

What Unites Right-Wing Populists in Western Europe?

Re-Examining Grievance Mobilization Models in Seven Successful Cases

Elisabeth Ivarsflaten

Nuffield College, University of Oxford,, United Kingdom

Unlike for the green party family, no empirically backed scholarly consensus exists about the grievances mobilized by populist right parties in Western Europe. To the contrary, three competing grievance mobilization models can be distinguished in the existing literature. These models focus on grievances arising from economic changes, political elitism and corruption, and immigration. This study discusses these three grievance mobilization models and tests them on comparable cross-sectional survey data for all seven relevant countries using multinomial probit analysis. The study finds that no populist right party performed well in elections around 2002 without mobilizing grievances over immigration. However, it finds several examples of populist right parties experiencing electoral success without mobilizing grievances over economic changes or political elitism and corruption. This study therefore solves a long-standing disagreement in the literature by comprehensively showing that only the appeal on the immigration issue unites all successful populist right parties.

Keywords: *political parties; populist right; immigration; grievance mobilization; Western Europe; multinomial probit*

In the 1980s and 1990s, the electoral successes of populist right parties fundamentally altered the party systems of at least half of Western Europe's democracies.¹ It is therefore understandable that this group of parties has

Author's Note: For their valuable assistance with the preparation of this article, the author would like to thank Christopher Anderson, Scott Blinder, Cees van der Eijk, Geoffrey Evans, Steve Fisher, Anthony Heath, Sara Binzer Hobolt, Allistair McMillan, David Rueda, Colin Provost, and three anonymous reviewers. The data were made available online by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services. The author alone is responsible for the analysis presented.

attracted widespread scholarly attention in comparative politics. However, a long-standing disagreement persists in the literature about what unites these parties across the different countries where they have risen to political influence. This study sorts out and seeks an empirical solution to this disagreement. It is argued that the debate began and became entrenched because the competing grievance mobilization models are all highly plausible on a theoretical level and because the data previously available to test them were not sufficiently detailed, comprehensive, and comparable.

By contrast, this study does analyze data that enable rigorous tests of the competing claims put forward in the literature. These data, from the *European Social Survey* (2002-2003), are ideally suited to establish what unites the populist right. This is so, first, because it is comprehensive so that the vote for all seven successful populist right parties can be examined in a strict comparative sense. Second, the survey is rich enough that all the grievance mobilization propositions can be tested in one multivariate model. This study is therefore able to distinguish grievances mobilized by all successful populist right parties from those only mobilized by some parties in some countries.

In what follows, the theory section discusses the role of grievance models in explanations of party system evolution generally before outlining the three competing grievance mobilization models in the literature on the populist right. In the empirical section, the five grievance mobilization propositions arrived at in the theory section are tested on data from the seven countries that had successful populist right parties around 2002: Austria, Denmark, Flanders,² France, the Netherlands, Norway, and Switzerland. The concluding section discusses how the results of these tests differ from those in previous work and the implications of the findings for future work on the populist right.

The Role of Grievance Mobilization Models in Party System Evolution

All existing theories of party system evolution, be they inspired by the Downsean economic tradition (Downs, 1957) or by the political sociology tradition of Lipset and Rokkan (1967), agree on one point. They implicitly or explicitly argue that unless there is some sort of societal change that gives rise to a widespread public grievance, a major change in the party system is unlikely to occur.³ Thus, in the most detailed explanation yet of the pattern of party systems evolution in Western Europe, Lipset and Rokkan emphasized the intimate connections between grievances, the expansion of suffrage, and the rise of new parties. Analyzing political development through a different

lens, Downs (1957) argued that new grievances—or as he put it, changes in “the distribution of voters”—were “among the most important political events possible” (p. 140). Such changes could, in Downs’s account, cause old parties to alter their behavior, the number of parties in equilibrium to change, or even cause new parties to replace the old ones.

Putting to work this broadly accepted notion that party system change is likely to be associated with the rise of new grievances, many scholars embraced Inglehart’s (1977) postmaterialism argument as a likely explanation for the rise of green parties in Western Europe. In a time of peace and prosperity, it was argued, caring for the environment and the beauty of one’s own surroundings increased in importance to voters. Therefore, a part of this literature claims that green parties, which spoke directly to new and widespread concerns about the environment, experienced success across the rich and peaceful countries of the world (Dalton, Flanagan, & Beck, 1984; Poguntke, 1987). Likewise and as will be discussed in detail below, many studies of the populist right in Western Europe have focused on identifying the grievance mobilized by these parties. However, unlike for the green parties, the correct model is much disputed.

Grievance Models Emphasizing Economic Changes

Western Europe experienced important economic changes from the mid-1980s and onwards. Old-fashioned industries declined while the service sector grew (Iversen, 2001). The welfare crisis of the 1980s was followed by various unpopular measures of welfare retrenchment (Offe, 1984; Pierson, 1994). An ideology of new public management spurred, among other things, a frenzy of privatizations (Hood, 1998; Suleiman, 2003). Most important, new technology, cheaper travel, and political efforts to lower trade barriers created more opportunities for businesses to relocate and opened up previously shielded industries to international competition (Held, 1999). This process of internationalization was of course most pronounced within the European Union (EU), where integration deepened and widened in this period (Scharpf, 1999; Stone Sweet, Sandholz & Fligstein, 2001).

Grievance models that place primary importance on economic changes therefore have many reasons for doing so. They argue that these economic changes produced realignments in the electorate that favored populist right parties with a certain appeal (Betz, 1994; Esping-Andersen, 1999; Kitschelt, 1995). Kitschelt identified the appeal likely to win the populist right the largest amount of votes as right-authoritarian. This winning formula consisted in his

account of a combination of two policy appeals—right-wing, neoliberal economic policies on one hand and authoritarian and nationalist sociocultural policies on the other hand.

One grievance model that places primary importance on economic changes therefore suggests that for a populist right party to succeed, it needs to successfully mobilize voters that prefer right-wing economic policies. This argument gives rise to the following empirically testable proposition:

Proposition 1: Successful populist right parties attract voters who prefer right-wing economic policies.

If we find that Proposition 1 is true, then those populist right parties that failed may have done so because of an inadequate policy formula. This is indeed what Kitschelt (1995) suggested when he argued that given the right context a populist right party is only likely to succeed “*provided* it finds the winning formula to attract right-authoritarian support, namely a resolutely market liberal stance on economic issues and an authoritarian and particularist stance on . . . [sociocultural] questions” (p. 275, original emphasis).

Many scholars studying the populist right have disagreed with Kitschelt’s argument that right-wing economic policies are a necessary part of the successful populist right’s appeal (Carter, 2005; Ivarsflaten, 2005; Lubbers, 2001; Mudde, 2000), but some have still agreed with his emphasis on economic grievances. Studies in this vein argue that voters vote for the populist right not because they prefer neoliberal economic policies but because they are frustrated with the economic changes taking place in their country (Andersen, 1992; Betz, 1994; Esping-Andersen, 1999).

According to this type of economic grievance argument, voters do not vote for the populist right because their economic policies have a special appeal. Instead, they vote for the populist right—an opposition party par excellence—to express their unhappiness with the economic situation in their country. The following empirically testable proposition can be derived from this strand of economic grievance arguments:

Proposition 2: Successful populist right parties attract voters who are dissatisfied with their country’s economy.⁴

The argument leading to Proposition 2 holds that the motive for voting for the populist right contains an element of protest. In this context, however, the protest vote is conceptualized differently from studies that argue that protest voting entails weak correspondence between policy preferences and party policies (van der Brug & Fennema, 2003; van der Brug, Fennema, & Tillie,

2000).⁵ The literature that inspired the above proposition, by contrast, suggests that populist right parties are likely to be successful only when they also extend their appeal beyond policies and tap into a more general unhappiness with economic changes. As argued by van der Brug and colleagues, determining the extent to which the vote for the populist right is primarily policy or primarily protest oriented is, however, an important question in and of itself, and the analysis presented here will also speak to that debate.

Grievance Models Emphasizing Political Disillusionment

Western Europe not only went through significant economic change in the 1980s and 1990s but also experienced important political changes. Most of these changes were related to the furthering of European integration, which by a significant part of the public was seen as an elite-driven project marred by democratic deficit and corruption.⁶ Alongside the deepening and widening of EU integration, governments engaged in more international cooperation, which to some citizens appeared to remove political power away from the national arena and democratic accountability (Held, 1999). In addition, several Western European countries—for instance, Italy, Britain, Belgium, and Germany—experienced large political corruption scandals in the 1990s, which further undermined the public's faith in their politicians (Della Porta & Mény, 1997).

These political changes and events, some suggest, have created a grievance against contemporary politicians, which benefits some or all outsider parties such as the populist right (Abedi, 2002; Bergh, 2004; Kitschelt, 1995; Rydgren, 2005). The vote for the populist right is, in this line of reasoning, cast at least in part because people want to express their disillusionment with politics and not necessarily their agreement with the populist right's policies. This focus on the grievance created by elitist and corrupt politics leads us to another set of testable propositions:

Proposition 3: Successful populist right parties attract voters who are disillusioned with political elites.

Proposition 4: Successful populist right parties attract voters who distrust the EU.

Note that Propositions 3 and 4 do not necessarily measure the same thing, because it has been argued quite convincingly, that people who distrust their own government may be more inclined to trust EU institutions and vice versa (Rohrschneider, 2002; Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000). The extent to which populist right parties mobilize one or both of these types of disillusionment is in the end an empirical question, which will be addressed in this article.

A final hypothesis belonging under this heading holds that populist right parties mobilize a backlash against the postmaterialist green movement of the educated classes (Inglehart, 1997; Kitschelt, 1995). According to this argument, a part of the population thinks that the focus on environmentalism has gone too far. They think gasoline has become too expensive and that industries are hurting because of too restrictive environmental policies. According to this logic, the populist right succeeds when it manages to mobilize the backlash against the green movement. The empirically testable proposition, which follows from this argument, can be formulated in the following way:

Proposition 5: Successful populist right parties attract voters that think political intervention to protect the environment is unnecessary.

Grievance Models Emphasizing Concerns Over Immigration

The third and final change in Western Europe that coincided in timing and scope with the rise of the populist right is the immigration crisis of the 1980s and 1990s. It has been called a crisis, because immigration grew substantially across Western Europe in spite of widespread and most often strict bans. The systems for receiving asylum seekers were not in any Western European countries fit for the increase in applications from the mid-1980s and onwards (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1995). Moreover, the integration of new minorities into the labor market largely failed. This failure is seen in that unemployment among immigrants is significantly higher than that of long-term citizens across most of Western Europe (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2004).

Moreover, most Western European countries were unprepared for the culture conflict that evolved between some in the new Muslim minority and the majority population. Attempts to facilitate or force integration were often controversial, such as the French legislation to ban the wearing of religious symbols in schools. Negative consequences of failed minority integration received much attention in the media (Klausen, 2005). For example, the riots in the French suburbs in the fall of 2005 and the assassination of a Dutch filmmaker, Theo van Gogh, who had made a film about violence against women in Islamic societies, were extensively covered across Western Europe.

The increase in immigration and the integration problems that came in its wake is seen by most students of the populist right as a source of grievances that created opportunities for the populist right (especially see Sniderman,

Hagendoorn, & Prior, 2004; Sniderman, Peri, De Figueiredo & Piazza, 2000; van der Brug & Fennema, 2003; van der Brug et al., 2000). However, several studies are also careful to point out that the populist right are not single-issue parties (Carter, 2005; Gibson, 2002; Lubbers, 2001; Mudde, 2000). The argument holding that rising populist right parties appealed to the public's concern over the immigration crisis lead to the sixth and last proposition:

Proposition 6: Successful populist right parties attract voters who wanted more restrictive immigration and asylum policies.

Case Selection

For both substantive and statistical reasons, this study examines the vote for the parties that (a) were commonly identified in the previous literature as belonging to the populist right and that (b) achieved at least 5% of the vote in the previous national election. The first selection criterion is chosen to facilitate as direct a debate as possible with previous research. Put simply, this study is about those parties that the disagreement in the previous literature concerns. Because previous accounts are not in complete agreement about the parties to be described as the populist right, the analysis to follow is structured in such a way that it allows us to identify outliers or misfits.⁷ The second criterion is chosen, because this seems a reasonable minimum threshold for electoral success in multiparty democracies and because setting the bar any lower than 5% would not make the statistical inferences below reliable.

Following these selection rules, then, the following seven political parties were successful populist right parties in 2002 and 2003: *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* in Austria; *Vlaams Blok* in Flanders, Belgium; *Schweizerische Volkspartei* in Switzerland; *Dansk Folkeparti* in Denmark; *Front National* in France; *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* in the Netherlands; and *Fremskrittspartiet* in Norway. *Lega Nord*, which is considered a rising populist right party in the majority of the literature, was not an electorally successful populist right party at the time period studied.

Data and Empirical Tests

As was discussed in the introduction, the European Social Survey is ideally suited for the task at hand, because it includes all Western European

countries and contains indicators enabling us to test all the propositions discussed above.⁸ Importantly, the survey asked specific questions about economic policy preferences on one hand and asylum and immigration policy preferences on the other hand. We therefore do not have to assume that respondents' placements on a left–right axis reflect their economic policy preferences. Although using the left–right self-placement is sometimes useful, we want to avoid this indicator in the analysis presented here, because we do not know which preferences this placement stands for in the eyes of any given individual in any given country at any given time.

Two different tests will be presented. The first test is a detailed and novel test of what unites the successful populist right. For this test, I divide the data set and examine voting in the separate countries independently.⁹ I further model the choice among the populist right, the major left party, and the major right party separately.¹⁰ This way of structuring the dependent variable facilitates testing of whether populist right parties mobilize voters from left and right parties differently and whether this pattern is similar across countries. Because I model choices among more than two options and consider the impact of multiple explanatory variables simultaneously, I estimate multinomial probit models.¹¹

The second empirical test is much less detailed and, except for the comprehensiveness of the data used, is not particularly novel. It is a summary test of the relative strength of association between the various grievance models and the vote for the populist right across the seven Western European countries. For this analysis, I use the pooled cross-sectional data set and a binary dependent variable contrasting the vote for the populist right with the vote for other parties.¹² This analysis is conducted mostly for the purposes of summary interpretation.

Results

The results to be presented are unwieldy, because I have estimated seven multivariate multinomial probit models with three or four party options on the dependent variable.¹³ Therefore, to facilitate interpretation and discussion, the complete multivariate regression results will not be presented in a country-by-country fashion in the following sections. Instead, coefficients will be compared following a thematic logic. The test statistics for each multivariate regression (i.e., each country), constants, and the number of observations are reported in the appendix alongside the question wording.

Table 1
The Impact of Economic Grievances on the Populist Right Vote.
Partial Results From Seven Multinomial Probit Regressions

	Log Odds of Major Left Versus Populist Right		Log Odds of Major Right 1 Versus Populist Right		Log Odds of Major Right 2 Versus Populist Right	
		<i>SE</i>		<i>SE</i>		<i>SE</i>
Right-wing economic preferences						
Austria	-0.24***	0.04	0.01	0.04	—	—
Denmark	-0.20***	0.04	0.13***	0.04	0.17***	0.05
Flanders	-0.14*	0.02	0.00	0.05	0.18***	0.05
France	-0.21***	0.06	0.24***	0.06	0.20***	0.07
Netherlands	-0.23***	0.03	-0.06	0.03	0.12***	0.03
Norway	-0.27***	0.04	0.16***	0.04	-0.10**	0.04
Switzerland	-0.36***	0.08	-0.09	0.07	—	—
Dissatisfaction with national economy						
Austria	0.01	0.04	-0.09*	0.04	—	—
Denmark	0.01	0.05	-0.04	0.05	0.07	0.06
Flanders	-0.10	0.06	-0.13*	0.06	-0.13*	0.06
France	-0.10	0.07	-0.26***	0.07	-0.13	0.09
Netherlands	-0.02	0.04	-0.03	0.04	0.01	0.04
Norway	-0.10**	0.03	-0.06	0.03	-0.06	0.04
Switzerland	-0.03	0.05	-0.04	0.06	—	—

Note: Coefficients in bold are in line with expectations (i.e., they are negative and statistically significant). Missing data were dropped in the shown analysis. No notable changes of results occurred when missing values were imputed using *Amelia* software. Additional documentation is in Appendices 1 and 2.

****p* significant at .001 level. ***p* significant at .01 level. **p* significant at .05 level.

Results for Economic Grievance Models

The results from the tests of the propositions derived from grievance models emphasizing economic changes are presented in Table 1. The table shows that economic grievances were not mobilized better by all populist right parties than by all major parties. We do, however, find that the extent to which successful populist right parties mobilized economic grievances varies greatly across countries and that our conclusions depend strongly on the type of major party we contrast the populist right to.

The upper part of Table 1 shows that in most countries, one or both of the major parties of the right mobilized voters prefer right-wing economic policies better than the populist right party. This was the case in Denmark, Flanders, France, the Netherlands, and Norway. In the two remaining countries, Austria and Switzerland, the populist right party was as good as the major right parties at mobilizing voters with right-wing economic preferences. In no country did the populist right mobilize economically right-wing voters significantly better than both major parties of the right. We may therefore conclude that populist right parties could be successful without mobilizing voters with right-wing economic preferences.

The lower part of Table 1 shows that electorally successful populist right parties were not particularly good at mobilizing dissatisfaction with the national economy. In all countries studied, at least one of the major parties did as good a job as the successful populist right party at mobilizing such voters. However, in no country did any of the major parties do a better job than the populist right parties either. Mobilizing dissatisfaction with the national economy therefore helped some populist right parties in some countries gain votes, but populist right parties could be successful without mobilizing these voters.

Results for Political Disillusionment Models

The results of the tests of the propositions derived from the grievance model that emphasized political disillusionment are presented in Table 2. The table shows that, although highly influential in many cases, neither disillusionment with politicians, lack of trust in the European Parliament, nor opposition to the green agenda were mobilized better by all successful populist right parties than by the major parties of the left and right. We notice significant cross-country variations in the pattern, and our conclusions depend very much on which major party we contrast the populist right to.

The top part of Table 2 shows that the electoral outcome for populist right parties in Flanders, France, the Netherlands, and Norway was clearly improved by mobilization of distrust of politicians. However, on the whole, populist right parties mobilized such distrust better than only half of the major parties studied. Only in Norway did the populist right party successfully mobilize distrust better than all major parties. In Switzerland, by contrast, the major party of the left, the Social Democratic Party, mobilized distrust in politicians better than the populist right party. Although it is therefore evident from Table 2 that several successful populist right parties

Table 2
The Impact of Grievances Over Elitism in Politics
on the Populist Right Vote. Partial Results From
Seven Multinomial Probit Regressions

	Log Odds of Major Left Versus Populist Right		Log Odds of Major Right 1 Versus Populist Right		Log Odds of Major Right 2 Versus Populist Right	
		<i>SE</i>		<i>SE</i>		<i>SE</i>
Distrust of politicians						
Austria	0.08	0.06	-0.03	0.06	—	—
Denmark	-0.05	0.05	0.04	0.06	-0.10	0.07
Flanders	-0.19**	0.07	-0.17**	0.07	-0.09	0.07
France	-0.08	0.08	-0.33***	0.08	-0.32***	0.09
Netherlands	-0.09	0.05	-0.21***	0.04	-0.19***	0.05
Norway	-0.21***	0.04	-0.15**	0.04	-0.25***	0.05
Switzerland	0.17**	0.07	-0.07	0.07	—	—
Distrust of the European Parliament						
Austria	-0.14**	0.05	-0.06	0.05	—	—
Denmark	-0.06	0.05	-0.15**	0.05	-0.12*	0.06
Flanders	-0.08	0.06	-0.15*	0.06	-0.10	0.06
France	0.02	0.07	0.10	0.07	0.14	0.08
Netherlands	-0.06	0.04	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.04
Norway	-0.01	0.04	-0.03	0.04	0.12**	0.04
Switzerland	-0.30***	0.06	-0.11	0.06	—	—
Unconcerned about the environment						
Austria	-0.02	0.03	-0.05	0.03	—	—
Denmark	-0.02	0.04	-0.01	0.04	0.02	0.05
Flanders	-0.05	0.05	-0.04	0.05	0.00	0.05
France	-0.04	0.05	-0.01	0.05	0.01	0.06
Netherlands	-0.03	0.03	-0.08**	-0.01	0.03	
Norway	-0.04	0.03	-0.02	-0.08*	0.03	
Switzerland	-0.07	0.04	0.01	0.04	—	—

Note: Coefficients in bold are in line with expectations (i.e., they are negative and statistically significant). Missing data were dropped in the shown analysis. No notable changes of results occurred when missing values were imputed using *Amelia* software. Additional documentation is in Appendices 1 and 2.

****p* significant at .001 level. ***p* significant at .01 level. **p* significant at .05 level.

improved their electoral performance by mobilizing distrust of politicians, it was possible for populist right parties to be successful without mobilizing such grievances.

The middle part of Table 2 shows that populist right parties in Austria, Denmark, Flanders, and Switzerland mobilized disillusionment with the European Parliament better than some of the major parties. However, in no country did the populist right mobilize such disillusionment better than all major parties. In Norway, the Christian Democratic Party mobilized disillusionment with the European Parliament better than the populist right party. Overall, Table 2 shows that populist right parties could be successful without mobilizing grievances over political elites and corruption.

The lower third of Table 3 shows that populist right parties and major parties of the left and right in the countries studied mobilized the backlash against the green movement equally well (or equally poorly). This particular formulation of the elite grievance model therefore receives low empirical support. Mobilizing a backlash against the green movement may have helped populist right parties in individual countries gain votes in some past elections, but in 2002 and 2003, several populist right parties performed well without successfully mobilizing such grievances.¹⁴

Results for the Immigration Grievance Model

Finally, the results presented in Table 3 show that no populist right party was successful without mobilizing grievances over the immigration crisis better than all major parties of the left and right. There is, however, considerable variation across countries regarding how much better populist right parties mobilized such grievances. We also see variation in how much better populist right parties mobilized these preferences depending on party contrasts. However, the main finding is that no populist right party managed to receive more than 5% of the vote in the previous national election without mobilizing grievances over immigration better than all major parties.

Moreover, Table 3 shows that the populist right parties that performed best in the preceding elections—the Swiss People's Party, the French National Front, and the Dutch Pim Fortuyn's List—were among the parties that most successfully mobilized grievances over immigration. The party that experienced the least success in the previous election, the Austrian Freedom Party, was the party least successful at mobilizing immigration policy grievances.

Generally speaking, Table 3 shows that populist right parties across Western Europe were considerably more successful at mobilizing immigration grievances when contrasted with the major parties of the left and less so when contrasted with major parties of the right. The coefficient for the

Table 3
The Impact of Immigration Grievances on the Populist Right Vote.
Partial Results From Seven Multinomial Probit Regressions

	Log Odds of Major Left Versus Populist Right		Log Odds of Major Right 1 Versus Populist Right		Log Odds of Major Right 2 Versus Populist Right	
		<i>SE</i>		<i>SE</i>		<i>SE</i>
Austria	-0.08*	0.04	-0.08*	0.04	—	—
Denmark	-0.17***	0.04	-0.11**	0.04	-0.19***	0.05
Flanders	-0.24***	0.06	-0.18***	0.05	-0.20***	0.05
France	-0.30***	0.05	-0.14**	0.05	-0.33***	0.06
Netherlands	-0.23***	0.03	-0.16***	0.03	-0.13***	0.03
Norway	-0.16***	0.03	-0.18***	0.03	-0.17***	0.04
Switzerland	-0.33***	-0.05	-0.14**	-0.05	—	—

Note: Coefficients in bold are in line with expectations (i.e., they are negative and statistically significant). Missing data were dropped in the shown analysis. No notable changes of results occurred when missing values were imputed using *Amelia* software. Additional documentation is in Appendices 1 and 2.

****p* significant at .001 level. ***p* significant at .01 level. **p* significant at .05 level.

contrast with the major party of the left is considerably larger than the contrast for at least one of the major parties of the right in Denmark, Flanders, France, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. We do not see this pattern in Austria and in Norway.

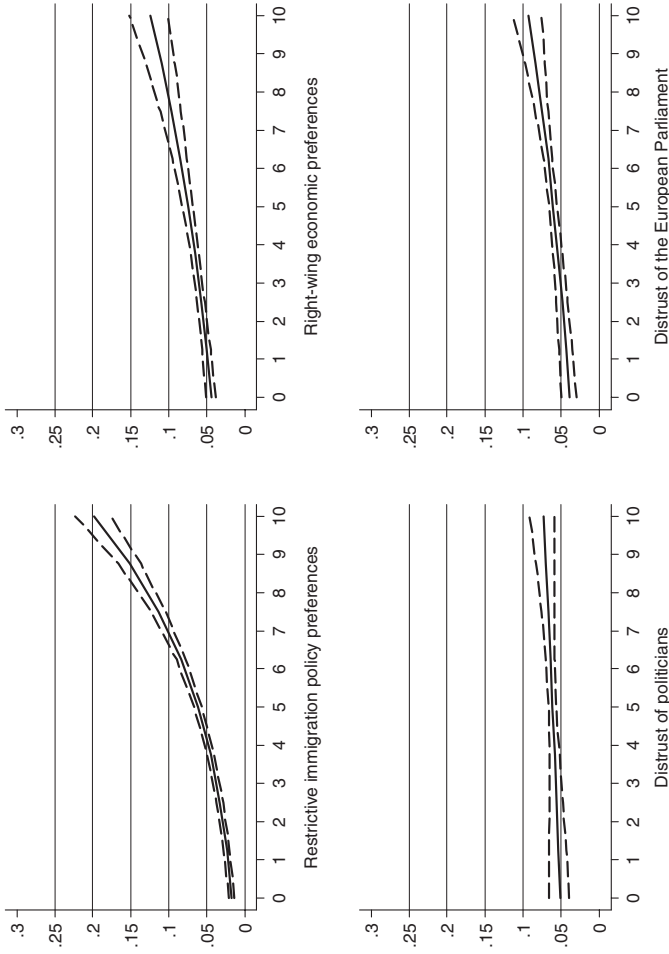
Comparing the Results

The graphs in Figure 1 show that also in a pooled analysis, the immigration mobilization model best accounts for the vote for the successful populist right. Unlike the results in the previous sections, results similar to these are quite well known from previous work on the populist right (Anderson, 1996; Gibson, 2002; Lubbers, 2001; Norris, 2005; van der Brug et al., 2000). The graphs depict how the probability of voting for the populist right varies as immigration policy preferences, economic left–right preferences, trust in politicians, and trust in the European Parliament vary while all the other variables are held at their means.¹⁵

As can be seen in the graphs, immigration policy preferences are close to a perfect predictor of not voting for the populist right, because those with

Figure 1

The Predicted Probability of Voting for the Populist Right in Seven Western European Countries, 2002 and 2003



Source: *European Social Survey*, in Jowell and the Central Co-ordinating Team, 2003. All other variables are kept at the means. Full results are available from the author on request.

Note: The solid line shows the predicted probabilities, and the dotted lines show the 95% confidence interval for these predictions.

very liberal immigration policy preferences (position 1 on the graph) have close to a zero probability of voting for the populist right. As immigration policy preferences become more restrictive, the probability of voting for the populist right increases dramatically. For voters with very restrictive immigration policy preferences (position 9 on the graph), the probability of voting for the populist right is somewhere between 15% and 20%.

The associations between the other variables and the populist right vote are as seen in the figures significantly weaker. The second strongest association is found between economic left–right preferences and the vote for the populist right. The likelihood that voters with extremely left-wing economic preferences will choose the populist right in countries where successful such parties exist is about 5% (at position 1), and the confidence interval at this end of the scale is narrow. The likelihood that voters with extremely right-wing economic preferences will choose the populist right is somewhere between 7% and 14% (at position 9). Moreover, the confidence interval at this end of the scale is the widest in our figures, and this suggests that right-wing economic preferences are an unreliable predictor of the vote for the populist right. Disillusionment with politicians is not significantly associated with the populist right vote in the pooled analysis.

Although being useful for summary interpretation, Figure 1 does not show that grievances over elitism and the economy were less consistently related to the vote for successful populist right parties across countries than were grievances over immigration. To establish this, the more detailed analysis of the previous sections was needed.

Conclusion

This study asked us to revisit the long ongoing debate about what unites populist right parties in Western Europe. On the theoretical level, it was argued that the various competing grievance mobilization propositions suggested in the literature were on the face of it all plausible, because they highlighted cross-national trends that occurred at a time that coincided with the rise to political influence of several populist right parties.

In the empirical sections, however, this study showed that only one of these grievances—the one over immigration—was consistently mobilized by all successful populist right parties. The other two grievance mobilization models—over economic changes and elitist and corrupt politics—contributed to the explanation of the populist right vote in some countries. However, populist right parties also performed well electorally without mobilizing these grievances.

This study therefore to a large extent settles the debate about which grievances unite all populist right parties. The answer is the grievances arising from Europe's ongoing immigration crisis. Previous literature has also pointed out that the immigration issue is central to the appeal of all populist right parties. The finding of the centrality of the immigration issue is however more comprehensive in this study. Most important, this study shows that mobilization of grievances over economic changes and political elitism and corruption play a less consistent part in the electoral performance of populist right parties across countries than do grievances over immigration. This was not previously known.

In settling this debate, the study not only highlights the close connection between the immigration crisis and the contemporary party systems instability in Western Europe but also throws light on the much debated role of the protest vote in this regard. In a detailed examination of the populist right vote, this study found that all the variables that can be thought of as protest measures were less consistently related to the populist right vote than the policy measure concerning immigration. Yet significant protest components were found in some countries—most notably in Flanders, the Netherlands, and Norway. This study therefore suggests that the existing disagreement about the role of the protest vote in the electoral success of populist right parties persists because of the highly variable impact of protest mobilization on the populist right vote across countries. This variable impact contrasts with the highly consistent impact of the policy-oriented concern over immigration.

The potential for variability in the impact of these grievances not only across countries but also over time means that the conclusions of this study are limited to the time point for which we have data (i.e., 2002 to 2003). Because this is quite late in the career for six of the seven populist right parties studied—the exception being *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* in the Netherlands—this study does not tell us about why populist right parties emerged. It is possible that for such a party to experience its electoral breakthrough, a broader mobilization effort was necessary. Adding a hypothesis to the debate about the breakthrough of populist right parties, however, the findings of this study suggest that such broadened appeals may not have been necessary and that they at the very least need not have been the same across countries.

Although adding to the existing literature the insight that only the immigration issue unifies an otherwise heterogeneous group of populist right parties, this study leaves the important question of why there were many countries without successful populist right parties in Western Europe to other studies. Existing research using aggregate data have brought us some way toward answering this question, but their results on, for example, the role of electoral systems are largely incomparable because they have not agreed on

how to select cases (Carter, 2005; Golder, 2003a, 2003b; Jackman & Volpert, 1996; Norris, 2005; van der Brug, Fennema, & Tillie, 2005).

Indirectly contributing to this related debate, this study provides comprehensive and detailed evidence to support a specific way of selecting cases. In short, the results presented here imply that future studies would be well advised to identify all parties that sought to mobilize grievances over immigration and explain why some of these parties managed to successfully do so whereas others did not. In this effort, future researchers cannot rely on surveys alone but perhaps need to turn to studies of party programs and media reports.

Appendix A

Question Wording and List of Major Parties

Recalled vote (dependent variable): Some people don't vote nowadays for one reason or another. Did you vote in the last [country] national election in [month/year]? . . . Which party did you vote for in that election? [Country-specific question and codes].

Right-wing economic preferences: (1) Using this card, please say to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements . . . The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels. (2) Using this card, please say to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements . . . Employees need strong trade unions to protect their working conditions and wages.

Restrictive immigration and asylum preferences: (1) Using this card, please say how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Refugees whose applications are granted should be entitled to bring in their close family members. (2) Using this card, please say how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. If people who have come to live here commit any crime, they should be made to leave.

Distrust of politicians: Using this card, please tell me on a score of 0-10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out. 0 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust . . . politicians?

Distrust of the EU: Using this card, please tell me on a score of 0-10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out. 0 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust . . . the European Parliament?

Dissatisfaction with national economy (i.e. socio-tropic evaluation): On the whole how satisfied are you with the present state of the economy in [country]?

Unconcerned about the environment: Using this card, please say to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements . . .
 Modern science can be relied on to solve our environmental problems.

Major parties of the left: Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs (SPÖ, Austria); Socialdemokratiet i Danmark (SD, Denmark); Socialistische Partij (SP, Flanders); Parti Socialiste (PS, France); Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA, Netherlands); Det Norske Arbeiderparti (DNA, Norway); Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz (SDP, Switzerland).

Major parties of the right 1: Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP, Austria); Venstre (V, Denmark); Christelijke Volkspartij (CVP, Flanders); Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF, France); Christen Democratisch Appèl (CDA, Netherlands); Høyre (H, Norway); Christlich-Deemokratische Volkspartei der Schweiz (CDV, Switzerland).

Major parties of the right 2: Konservative Folkeparti (KF, Denmark); Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten (VLD, Flanders); Rassemblement pour la République (RPR, France); Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD, Netherlands); Kristelig Folkeparti (KrF, Norway); Freisinnig-Demokratische Partei der Schweiz (FDP, Switzerland).

Appendix B

Test Statistics and Constants for Multinomial Probit Models Estimated Separately for Each Country

	Major Left		Major Right 1		Major Right 2		<i>N</i>	Wald Chi ²	<i>df</i>
	Constant	<i>SE</i>	Constant	<i>SE</i>	Constant	<i>SE</i>			
Austria	2.97***	0.42	2.93***	0.42	—	—	888	131.25***	12
Denmark	3.16***	0.40	1.89***	0.40	0.81	0.48	812	162.9***	18
Flanders	4.64***	0.67	4.52***	0.64	3.15***	0.63	584	132.48***	18
France	4.96***	0.75	4.58***	0.77	3.45***	0.87	538	192.46***	18
Netherlands	3.51***	0.37	3.36***	0.34	1.45***	0.37	1,269	246.10***	18
Norway	3.82***	0.37	1.82***	0.37	2.54***	0.39	1,008	246.06***	18
Switzerland	4.50***	0.52	1.91***	0.54	—	—	491	142.35***	12

****p* significant on .001 level.

Notes

1. For example, see Carter, 2005; Kitschelt, 1995; Norris, 2005.
2. Flanders is treated as a country here, because it has a separate party system.
3. See Cox (1997) for an argument about the role of grievances in institutionalist accounts.
4. An indicator of egocentric economic voting was tried and found to have no explanatory power. However, an indicator tapping grievances over increased international competition did not exist in the European Social Survey. The measures presented in the next section likely pick

up some aspects of this grievance, but the economic grievance model as a whole would possibly have performed better had such an indicator been included.

5. They find that protest voting is not an important explanation for populist right parties' success. This finding has recently been challenged (Belanger & Aarts, 2006).

6. See Rittberger (2005) and Scharpf (1999) for discussions of the European Union's democratic deficit.

7. See Ragin (2004) for an argument in support of this approach to case selection.

8. The disadvantage of the data used here is that it was collected 10 years after the breakthrough of most populist right parties (which took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s). An equally comprehensive test of breakthrough elections is not possible because we lack equally good data from this earlier period.

9. This is equivalent to keeping a pooled dataset and fitting interaction effects for all variables, but this way allows for more straightforward interpretation of coefficients.

10. A list of the major left and major right parties is in Appendix A. Some countries have two major right parties.

11. Because the Independence of Irrelevant Alternatives assumption is violated, multinomial probit is preferred to multinomial logit. However, the results presented are so robust that the main conclusions do not depend on using multinomial probit rather than logit models.

12. See Appendix A for question wording for the dependent variable.

13. The estimated models have the following form: $\text{Probit}(y = 1) = (\beta_1 \times \text{Right-Wing Economic Preferences}) + (\beta_2 \times \text{Dissatisfaction With National Economy}) + (\beta_3 \times \text{Distrust of Politicians}) + (\beta_4 \times \text{Distrust of the European Parliament}) + (\beta_5 \times \text{Unconcerned About Environment}) + (\beta_6 \times \text{Restrictive Immigration Policy Preferences}) + \text{Constant} + \text{Error}$. Although sociodemographic characteristics are used as control variables in some studies, this is not done here, because sociodemographics explain little variance once attitudes have been included in the model. Superfluous control variables is particularly undesirable in this context because the number of respondents that voted for the populist right is limited.

14. As is seen in Appendix A, the operationalization of the green politics measure is not ideal, although it is the best measure available in the survey. Our confidence that the chosen measure gets at relevant environmental policy grievances is strengthened in that the measure does predict green party voting in separate tests conducted.

15. These predictions are based on the results of a binomial logit model using country dummies and robust standard errors. The dependent variable is binary (vote for the populist right-not vote for the populist right). The full results of this model are available from the author on request.

References

- Abedi, Amir. (2002). Challenges to established parties: The effects of party system features on the electoral fortunes of the anti-political-establishment parties. *European Journal of Political Research*, 41, 551-583.
- Andersen, Jørgen Goul. (1992). Denmark: The Progress Party—Populist neo-liberalism and welfare state chauvinism. In Paul Hainsworth (Ed.), *The extreme right in Europe and the USA* (pp. 193-205). London: Pinter.
- Anderson, Christopher J. (1996). Economics, politics, and foreigners: Populist party support in Denmark and Norway. *Electoral Studies*, 15(4), 497-511.
- Belanger, Eric, & Aarts, Kees. (2006). Explaining the rise of the LPF: Issues, discontent, and the 2002 Dutch election. *Acta Politica*, 41, 4-20.

- Bergh, Johannes. (2004). Protest voting in Austria, Denmark, and Norway. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 27(4), 367-389.
- Betz, Hans-Georg. (1994). *Radical right-wing populism in Western Europe*. New York: St. Martin's.
- Carter, Elisabeth. (2005). *The extreme right in Western Europe: Success or failure?* Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Cox, Gary W. (1997). *Making votes count: Strategic coordination in the world's electoral systems*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Dalton, Russell J., Flanagan, Scott, & Beck, Paul Allen. (Eds.). (1984). *Electoral change in advanced industrial democracies: Realignment or dealignment?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Della Porta, Donatella, & Mény, Yves. (Eds.). (1997). *Democracy and corruption in Europe*. New York: Pinter.
- Downs, Anthony. (1957). *An economic theory of democracy*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Esping-Andersen, Gösta. (1999). Politics without class: Postindustrial cleavages in Europe and America. In Herbert Kitschelt, Peter Lange, Gary Marks, and John D. Stephens (Eds.), *Continuity and change in contemporary capitalism* (pp. 293-316). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Gibson, Rachel Kay. (2002). *The growth of anti-immigrant parties in Western Europe*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen.
- Golder, Matt. (2003a). Electoral institutions, unemployment and extreme right parties: A correction. *British Journal of Political Science*, 33(3), 525-534.
- Golder, Matt. (2003b). Explaining variation in the electoral success of extreme right parties in Western Europe. *Comparative Political Studies*, 36(4), 432-466.
- Held, David. (1999). *Global transformations: Politics, economics and culture*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Hood, Christopher. (1998). *The art of the state: Culture, rhetoric, and public management*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon.
- Inglehart, Ronald. (1977). *The silent revolution: Changing values and political styles among Western publics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Inglehart, Ronald. (1997). *Modernization and postmodernization: Cultural, economic, and political change in 43 societies*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Ivarsflaten, Elisabeth. (2005). The vulnerable populist right parties. *European Journal of Political Research*, 44(3), 465-492.
- Iversen, Torben. (2001). The dynamics of welfare state expansion: Trade openness, de-industrialization, and partisan politics. In Paul Pierson (Ed.), *The new politics of the welfare state* (pp. 45-79). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Jackman, R. W., & Volpert, K. (1996). Conditions favouring parties of the extreme right in Western Europe. *British Journal of Political Science*, 26(4), 501-522.
- Jowell, Roger (and the Central Co-ordinating Team). (2003). *European Social Survey 2002/2003: Technical report*. London: City University, Centre for Comparative Social Surveys.
- Kitschelt, Herbert (in collaboration with Anthony J. McGann). (1995). *The radical right in Western Europe: A comparative analysis*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Klausen, Jytte. (2005). *The Islamic challenge: Politics and religion in Western Europe*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Lipset, Seymour Martin, & Rokkan, Stein. (Eds.). (1967). Cleavage structures, party systems, and voter alignments: An introduction. In *Party systems and voter alignments* (pp. 1-64). New York: Free Press.
- Lubbers, Marcel. (2001). *Exclusionistic electorates: Extreme right-wing voting in Western Europe*. Nijmegen, Netherlands: Katholieke Universiteit.

- Mudde, Cas. (2000). *The ideology of the extreme right*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Norris, Pippa. (2005). *Radical right: Voters and parties in the electoral market*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Offe, Claus. (1984). *Contradictions of the welfare state*. London: Hutchinson.
- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. (2004). *Trends in international migration 2004*. Paris: Author.
- Pierson, Paul. (1994). *Dismantling the welfare state? Reagan, Thatcher, and the politics of retrenchment*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Poguntke, Thomas. (1987). New politics and party systems: The emergence of a new type of party? *West European Politics*, 10(1), 76-88.
- Ragin, Charles C. (2004). Turning the tables: How case oriented research challenges variable oriented research. In Henry E. Brady & David Collier (Eds.), *Rethinking social inquiry* (pp. 123-138). New York: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Rittberger, Berthold. (2005). *Building Europe's Parliament: Democratic representation beyond the nation state*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Rohrschneider, Robert. (2002). The democratic deficit and mass support for an EU-wide government. *American Journal of Political Science*, 46(2), 463-475.
- Rydgren, Jens. (2005). Is extreme right-wing populism contagious? *European Journal of Political Research*, 44(3), 413-438.
- Sanchez-Cuenca, Ignacio. (2000). The political basis of support for European integration. *European Union Politics*, 1, 147-172.
- Scharpf, Fritz. (1999). *Governing in Europe: Effective and democratic?* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Sniderman, Paul M., Hagendoorn, Louk, & Prior, Markus. (2004). Predisposing factors and situational triggers: Exclusionary reactions to immigrant minorities. *American Political Science Review*, 98(1), 35-49.
- Sniderman, Paul M., Peri, Pierangelo, De Figueiredo, Rui J. P., Jr., & Piazza, Thomas. (2000). *The outsider: Prejudice and politics in Italy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Stone Sweet, Alec, Sandholz, Wayne, & Fligstein, Neil. (Eds.). (2001). *The institutionalization of Europe*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Suleiman, Ezra. (2003). *Dismantling democratic states*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (1995). Asylum under threat. *Refugees Magazine: Asylum in Europe*, 101. Retrieved September 18, 2006, from <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/doclist?page=publ&id=3b5696144>
- van der Brug, Wouter, & Fennema, Meindert. (2003). Protest or mainstream? How the European anti-immigrant parties developed into two separate groups by 1999. *European Journal of Political Research*, 42(1), 55-76.
- van der Brug, Wouter, Fennema, Meindert, & Tillie, Jean. (2000). Anti-immigrant parties in Europe: Ideological or protest vote? *European Journal of Political Research*, 37, 77-102.
- van der Brug, Wouter, Fennema, Meindert, & Tillie, Jean. (2005). Why some anti-immigrant parties fail and others succeed: A two-step model of aggregate electoral support. *Comparative Political Studies*, 38(5), 537-573.

Elisabeth Ivarsflaten is a postdoctoral prize research fellow in politics at Nuffield College, University of Oxford.