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Negative partisanship towards the populist radical right and democratic resilience in Western Europe

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ABSTRACT


Democracy is under threat today and scholars agree that the main challenge is not sudden regime breakdown, but rather the gradual erosion of key institutions and norms because of growing public support to political forces with illiberal tendencies. In the case of Western Europe, the major threat comes from the populist radical right. Although it is true that the latter has been gaining votes in Western Europe, scholars have not analysed the extent to which a sizeable share of the electorate dislikes this party family. Nevertheless, recent studies reveal that it is important to consider both those who feel close to and those who reject political parties, i.e. positive and negative partisanship. To address this research gap, in this contribution we rely on original survey data for 10 Western European countries to examine negative partisanship towards the populist radical right. The empirical analysis reveals that a large section of the Western European electorate has an aversion to this party family and this finding should be seen as an important sign of democratic resilience. In fact, those who dislike the populist radical right are strong supporters of both democracy per se and the liberal democratic regime.


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1. Introduction

Hardly a day goes by without reports in the press about the populist radical right (PRR) and the danger it constitutes for democracy. Although it is true that PRR forces do not reject democracy per se, there is little doubt that they maintain an ambivalent and difficult relationship with key elements of the liberal democratic regime.¹ Put in other words, PRR parties should not be thought of as bluntly authoritarian forces, but rather as actors that play by the democratic rules of the game to gradually subvert the liberal democratic regime from within. By promoting illiberal ideas, the PRR can set in motion a process of democratic erosion that in some cases might even lead to democratic breakdown.² This argument aligns with the editors of this special issue, who rightly point out that “the main contemporary challenge to democracy is not sudden regime breakdown in the form of military coups, but its gradual demise after illiberal or authoritarian-leaning political leaders come to power in elections.”³

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Not by chance, this party family continues to make headlines and an increasing number of academics and pundits alike warn about its consequences for democracy.⁴ While we certainly share this cautionary note, we are of the opinion that current analyses tend to be one-sided as they only consider the increasing electoral support that the PRR gets, without examining in detail if there is an electoral ceiling for this party family. In this contribution we are interested in addressing this research gap, the extent to which there is a clear limit to the potential electoral growth of PRR parties in Western Europe. Put differently, by talking about the electoral ceiling of the PRR in Western Europe, we are interested in studying if this party family is reaching its maximum potential mobilization under the current political circumstances, which are marked indeed by the high saliency of the immigration topic.⁵

While it is obvious that no party family can expand its electoral support endlessly, this problem is particularly evident for the PRR as it develops ideas that are at odds with what it is normally considered socially acceptable in Western Europe. As Hartevelde and Ivarsflaten⁶ have recently indicated, even though the message of the PRR resonates with large segments of the Western European electorate, “many of these parties also raise normative concerns about discrimination and prejudice due to fascist or extremist legacies or contemporary rhetoric and symbols.” Therefore, it is not far-fetched to suggest that PRR forces should have difficulties expanding their base of support beyond their core constituency, which is normally depicted as the “losers of globalization”: workers (mainly men) who, because of the transformation of advanced economies, face a devaluation of their skillsets and feel that their social status is seriously under threat.⁷

With the aim of theoretically and empirically analysing the electoral ceiling of the PRR, in this contribution we bring to the fore the concept and measurement of positive and negative partisanship. Whereas the former alludes to the extent to which individuals have an enduring psychological attachment to a specific political party, the latter refers to the extent to which individuals have a stable psychological *repulsion* from a specific political party.⁸ Studies on the combination of these two types of partisanship have been gaining preponderance in the United States,⁹ a country marked by a bipartisan political system that shows increasing levels of affective polarization: the tendency of Democrats and Republicans to dislike and distrust one another.¹⁰ Another interesting example is Brazil, although this is a case of a multiparty system that has become increasingly polarized between those who support and reject one specific party: the center-left Workers’ Party.¹¹

However, there are almost no systematic and cross-national analyses of negative partisanship in Western Europe.¹² This means that we do have knowledge about those who identify with the PRR, but do not know much about those who have an animosity towards this party family. Part of the problem lies in the existence of limited empirical evidence on negative partisanship in Western Europe. Nevertheless, a recent public opinion study conducted by the Bertelsmann Foundation for the 2019 elections for the European Parliament included a set of survey items to measure both positive and negative partisanship.¹³ In this paper, we analyse this data in detail. Among other issues, we show that given that an important section of the Western European electorate is at odds with the PRR, the latter has serious difficulties continuing to expand its base of support and therefore it is possible to argue that democracy in the region is in safe hands. However, we also argue that this optimistic interpretation hinges on the capacity to activate and mobilize negative partisanship

towards the PRR, something that our empirical analysis reveals is only partially occurring today.

The rest of this contribution is structured as follows. In the next section, we shortly define PRR parties and show that the concept and measurement of positive and negative partisanship towards this party family helps to understand its electoral ceiling. Here we also provide descriptive data of these two types of partisanship for the different party families that are predominant in the Western European context. After this, we present empirical evidence about those who have a positive and negative identity with the PRR in Western Europe, putting emphasis on their ideological characteristics, democratic profile and sociodemographic attributes. To examine the political relevance of positive and negative partisanship, in this section we also present evidence on the impact of these two types of partisanship towards the PRR on turnout in Western Europe. Finally, we close by summarizing the main findings of this contribution and by providing ideas about the future research agenda on the link between positive and negative identities towards the PRR and democratic resilience in Western Europe and beyond.

2. Positive and negative partisanship towards the PRR in Western Europe

There is a considerable body of academic literature on the PRR, which is normally defined as a party family identified by three ideological attributes: authoritarianism, nativism and populism.¹⁴ While authoritarianism alludes to the defense of a strictly ordered society and strong punishment of what is seen as deviant behaviour, nativism refers to the argument that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (“the nation”) and that nonnatives (“alien”) are threatening to the alleged homogeneity of the nation-state. Populism, in turn, should be thought of as a set of ideas characterized by the Manichean distinction between “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite” and the defense of popular sovereignty by all means. By combining these three ideological tenets – authoritarianism, nativism and populism – this party family has been able not only to carve out a political space to the right of Conservative and Christian Democratic parties, but also to defy the post-war consensus on what democracy means and how it should work in Western Europe.¹⁵

Most scholars share the opinion that the appearance of the PRR represents a major challenge, particularly because of its subtle but nonetheless significant attack on key institutions and the norms of the liberal democratic regime that are inherent in post-war Europe.¹⁶ In effect, the PRR is at odds with the protection of minority rights, the independence of the judiciary and the delegation of power to supranational institutions that monitor the proper functioning of the rule of law. This danger is reinforced by recent research showing that the PRR has over time not moderated its agenda, but rather radicalized many of its programmatic positions.¹⁷ The increasing relevance of the PRR can be seen in the following graph, which shows the average of votes for PRR parties per decade as percentages across Western Europe.¹⁸ According to this data, the PRR party family has been able to establish itself and expand its electoral appeal from 8.9% in the 1980s to 13.8% in the 2010s (Figure 1).

The very fact that the PRR has become entrenched in Western Europe not only calls into question the famous “freezing hypothesis” of Lipset and Rokkan, but also sparks a debate about the strength of democracy in the region. Although we agree with the

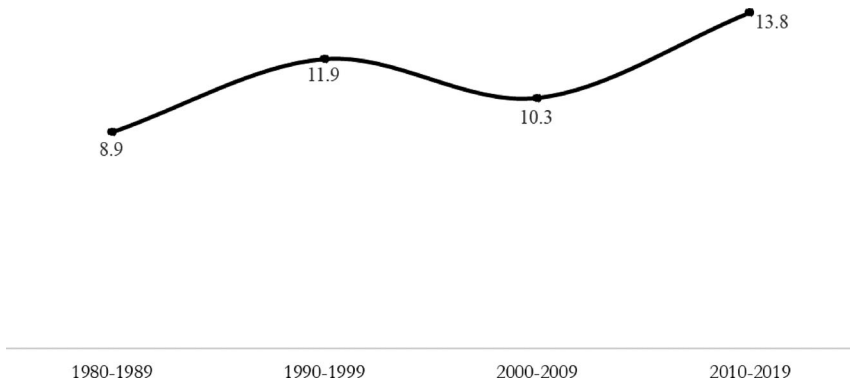


Figure 1. Support for Populist Radical Right Parties in Western Europe (average percentage per decade)

general idea that the PRR represents a major challenge to Western European democracy, extant research looks mainly at those who support the PRR and only marginally at those who reject it. By way of illustration, even though the recently published *Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*¹⁹ offers an excellent state of the art of the research on this topic, almost no space is given to the question about the limits to the electoral growth of the PRR. The only exception is the chapter by Nonna Mayer²⁰ on France, in which she devotes a couple of pages to argue that, despite Marine Le Pen’s de-demonization strategy, there are clear barriers (e.g. education, gender and the relevance of the left-right cleavage) to the electoral expansion of the French PRR. Another interesting exception is the work of Ivarsflaten,²¹ who has shown that the PRR struggles with an extremist reputation that constrains its electoral growth and this is why this party family pays increasing attention to issues other than immigration with the aim of developing a “reputational shield” to rebut charges of prejudice and adopt radical-right positions while retaining legitimacy.

The previous examples reveal that some scholars have done research that at least indirectly deals with the electoral ceiling of the PRR. However, to address this issue directly, we are of the opinion that it is crucial to take into account negative partisanship, a concept and measurement that has been gaining traction to paint a better picture of how voters relate to the political world today. For a long time, negative partisanship has been treated as the “forgotten side” of partisanship,²² but given that citizens decreasingly identify with political parties, negative partisanship can be more powerful than its positive counterpart.²³ In line with previous research, we consider negative partisanship as a stable and systematic animadversion to a specific political party,²⁴ which has an independent psychological and sociological structure from its positive counterpart²⁵ and therefore can be particularly valuable when it comes to explaining political behaviour.²⁶ People’s natural reflexes on building political boundaries can be expressed by perceiving themselves as members of an “ingroup” and/or members of an “out-group.”²⁷ These perceived memberships can be understood as “instrumental partisanship” (i.e. to support parties based on an issue-agenda) or as “expressive partisanship” (i.e. to support parties based on emotional attachments associated to social affiliations like gender, religious or ethnic groups).²⁸ Positive and negative partisanship can imply instrumental reasoning and expressive connections towards specific political parties, but negative partisanship tends to be related

to strong emotions like collective threat and defense of political identities. In this sense, the psychological micro-foundations of positive and negative partisanship are different: while the former is related to the positive feelings for the in-group, the latter is linked to negative evaluations of the out-group. This means that negative partisanship does not necessarily provide a psychological sense of belonging that positive partisanship does.²⁹ This argument stays in line with the classic work of Brewer³⁰ on the psychology of prejudice, who argues that one should not assume the existence of an automatic negative reciprocity between in-group and out-group distinctions. At the same time, negative information is received and processed differently than positive information: the former generates stronger reactions (e.g. anger) and heavier evaluations (e.g. persuading others not to support the disliked parties) than the latter.³¹ In this sense, while an individual can endorse one political party, she can develop hostile feelings and actions for more than one. Actually, the literature of positive/negative partisanship in multiparty systems has warned that “every individual could hold only one positive party identification; however, he/she could have several negative party identifications.”³²

Nevertheless, as Mayer³³ has rightly pointed out, most studies on negative partisanship focus either on the United States³⁴ or on other similarly bipolar majority party systems.³⁵ This means that there is little theoretical discussion and empirical evidence about negative partisanship on stable multi-party systems, which are dominant in Western Europe.³⁶ To fill this research gap and generate evidence on the electoral ceiling of the PRR, in this contribution we utilize original data from a survey conducted by YouGov on behalf of the Bertelsmann Foundation in a single wave in January 2019 in the following ten Western Europe countries: Austria (1,984 cases), Denmark (1,973 cases), France (1,949 cases), Germany (1,995 cases), Greece (2,027 cases), Italy (1,952 cases), the Netherlands (1,924 cases), Spain (1,949 cases), Sweden (1,976 cases) and the United Kingdom (2,133 cases).³⁷ For the purpose of this study, we merged the country datasets in a single continental database of 19,862 observations.³⁸

Two main options are available to measure positive and negative party identification. On the one hand, the group-identity approach classifies individuals based on their declared patterns of voting behaviour, i.e. by asking which parties individuals would definitively vote for or which ones would never vote for.³⁹ On the other hand, the feeling-thermometer/sympathies approach considers levels of proximity to the reference group.⁴⁰ We adopted the former since we conceptualize party identification as an enduring psychological attachment to a political party that conditions ingroup and outgroup references. Relying on previous research on negative partisanship⁴¹ and adapting this to the European context marked by the coexistence of different electoral arenas, we operationalized positive and negative partisanship as a coherent behavioural intention, based on a battery of questions about the preferences of voters at three electoral levels: European Parliament, national parliament and regional parliament (in those countries where there are no regional parliaments, we asked instead about local elections). Multi-item scale of partisanship has advantages since it goes beyond measuring simple negative affect and it proxies more accurately identity-based measures of party identification.⁴² In more concrete terms, we label respondents as positive partisans if they meet a demanding condition: if they *would definitively* vote for a candidate of the same party in each of the three elections asked. By contrast, we label respondents as negative partisans if they meet a similar

exhaustive condition: if they *would definitively not* vote for a candidate of the same party in each of the three elections asked. We asked this set of questions for each relevant political party in each country under study. By employing this measurement, we are capturing hardcore (positive and negative) partisanship, which are the stronger, and, consequently, enduring kind of followers.⁴³

Since we are interested in providing an analysis focused on the Western European electorate, we clustered positive and negative party identifiers – across countries – for each of the six different party families that are predominant in the region today: (1) populist radical right (PRR) parties, (2) Christian democratic and conservative parties, (3) liberal parties, (4) social democratic parties, (5) green parties, and (6) populist radical left (PRL) parties.⁴⁴ For example, if a Spanish respondent qualifies as a PSOE's positive partisan, she is grouped as being a positive partisan towards the social democratic party family, while if a Spanish respondent qualifies as a PSOE's negative partisan, she is grouped as being a negative partisan towards the social democratic party family. As expected for multiparty-systems,⁴⁵ positive partisanship are exclusive, while negative partisanship are not, i.e. individuals can hold multiple negative partisanship. The possibility of an individual holding one positive partisanship and multiple negative partisanship impedes conceiving a negative partisanship as the automatic bipolar counterpart of a positive one. Nevertheless, the low proportion of citizens with positive partisanship should not be confused with apathy or dealignment, since a big part of the electorate dislikes certain political parties. As Rose and Mishler have indicated, the process of cognitive mobilization that has occurred in advanced democracies encourages voters to behave as “knowledgeable sceptics,” who are therefore “more likely to name a party they would never vote for than to identify positively with a party.”⁴⁶

Before presenting a detailed empirical analysis of those who have a positive and negative partisanship towards the PRR, we show descriptive data on the average number of positive and negative partisans towards each the six party families that are normally identified in the academic literature on Western Europe. This evidence is provided in [Figure 2](#), from which two main points stand out. First, positive partisanship is much less widespread than negative partisanship. This is not a minor issue, because it implies that few citizens have a political party that they love, but most citizens do have aversion to certain political parties. In other words, many citizens do not opt first and foremost for the party to which they feel most attached but rather react against those parties that they most strongly oppose.

Second, it is quite clear that the PRR is the most peculiar party family of all those considered in the analysis: it is the one with the highest percentage of both positive partisanship (10.53%) and negative partisanship (52.59%). Even though many of the PRR parties are relatively new in Western Europe, they have been able to create an important number of loyal supporters as well as a large amount of detractors. This is probably related to the fact that the PRR continuously sparks heated debates on immigration and other topics, which fosters not only emotional reactions but also ideological polarization between those who belong and don't belong to the reference group.

What can we learn from this first piece of descriptive evidence on positive and negative partisanship in Western Europe? The very fact that, of all the party families considered, the PRR has the highest level of negative partisanship reveals that it generates strong feelings of rejection, and in consequence, it is not far-fetched to suggest that it

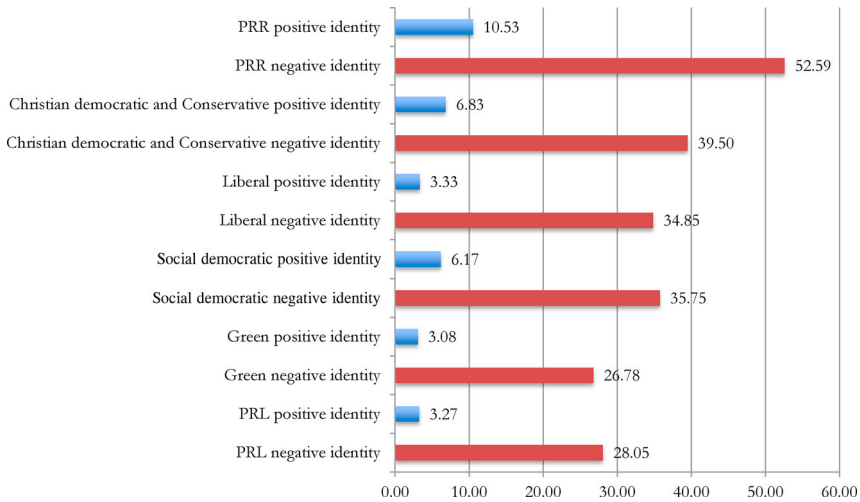


Figure 2. Positive and negative partisanship in Western European countries (in percentage)

has a clear electoral ceiling. On average, approximately half of the Western European electorate declares that will never support the PRR. There are good reasons to interpret this as a sign of democratic resilience. However, PRR negative partisans are electorally fragmented and we need to look at their sociopolitical characteristics. Therefore, to better substantiate if the high level of negative partisanship can be seen as a sign of democratic resilience, it is crucial to undertake a more fine-grained empirical analysis of the attributes of those who have both a positive and negative identity towards the PRR.

Before moving to the next section, it is important to clarify the very notion of democratic resilience. In line with the argument advanced by Boese et al.⁴⁷ in their contribution to this special issue, we define democratic resilience as the persistence of democratic institutions and practices, despite the existence of political forces that implicitly or explicitly attack the liberal democratic regime. In other words, democratic resilience means the ability to avoid the onset of autocratization as well as attempts of regime breakdown. Therefore, by exploring the ideological underpinnings of those who have positive and negative partisanship towards the PRR in Western Europe, we can examine if they have different values which are either supportive or contrary to democratic resilience.

3. The profile of citizens with positive and negative partisanship towards the PRR in Western Europe

The evidence presented above reveals that PRR parties in Western Europe are strongly rejected by approximately half of the electorate and strongly supported by a bit more than ten percent of the electorate. Are these two different constituencies with clear political and sociological backgrounds? To answer this question, we have built three profiles focused on the ideological characteristics, democratic preferences and socio-demographic attributes of those citizens who have positive and negative identities towards the PRR in Western Europe. Given that the construction of each these

three profiles deserves some clarification, we begin by discussing the measurement and method. After this we present the analysis and interpretation. Finally, we close this section with the examination of the impact of positive vis-à-vis negative partisanship towards the PRR on turnout.

3.1. Measurement and method

The survey data we employ in this contribution allows for the creation of three profiles that are useful for explaining the differences between those evincing positive and negative partisanship towards the PRR in Western Europe. The first profile considers ideological characteristics of voters and is articulated by the following variables: conventional ideological self-positioning (from extreme left, 1, to extreme right, 10), populist attitudes (8-item index based on Van Hauwaert and van Kessel⁴⁸), attitudes towards European integration (one question asks for level of agreement with European Union integration), attitudes towards immigration (4-question index on tolerance of foreign immigrants in respondent's country; higher scores represent higher levels of disagreement with pro-immigration policies), left/right preferences in economic terms (4-question item, lower-scores represent pro-state preferences and higher scores represents pro-market preferences) and left/right preferences in moral terms (5-question item, lower scores represent liberal values and higher scores represent conservative values).⁴⁹

The second profile alludes to the democratic preferences of citizens and it is composed of the following indicators, which were originally developed for the 2012 the European Social Survey⁵⁰: relevance of electoral democracy (3-item index on the importance of free and fair elections, opposition's freedom to criticize government, and freedom to express one's political views), relevance of liberal democracy (3-item index on importance of courts in balancing power, protection of minorities' rights, and media's freedom to criticize government), relevance of direct democracy (2-item index on the importance of citizens' participation in issue-referendums and recall referendums) and relevance of social democracy (2-item index on the importance of the government taking actions to protect citizens from poverty and income inequality). In every case, higher scores represent more importance. Additionally, we included the classic question on support for democracy (5-level agreement scale on democracy as the most preferable form of government, where 1 represents strongly disagree and 5 represents strongly agree) and the question on satisfaction with democracy (0–10 scale of satisfaction, where 0 represents very dissatisfied and 10 very satisfied).⁵¹

The third and final profile deals with the socio-demographic attributes of citizens and it considers the following variables: gender, age, income and education level. Gender was coded as a dichotomic variable (1=female), and Age was coded as a continuous variable. Income was recoded in three levels of monthly income (less than 1,500 Euros, between 1,500 and 3,000 Euros, and more than 3,000 Euros) based on a question regarding gross household income after taxes, including wage, salaries, pensions, unemployment benefits, social care and rents. Education was codified and standardized in six levels, according to each country's educational system.

In order to assess the statistical effect of the ideological, democratic and socio-demographic profiles on positive and negative PRR identifiers, we performed binary logistic regressions, treating separately positive and negative partisanship towards

the PRR as dependent variables (positive identifiers as 1, and the rest of the sample as 0; negative identifiers as 1, and the rest of the sample as 0), and the previously mentioned variables of the ideological, democratic and socio-demographic profiles as independent variables. We also employed the corresponding survey weights. Results are shown and interpreted in the next section.

3.2. Analysis and interpretation

As expected, Western European citizens with positive and negative identities towards the PRR are extremely different and constitute two contrary constituencies. [Table 1](#) reports logistic coefficients considering both political identities as dependent variables (corresponding standard deviations are indicated in parenthesis and odds ratios between brackets). For each PRR partisanship, we performed two versions of logistic models with fixed-effects in order to control for potential country-effects. The first version (Full Model All) indicates a complete model in which we considered controls for every of the ten countries included in the analysis (Model 1 for PRR positive partisanship and Model 3 for PRR negative partisanship). In the second version (Full Model), as a robustness check, we excluded countries with no significant statistical relationship in the fixed-effect complete model since they might express outliers or cases that go against the direction of most of the observations (France and Denmark for PRR positive partisanship; Germany for PRR negative partisanship) (Model 2 for PRR positive partisanship and Model 4 for PRR negative partisanship).⁵² We start by analysing PRR positive partisans based on the statistical findings (Model 1 and Model 2). The evidence reveals that PRR positive partisans are prone to position themselves as right-wingers, are attracted by populist appeals, can be seen as Eurosceptics and tend to be intolerant towards immigrants. It is worth indicating that left/right preferences in economic terms do not have a significant impact on holding a positive identity towards the PRR. Moreover, those with a positive PRR identity tend to be more conservative than liberal, although with a statistical significance level at 95% of confidence interval. This finding reinforces the argument made by several scholars who point out that support for the PRR is driven first and foremost by nativism.⁵³

In terms of the democratic profile, the evidence shows that those who have a positive identity towards the PRR are not only at odds with the liberal dimension of democracy, but also in favour of the direct democratic dimension (Models 1 and 2). Giving more importance to the liberal dimension of democracy reduces the propensity for positive PPR identification, although the statistical significance reaches 95% of confidence interval in both models. Additionally, considering democracy as the most preferable regime decreases the propensity of being a positive PRR identifier (although its statistical significance is at the 95% of confidence interval in both models), and satisfaction with democracy does not condition PRR positive partisanship. In summary, PRR positive partisans' democratic profile is marked by the support for direct democratic mechanisms as well as the rejection of key liberal democratic institutions that seek to guarantee horizontal accountability. At the same time, PRR positive partisans are characterized by their objection to democratic support. When it comes to analysing those who have positive partisanship towards the PRR in Western Europe, neither satisfaction with democracy nor the social-democratic dimension is statistically significant. The latter point is interesting, since it connects to the growing literature on welfare chauvinism, which shows that the PRR does not develop a genuine social-

Table 1. Ideological, democratic and socio-demographic attributes as predictors for PRR positive and negative partisanship in Western Europe.

VARIABLES	(1) PRR positive partisanship <i>Full Model All</i>	(2) PRR positive partisanship <i>Full Model</i>	(3) PRR negative partisanship <i>Full Model All</i>	(4) PRR negative partisanship <i>Full Model</i>
Left/Right Self-positioning	0.287*** (0.015) [1.333]	0.307*** (0.017) [1.359]	-0.267*** (0.010) [0.766]	-0.264*** (0.011) [0.768]
Populism Index	0.282*** (0.060) [1.326]	0.290*** (0.067) [1.336]	-0.074* (0.039) [0.928]	-0.060
EU Index	-0.308*** (0.028) [0.735]	-0.316*** (0.032) [0.729]	0.265*** (0.020) [1.303]	0.253*** (0.021) [1.287]
Immigration Index	0.695*** (0.044) [2.003]	0.690*** (0.049) [1.994]	-0.687*** (0.028) [0.503]	-0.665*** (0.029) [0.514]
Liberal/Conservative Index	0.032** (0.015) [1.032]	0.032** (0.016) [1.032]	-0.111*** (0.010) [0.895]	-0.106*** (0.011) [0.900]
State/Market Index	0.002	0.002	-0.008	-0.012
Electoral Democracy	-0.041	-0.020	0.039** (0.019) [1.040]	0.043** (0.020) [1.044]
Liberal Democracy	-0.051** (0.024) [0.950]	-0.057** (0.026) [0.945]	0.075*** (0.018) [1.078]	0.072*** (0.019) [1.074]
Direct Democracy	0.087*** (0.020) [1.091]	0.098*** (0.023) [1.103]	-0.115*** (0.012) [0.891]	-0.111*** (0.013) [0.895]
Social Democracy	0.030* (0.018) [1.030]	0.019	0.038*** (0.013) [1.038]	0.036** (0.014) [1.037]
Democratic Support	-0.075** (0.034) [0.928]	-0.091** (0.038) [0.913]	0.182*** (0.026) [1.200]	0.174*** (0.027) [1.190]
Democratic Satisfaction	-0.011	-0.005	-0.023** (0.009) [0.978]	-0.029*** (0.010) [0.971]
Gender (1=Female)	-0.265*** (0.066) [0.767]	-0.223*** (0.074) [0.800]	0.163*** (0.044) [1.178]	0.136*** (0.047) [1.146]
Age	-0.000	-0.001	0.011*** (0.001) [1.011]	0.011*** (0.002) [1.011]
Income	-0.002	0.031	0.081** (0.032) [1.084]	0.090*** (0.033) [1.094]
Education	-0.085* (0.047) [0.918]	-0.053	0.092** (0.030) [1.096]	0.123*** (0.032) [1.131]
Austria_country_categoric	0.548*** (0.159) [1.729]	0.521*** (0.161) [1.685]	-0.811*** (0.095) [0.445]	-0.803*** (0.095) [0.448]
Denmark_country_categoric	-0.062		-0.606*** (0.102) [0.545]	-0.596*** (0.102) [0.551]

(Continued)

Table 1. Continued.

VARIABLES	(1) PRR positive partisanship <i>Full Model All</i>	(2) PRR positive partisanship <i>Full Model</i>	(3) PRR negative partisanship <i>Full Model All</i>	(4) PRR negative partisanship <i>Full Model</i>
France_country_categoric	0.206		-0.224** (0.098) [0.799]	-0.248** (0.098) [0.780]
Germany_country_categoric	0.918*** (0.157) [2.504]	0.900*** (0.158) [2.460]	0.101	
Greece_country_categoric	-1.607*** (0.223) [0.201]	-1.646*** (0.226) [0.193]	1.333*** (0.098) [3.794]	1.279*** (0.098) [3.593]
Italy_country_categoric	0.942*** (0.153) [2.566]	0.933*** (0.154) [2.542]	0.211** (0.098) [1.235]	0.205** (0.097) [1.227]
Netherlands_count_categoric	0.548*** (0.164) [1.730]	0.514*** (0.166) [1.671]	0.473*** (0.098) [1.605]	0.462*** (0.098) [1.588]
Sweden_country_categoric	1.067*** (0.161) [2.905]	0.988*** (0.164) [2.687]	-0.654*** (0.103) [0.520]	-0.657*** (0.103) [0.518]
UK_country_categoric	-0.7368*** (0.205) [0.479]	-0.785*** (0.209) [0.456]	0.354*** (0.105) [1.425]	0.331*** (0.105) [1.393]
Constant	-6.2246*** (0.410) [0.002]	-6.560*** (0.454) [0.001]	1.395*** (0.258) [4.035]	1.321*** (0.273) [3.749]
Pseudo r-squared	0.308	0.321	0.308	0.301
Observations	14,040	11,426	14,040	12,586

Note: Numbers reported are logistic coefficients. When these are significant, standard errors are indicated in parenthesis, and odds ratios are calculated and presented in brackets. Spain is used as baseline in all models. The two Full Model All indicate complete models in which we considered controls for each of the ten countries included in the analysis (Models 1 and 3). The respective two Full Models exclude countries with no significant statistical relationship in the fixed-effect complete model (France and Denmark for PRR positive partisanship in Model 2, and Germany for PRR negative partisanship in Model 4).

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

democratic agenda but rather promotes the defense of generous social rights only for the native population.⁵⁴

Regarding the socio-demographic profile, the propensity of being a PRR positive partisan is higher among men and decreases with education levels (although only in the Full Model and at the 90% of confidence interval). Neither income nor age condition PRR positive partisanship. This information about the socio-demographic profile of those who can be seen as PRR positive partisans stays in line with much of the extant research on this topic, which demonstrates that those who support the PRR are not predominantly “economic losers” in an objective sense, but rather individuals who at the subjective level feel left behind because of ongoing cultural and economic transformation that negatively affect their social status.⁵⁵ Last but not least, it is worth indicating, that overall, these three profiles – ideological, democratic, and socio-demographic – explain 30 percent of the general variation of PRR positive partisanship when controlling by country effects, and 32 percent of the same variation when excluding countries with no significant statistical relationship in the fixed-effect complete model (i.e. France and Denmark).

We proceeded similarly in order to explain the ideological, democratic and socio-demographic profile of PRR negative partisans (Model 3 and Model 4). Let's start with the ideological profile. Self-positioning to the left, having preferences for European integration, being tolerant towards immigration and embracing liberal values increase the propensity of being a PRR negative identifier. Interestingly, populist attitudes bear a negative effect on having negative partisanship towards the PRR only at the 90% of confidence interval in the Full Model All.

When considering the democratic profile, those with a negative identity towards the PRR are in favour of the electoral, liberal and social-democratic dimensions of democracy, while they also tend to reject the direct democratic dimensions. At the same time, PRR negative identifiers tend to be dissatisfied with democracy but to support it as the most preferable regime. Given that negative PRR identifiers are prone to support democracy as the most preferable regime despite the fact that they are dissatisfied with it, they can be classified as "critical citizens": voters who are in favour of the democracy but disappointed with the way democracy is working in practice.⁵⁶

Regarding the socio-demographic profile, the propensity to be labelled as PRR negative identifier increases among women. It is positively associated with age, income, and education. When comparing the socio-demographic profile for the two profiles, it becomes clear that negative party identification towards the PRR is not simply the bipolar opposite of positive partisanship towards the PRR. Overall, these three profiles (ideological, democratic, and socio-demographic) explain 30% of the general variation of PRR positive partisans. Moreover, the fact that statistical relations comparing Full Model All and Full Model – for positive and negative partisanships – are similar gives us more confidence about the robustness of the findings.

What can we learn from this evidence about the different profiles of those who have positive and negative partisanship towards the PRR in Western Europe? The logistic regressions provided lend support for our expectation that PRR positive and negative identifiers should be thought of as constituencies with very different ideological, democratic and socio-demographic backgrounds. Even though both constituencies are not complete opposites, they are very distinctive in key issues, which have important consequences for the prospects of liberal democracy in Western Europe. On the one hand, PRR positive identifiers are inclined to the right-wing populist camp, are at odds with both European integration and immigration, are inclined to socially conservative values, endorse an illiberal understanding of democracy, and do not support democracy as the most preferable political regime. On the other hand, PRR negative identifiers are inclined to the left-wing camp, are in favour of both European integration and immigration, show preferences for the electoral, liberal and social-democratic dimensions of democracy, are at odds with the direct democratic model, and are supportive of the democratic regime despite their dissatisfaction with it. The finding that PRR positive partisans in Western Europe are averse to the liberal democratic regime and that tend to object democracy as preferable regime is in line with a significant body of literature that empirically assesses the characteristic of PRR voters.⁵⁷ However, the empirical evidence about those exhibiting a negative identity towards the PRR is quite novel, since we are able to demonstrate that in Western Europe there is a constituency of roughly half electorate that dislikes this party family and strongly supports liberal democracy despite its dissatisfaction with the ways in which the democratic regime is working. This is certainly a significant indicator of democratic resilience, because the ceiling for the PRR is related to the rejection of various of its core principles,

such as anti-immigration, illiberalism and Euroscepticism, by a large part of the Western European electorate.

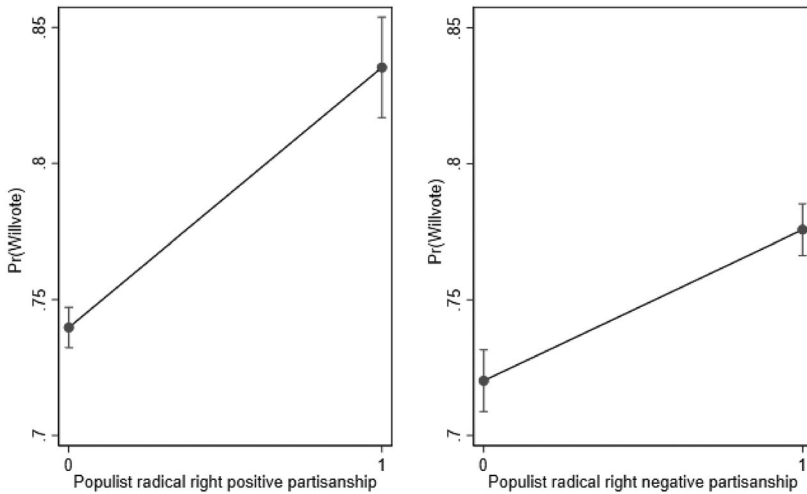
3.3. Analysing the impact of positive vis-à-vis negative partisanship towards the PRR on turnout

In the previous section we showed that citizens with positive and negative identities towards the PRR constitute two different constituencies, which each have their own views on what democracy means and how should it operate in Western Europe. The very fact that those who have an aversion towards the PRR have strong liberal-democratic credentials is good news for Western Europe, because it gives ground to think that there is a clear electoral ceiling for the PRR. However, to better examine the validity of this argument, we undertake an additional empirical test in this last section of the paper, namely, we explore the impact of having a positive versus a negative partisanship towards the PRR on declared turnout. By undertaking this additional analysis, we are able to see the extent to which positive and negative partisanship towards the PRR leads to the mobilization of the electorate. In theory, one can expect that not only those who like the PRR, but also that those who dislike the PRR would go to the polls: while the former should do this to support the party that they love, the latter should do this to avoid that the party that they hate becoming too strong.⁵⁸ The key question is, then, which type of partisanship has a stronger effect on turnout. Put shortly, the greater the impact of negative partisanship towards the PRR on turnout, the stronger the electoral ceiling for the PRR should be and therefore the safer democracy in Western Europe is.

It is worth emphasizing that the 2019 elections for the European Parliament are particularly interesting in this regard, since they reached the highest voter turnout in two decades: half of eligible voters casted their ballots.⁵⁹ To empirically analyse the impact of positive and negative partisanship towards the PRR on turnout, we performed binary logistic regression models – with fixed effects to control for potential country effects – considering responses about electoral participation in the upcoming European Parliament elections (1 = those who responded that they *will definitely vote* on those elections). We included ideological self-positioning and regular socio-demographic factors as control variables. The result of the analysis indicates that both PRR positive and negative partisanship are positively related to the intention to vote in the next elections, but the effect is stronger for those having a positive identity towards the PRR than for those having a negative identity towards the PRR (see Annex C, see supplemental data).

Figure 3 shows the predicted probabilities of a respondent's intention to vote in upcoming elections by PRR positive and negative partisanship, holding all covariates constant at their means or modes (see Models 5 and 6 in Annex C, see supplemental data). On the one hand, the probability of declaring to vote increases by nearly 9% between respondents who hold a PRR positive partisanship from those who do not hold it. On the other hand, the probability of declaring to vote increases by 4% between respondents who hold a PRR negative partisanship from those who do not hold it. Respondents who hold a PRR positive partisanship have a 83% predicted probability of voting in upcoming elections, while those who hold a PRR negative partisanship have a 76% of predicted probability of doing it.⁶⁰ Although both PRR positive and negative partisans are electorally mobilized, the level of mobilization among the latter

Predictive Margins with 95% CIs
 Populist radical right positive partisanship and Populist radical right negative partisanship



Source: own elaboration

Figure 3. Predictive margins of intention to vote by populist radical right positive partisanship (left-hand panel) and populist radical right negative partisanship (right-hand panel)

group is lower. By contrast, PRR positive identifiers not only seem to be more prone to vote but it is also clear that they have one electoral option that find extremely attractive, the PRR. This means that the electoral ceiling for the PRR depends on the ability of existing political parties to raise awareness of the dangers that the PRR poses for the post-war consensus on what democracy means and how it should work in Western Europe, so that those eligible to vote actually end up going to the polls. In other words, the activation and mobilization of negative partisanship towards the PRR is crucial to strengthening the electoral ceiling for the PRR.

4. Conclusions

In this contribution we have brought to the fore the concept and measurement of negative partisanship, since they help us to understand that voters develop deep antipathies towards certain political parties. The empirical analysis reveals at least two interesting patterns. On the one hand, approximately 10 percent of the Western European electorate has a positive identity towards the PRR, and that group is distinguished by authoritarian and illiberal tendencies. On the other hand, approximately 50 percent of the Western European electorate has a negative identity towards the PRR, and that group is characterized by the defense of both immigration and European integration, as well as the promotion of the electoral, liberal and social-democratic dimensions of democracy.

This why we argue in this contribution that both the large amount of PRR negative identifiers and their democratic proclivities can be interpreted as a sign of democratic resilience in Western Europe. Nevertheless, the evidence also demonstrates that those who have a negative identity towards the PRR are less mobilized than those who have a

positive identity towards the PRR. Part of the reason for this lies in the fact that those who dislike the PRR have very heterogeneous electoral preferences (from PRL to conservative parties). This means that the effective politicization of PRR negative partisanship by the existing political parties depends on how they can overcome collective action problems in order to support a unique opposition towards the PRR. By looking at the empirical results presented above, one possibility of building a broad political coalition against the PRR could lie in the capacity of politicizing those issues that are relevant for those who dislike the PRR, namely support for immigration, liberal values, the European Union as well as electoral, liberal and social-democratic understandings of the democratic regime. The electoral ceiling of PRR parties depends then not only in their own (in)capacity to develop a “reputational shield” against accusations of racism and extremism,⁶¹ but also from the ability of mainstream parties to mobilize all those who reject the PRR.

Given that studies on negative partisanship are still in their infancy in Western Europe, we would like to close this contribution by pointing out ideas for the future research agenda on negative partisanship towards the PRR and its impact on democratic resilience. Without the aim of providing a detailed discussion, we think that four ideas are particularly worth exploring. First, in this contribution we have developed a cross-national analysis, because this way it is easier to make an interpretation for Western Europe as a whole and also because the data employed comes from a survey that was done to study the positions of voters for the 2019 European Parliament election. However, there are good reasons to think that there are important differences between West European countries when it comes to studying negative partisanship towards the PRR. For instance, in a recent article Caramani and Manucci⁶² have shown that the electoral performance of the PRR depends on the type of re-elaboration of countries’ national past and their collective memories. Therefore, it would be interesting to analyse if the size of negative partisanship towards the PRR hinges on the types of collective memories that countries have developed over time.

Second, the analysis we offer here shows that both those having a positive identity as well as those having negative identity towards the PRR are mobilized, but the former seem to be more willing to participate in the elections than the latter. This finding suggests that the politicization of positive and negative partisanship towards the PRR is one factor among several that can influence the actual electoral ceiling of the PRR. Future research can explore other factors that can impact the raising or lowering of the electoral ceiling of the PRR, such as the actions of the PRR itself (e.g. its capacity to build a “reputational shield” to distance itself from extremism and racism) as well as contextual situations (e.g. economic downturns, immigration crises, etc.).

Third, the empirical study we offer here is focused on one single measure in time, and in consequence, we do not know how stable the size of both positive and negative partisanship towards the PRR are. To deal with this question, future studies should provide new empirical evidence on positive and negative partisanship towards the PRR and it would be particularly relevant to generate longitudinal data on this topic. Fourth and finally, the PRR is not exclusively a Western European phenomenon. This party family also exists in Eastern Europe and the rise of presidents such as Donald Trump in the United States and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil demonstrates the PRR is becoming a global phenomenon with problematic consequences for democracy.⁶³ Therefore, scholars from other regions would do well to employ existing datasets or generate new ones to empirically assess not only the size of negative

partisanship towards the PRR, but also the democratic credentials of those who are at odds with this party family.

Notes

1. Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*; Mudde, “The Populist Radical Right”; Mudde, “Three Decades of Populist Radical Right Parties in Western Europe”.
2. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism*.
3. See introduction to this special issue, Lührmann and Merkel.
4. Mudde, *The Far Right Today*; Rydgren, *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*; Wodak *The Politics of Fear*.
5. Dennison and Geddes, “A Rising Tide?”.
6. Hartevelde and Ivarsflaten, “Why Women Avoid the Radical Right”.
7. Gidron and Hall, “The Politics of Social Status”; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, “Studying Populism in Comparative Perspective”; Rydgren, *Class Politics and the Radical Right*.
8. Meléndez and Rovira Kaltwasser, “Political Identities”.
9. Abramowitz and Webster, “The Rise of Negative Partisanship and Nationalization”; Abramowitz and Webster, “Negative Partisanship”; Medeiros and Noel, “The Forgotten Side of Partisanship”; Bankert, “Negative and Positive Partisanship”.
10. Iyengar, Lelkes, Levendysky, Malhotra, and Westwood, “The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization”.
11. Samuels and Zucco, *Partisans, Antipartisans, and Nonpartisans*.
12. A notable exceptions is Mayer “How Negative Partisanship Affects Voting Behavior in Europe”.
13. Rovira Kaltwasser, Vehrkamp and Wratil, *Europe’s Choice*.
14. Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*.
15. Bale and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Riding the Populist Wave*.
16. Mudde, *The Far Right Today*; Rydgren, *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*; Wodak, *The Politics of Fear*.
17. Akkerman, De Lange and Rooduijn, *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties*;
18. A list of the parties included can be found in the appendix. The electoral data for the parties was collected from the ParlGov database (www.parlogov.org) and the European Journal of Political Research (ECPR) Political Data Yearbook.
19. Rydgren, *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*.
20. Mayer, “The Radical Right in France”.
21. Hartevelde and Ivarsflaten, “Why Women Avoid the Radical Right”; Ivarsflaten, Blinder and Bjånesøy, “How and Why the Populist Radical Right Persuades Citizens”.
22. Medeiros and Noel, “The Forgotten Side of Partisanship”; Samuels and Zucco, *Partisans, Antipartisans, and Nonpartisans*.
23. Baumeister et al., “Bad is Stronger than Good”.
24. Meléndez and Rovira Kaltwasser, “Political Identities”.
25. Medeiros and Noel, “The Forgotten Side of Partisanship”; Caruana et al., “The Power of the Dark Side”.
26. Zhon et al., “Negational Categorization and Intergroup Behavior”.
27. Huddy, “From Social to Political Identity”.
28. Huddy et al. “Expressive Partisanship”.
29. Bankert, “Negative and Positive Partisanship”.
30. Brewer, “The Psychology of Prejudice”.
31. Caruana et al., “The Power of the Dark Side”.
32. Mayer, “How Negative Partisanship Affects Voting Behavior in Europe”, 3.
33. Mayer, “How Negative Partisanship Affects Voting Behavior”, 2.
34. Abramowitz and Webster, “The Rise of Negative Partisanship and Nationalization”; Abramowitz and Webster, “Negative Partisanship”; Iyengar et al., “The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization.”
35. Caruana et al., “The Power of the Dark Side”; Medeiros and Noel, “The Forgotten Side of Partisanship”.

36. Two notable exceptions are the work of Mayer, "How Negative Partisanship Affects Voting Behavior", and Spoon and Kanthak, "He's not my Prime Minister!".
37. More details about the survey data can be found in Rovira Kaltwasser, Vehrkamp and Wratil, *Europe's Choice*.
38. We are aware of the limitations of measuring party identifications in one point in time in order to tackle its temporal stability. However, previous research on negative partisanship by party families in Europe shows similar percentages of partisans' support and dislikes. See Mayer, "How Negative Partisanship Affects Voting Behavior".
39. Rose and Mishler, "Negative and Positive Party Identification"; Samuels and Zucco, *Partisans, Antipartisans, and Nonpartisans*.
40. Richardson, "European Party Loyalties Revisited."
41. Meléndez and Rovira Kaltwasser, "Political Identities".
42. Bankert, "Negative and Positive Partisanship".
43. To test this argument in detail, one would need longitudinal data, which unfortunately does not exist for Western Europe. However, it is not far-fetched to suggest that the more radical a political party becomes, the more polarization generates, thereby fostering positive and negative feelings that are not short-lived but rather enduring. Seen in this light, if PRR parties in Western Europe continue to radicalize, this can certainly reinforce negative partisanship against them.
44. We provide a list of the political parties included in each of these party families in Annex A, see supplemental data. It is worth noting that the survey data we use in this paper is for ten Western European countries, including the case of Greece, where one can find an extreme right party: Golden Dawn. We are aware that the academic literature makes the distinction between populist radical right parties and extreme right parties: while the former are nominally democratic, the latter are openly undemocratic. Nevertheless, we decided to include the case of Golden Dawn in our analysis of positive and negative partisanship towards the PRR, since this permit us to consider the Greek case study and therefore bring more variety to the research design.
45. Mayer, "How Negative Partisanship Affects Voting Behavior"; Caruana et al., "The Power of the Dark Side".
46. Rose and Mishler, "Negative and Positive Party Identification," 230–1.
47. Boese et al., "How Democracies Prevail".
48. Van Hauwaert and van Kessel, "Beyond Protest and Discontent".
49. We performed factorial analysis in order to build the corresponding indexes. We proceeded with orthogonal varimax rotation method. In the Populist Index, all items load heavily on the coalescing factor. The State/Market Index originally included 5 items, after factor analysis we dropped one item. The Conservative/Liberal Index originally included 5 items, and after factor analysis we dropped two items. The Immigration Index maintained their original item-compositions. The item-composition of the Populist Index and Immigration Index are based theoretically based on previous research (e.g. Meléndez and Rovira Kaltwasser, "Political identities", van Hauwaert and van Kessel, "Beyond protest and discontent"). State/Market and Conservative/Liberal indexes were modified empirically according to factor analysis results. We considered it appropriate to proceed by an exploratory technique in the latter cases, since the literature has employed diverse measurements to capture left-right preferences in economic and socio-cultural realms. For a detailed analysis of the items included in this ideological profile, see Annex A, see supplemental data.
50. Ferrín and Kriesi, *How Europeans View and Evaluate Democracy*.
51. We performed factorial analysis – orthogonal varimax rotation method – in order to build the corresponding indexes. All indexes kept their original item-composition. For a detailed analysis of the items included in this democratic profile, see Annex A, see supplemental data.
52. For fixed-effects models we arbitrarily took Spain as the reference case in order to control for potential country effects.
53. Ivarsflaten, "What Unites Right-wing Populists in Western Europe?"; Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*; Mudde, "Three Decades of Populist Radical Right Parties"; Oesch, "Explaining Workers' Support"; van Hauwaert and van Kessel, "Beyond Protest and Discontent".

54. Akkerman, De Lange and Rooduijn, *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe*; Häusermann, Picot and Geering, “Rethinking Party Politics and the Welfare State”; Schumacher and Van Kersbergen, “Do Mainstream Parties Adapt”.
55. Gidron and Hall, “The Politics of Social Status”; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, “Studying Populism in Comparative Perspective”; Rooduijn and Burgoon, “The Paradox of Well-being”.
56. Dahlberg, Linde and Holmberg, “Democratic Discontent in Old and New Democracies”; Norris, *Democratic Deficit*.
57. Mudde, “The Populist Radical Right”; Mudde, “Three Decades of Populist Radical Right Parties in Western Europe”.
58. Immerzeel and Pickup, “Populist Radical Right Parties Mobilizing ‘the People?’”.
59. Since 1979 turnout for the European Parliament elections has been steadily dropping, going from almost 62% in that year, down to a historic low of 42.6% in 2014. For more details on this, see Rovira Kaltwasser, Vehrkamp and Wratil, *Europe’s Choice*, 8–9.
60. It is worth indicating that previous research has shown that results on questions about declared participation in elections tend to be inflated because of social desirability bias. This problem might be probably stronger for those with negative partisanship towards the PRR than for those with positive partisanship towards the PRR, since the latter do have clear electoral preference (i.e. voting for the PRR), while the former have many different electoral preferences (i.e. voting for any party besides the PRR, including the option of abstaining or casting a blank/null vote). For more information about the social desirability bias in measuring turnout via surveys, see Jeffrey A. Karp and David Brockington, “Social Desirability and Response Validity”, as well as, Allyson L. Hoolbrook and Jon A. Krosnick, “Social Desirability Bias in Voter Turnout Reports”.
61. Hartevelde and Ivarsflaten, “Why Women Avoid the Radical Right”; Ivarsflaten, Blinder and Bjånesøy, “How and Why the Populist Radical Right Persuades Citizens”.
62. Caramani and Manucci, “National Past and Populism”.
63. Mudde, *The Far Right Today*.

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