to determine a difference in effects. The same does not apply to users on the left side of the panel. For users with ideological scores between m5s and Lega, the rate-of-retweet before the election and after the coalition reflects substantial differences. Not only is the overall willingness to express support lower after May 14. The strength of association between ideological placement and rate-of-retweet (as measured in the slope of both lines) is slightly lower *after* the coalition. Compared to the *before*, the ideological distance between user and party matters less for the expression of support. Again, this implies support for H2. More moderate party supporters rely more on their party affinity to determine issue positions.

Taken together these effects support the hypotheses that different kinds of users are more prone to follow the party line. The observed effects in supporter behaviour differ for users with an ideology score between the means of Lega and m5s. This is a good indicator that the effects are due to the parties' activities, rather than a mere 'campaign effect' of mobilization before and after an election. A simple validation affirms this. Applying the same regression to the other parties and their supporters reveals that systematic effects like these do not appear in other constellations (see appendix 2 for details).

Further, the model specification I chose is prone to underestimate true effects. Examination of the overall data (cf. figure 4.10) suggests that a logarithmic scale of effects would provide a better fit of the model for Lega supporters. However, this would force a trade-off between model specification and interpretability. Thus I present the results from linear regressions here. The model leans also towards conservative estimation of effects since in cases where a user does *not* tweet or retweet in one of the timeframes, my analysis does not count the observation as 'missing' but uses a 'zero' as the dependent variable. This might reduce effect size in the model but is a conservative

estimate to avoid “false positive” type 1 errors for the tested hypotheses. Nonetheless, the different associations of ideological distance and retweeting behaviour stand. Not only are the effects contingent on direction of distance to Lega and m5s, they also appear exclusively for these two parties.

4.8. Discussion and further research

The research presented here addresses an important question about democracy: Do politicians follow voters or do politicians lead voters? I use the Italian election of 2018, with its unlikely coalition formation, as a test case. Findings from examination of non-traditional social science data extracted from Twitter suggest that not all voters are equally willing to be led and to follow. Overall, my investigation established two findings. Firstly, after the coalition announcement Twitter activity favouring Lega and m5s moved closer together. Secondly, usage patterns of individuals affiliated with either party were different between timeframes and dependent on their own ideological position.

Contrary to what previous literature suggests for a highly salient topic, my findings suggest that stauncher party supporters of the Lega were willing to endorse Lega’s coalition with m5s. For less staunch supporters of Lega, and backers of m5s overall, the announcement of the collaboration between both parties put off these users, and their rate of endorsement decreases. For individuals with a larger distance between party position and personal ideological placement, the effects depend on the direction of the distance. The coalition affected users falling between Lega and m5s on the latent scale differently by the coalition than users on the outer side of the parties’ range.

This study confirms previous findings about the relationship between niche parties and their followers. No free-wheeling dynamic applies where the party leads and ideologically blinded, devout followers follow every step of the way. Parties like the Lega and m5s do not retain their supporters no matter what. Instead, and in line with Adams et al. (2006) and Adams, Ezrow, and Leiter (2012), staunch supporters of extreme parties appear to be more sensitive to policy shifts of their parties than more moderate supporters.

Of note is the ideological split evident in my findings. Supporter behaviour of the RRP is in line with, at least, indifference towards party behaviour. The coalition

announcement as break from a salient previous promise did not impact usage patterns of ideologically closer users. For the other camp and its more diverse supporter base, levels of support dropped after the coalition was confirmed. Logics of party leadership styles echo this behaviour. The radical-right *Lega Salvini* carries its leader's name not only in its name, but also in its authoritarian top-down internal organisation. This rallying behind centralized leadership is not just typical for RRPs, appears amongst social media supporters with their tendency to follow the leader into the coalition.

The less authoritatively led *movimento5stelle* with its decentralized party organisation represents a different emphasis of populist style. The focus is on the movement made up from many, who are as a whole opposed to perceived elites. Authority is distributed amongst a much larger number of individuals, which characterizes all levels of party activity. This anti-elitism reflects in the empirical findings of this chapter.

My investigation does not establish the underlying structural changes in activity across Twitter users. My analysis focused on the difference in party support between *before* and *after* for a set of users but does not deliver insights into the *overall* makeup of retweets for either party in different timeframes. While I establish effects of ideology on support for the same party before and after, my analysis does not deliver insights about party switchers and their ideological distance. These switchers have potential to serve as fruitful extensions of my argument if the propensity to switch is related to both the ideological distance of either party and the timeframe at which switching is examined. A study considering switchers not just between Lega and m5s, but, for example, between Lega and its electoral alliance partner *Forza Italia* would shed more light on the effects of ideological distance on expression of partisan preferences.

5. Conclusion: Radical Right Parties in Western Europe – Architects of their own destiny or destined to live in a prefab?

RRPs have reshaped how political conflicts extend into electoral competition in Western Europe. During the last half of the twentieth century, each of these challenger parties has amalgamated a specific set of core traits, with xenophobia forming the ideological anchor concept for every member of the party family, and immigration issues as the foundation to generate support. However, even though RRPs form their own party category, their ways into democratic institutions have followed different trajectories. Despite sharing the same ideational foundations, their electoral gains have not happened in parallel. Across Western Europe in the last 50 years, RRPs have experienced different degrees of success. From just about reaching parliamentary representation within the last few years, to achieving largest opposition status, to holding government participation, the field is heterogeneous across national contexts. On one hand, it has repeatedly required a broad coalition of voters in what has been nicknamed a 'republican front' in France to prevent a win by the National Front's Jean-Marie/Marine Le Pen in the second round of multiple presidential runoffs. On the other hand, *Chega*, the RRP in Portugal, only won its first seat in parliament in 2019.

This dissertation explains how political opportunity structure and contextual effects on party support can help explain the discrepancies in timing of RRP advance and aid further understanding of RRPs overall. The three parts of this dissertation were motivated by one common question: what explains RRP success across time and place? After a recap of each section's central findings, this closing chapter caps the investigation with considerations on the agency and self efficacy of RRPs. How large is their leverage to shape opportunity structures to be beneficial to their electoral success? Can they forge their own destiny? Or are they forced to remain in waiting until an opportunity window presents itself for their political entrepreneurship?

The core aim of the three substantive parts of this dissertation is to investigate the heterogeneity in RRP support across space and time. Each assumes that the existence of certain political opportunity structures, defined as an accessibility and openness of political contexts to new political entrepreneurs (Kitschelt 1986), is

necessary for RRP success. The constellation of a variety of contextual elements influences how voters' support turns into electoral performance of RRPs each election. Crucially, two of the three chapters explore how electoral contexts impact the best attitudinal predictor for RRP voting – anti-immigration sentiment. These contextual influences are investigated at different levels throughout the three parts, with each chapter combining analysis of influences on national levels with individual characteristics. This combination advances the literature.

Chapter 2 sets the stage for the investigation with both a cross-sectional and a longitudinal perspective, analyzing observational data across countries as well as over time. This methodological choice distinguishes it from much of the other work on political opportunity structures and RRP success. Previous studies have mostly captured a moment in time, with either case-study or large-N approaches. By taking a more integrated approach, I find evidence that individuals' issue positions on immigration are most consequential for RRP support when the issue dominates political conflict overall. This is the case when its salience in the population is high and polarization over other social and/or economic issues is relatively low. Prior research has produced valuable insights about how polarization over specific political issues aids RRP success, but static data fail to account for dynamic interdependencies in how national contexts become beneficial for RRPs. This chapter provides an account that combines methodological innovation and theoretical insights from individual and national levels of analysis. Previous literature focuses on one or the other. This is the first of two important contributions of this part.

The second substantial element of my approach offers an interaction between micro-level attitudinal data and macro-level data on partisan conflict. This triangulates the mechanisms undergirding RRP electoral success from two sides – how the context for each election affects attitudinal determinants of RRP voting. This links the literature on attitudes of RRP supporters with an understanding of country-specific contexts. The conclusion of this chapter reconciles two competing narratives on the rise of RRPs: that it depends primarily on nativism, and that it is the reasonable outcry of those modernization has left behind. RRP rise, rather, is an effect of contexts offering RRPs the window to reach supporters with specific attitudes. As a third aspect, this study contributes to the ongoing debate about the multi-dimensionality of political conflict. Since my approach allows for differences in space and time, it shows how the

dimensions of conflict differ systematically across cases. This helps to explain differing degrees of RRP success both *across* countries and *within* countries over time. After establishing this, my next chapter focused on one case.

Chapter 3 of this dissertation hones in on one country at a critical juncture to investigate further details on how attitudes matter in specific contexts. The case of Germany's 2017 election was notable for the AfD's momentous rise to become the largest opposition party in the Bundestag. I use the backdrop of an election with high salience of immigration, after the events in the fall of 2015, when an influx of refugees and asylum seekers put immigration on the top of public agendas across Europe.

I consider this to be a priming event and find that, overall, AfD support did not systematically shift among the respondents –- on average the degree of support before is similar to supporter proportions after. But digging deeper in the findings reveals crucial nuances indicating that after the priming event, AfD support appears to be much lower among individuals without anti-immigrant views, but mostly stayed the same among previous immigration-critics. This is akin to a negative priming effect, where the clarification and fortification of issue positions by a party deters voters with different positions. Individuals that shared the xenophobia are not affected by this.

In the analysis of political behaviour, the voter-deterring effects of negative priming are much less studied than their positive counterpart. It is a mechanism implicitly assumed by theories of issue voting, but rarely –by itself– as center of empirical tests of political behaviour. Chapter 3 contributes a perspective to this scholarly gap. Also, it greatly matters for party strategy, where electioneering over wedge issues can decide elections. Here, the sole purpose of agenda setting is to achieve voter deterrence in a camp other than the own (Van De Wardt, De Vries, and Hobolt 2014).

The crucial take-away from the two chapters is that micro-level determinants of RRP support are contingent on national electoral contexts – chiefly political competitors (chapter 2) and issue salience of immigration (chapter 3). Alignment of both is what allows RRPs to enter electoral arenas and electioneer around themes of xenophobia and strong leadership. In line with the theory of policy entrepreneurship (Vries and Hobolt 2020), there appears to be an opportunity window for ideas of exclusionary nationalism to catch in certain parts of the electorate, while for other groups of voters (as

chapter 3) shows) it serves as a deterrent. These opportunity windows evolve over time, and my contribution adds a temporal perspective. The last chapter shifts focus from initial successes to endurance of RRPs.

Chapter 4 takes the consideration of context one step further and focuses on an RRP after it has established itself as politically viable alternative. For the Lega as one of the 'old-stock' RRPs in Western Europe, context plays a different role than for challenger parties. Instead of a specific focus on the growth in electoral support, this last chapter studies the *retention* of support for an RRP by studying its supporters' Twitter data. Even though the Lega crossed a self-imposed red line when entering the coalition with m5s, it did so without disappointing its own supporter base.

Indeed, results in chapter 4 indicate that distance in affinity between party supporters and Lega predicted users' behaviour. Accounts that were modeled as possessing high affinity to Lega hardly toned down their support for the party after it announced its governing switch. In contrast, Twitter users close to m5s behaved less supportively of the party as a reaction to the government contract. Consequently, users sitting in between both parties were less affected by the elites' interactions than staunch party supporters were. A majority of RRP party supporters followed the party leader into the coalition.

This is in line with findings that voters accept party cues to a large extent and embed them into their existing cognitive framework. Previous research has long recognized that party identification is central to an individuals' propensity to follow politicians' positions (Lenz 2012; Richard Johnston 2006). In this present example, this manifested more for the radical right than the populist left, itself a reflection of differences in party organisation and political styles between either.

The radical-right *Lega* crystallizes its authoritarian values into party organisation focused on its leader's authority. This included RRP supporters on social media who, as a consequence, followed into the coalition. The more decentralized *movimento5stelle* with its party organisation represents a different archetype. Their focus is on the opposition to political elites and authority is spread between a much larger number of individuals. This attracts a more ideologically diverse group of supporters, but reduces willingness to rally behind a top-down dictate.

The evidence that electoral contexts shape political conflicts is of consequence for the study of RRP party success: it means that there is more to their rise than just alignment of voters on certain issues. Voting is not a purely spatial process, with issue closeness determining the party an individual votes for. There are other processes at play. One of the major constraints on electioneering is that not all issues can be politized by RRPs at any time and not all xenophobic voters support these parties all the time. This extends classical theories of issue entrepreneurship (Carmines and Stimson 1986; Schattschneider 1960) by clarifying prerequisites for new policy entrepreneurs to mobilize on new issue dimensions . Indeed, there are circumstances under which voters and parties match up "better," i.e. attitudes become a stronger predictor of vote choice. This is where electoral context appears to play a role. Once this match has been made, however, and voters have latched onto an RRP, the party gains programmatic freedoms, and can adjust its stances without losing its base of supporters. With this, they become similar to any other political party, where among the best predictors of vote choice is previous vote.

This widened understanding of voter/party dynamics expands the explanatory power of any theory of voting in that it elegantly accommodates differences over time. This is the extension my dissertation brings as previous approaches with a focus on political behaviour often only imply an expectation of differences over time. My work accounts for it and I add a perspective on how shifting contexts change the individual foundations for voting. Not only are "issues that divide the Left and the Right (…) linked in ways contingent upon time and space" (Kitschelt and McGann 1995). The fact that they do has an impact on how individuals make decisions on voting day. This helps to shed light on the central puzzle of this dissertation, on the differences in timing and trajectories of RRP successes.

A wider lens on electoral choices as embedded into political conflicts also raises a substantive question. This larger question concerns the role of RRPs in their rise overall: How powerful are those parties' in facilitating the opportunity structure for their electoral success? How far does their self-efficacy in the national political contexts go?

Theories on agenda setting, issue entrepreneurship, and public opinion formation posit that RRPs hold considerable leverage to enable their own success: political elites can shape agendas, and can politicize certain issues over others, especially when mass

media are drawn towards them due to the dramatic news hooks RRPs provide. This is essentially the mechanism underneath the “media as RRP-complicit” argument. To a certain extend –given public attention on RRPs, their leaders and issues– their fate is in their own hands. Outrage and crossing discursive boundaries generate coverage which affords them leverage over issue salience. While this is convincing and well studied, it does not explain the central puzzle of this dissertation – the discrepancies in timing and degrees of success.

The other aspect to consider for RRP opportunity structures is the politization of political conflicts. As theories on spatial party competition and issue ownership posit, cleavages within political opportunity structures are formed in dynamic processes, substantially determined through public discourse. This involves a long list of public entities, such as political parties as well as social groups, organized interest, and mass media. Since it is a pan-societal process and involves many actors, RRPs have proportionally less influence to mill cleavages and wedge their issues into them.

Consider the following examples: The Italian Lega had government participation as a junior partner in the 1990s and 2000s, but did not truly break through electorally as it was embedded into a larger right-wing coalition which accommodated any politicize-able rifts. Germany had regional RRP electoral successes in the 1960s and the 1990s, but the breakthrough on a federal level came only in 2017, both due to public agendas maintaining balanced salience of economic and social issues, as well as “big tent” *Volksparteien* accommodating wide ranges of interest. Wallonia has yet to see an RRP party to establish itself meaningfully, with both mainstream politics and media maintaining a strict cordon sanitaire, while in Flanders the VB is a major actor and can draw successfully from a wide support network.

Indeed, while RRPs do not have to sit quietly in a stupor, waiting for the stars to align in a way that allows them to garner support, they also do not have the leverage to swing countervailing dynamics their way. Any window of opportunity is a combination of preparation aligning with chance. The time after the arrival of numerous immigrants in the fall of 2015 was, in a way, a perfect storm. Now that the wind has settled, and issue agendas have moved on to the environment as most pressing problem of the 21st century, RRPs appear to have a harder time expanding numbers of supporters. In addition, examples on how mainstream politics reacts to RRPs do suggest a tendency

towards calm rationality. One can point to a Danish approach where the Socialist party has flipped on their immigration stance to become more restrictive, and hence took wind out of the sails of the DFP. And to an Austrian approach where a scandal-laden ÖVP-FPÖ coalition has made way to a less shrill way of governance between the ÖVP and Green party (even though it has seen the chancellor step down from his duties in a self-imposed scandal and the successor has seen more rifts to mend).

Close to half a decade after the proclaimed "year of the patriot," I return to the participants of the meeting at the confluence of Rhine and Mosel. A recap of what has happened since 2017: Salvini's Lega has amalgamated with most of the other parties in Italy to support an expert-led, technocratic government. As a result, Lega support has dropped significantly, and the neo-fascist FdI have passed Salvini's party in electoral support, even taking the overall lead in some polls. In the UK, the postscript to Brexit has led to tumultuous scenes in British supermarkets and at petrol stations in the fall of 2021, with widespread scarcity of goods and long wait times. UKIP's supporter base has collapsed, and the party is undergoing internal turmoil, while increasingly adopting far-right nationalist stances. Austria's FPÖ had a falling out with their center-right coalition partner after the *Ibiza*-scandal rocked the Alpine republic in the early summer of 2019 and led to an early election call by the Austrian chancellor. FPÖ's public support collapsed and the party lost close to 10 % of votes along with 20 of their 51 seats in parliament. At the time of writing, the conservative party faces a scandal over ad sponsoring and paid media promotion, which could bring an electoral updraft to the FPÖ by driving disgruntled former ÖVP supporters to switch in the next parliamentary election.

Germany's AfD has not expanded its supporter base in the most recent federal election. The party did not manage to build on its status as largest opposition party between 2017 and 2021. Instead, it has seen a slight drop in electoral support down to 10.3 %. Despite inching towards anti-vaccination activism and conspiracy theories to draw supporters, the RRP was not able to transact their incendiary rhetoric into an electoral boost during the global health emergency, but instead saw a first-time contender party ascend to 1.35% of votes, most of which are likely to have been mobilized from AfD clientele. In France, RN's Marine Le Pen was head-to-head in polls with President Emmanuel Macron during the summer of 2021, only to have a competitor overtake her on the *far* far-right and temporarily dent her chances of entering the second

round of the run-off vote during France's presidential election in April 2022. Despite her ultimate defeat, support for her in this run-off round increased in large parts of France compared to 2017. The PVV as Netherlands' participant at the kick-off party to the "year of the patriot" had hopes of becoming largest party during the upcoming federal election. While Geert Wilder's party won 20 seats –five seats more than in 2013– this was still 13 seats short of that year's electoral top-spot. Then, in the general election in 2021, it lost three of those previously won seats. The 2021 election was called early over a scandal involving the ruling conservative-liberal party about daycare financing. The defamatory, staunch Islamophobic campaign of the PVV did not catch overly well in light of the still-ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, an extreme-right party and its youth list won ten seats, pilfering votes from Wilders' supporter base.

This dissertation set out with a description of the upward trends in RRP support over the last 40 years. Yet these examples from the last half decade seem like an ebbing of the tides. Is this indicative of a long-term trend? Are the years of electoral boom for RRPs over?

While the three parts do not provide any tests of forecasting, their core finding – context matters for how RRPs attract voters– offers a foundation for informed crystal ball reading. RRPs can, given media attention and specific constellations of political conflict, work as electioneering entrepreneurs. The last few decades have presented several windows of opportunity that RRPs seized, most notably the months in 2015 and 2016 when immigration became a highly visible and salient topic in European politics. The electoral boom before this little bust in the last few years was a consequence. Different RRPs have taken different degrees of inspiration from this crisis profiteering. One opportunity was around anti-government sentiment during the Covid-19 pandemic, another is to continue to emphasize codes from the exclusionary nationalist playbook.

The perceived ebb in the examples above hints at a quandary RRPs find themselves in once they become established political alternatives. As (so far) none have been successful in fully uprooting a liberal democratic system (but rather chipped away at the sides), three of the RRPs in the examples have lost support to extremist challenger parties – RN, PVV, Lega, and AfD. The 'warriors against the establishment' have been taken on by warriors against co-opted anti-establishment actors.

Nonetheless, we have two reasons to reject complacency concerning RRP fortunes. The first is that extremist opposition to RRPs is indicative of a larger development, which is, arguably, the biggest legacy of electioneering by RRPs in Western Europe. A direct effect of these parties ascending in their respective political systems is that they push the envelope of what discursive norms deem acceptable as political messaging. So, in a way, RRPs might be considered victims of their own recipe for success: by introducing extreme positions to electioneer on, they widen the available corridor for political messages to introduce.

In doing so they face a conundrum. Most RRPs employ a dual strategy of signaling to the fringes of electorates, while aiming to appear as centrist moderates, as "true" conservatives. The latter restricts the messaging from becoming too extremist, since the negative priming effects discussed in chapter two reduce the pool of voters to fish in. Thus, the flank on their right is exposed for other actors to capitalize on an unmet demand for extremist positions, caused, in turn, by the RRP's crossing of discursive red lines. These new contenders in politics increase system-wide polarization.

Second, the context of political conflicts in which RRPs and extremist parties electioneer effectively can manifest suddenly. This can happen over the course of months or even weeks, as salience of policy issues can rise quickly on public agendas. Climate turmoil on a planetary scale is within the possible scenarios for mid-21st century. One possible result is millions of displaced individuals, forced to leave then inarable regions, heading towards more moderate climates. If these scenarios materialize, greater migratory flows compared to the numbers in 2015/2016 will knock on Europe's borders with millions of people seeking livelihoods. At the time of writing, thousands of migrants are stuck in Belarus, just outside of EU territory, as pawns in a cynical conflict between the country's authoritarian ruler and EU legislative bodies. Mainly from Iraq and Syria and facing tremendous hardships and inhumane living conditions, the politization of their arrival in the EU could propel refugee policy back to the top of public agendas and voters' minds across the continent. In the meantime, almost every country in Western Europe (Spain and Portugal as the latest additions) has RRP politicians sitting in parliament who are to proclaim their visions of exclusionary nationalism, authoritarianism, and populism.

So, there they sit –some loudly electioneering, some quietly waiting– in parliaments, in talk shows, in council halls, anticipating the right moment. Specific political contexts are what allow RRPs to exploit political conflicts for their own electoral gain. These contexts might come and go, but the RRPs of Western Europe, once established, are ready to seize any opportunity to question individual rights and undermine constitutional processes. My dissertation demonstrates that determinants at different levels matter for when and how RRPs become successful. I drew on insights from theories of change in political conflict, issue voting, and priming. To test a number of hypotheses I employed multi-level modeling, panel analysis, and item-response theory to provide integrated analysis covering influences at multiple levels. This addresses important questions about democratic representation, and showed that both opportunity structures and individual factors together are key-determinants of RRP success.

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Appendix.

Supplemental information for chapter four

A1. Search terms for Twitter query

Tweets were collected by accessing Twitter's Stream API using the R-Program for Statistical Computing. All Tweets sent between February 2, 2018 and June 4, 2018 containing any of the following keywords were collected for my analysis:

"elezioni2018","elezionipolitiche2018","voto","macerata","4marzo2018","elezioni","4marzo","berlusconi","forzaitalia","4marzovotoforzaitalia","centrodestra","forza_italia","liberi_uguali","liberieuguali","pietrograsso","piu_europa","piueuropa","civicapopolare_","civicapopolare","renzi","matteorenzi","pdnetwork","programmapd","sceglipd","avanti","iovotopf","squadrapd","ilmioimpegno","partitodemocratico","centrosinistra","m5s","grillo","beppe_grillo","mov5stelle","dimaio","dimaiopresidente","votiamolivia","participa","scegli","maipiupd","Lega","legasalvini","matteosalvinimi","salvini","4marzovotolega","salvinipremier","lalegatifrega","fratelliditalia","centrodestrait","votagiorgiameloni","giorgiameloni","4marzofdl","giorgiapresidente","melonipresidente","Sinistra_europa","Articolounomdp","patriotiDitalia","socialistarturo","oravotocasapound","direzioneparlamento","accettolasfida","CasaPound",,"mattarella","cottarelli","#politiche","#politiche2018","#montecitorio","#politico","#parlamento","#governo","#sovranità","#sivota",

Keywords below were added 4/4/2018

#LEGA
"#votare","#elezioni","#Legapadania","#autonomia","#primaglitaliani","#labuonapolitica","#salvinipremier","#stopinvasione","#matteosalvini","#andiamoagovernare","#noiussoli","#lacittadinanzanonsiregala","#sbarchi","#immigrati","#immigrazione","#centrodestra","#napolitano","#leggeelettorale",

#M5S
"#alessandrodibattista","#movimento5stelle","#5stelle","#politica","#movimento","#dibattista","#onestà","#grillino","#beppegrillo","#deputato","#bepopular","#onorevole",

#FAR RIGHT
"#casapound","#osa","#cambiamento","#forzanuova","#ipasvi","#vota","#lista","#fiamma","#tricolore","#forza","#nuova","#sala","#milano","#forzanuova",

Keywords below were added 5/21/2018
"andiamoagovernare","quirinale","Consultazioni2018","m5slega", "legam5s", "salvinidimaio", "dimaiosalvini", "governom5slega", "governolegam5s", "contrattodigoverno" , "governo", "giuseppeconte","maratonamentana"

A2. List of Politicians – Identifiers and Scaled Locations

This table contains a list of the accounts of political actors that were positioned on the latent scale using emIRT (Imai et al 2017; Imai et al. 2017) and their number of followers at the time of collection:

Last Name	First Name	Username	Party	Twitter ID	Followers	Scaled Location	Executive Branch 2018
Adinolfi	Isabella	Isa_Adinolfi	5SM	2195622679	9132	2.92979	EU
Affronte	Marco	marcoaffronte	5SM	46416760	3532	3.31106	EU
Airola	Alberto	AlbertoAirola	5SM	634999260	11943	1.94087	Senate
Aiuto	Daniela	DanielaAiuto	5SM	2466169957	4436	2.87188	EU
Alberti	Dino	dinoalberti	5SM	138358005	1645	3.22554	Parliament
Alfonso	Luciano	lucianodalfonso	Democr.	238681240	3772	7.50175	Local
Amendola	Vincenzo	amendolaenzo	Democr.	398726169	5858	8.78795	Parliament
Anzaldi	Michele	Michele_Anzaldi	Democr.	2902178505	3093	8.12748	Parliament
Appendino	Chiara	c_appendino	5SM	963073442	62397	3.60696	Local
Argentin	Ileana	IleanaArgentin	Democr.	448039159	2389	8.0589	Parliament
Arrigoni	Paolo	arrigoni_paolo	Lega	1075084718	1505	4.82572	Senate
Ascani	Anna	AnnaAscani	Democr.	492325083	16566	8.52462	Parliament
Astorre	Bruno	BrunoAstorre	Democr.	2900717633	732	7.65432	Senate
Baldelli	Simone	simonebaldelli	Forzaltalia	13812612	4329	6.42816	Parliament
Baretta	PierPaolo	PPBaretta	Democr.	414634390	5815	8.65447	Parliament
Baroni	MassimoEnrico	M5S_Baroni	5SM	2459996144	4457	2.48629	Parliament
Basilio	Tatiana	tatianabasilio1	5SM	969081366	6454	2.2922	Parliament
Bazoli	Alfredo	alfredobazoli	Democr.	473842449	1704	7.80506	Parliament
Beghin	Tiziana	beghin_t	5SM	2343845391	5491	2.73712	EU
Bellanova	Teresa	TeresaBellanova	Democr.	606259626	7464	8.77948	Parliament
Benamati	Gianluca	GBenamati	Democr.	168586183	1209	7.67309	Parliament
Bergamini	Deborah	DeborahBergamin	Forzaltalia	92556620	22331	5.91675	Parliament
Berlusconi	Silvio	berlusconi	Forzaltalia	9.20277E+17	22392	5.65912	No elected mandate
Bernini	Paolo	Bernini_P	5SM	19863725	5346	2.63098	Parliament
Bernini	AnnaMaria	BerniniAM	Forzaltalia	757291945	17159	5.83541	Senate
Berretta	Giuseppe	G_Berretta	Democr.	958167698	2820	7.81658	Parliament
Bianchi	Nicola	nicola_bianchi	5SM	133366702	4745	2.51651	Parliament
Bianchi	Stella	stellabianchi	Democr.	47377992	1798	8.33872	Parliament
Biancofiore	Michaela	BiancofioreMiky	Forzaltalia	592160447	12382	5.75477	Parliament
Biffoni	Matteo	MattBiff	Democr.	51067487	6042	8.47231	Local
Bini	Caterina	caterinabini	Democr.	119007003	2697	8.22538	Parliament
Bitonci	Massimo	massimobitonci	Lega	106673706	8340	5.31842	No elected mandate
Blundo	Enza	enzablundo1	5SM	560907259	3238	3.03231	Senate

Last Name	First Name	Username	Party	Twitter ID	Followers	Scaled Location	Executive Branch 2018
Bobba	Luigi	LuigiBobba	Democr.	514478368	3820	8.27128	Parliament
Boccadutri	Sergio	boccadutri	Democr.	490373717	5962	8.10689	Parliament
Bonaccini	Stefano	sbonaccini	Democr.	61765111	34594	8.98079	Local
Bonaccorsi	Lorenza	lorenzabo	Democr.	15191260	4633	8.58883	Parliament
Bonafe	Simona	simonabonafe	Democr.	391945446	37618	8.79725	EU
Bonifazi	Francesco	FrancescoBonif1	Democr.	418814614	7585	9.09588	Parliament
Bonomo	Francesca	FraBonomo	Democr.	1093092662	4205	8.354	Parliament
Bordo	Michele	bordomichele	Democr.	62038434	2560	7.96191	Parliament
Borghesi	Stefano	BorghesiStefano	Lega	2170637596	472	5.88899	Parliament
Borghi	Enrico	EnricoBorghi1	Democr.	474175425	2974	8.16184	Parliament
Borletti	Ilaria	ilaborletti	Democr.	1095383269	4413	7.99305	Parliament
Boschi	MariaElena	meb	Democr.	588200416	569852	8.68886	Parliament
Bossio	EnzaBruno	enzabrunobossio	Democr.	88014506	4747	8.27971	Parliament
Bottici	Laura	LauraBottici	5SM	1943781798	4680	2.31132	Senate
Braga	Chiara	bragachiara	Democr.	385923471	8180	8.76862	Parliament
Bratti	Alessandro	alebratti	Democr.	378212883	2984	8.11673	No elected mandate
Brescia	Giuseppe	g_brescia	5SM	1326743389	13345	1.73413	Parliament
Brothers of Italy off.		FratellidItalia	BrothersOfItaly	1024976264	29798	5.3433	Party
Buccarella	Maurizio	MBuccarella	5SM	772349570	8810	2.14715	Senate
Busin	Filippo	FilippoBusin	Lega	455667847	1176	5.8394	Parliament
Businarolo	Francesca	FrancBusinarolo	5SM	1072331106	7950	2.0996	Parliament
Busto	Mirko	MirkoBusto	5SM	974102796	11469	2.13325	Parliament
Calabria	Annagrazia	CalabriaTw	ForzaItalia	412371227	19948	5.84737	Parliament
Calenda	Carlo	CarLocalenda	Democr.	2416067982	39017	8.14019	Government
Calipari	Rosa	RosaCalipari	Democr.	1134469160	1068	7.70118	Parliament
Cancelleri	Azzurra	Azzurra_C	5SM	87934587	10272	2.22939	Parliament
Candiani	Stefano	CandianiStefano	Lega	1250116818	1735	5.1689	Senate
Capone	Salvatore	SalvCapone	Democr.	1111384315	2380	8.08933	Parliament
Cappelletti	Enrico	e_cappelletti	5SM	2210614638	2012	3.0721	Senate
Carbone	Ernesto	ernestocarbone	Democr.	35804051	11335	8.42951	Parliament
Carfagna	Mara	mara_carfagna	ForzaItalia	104485125	193134	5.97924	Parliament
Cariello	Francesco	CarielFr	5SM	369177021	3485	2.76974	Parliament
Carinelli	Paola	berenice0104	5SM	93917881	10134	1.87703	Parliament
Carnevali	Elena	ElenaCarnevali	Democr.	435740653	2074	8.08692	Parliament
Carra	Marco	onMarcoCarra	Democr.	414930127	1487	7.66284	Parliament
Castaldi	Gianluca	GianlucaVasto	5SM	318499634	5627	2.66768	Senate
Castaldo	FabioMassimo	FMCastaldo	5SM	1368850908	9410	2.58322	EU
Castelli	Laura	LaCastelliM5s	5SM	720379711	18294	1.60842	Parliament
Catalfo	Nunzia	CatalfoNunzia	5SM	572128310	5101	2.34719	Senate
Causin	Andrea	Andreacausin72	ForzaItalia	949261333	3472	7.21473	Parliament

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Cenni	Susanna	susannacenni	Democr.	408615010	2048	7.70065	Parliament
Centinaio	GianMarco	giamma71	Lega	101573147	6627	5.20903	Senate
Centoz	Fulvio	fulviocentoz	Democr.	31093722	1756	7.10112	Local
Chiamparino	Sergio	SergioChiampa	Democr.	2401468358	6535	8.36837	Local
Chimienti	Silvia	silviachimienti	5SM	1888044751	8857	2.55822	Parliament
Cicu	Salvatore	SalvoCicu	ForzaItalia	379645871	4845	6.19446	EU
Ciprini	Tiziana	TiziCip	5SM	968615264	7907	2.21557	Parliament
Cirinna	Monica	MonicaCirinna	Democr.	334337968	31917	7.78524	Senate
Cociancich	Roberto	rcociancich	Democr.	314392100	3239	8.57006	Senate
Colletti	Andrea	AndCol81	5SM	1407978600	7833	1.98922	Parliament
Collina	Stefano	CollinaStefano	Democr.	437790954	2017	8.13081	Senate
Colonnese	Vega	VegaColonnese	5SM	973465514	7161	2.21157	Parliament
Cominardi	Claudio	cla_cominardi	5SM	203915389	7801	2.08282	Parliament
Coppola	Paolo	coppolapaolo	Democr.	13056322	4407	8.13687	Parliament
Corda	Emanuela	Emanuela_Corda	5SM	398603525	6740	2.27574	Parliament
Corrao	Ignazio	ignaziocorrao	5SM	143393223	8331	3.05563	EU
Cova	Paolo	paolo_cova	Democr.	42113491	2700	8.23332	Parliament
Covello	Stefania	CovelloStefania	Democr.	1128760278	5882	8.6744	Parliament
Crimi	Filippo	f_crimi	Democr.	1028499156	4204	8.30611	Parliament
Crimi	Vito	vitocrimi	5SM	62003557	73610	3.67594	Senate
Crippa	Davide	crippa5stelle	5SM	1283276454	7287	2.09947	Parliament
Dadone	Fabiana	DadoneFabiana	5SM	708276706	7629	2.07978	Parliament
Daga	Federica	FedericaDaga	5SM	361373768	7085	2.20145	Parliament
DallOsso	Matteo	matteodallosso	5SM	13065292	13407	1.88663	Parliament
DalMoro	Gianni	giannidalmoro	Democr.	472109265	1249	7.59589	Parliament
Damiano	Cesare	Cesare_Damiano	Democr.	430127505	17349	8.50285	Parliament
DeBiasi	Emilia	EmiliaDeBiasi	Democr.	934863998	3245	7.91138	Senate
DeFilippo	Vito	Vito_DeFilippo	Democr.	518743903	3175	7.68752	Government
DelBarba	Mauro	emmedibi	Democr.	58020070	2402	8.15196	Senate
DelGrosso	Daniele	DgPilot81	5SM	202726940	5474	2.19941	Parliament
DellOrco	Michele	dellorco85	5SM	1638278257	6651	2.19063	Parliament
DeLorenzis	Diego	DiegoDeLorenzis	5SM	44370691	4469	2.57016	Parliament
Delrio	Graziano	graziano_delrio	Democr.	484982241	255535	11	Government
DeLuca	Vincenzo	VincenzoDeLuca	Democr.	110960339	60774	7.00923	Local
DeMaria	Andrea	andreademaria_	Democr.	384881122	2868	8.81488	Parliament
DeMenech	Roger	RogerDeMenech	Democr.	1116261655	3127	8.41249	Parliament
DeMicheli	Paola	paola_demicheli	Democr.	461306712	6670	8.43316	Parliament
Democr. Party		pdnetwork	Democr.	13294452	254030	8.54128	Party
Democr. P. Parl.Group		Deputatipd	Democr.	76616277	65097	9.03	Party
DeMonte	Isabella	IsabellaDeMonte	Democr.	1510780328	3470	7.90471	EU
DeRose	Massimo	Maxdero	5SM	195689744	9408	2.00472	Parliament

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DeVincenti	Claudio	C_DeVincenti	Democr.	844852483180523	675	7.44072	Government
DiBattista	Alessandro	ale_dibattista	5SM	615597661	191052	1	Parliament
DiBenedetto	Chiara	Chiara_DiBe	5SM	277460126	16409	2.02124	Parliament
DiGiorgi	RosaMaria	RosaMDiGiorgi	Democr.	1372230528	3200	8.51386	Senate
DiMaio	Luigi	luigidimaio	5SM	48062712	274074	1.09959	Parliament
DiMaio	Marco	marcodimaio	Democr.	48484178	3769	8.35915	Parliament
Dipiazza	Roberto	RobertoDipiazza	ForzaItalia	1071053071	1856	6.11823	Local
DiSalvo	Titti	titti_disalvo	Democr.	368935338	5955	8.19644	Parliament
DiStefano	Manlio	ManlioDS	5SM	208642171	21695	1.53208	Parliament
DiVita	Giulia	GiuliaDiVita	5SM	379256309	45036	1.78067	Parliament
Donno	Daniela	DanielaDonno	5SM	136840065	1561	3.37287	Senate
DOttavio	Umberto	umbertodott	Democr.	491417328	1200	7.82933	Parliament
DUva	Francesco	F_DUva	5SM	238909679	11748	1.94651	Parliament
Emiliano	Michele	micheleemiliano	Democr.	19392607	146140	7.03383	region
Ermini	David	DavidErmini1	Democr.	394787464	4996	8.96194	Parliament
Esposito	Lucia	espositoluci	Democr.	420437976	1082	7.70965	Senate
Esposito	Stefano	stefanoesposito	Democr.	15047521	13478	7.7578	Senate
EU m5s account		M5S_Europa	5SM	2530314205	21340	2.17474	Party
Evi	Eleonora	EleonoraEvi	5SM	1135141640	4740	2.79898	EU
Fabbri	Marilena	MariFabbri	Democr.	1313490145	1334	8.07784	Parliament
Famiglietti	Luigi	luifam	Democr.	42478291	3101	8.21477	Parliament
Fantinati	Mattia	MFantinati	5SM	49275896	7451	2.13904	Parliament
Faraone	Davide	davidefaraone	Democr.	41391760	33642	8.47744	Parliament
Fassino	Piero	pierofassino	Democr.	100218289	145083	7.98882	No elected mandate
Fattori	Elena	Fattorisenato5s	5SM	1267240632	1772	3.2689	Senate
Fedeli	Valeria	valeriafedeli	Democr.	480645077	20117	8.23195	Senate
Fedi	Marco	MarcoFedi58	Democr.	393974023	1299	7.67382	Parliament
Fedriga	Massimiliano	M_Fedriga	Lega	156316785	10658	5.16816	Local
Ferraresi	Vittorio	Ferraresi_V	5SM	2256679742	3847	2.58417	Parliament
Ferrari	Alan	alnferrari	Democr.	1280190198	841	7.59221	Parliament
Fiano	Emanuele	emanuelefiano	Democr.	327455219	28583	8.42567	Parliament
Fico	Roberto	Roberto_Fico	5SM	22834067	81163	1.15449	Parliament
Fontana	Lorenzo	Fontana3Lorenzo	Lega	455378815	1614	5.0077	EU
Fontana	Gregorio	Greg_Fontana	ForzaItalia	2451712279	1051	5.73028	Parliament
Forza official		forza_italia	ForzaItalia	147543162	143211	5.79161	Party
Fraccaro	Riccardo	riccardo_fra	5SM	1052596340	28099	1.72576	Parliament
Fragomeli	Gianmario	GianmarioFrago	Democr.	248604737	1369	7.72342	Parliament
Franceschini	Dario	dariofrance	Democr.	61154684	437457	9.35336	Parliament
FreeAndEqual official		liberi_uguali	FreeAndEqual	937357777294544	7946	7.04237	Party

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FreeAndEqual unofficial		LiberiUguali	FreeAndEqual	837026848986	1406	6.20816	NA
Fregolent	Silvia	SilviaFregolent	Democr.	590358735	3210	8.49236	Parliament
Frusone	Luca	lucafrusone	5SM	262823808	3868	2.61611	Parliament
Gadda	MariaChiara	McGadda	Democr.	1061367398	3365	8.32942	Parliament
Gagnarli	Chiara	chiara_201181	5SM	398611235	4581	2.60954	Parliament
Galli	Giampaolo	GiampaoloGalli	Democr.	1120077589	8697	8.36614	Parliament
Gallinella	Filippo	Gallinella_F	5SM	1637833237	5273	2.36245	Parliament
Gallo	Luigi	LuigiGallo15	5SM	920435114	13726	1.8599	Parliament
Gandolfi	Paolo	paologandolfi	Democr.	81808899	1985	7.56139	Parliament
Garavini	Laura	LauraGaravini	Democr.	321939235	2417	8.21324	Parliament
Gasparri	Maurizio	gasparripdl	ForzaItalia	413217587	100041	5.72847	Senate
Gelli	Federico	federicogelli	Democr.	78914169	4891	8.49036	Parliament
Gentiloni	Paolo	PaoloGentiloni	Democr.	406869976	406966	7.82393	Government
Giachetti	Roberto	bobogiac	Democr.	523058143	145508	8.10489	Parliament
Giacobbe	Anna	AnnaGiacobbePD	Democr.	1247288606	2725	8.22485	Parliament
Giacomelli	Antonello	Antonellogiac	Democr.	480023608	4831	8.61155	Parliament
Giammanco	Gabriella	GabriGiammanco	ForzaItalia	714417878	11122	5.75809	Parliament
Gibertoni	Giulia	GiuliaGibertoni	5SM	99916072	1390	3.55148	No elected mandate
Ginefra	Dario	DarioGinefra	Democr.	140044951	1816	8.04213	Parliament
Girotto	Gianni	GianniGirotto	5SM	26762533	3602	3.18498	Senate
Giuliani	Fabrizia	FabriziaGiulian	Democr.	1098999823	2741	8.26921	Parliament
Gori	Giorgio	giorgio_gori	Democr.	368950045	88459	7.34993	Local
Gozi	Sandro	sandrogozi	Democr.	76769340	18154	8.91873	Parliament
Grande	Marta	MartaGrande87	5SM	1269713336	4629	2.70001	Parliament
Grasso	Pietro	PietroGrasso	FreeAndEqual	1071332641	601954	8.39119	Senate
Gribaudo	Chiara	chiaragribaudo	Democr.	1030715161	3266	8.43694	Parliament
Grillo	Giulia	GiuliaGrilloM5S	5SM	236565724	26021	1.36016	Parliament
Grimoldi	Paolo	GrimoldiPaolo	Lega	417962415	3498	4.87139	Parliament
Guerini	Giuseppe	GiuseppeGuerin1	Democr.	484589440	5226	7.93304	Parliament
Guerini	Lorenzo	guerini_lorenzo	Democr.	1870754606	21640	9.28842	Parliament
Gutgeld	Yoram	YoramGutgeld	Democr.	1975658623	6070	8.71891	Parliament
Incerti	Antonella	antoincerti	Democr.	1030729472	2279	8.05558	Parliament
Iori	Vanna	vannaio	Democr.	1160083688	2680	8.19638	Parliament
Kyenge	C_cile	ckyenge	Democr.	140133595	121503	7.96103	EU
LAbbate	Giuseppe	baffone5stelle	5SM	1509825860	3520	2.58863	Parliament
Lai	Silvio	silviolai	Democr.	113383366	2606	8.04573	Senate
LaMarca	Francesca	FrancescaLaMar	Democr.	826209650	1602	7.61057	Parliament
LaRussa	Ignazio	Ignazio_LaRussa	BrothersOfItaly	425933041	69028	5.5091	No elected mandate
Latorre	Nicola	Latorrenicola	Democr.	413141346	8506	8.41274	Senate

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Lenzi	Donata	DonataLenzi	Democr.	1024235078	2512	8.42863	Parliament
Leonori	Marta	MartaLeonori	Democr.	429683173	3313	8.10363	Parliament
Lepri	Stefano	stefanolepri	Democr.	384353170	1581	8.0276	Senate
Librandi	Gianfranco	GFLibrandi	Democr.	1074223417	2357	6.73977	Parliament
Liuzzi	Mirella	mirellaliuzzi	5SM	11945512	10987	2.53854	Parliament
Lodolini	Emanuele	ELodolini	Democr.	1016682894	2293	8.26573	Parliament
LoGiudice	Sergio	SergioLoGiudice	Democr.	16401526	5945	8.27515	Senate
Lombardi	Roberta	robertalombardi	5SM	61727028	46403	2.30132	Parliament
Lorefice	Marialucia	Mlucialorefice	5SM	1623798294	4811	2.41704	Parliament
Losacco	Alberto	albertolosacco	Democr.	120206776	1863	7.99403	Parliament
Lotti	Luca	LottiLuca	Democr.	1949844973	67326	8.87477	Parliament
Lucidi	Stefano	sfnlcd	5SM	2330261468	1057	3.63871	Senate
m5s Parl. group		M5S_Camera	5SM	1354935949	72426	1.33743	Party
Madia	Marianna	mariannamadia	Democr.	588975097	197477	1.08312	Parliament
Magorno	Ernesto	Emagorno	Democr.	1114681735	3042	8.44291	Parliament
Malan	Lucio	LucioMalan	ForzaItalia	919526072	7676	5.67366	Senate
Malpezzi	Simona	SimonaMalpezzi	Democr.	428521248	9338	8.30317	Parliament
Manconi	Luigi	LuigiManconi1	Democr.	402171616	13295	7.55441	Senate
Mandelli	Andrea	mandelli_andrea	ForzaItalia	703511639	1688	6.78833	Senate
Mannino	Claudia	ManninoClaudia	5SM	423780098	6546	2.39254	Parliament
Manzi	Irene	ManziIrene	Democr.	2389507018	1312	7.839	Parliament
Marcucci	Andrea	AndreaMarcucci	Democr.	57282569	11051	8.78994	Senate
Margiotta	Salvatore	s_margiotta	Democr.	501874833	12828	7.77779	Senate
Mariani	Raffaella	mariraf	Democr.	492928982	2653	8.21903	Parliament
Marin	Marco	Marin63Marco	ForzaItalia	921162848	2232	6.11324	Senate
Marini	Catiuscia	CatiusciaMarini	Democr.	574310014	5133	7.87847	Local
Maroni	Roberto	RobertoMaroni_	Lega	495277374	86521	5.70398	Local
Martelli	Carlo	Carlo_Martelli	5SM	1949749195	7600	2.13915	Senate
Martina	Maurizio	maumartina	Democr.	415571726	170430	1.0138	Government
Marzana	Maria	maria_marzana	5SM	3101551210	1335	3.49086	Parliament
Meloni	Giorgia	GiorgiaMeloni	BrothersOfIt aly	130537001	626574	5.90969	Parliament
Meloni	Marco	MarcoMeloni	Democr.	12994392	6388	8.62802	Parliament
Merola	Virginio	virginiomerola	Democr.	230817595	10617	8.08266	Local
Meta	Michele	michele_meta	Democr.	1153753759	1180	7.78019	Parliament
Micillo	Salvatore	micillom5s	5SM	1715119512	4895	2.41132	Parliament
Migliore	Gennaro	gennaromigliore	Democr.	154082631	15784	8.16448	Parliament
Minardo	Antonino	NinoMinardo	ForzaItalia	607309665	990	6.74526	Parliament
Minnucci	Emiliano	eminnucci	Democr.	428300383	1282	7.88839	Parliament
Mirabelli	Franco	FraMirabelli	Democr.	545136488	2153	8.42804	Senate
Misiani	Antonio	antoniomisiani	Democr.	336975968	4755	8.66541	Parliament
Mogherini	Federica	FedericaMog	Democr.	460163041	449176	1.06043	EU

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Molteni	Nicola	NicolaMolteni	Lega	635446554	3852	5.09626	Parliament
Mongiello	Colomba	ColombaMongiell	Democr.	613387563	3162	7.75298	Parliament
Montevecchi	Michela	m_montevecchi	5SM	700756368	8903	2.57177	Senate
Morani	Alessia	AlessiaMorani	Democr.	429312499	18762	8.22955	Parliament
Moretti	Alessandra	ale_moretti	Democr.	540895773	72543	8.19318	No elected mandate
Moretto	Sara	sara_moretto	Democr.	823648998	2281	8.08435	Parliament
Moronese	Vilma	vilmamoronese	5SM	126970118	7501	2.04596	Senate
Morra	Nicola	NicolaMorra63	5SM	1314728936	54836	1.21101	Senate
Mura	Romina	RominaMura	Democr.	112485367	1623	7.78882	Parliament
Nardella	Dario	DarioNardella	Democr.	434505068	57693	8.13936	Local
Nardelli	Flavia	FlaviaNardelli1	Democr.	1076737932	1194	7.80182	Parliament
Narduolo	Giulia	GNarduolo	Democr.	1023109254	2558	8.18983	Parliament
Nugnes	Paola	paolanugnes	5SM	127012324	1761	3.22458	Senate
Nuti	Riccardo	Riccardo_Nuti	5SM	37507247	32783	1.80934	Parliament
Occhiuto	Roberto	robertoocchiuto	Forzaltalia	85264321	3203	7.19457	Parliament
Orfini	Matteo	orfini	Democr.	12514212	84723	8.71189	Parliament
Orlando	Leoluca	LeolucaOrlando1	Democr.	454142762	72447	6.83294	Local
Orlando	Andrea	AndreaOrlandosp	Democr.	496437886	160975	1.08573	Parliament
Padoan	PierCarlo	PCPadoan	Democr.	2377155925	42275	8.62612	Government
Pagano	Alessandro	alepaganotwit	Lega	75155781	2659	6.51539	Parliament
Palmieri	Antonio	antoniopalmieri	Forzaltalia	6827962	17306	6.33726	Parliament
Parente	Annamaria	Am_Parente	Democr.	701094295	2598	8.53416	Senate
Parentela	Paolo	PaoloParentela	5SM	381611850	7331	2.22827	Parliament
Paris	Valentina	paris_valentina	Democr.	440382143	4834	8.803	Parliament
Parrini	Dario	DarioParrini	Democr.	587802594	5002	8.85579	Parliament
Patriarca	Edoardo	edopatriarca	Democr.	1171546866	2110	8.09746	Parliament
Peluffo	Vinicio	Vpeluffo	Democr.	394233849	1934	8.18394	Parliament
Pes	Caterina	caterinapes	Democr.	416923575	2127	8.07807	Parliament
Petrocelli	VitoRosario	vitopetrocelli	5SM	318400179	6285	2.66902	Senate
Pezzopane	Stefania	stefaniapezzopa	Democr.	1080795937	10133	7.9183	Senate
Piazzoni	Ileana	IleP	Democr.	20373953	2878	8.08469	Parliament
Picierno	Pina	pinapic	Democr.	339672122	38709	8.30243	EU
Pili	Mauro	MAURO_PILI	Forzaltalia	428062604	3053	5.06552	Parliament
Pinotti	Roberta	robertapinotti	Democr.	102672182	126782	1.06367	Senate
PM residence		Palazzo_Chigi		963938472	572320	8.27637	PM residence
Prestigiacomo	Stefania	stefprest	Forzaltalia	544320978	39255	6.17848	Parliament
Preziosi	Ernesto	ernestopreziosi	Democr.	1161167916	2274	7.875	Parliament
Puglia	Sergio	sergiopuglia	5SM	57391779	7274	2.08796	Senate
Puglisi	Francesca	PuglisiPD	Democr.	57060570	15615	8.64777	Senate
Quartapelle	Lia	LiaQuartapelle	Democr.	216361540	13213	8.76606	Parliament
Raggi	Virginia	virginiaraggi	5SM	1530798872	327462	4.73468	city

Last Name	First Name	Username	Party	Twitter ID	Followers	Scaled Location	Executive Branch 2018
Rampelli	Fabio	fabiorampelli	BrothersOfItaly	493025647	8035	5.66629	Parliament
Rampi	Roberto	rampi	Democr.	14110067	3685	8.35854	Parliament
Ravetto	Laura	lauraravetto	ForzaItalia	587805027	36487	5.75649	Parliament
Razzi	Antonio	senantoniorazzi	ForzaItalia	2977934441	33260	5.80234	Senate
Realacci	Ermete	erealacci	Democr.	402997564	13903	8.14772	Parliament
Renzi	Matteo	matteorenzi	Democr.	18762875	3354599	7.28398	No elected mandate
Richetti	Matteo	MatteoRichetti	Democr.	395183088	26298	8.83623	Parliament
Rizzetto	Walter	w_rizzetto	BrothersOfItaly	359933447	4806	4.10866	Parliament
Rizzo	Gianluca	gianlucarizzo46	5SM	397245294	3938	2.68625	Parliament
Romani	Paolo	_paolo_romani_	ForzaItalia	487751312	11365	5.88389	Senate
Romano	Andrea	AndreaRomano9	Democr.	284706444	22985	8.25935	Parliament
Rosato	Ettore	Ettore_Rosato	Democr.	258861907	17307	8.37252	Parliament
Rossomando	Anna	RossomandoPd	Democr.	2927013813	871	7.72207	Parliament
Rotondi	Gianfranco	grotondi	ForzaItalia	87467449	25652	6.09546	Parliament
Rotta	Alessia	alessiarotta	Democr.	256163349	8951	8.53334	Parliament
Rubinato	Simonetta	SRubinato	Democr.	840400950	2229	7.76854	Parliament
Ruocco	Carla	carlaruocco1	5SM	978488840	47296	1.07658	Parliament
Russo	Paolo	_PaoloRusso_	ForzaItalia	494267753	1722	6.58675	Parliament
Sala	Guiseppe	BeppeSala	Democr.	4524412653	49576	7.18628	Local
Saltamartini	Barbara	BSaltamartini	Lega	253262674	15779	5.95141	Parliament
Salvini	Matteo	matteosalvinimi	Lega	270839361	638840	5.64109	EU
Lega official		LegaSalvini	Lega	13514762	27136	5.14471	Party
Santanche	Daniela	DSantanche	BrothersOfItaly	440815818	149753	5.58482	Parliament
Santangelo	Vincenzo	mausantangelo	5SM	447832680	6057	2.21892	Senate
Savino	Elvira	elvirasavino	ForzaItalia	485685744	3318	6.21324	Parliament
Savino	Sandra	Sandra_Savino	ForzaItalia	1905601525	1469	6.11217	Parliament
Sbrollini	Daniela	DaniSbrollini	Democr.	903723812	3508	8.22266	Parliament
Scagliusi	Emanuele	E_Scagliusi	5SM	1385237533	4913	2.39888	Parliament
Scalfarotto	Ivan	ivanscalfarotto	Democr.	30248306	94716	8.73046	Parliament
Schifani	Renato	RenatoSchifani	ForzaItalia	1244376643	2932	6.67152	Senate
Scibona	Marco	loscibo	5SM	165443253	7816	2.19884	Senate
Scuvera	Chiara	chiarascuvera	Democr.	2512069500	1072	7.46823	Parliament
Senate Democr. Party account		SenatoriPD	Democr.	404048864	48799	9.01835	Senate
Senate press office		SenatoStampa		1377373874	138501	7.92602	Senate official
Sereni	Marina	MarinaSereni	Democr.	440724583	13821	8.846	Parliament
Serracchiani	Debora	serracchiani	Democr.	35298549	297473	7.65441	Regional
Sibilia	Carlo	carlosibilia	5SM	127025568	36994	1.61468	Parliament
Silvestro	Annalisa	ALSilvestro	Democr.	491947678	1039	6.95557	Senate

Last Name	First Name	Username	Party	Twitter ID	Followers	Scaled Location	Executive Branch 2018
Sisto	FrancescoPaolo	fp_sisto	ForzaItalia	463064441	1131	6.68785	Parliament
Sorial	GiorgioGirigs	SorialGiorgio	5SM	1915200546	9460	1.88324	Parliament
Spadoni	MariaEdera	mariaederaM5S	5SM	1376730776	6412	2.12435	Parliament
Stefani	Erika	erikastefani71	Lega	2362890141	239	6.58923	Senate
Stefano	Dario	DarioStefano	Democr.	295754318	5324	7.72134	Senate
Tamburrano	Dario	tamburrano	5SM	19422447	6263	2.74126	EU
Taricco	Mino	MinoTaricco	Democr.	416123085	962	7.38062	Parliament
Tartaglione	Assunta	asstartaglione	Democr.	1130709956	3928	8.39549	Parliament
Tentori	Veronica	VeronicaTentori	Democr.	401332098	2149	8.07111	Parliament
Terzoni	Patrizia	PatriziaTerzoni	5SM	438385480	9372	2.07807	Parliament
Tinagli	Irene	itinagli	Democr.	136343557	12531	8.0604	Parliament
Tofalo	Angelo	AngeloTofalo	5SM	337171830	32417	1.75492	Parliament
Toninelli	Danilo	DaniloToninelli	5SM	960924277	38086	1.91665	Parliament
Toti	Giovanni	GiovanniToti	ForzaItalia	2331718804	43302	5.57321	Local
Vacca	Gianluca	GianlucaVacca	5SM	124236178	8806	2.11615	Parliament
Vaccari	Stefano	Tetovaccari	Democr.	532545883	6072	8.62575	Senate
Valente	Valeria	ValeriaValente_	Democr.	1288696170	3967	8.27666	Parliament
Vallascas	Andrea	AndreaVallascas	5SM	1386423176	2100	3.08598	Parliament
Vazio	Franco	francovazio	Democr.	923413273	1960	8.07314	Parliament
Ventricelli	Liliana	L_Ventricelli	Democr.	1280157438	2316	8.11857	Parliament
Vignaroli	Stefano	SVignaroli	5SM	1107008174	8928	2.19343	Parliament
Villarosa	Alessio	ale_villarosa	5SM	1908166152	12201	1.76072	Parliament
Vito	Elio	elio_vito	ForzaItalia	1557514573	5138	5.97167	Parliament
Volpi	Raffaele	volpi_raffaele	Lega	3036616924	1023	5.88831	Senate
Zaia	Luca	zaiapresidente	Lega	1324893229	43085	5.46754	Local
Zampa	Sandra	szampa56	Democr.	964460408	6585	8.85445	Parliament
Zan	Alessandro	ZanAlessandro	Democr.	1022254674	3440	7.93091	Parliament
Zanni	Marco	Marcozanni86	Lega	112873259	8958	3.54746	EU
Zanoni	Magda	MagdaZanonii	Democr.	1484550222	2383	8.25776	Senate
Zardini	Diego	DiegoZardini	Democr.	442677409	1782	8.12637	Parliament
Zingaretti	Nicola	nzingaretti	Democr.	403544693	364561	8.21384	Regional

A3. Regression Tables

The regression tables below are the statistical output that figure 4.11 (Lega) and figure 4.12 (m5s) are based on:

Table A.1. Regression table – Lega

Lega Supporter Retweet Behaviour

	Dependent variable:	
	Rate-of-retweet	
	Distance < 0	Distance > 0
	(1)	(2)
Lega-User distance	0.034***	-0.034***
	(0.005)	(0.001)
Timing: before	0.010	0.016***
	(0.006)	(0.003)
'Lega-User dist. * Timing: before	0.007	-0.011***
	(0.007)	(0.002)
Constant	0.107***	0.090***
	(0.004)	(0.002)
Observations	8,236	19,381
R^2	0.014	0.079
Adjusted R^2	0.014	0.079
Residual Std. Error	0.202 (df = 8232)	0.138 (df = 19377)
F Statistic	40.078*** (df = 3; 8232)	555.667*** (df = 3; 19377)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A.2. Regression table - m5s

m5s Supporter Retweet Behaviour

	Dependent variable:	
	Rate-of-retweet	
	Distance < 0	Distance > 0
	(1)	(2)
m5s-User distance	0.042***	-0.035
	(0.001)	(0.027)
Timing: before	0.086***	0.025
	(0.005)	(0.022)
'm5s-User dist. * Timing: before	0.023***	0.022
	(0.002)	(0.038)
Constant	0.171***	0.181***
	(0.004)	(0.016)
Observations	26,504	1,113
R^2	0.116	0.009
Adjusted R^2	0.116	0.006
Residual Std. Error	0.175 (df = 26500)	0.212 (df = 1109)
F Statistic	1,154.790*** (df = 3; 26500)	3.309** (df = 3; 1109)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

A4. Robustness check: Regression Discontinuity Plots for all Parties

Figure A.1 through figure A.10 present plots of regression discontinuity model outputs for Lega, m5s, and other Italian political parties active on Twitter during the election of 2018. Scales and estimation techniques are comparable across all figures. This helps to illustrate that the patterns observed for Lega and m5s makes them stand out from their electoral competition.

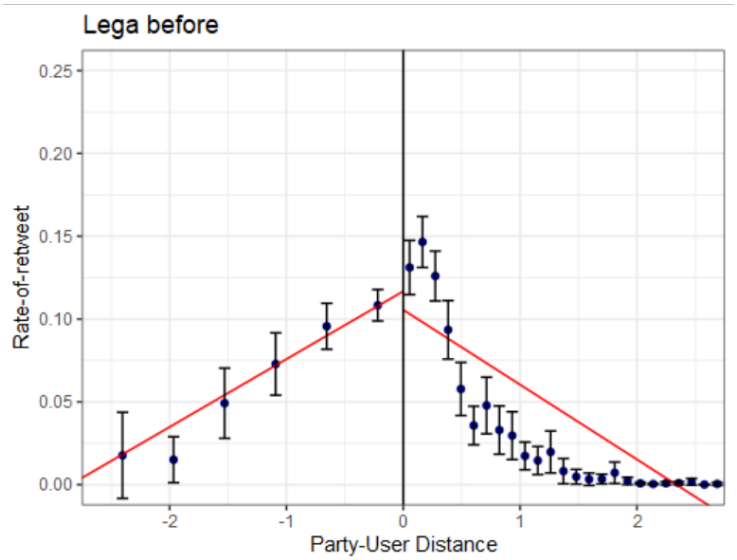

Figure A.1. Regression discontinuity plot for Lega -- before coalition

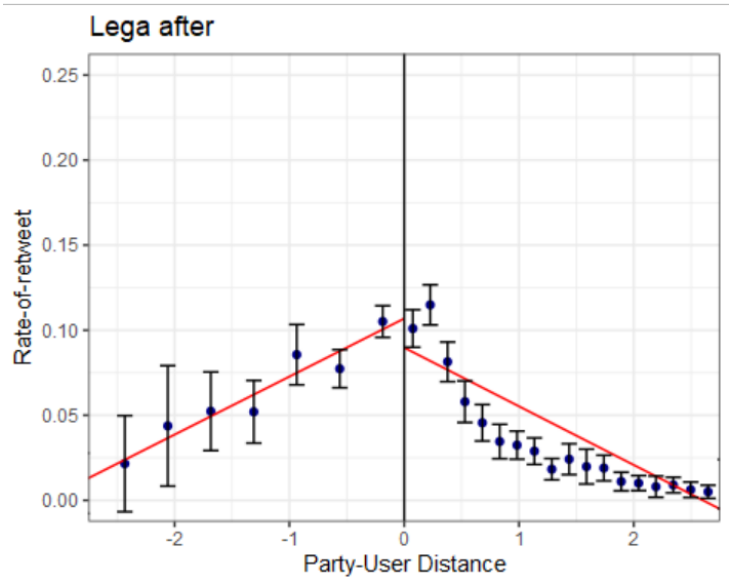

Figure A.2. Regression discontinuity plot for Lega -- after coalition

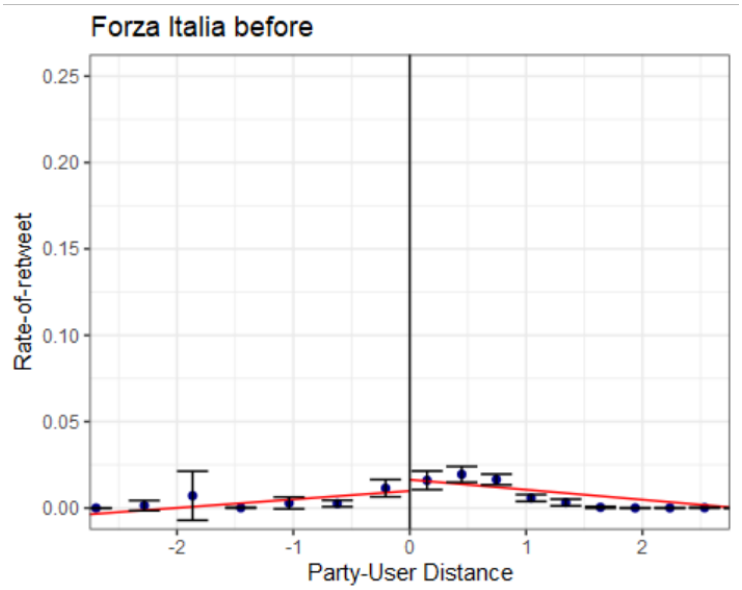

Figure A.3. Regression discontinuity plot for Forza -- before coalition

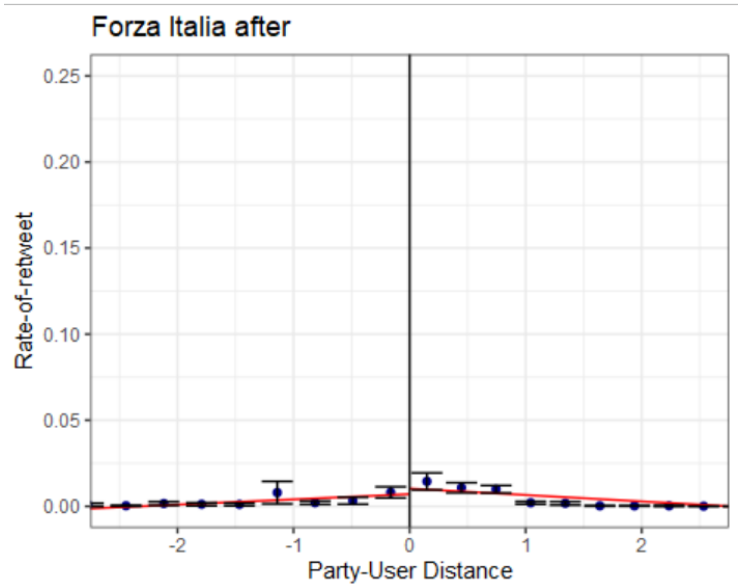

Figure A.4. Regression discontinuity plot for Forza -- after coalition

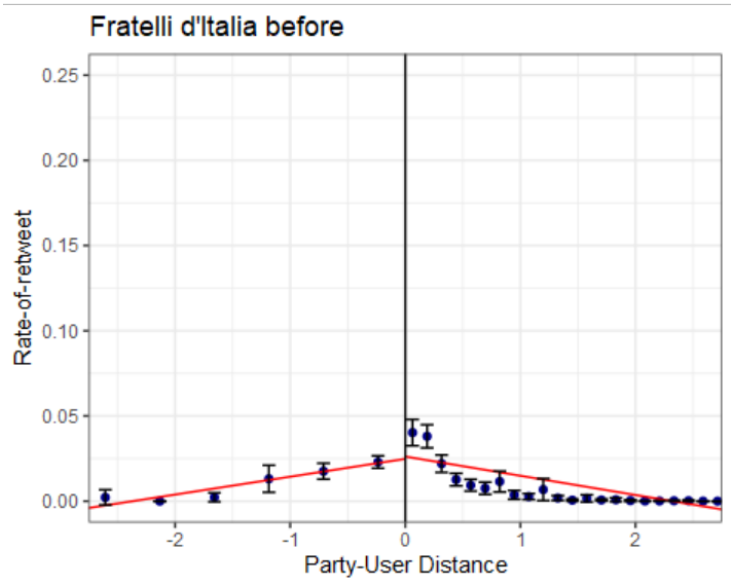

Figure A.5. Regression discontinuity plot for Brothers of Italy -- before coalition

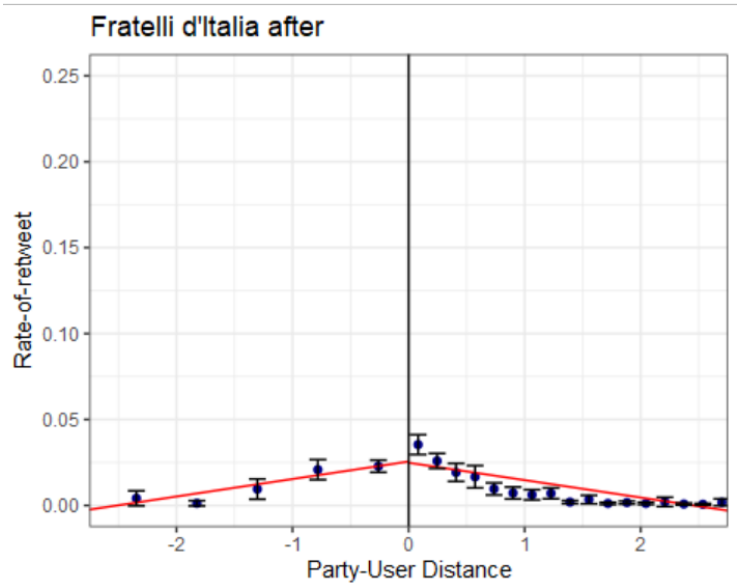

Figure A.6. Regression discontinuity plot for Brothers of Italy -- after coalition

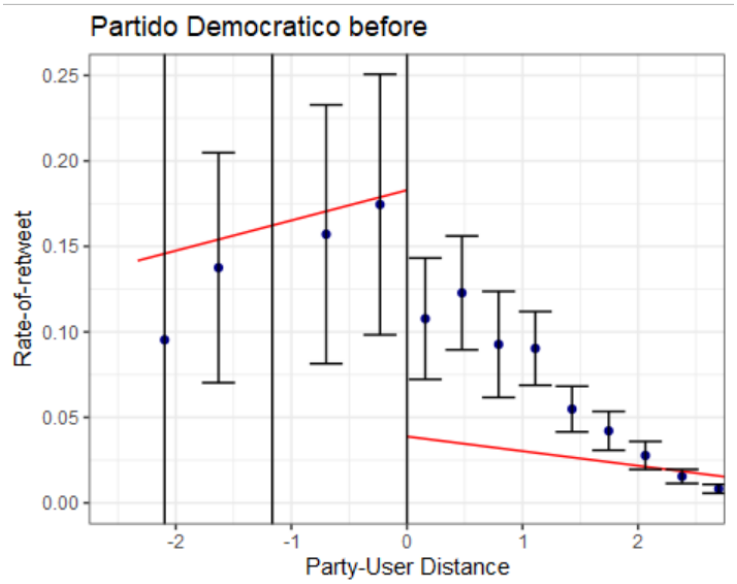

Figure A.7. Regression discontinuity plot for Democratic Party -- before coalition

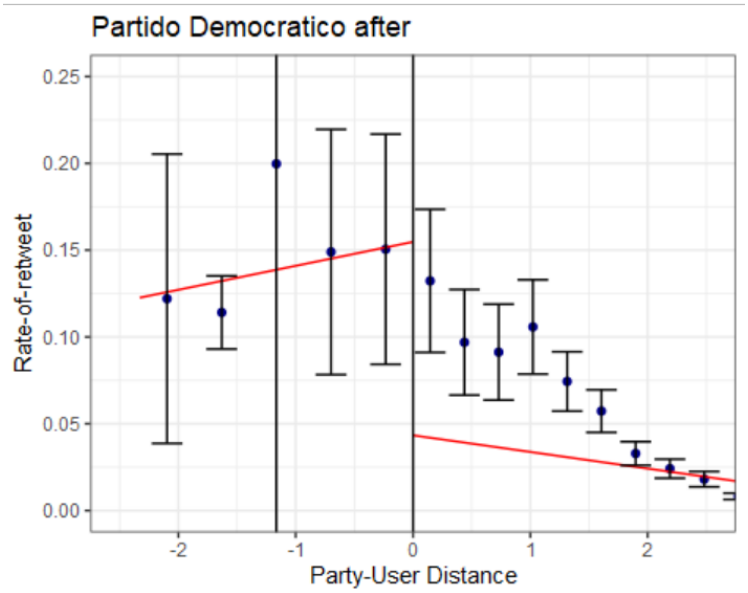

Figure A.8. Regression discontinuity plot for Democratic Party -- after coalition

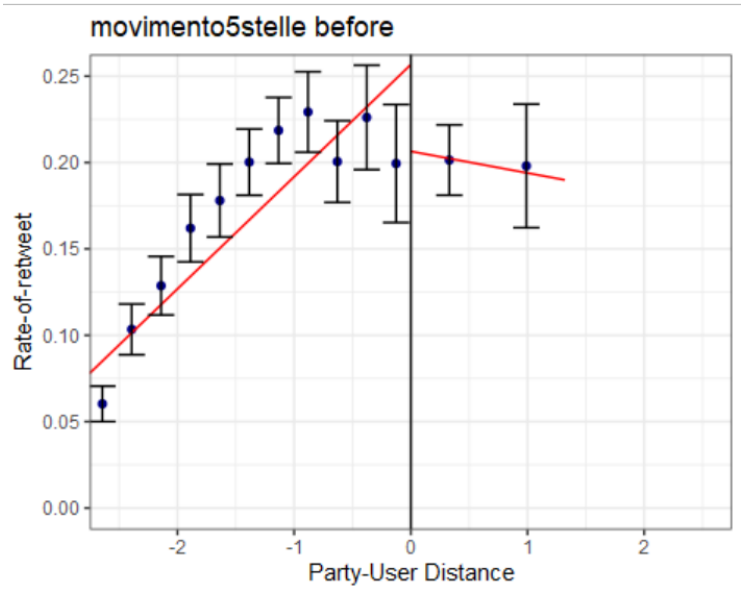

Figure A.9. Regression discontinuity plot for Five Star Movement -- before coalition

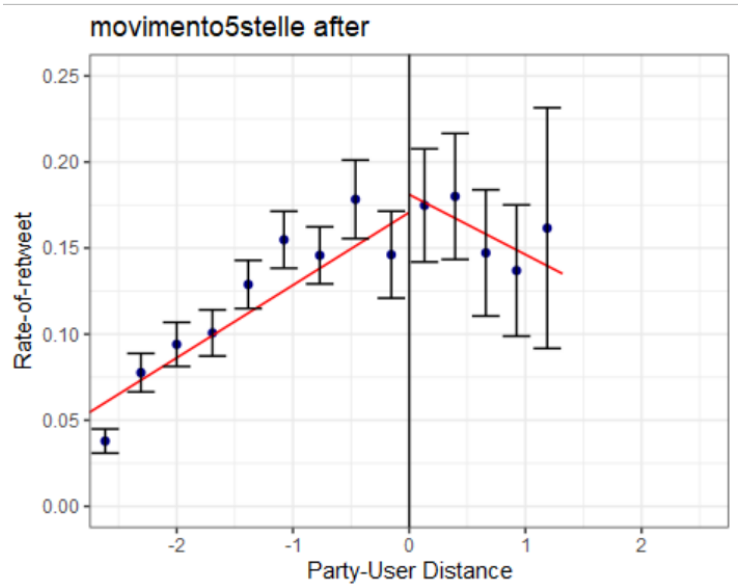

Figure A.10. Regression discontinuity plot for Five Star Movement -- after coalition