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The Interdependency between Party Isolation and Predictors of Sympathy with Parties of the Radical Right

Manuel Kleinert

Justus-Liebig University Giessen

Manuel Kleinert,

Justus-Liebig-University of Giessen, Institute of Sociology,

Karl-Glöckner-Str. 21E,

35394 Giessen,Germany

manuel.kleinert@sowi.uni-giessen.de

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ABSTRACT

1

2   Radical right-wing populist parties (RRP) have entered most western parliaments. Existing demand-

3   side research of party success has highlighted the crucial role of anti-immigration attitudes and

4   political dissatisfaction as their main drivers of support. Supply-side research often points at the

5   isolation (cordon sanitaire) such parties face in their respective parliament. In this research report, we

6   demonstrate that these perspectives can inform each other and differences in the parliamentary status

7   of the RRP can predict cross-country differences in attitudinal effects. We find that besides direct

8   effects, anti-immigration attitudes and political dissatisfaction vary considerably in their effect on RRP

9   sympathy. This variation coincides with the status of RRP in the respective country. In parliamentary

10   isolation, political dissatisfaction reinforces the effect of anti-immigration attitudes, while it reduces it

11   when the RRP is governing and turns insignificant if the RRP has a history of governing.

12

13   **Introduction**

14   The entry and success of radical right-wing populist parties (RRP) has received profound academic

15   attention from demand-side party research. There is considerable variation in this party family and its

16   electorate. However many studies converge around two particularly important aspects, which predict

17   support for RRPs: anti-immigration attitudes and political dissatisfaction. Anti-immigration attitudes

18   are often described as a core ideology, a lowest common denominator that unites voters behind the

19   party (Roodujin 2018). Consequently, many studies find strong correlations of anti-immigration

20   attitudes and RRP support (Rydgren 2007; Arzheimer 2018). Political dissatisfaction on the other hand

21   is sometimes linked to the theory of 'protest vote' (Klein, Heckert et al. 2018). At its core this

22   argument posits that citizens´ disapproval of current politics makes them more likely to support RRPs

23   (Schmitt-Beck 2017; Voogd, Dassonneville 2020). We conceive of political dissatisfaction as a

24   moderator of anti-immigration attitudes in their effect on sympathy for RRPs. This rationale is based

25   on the assumption, that anti-immigration attitudes become more salient as a predictor of party

26   preferences for citizens who are dissatisfied with the incumbent government (Kleinert 2021).

27

Regarding the supply side, it has been stressed that RRPs face unique challenges in many parliaments. In contrast to mainstream parties, which occasionally switch between opposition status and governing, RRPs are sometimes isolated through a cordon sanitaire imposed on them by the rest of the parliament. Meaning that no other party forms a coalition with them, even rejecting informal bounds and support. An own strand of research is concerned with when and how such strategies are pursued by mainstream parties (Heinze 2018, Karlsson 2021), the effects of such strategies on the RRPs (Rumens and Abts 2010, Pauwels 2011, Jonge 2021, Krause et al. 2022) as well as their effects on mainstream parties (Van de wardt 2015, Schumacher and van Kersbergen 2016, Abou-Chadi 2016, 2020, Gessler and Hunger 2021). However, largely missing are efforts to understand the effects of the parliamentary status of a RRP on citizens´ attitudes and support for these parties on an individual basis (instead of aggregated election results). An exception is the study of Han (2020) who´s findings suggest, that isolation of an RRP in fact increases support among parts of its electorate. In this case, it is especially reinforced for those who harbor authoritarian attitudes.

In this research note, we link demand-side attitudes and supply-side circumstances to explain cross-country differences in supporting the populist radical right. As mentioned, we expect the effect of anti-immigration attitudes to be moderated by a person´s level of political dissatisfaction. We include the supply-side perspective by predicting, that this effect depends on the level of integration of the RRP within the specific national party system. To illustrate these premises, imagine a citizen harboring high levels of anti-immigration attitudes, who is more and more frustrated, that the current government does not take sufficient action in his preferred direction. When looking for alternatives, parties that present themselves as the complete opposite of the incumbents and advocate tough migration policies may seem like a promising alternative. Parties which were previously included in the government may be less appealing as high expectations might have been disappointed bevor. Finally, RRPs who are in government at the moment are obviously not the right choice for someone disappointed with current policies. Isolated parties may therefore profit from their status in the sense that political dissatisfaction boosts the main motive – anti-immigration attitudes – for supporting them. For parties, which had been part of governments in the recent past, this effect becomes less relevant and for currently ruling

1 RRPs, higher levels of political dissatisfaction should not only directly decrease sympathy for this

2 party but also lower the effect of anti-immigration attitudes in predicting sympathy for them.

3

4 **Data and analytic strategy**

5 To test our assumptions, we use large-scale survey data from various sources and countries, collected

6 within the recent and ongoing 'fourth wave' (Krause, Cohen et al. 2022) of the European radical right.

7 The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES; CSES 2021) data set provides researchers with

8 high quality survey data, which has been collected independently during national election campaigns

9 in various countries and was later matched on an item-to-item basis. It provides the test cases of

10 Germany, Sweden, France, Austria, Italy, Finland, Belgium, Norway and Hungary[1]. The

11 RECONNECT survey (abbreviated as REC for this article; Plescia, Wilhelm et al. 2020) took place as

12 a centralized pre- and post-election survey focusing on the European Parliament Election in 2019. The

13 countries covered by this data set are Germany, France, Spain, Denmark, Italy, Poland and Hungary.

14 We use only the first of two waves in this data set, as many items we use were not asked in the second

15 round.

16

17 To represent our theoretical constructs, anti-immigration attitudes and political dissatisfaction we used

18 latent and manifest operationalizations. For the CSES data set, we were able to measure anti-

19 immigration attitudes as a latent construct of three indicators. These covered salient and often-

20 employed aspects of immigration. Specifically, the items asked respondents to state their position on

21 three statements, whether immigrants are good for the economy, harm the culture of the host country

22 or increase crime in the host society on a 5-point-Likert-scale.[2] We assessed political dissatisfaction as

23 attitudes towards the ruling government (Torcal 2011), using a single indicator targeting participants´

24 opinion on the performance of the current government since it took office on a 4-point scale. Our

25 dependent variable is a sympathy scale ("0 strongly dislike" – "10 strongly like") for the most relevant

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[1] Belgium is also included in this data set. However, preliminary analyses reveal, that some of the parties listed for Belgium by PopuList are negatively related to anti-immigration attitudes, thereby questioning established characteristics of RRPs. We believe that the unique party system of Belgium with its strong regional/autonomy cleavage may overlay the cleavage of immigration and therefore regard it as justified to exclude Belgium from our analyses.

[2] For Sweden, the third item was not asked, thus only the former two were used.

1   RRP of the respective country. To identify these RRPs, we referred to all parties mentioned in

2   PopuList (Rooduijn, van Kessel et al. 2019), and then took the one that achieved the greatest vote

3   share in the last election.[3] Note that this item allows the respondents to indicate their general

4   preference for the RRP party irrespective of their voting intentions (Gschwend, Juhl et al. 2018). This

5   is a subtle but beneficial distinction, given that citizens' voting intentions might plausibly shaped by

6   external factors (e.g., thresholds for parliamentary entry, coalition considerations; see van der Eijk,

7   van der Brug et al. 2006).

8

9   For the REC data set, we identified three items capturing respondents' views on immigration, which

10   we all integrated in our scale. The items were 11-point Likert-scales with verbalized ends. These were

11   "immigrants should adapt to [country]´s customs/immigrants should be free to keep their own

12   cutoms", "Immigrants do not/take away jobs from [country]s" and "Restrict/Maintain welfare benefits

13   access for immigrants". Political dissatisfaction asked for the respondents satisfaction with the current

14   national government "to date" on an 11-point scale. The dependent variable in this data set is an item

15   asking: "How probable is it that you will ever vote for [most relevant RRP of country]?" Similar to the

16   sympathy-scale we used for the CSES, we employ a metric-scale here, not a voting indicator, for the

17   above-mentioned reasons. For analyses with both datasets, we also included the same set of common

18   control variables. For a detailed list of these, please refer to table 2 in the appendix.

19

20   We employ these cross-sectional, cross-national data sets in structural equation models. These models

21   include definitions of the latent constructs, and the regression of all variables solely on the dependent

22   variable, the respondent´s sympathy for the RRP of the respective country. We also included an

23   interaction term of anti-immigration attitudes and political dissatisfaction in each model and allowed

24   the variances of both constructs to be correlated. To make the results more intuitive and accessible, we

25   plotted the relevant coefficients in a forest plot (Figure 1) separately for each country.

26

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[3] For a detailed list of all RRPs that were included, see Appendix.

1   We then grouped the countries by the status of the RRP in their countries at the time of data collection.

2   Each RRP was assigned one of three status levels. The first level is assigned if the party is isolated, or

3   subject to a cordon sanitaire at the time of data collection. In level two, the party was part of

4   government(s) before but not at the time of data collection and level three meant that the party was

5   part of the incumbent government during the field phase. This data was collected manually with

6   reference to the Parlgov data set (Döring, Huber et al. 2022). For detailed documentation please refer

7   to table 1 in the appendix.

8

9   **Results**

10   On the individual level, we find strong support for both our theoretically relevant variables (Figure 1).

11   Anti-immigration attitudes have a positive effect on RRP sympathy in all countries except Poland and

12   Hungary (REC). At first glance, these exceptions come as a surprise, given the strong anti-

13   immigration sentiment these parties (PiS and Fidesz) often express. However, these parties also

14   constitute majority parties in these countries, which are supported by a broad and diverse share of the

15   electorate. Therefore, single issues may be less relevant to their voters. In general, effects of anti-

16   immigration attitudes seem to be stronger in the CSES data set compared to the REC data set. This

17   may be related to the different items included in the measurement of this construct.

18

19   Regarding political dissatisfaction, results are more stratified, ranging from strong positive to strong

20   negative effects on RRP sympathy. Nevertheless, it is relatively trivial that we find negative effects for

21   Poland, Hungary, Italy (REC) and Hungary, Norway (CSES), since these countries were governed at

22   least partially by the RRPs we look at. Put differently, it is no surprise that respondents who are

23   satisfied with the all-PiS government in Poland also express sympathy for this party.

24

25   We now turn to the interaction/moderating effect of political dissatisfaction and anti-immigration

26   attitudes on RRP sympathy. As the results above already indicated, taking into account the perspective

27   of parliamentary/governing status when interpreting cross-country differences proves valuable. In fact,

28   we find strong support for our theoretical assumption, that political dissatisfaction reinforces or lowers

the positive effect of anti-immigration attitudes on sympathy for RRPs depending on the parliamentary status of the party. For our overall sample of countries, RRPs were isolated at the time of the survey in Germany, France and Sweden in the CSES, and in Germany, France and Spain in the REC data. As one can also infer from Figure 2, it is exactly for those – and only those countries – where we find positive (reinforcing) effects of the interaction term. Not part of the current government but of previous, were the RRPs in Austria, Finland, Italy (all CSES) and Denmark (REC). It is this group of countries, for which we find no significant effect of the interaction term. In Norway and Hungary (CSES), Poland, Italy and again Hungary (REC) RRPs were in government at the time of field period. For these countries, political dissatisfaction lowers the effect of anti-immigration attitudes on RRP sympathy.

Particularly interesting are the cases of Italy and Denmark. Italy is the only country for which we can make a comparison between different status´ of the RRP we investigate. Lega was part of previous governments but not of the current when data for the CSES was collected. However, shortly afterwards it constituted a major participant in the government, which hold also during the field phase of the REC data set. This switch from opposition to government benches is reflected in our results as the moderation effect for Italy moves from narrowly insignificant to significantly negative between these two observations. Denmark (REC) appears as a bit odd, fitting our predicted schema only by a narrow margin and showing a negative effect for political dissatisfaction. Meaning that those who were rather satisfied with governmental performance were also more likely to report positive evaluations of the RRP. The respective party, 'Dansk Folkepartiet', was not formally part of the government but informally supported a right-wing government during the time of data collection, thereby constituting a unique and exceptional status among the parties in our data sets. Therefore this case fits theoretically as well as empirically between two levels we formally specified (not in government but also not isolated vs. in government).

Taken together, these results indicate that the extent of parliamentary exclusion or inclusion, a supply-side characteristic of the party translates to differences in demand-side predictors of party sympathy.

While anti-immigration attitudes – in line with previous research – proves to be a nearly universal explanatory factor for higher RRP sympathy, the results for political dissatisfaction are mixed. As one would expect, sympathizers of an RRP also approve of the government if the RRP is part of it and rather disapprove of it if the RRP is not included in the incumbent administration. However, we also find that these variables influence each other contingent on the parliamentary status of the party. Higher levels of political dissatisfaction increase the salience of anti-immigration attitudes as a reason to support RRPs only in those countries where these parties operate under a cordon sanitaire in parliament. When the party is not isolated but also not part of the current government, these variables are rather independent of each other, resulting in an insignificant moderation term. For countries where the RRP governs, higher dissatisfaction even decreases this issue-related support for a RRP.

Conclusion

In this research note we investigated how well-known explanatory demand-side factors of RRP sympathy, anti-immigration attitudes and political dissatisfaction jointly influence each other and how this interaction depends on the parliamentary status of the RRP in question. We use two independent cross-sectional data sets including totaling 15 unique country observations to test our theoretical assumptions. As previous research of the field also highlighted, anti-immigration attitudes are a sound direct predictor of RRP sympathy. Barely surprising, the effect of political dissatisfaction differs dependent on the governmental status of the RRP. However, as one of the first studies, we also investigate how moderating effects may be contingent on the parliamentary status (Han 2020). We find that the reinforcing relationship between political dissatisfaction and anti-immigration attitudes in their effect on RRP sympathy is only positive in countries where the RRP is politically isolated in the parliament (cordon sanitaire). When the party was in government previously, the effect turns insignificant and finally switches to significantly negative when the party is in government.

We used broad and independent data to cross-validate our theoretical argument, however, we also acknowledge caveats in our research design. Our study was based on cross-sectional data only. Therefore, we cannot assess the temporal precedence of our key constructs and all our results should

be regarded as merely correlational. Due to the observational character of our data we also cannot exclude the risk that some third undetermined factor is causing the relationships we observe. Nevertheless, we accounted for important control variables known from previous research in order to reduce this potential bias. In addition, this research shares the limitation of many secondary analyses of survey data, such that the indicators available were not ideal for the current research. For example, some constructs were assessed only by single indicators, which might increase the influence of random measurement error. However, despite these shortcomings, we believe that the strong and unequivocal results across all country cases we investigated testifies to the generalizability of our findings.

Our results inform the salient and growing body of research investigating established parties strategies to deal with RRPs in parliament. So far efforts have been concentrated on investigating how isolation, adapting and accompanying strategies of competitors have influenced electoral results on the macro level (Pauwels 2011) and direct trajectories to support of RRPs on the individual demand-side level (Abts 2015). However, with few exceptions (Han 2020; Muis, Brils et al. 2021), previous research lacked to take into account the subgroup level. This is, specifying how such party positions influence different parts of the electorate. We demonstrated, that even the well-established factor anti-immigration attitudes can be substantially less important in predicting RRP sympathy once the level of political dissatisfaction of the respondent and the parliamentary status of the RRP is taken into account. In that sense, future research might be well advised to regard demand and supply side factors impartially and integrate both perspectives in order to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding for support of RRPs.

1   **FIGURES AND TABLES**
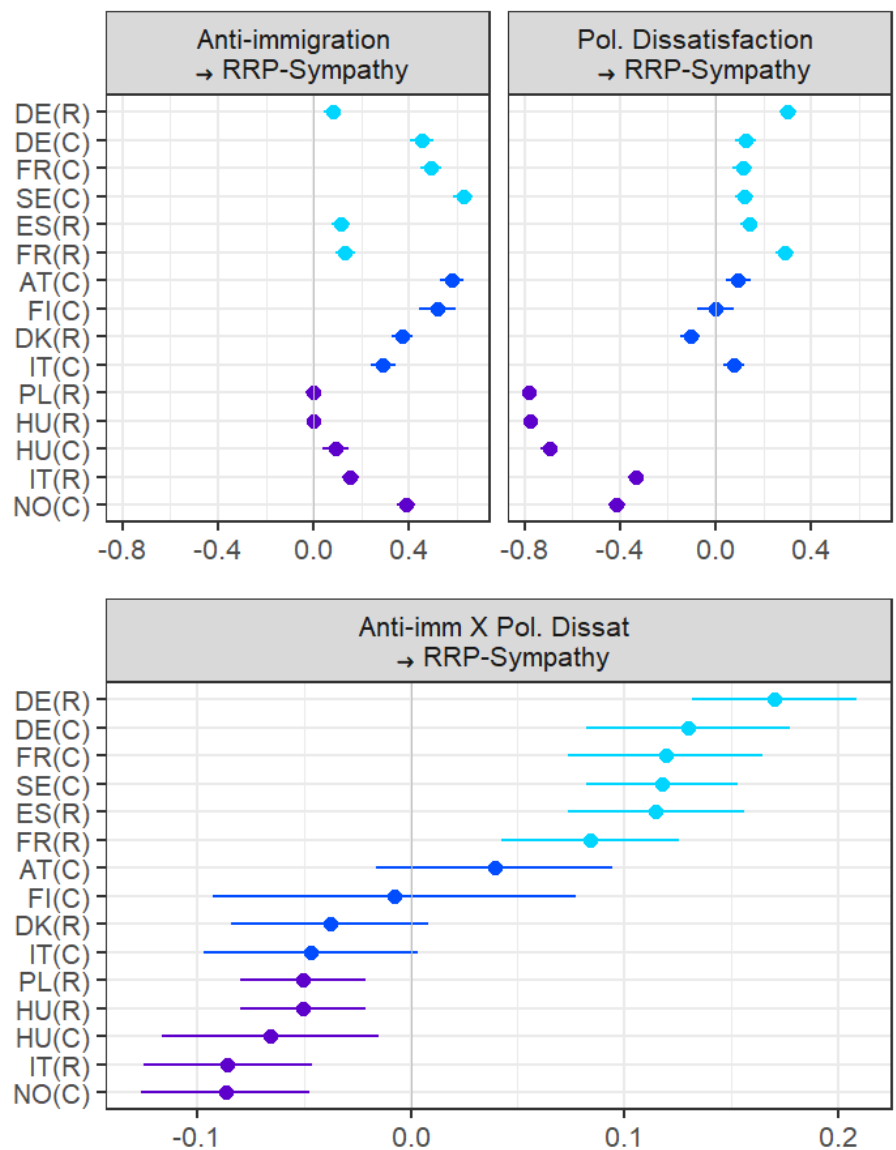
2

3   Figure 1: Forest plot visualizing standardized results of multivariate multi-group structural equation

4   models. The plots are separated by variables and grouped by countries within each plot. Letters in

5   parentheses indicate the origin of the data, C for the CSES data set, R for the REC data set. The order

6   of the countries follows the position of the RRP and is furthermore highlighted by colors: light blue

7   denotes countries in which the RRP is isolated, dark blue dots are used for countries in which the RRP

8   was part of a cabinet or supported a minority government before. Purple indicates countries in which

9   the RRP was governing during the fieldwork period.

10

11
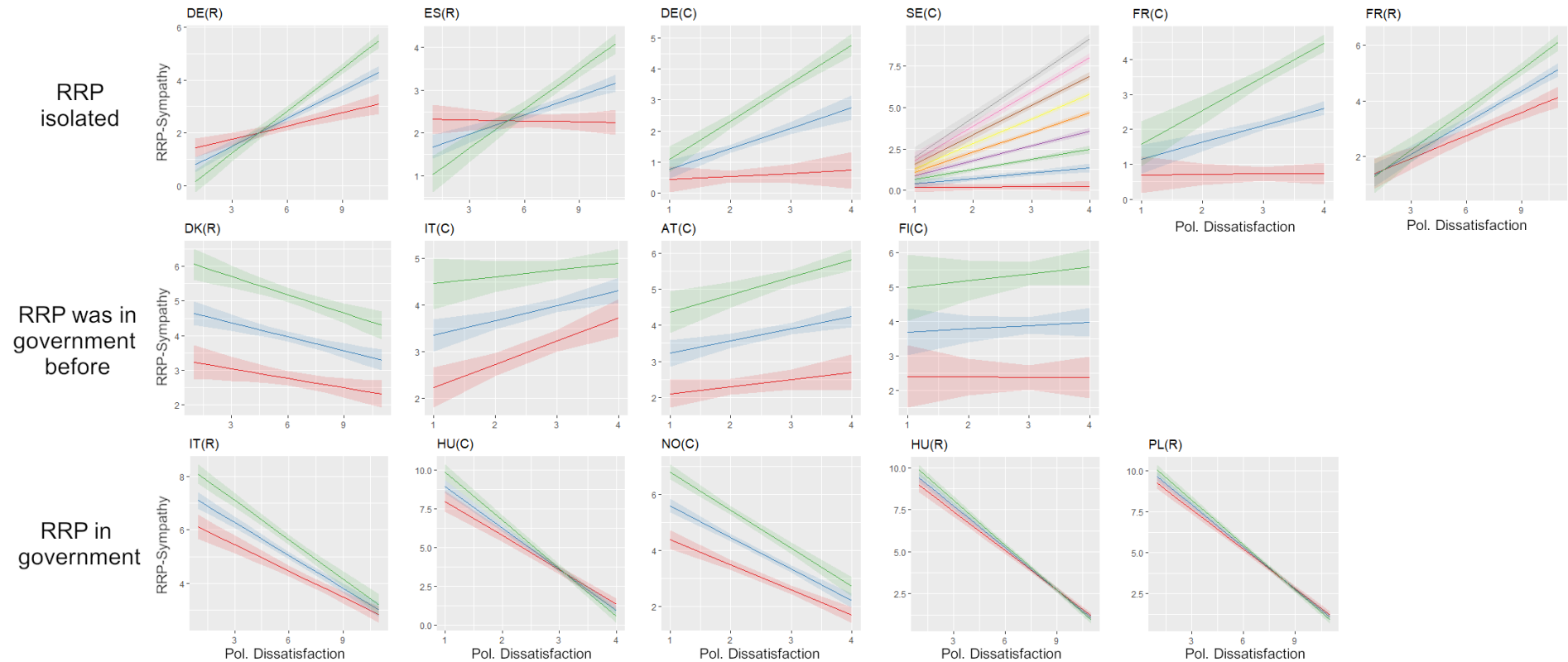
1

2 Figure 2: These charts show the effect of dissatisfaction on sympathy for the RRP for different levels of anti-immigration attitudes (blue = arithmetic mean, red =

3 mean -1SD, green = mean +1SD). Letters in parentheses refer to the data set (C for CSES, R for RECONNECT). For Sweden (C) the index of anti-imigration

4 attitudes misses one variable, thus it has only nine levels, which are all displayed by different colors (red = lowest, grey = highest). The countries are grouped in

5 rows by the status of the RRP in the respective country, as indicated at the left of the panels.

Country	Data	n	Fieldwork period	RRP in gov.	Notes
Austria	CSES	1203	19.10.2017-30.11.2017	0	FPÖ included in government shortly after field period
Denmark	REC		02.04.2019-19.04.2019	0	DF supports Conservative-right minority government
Finland	CSES	1598	17.04.2019-05.10.2019	0	Ps previously in government
France	CSES	1830	09.05.2017-23.05.2017	-1	FN in isolation
France	REC		03.04.2019-15.04.2019	-1	FN in isolation
Germany	CSES	2032	25.09.2017-30.11.2017	-1	AfD in isolation
Germany	REC		04.04.2019-16.04.2019	-1	AfD in isolation
Hungary	CSES	1208	23.04.2018-05.05.2018	1	Fidesz in government
Hungary	REC		03.04.2019-22.04.2019	1	Fidesz in government
Italy	CSES	2001	08.03.2018-02.05.2018	0	New Government including RRP (Lega) was formed shortly after field period
Italy	REC		04.04.2019-15.04.2019	1	Lega in government
Norway	CSES	1792	20.09.2017-16.10.2017	1	FrP in government
Poland	REC		02.04.2019-18.04.2019	1	PiS in government
Spain	REC		03.04.2019-15.04.2019	-1	VOX in isolation
Sweden	CSES	3784	10.09.2018-06.11.2018	-1	SD in isolation

1

2 Table 1: Table listing countries and status of RRPs at the time of data collection. Variable 'RRP in

3 government' was determined based on the Parlgov data set (Döring, Huber et al. 2022).

	RECONNECT	CSES
yearborn/ age	W1_Q1b Age	E2001_Y Year of birth
female	W1_Q2 Male is 1, Female is 2.	E2002 Male is 1, female is 2. Others coded as missing.
edu	W1_Q_edu	E2003
rile	W1_Q16 Inverted from original variable.	E3020 Inverted from original variable.
unemp	W1_Q75 4 and 5 coded as 1, 0 for else.	E2006 5 coded as 1, 0 for else. Austria: 10 coded as 1.
deprivation	W1_Q79	E2010
anti_immA	W1_Q39_3 Inverted from original variable.	E3005_3
anti_immB	W1_Q39_4 Inverted from original variable.	E3005_4 Inverted from original variable.
anti_immC	W1_Q39_9 Inverted from original variable.	E3005_5 Inverted from original variable. Not asked in SE.
dissat	W1_Q11 Inverted from original variable.	E3009 Neutral center category in Norway and Finland coded as missing.
rrp_sym	W1_Q57_XX_Y XX is country number (10-70), Y is party number (1-6). For variable-country matching see selected RRPs in Table 3.	E3017_A[-I] For variable-country matching see selected RRPs in Table 3.

4 Table 2: Variables used in analyses by data set.

1

Country	Popu-List lists…	CSES variable	RECONNECT variable
Austria	FPÖ	E3017_C	-
	BZÖ	-	-
Denmark	DF	-	W1_Q57_60_1
	NB	-	-
	FrP	-	-
Finland	Ps (True Finns)	E3017_B	-
France	FN/RN	<u>E3017_B</u>	W1_Q57_20_6
	DLR/DLF	E3017_F	-
Germany	AfD	E3017_C	W1_Q57_10_6
Greece	EL	-	-
	LAOS	-	-
	POLAN	-	-
Great Britain	UKIP	E3017_E (all missing)	-
Hungary	Fidesz	<u>E3017_A</u>	<u>W1_Q57_40_6</u>
	Jobbik	E3017_B	W1_Q57_40_1
	Fi+KNDP	-	-
	MIEP	-	-
	MH	-	-
Italy	LN	<u>E3017_E</u>	<u>W1_Q57_70_6</u>
	FdI	E3017_C	W1_Q57_70_5
	LAM	-	-
Norway	FrP	E3017_C	-
Poland	PiS	-	<u>W1_Q57_50_4</u>
	Kukiz`15	-	W1_Q57_50_5
	LPR	-	-
	X	-	-
Portugal	CH	E3017_G (all missing)	-
Spain	VOX	-	W1_Q57_30_5
Sweden	SD	E3017_C	-
	NyD	-	-
Switzerland	SVP	E3017_A (all missing)	-
	LdT	E3017_H (all missing)	-
	FPS	-	-
	MCR	-	-

2

3 Table 3: Table of RRPs defined by Popu-List as farright and populist and their availability as

4 sympathy scale in CSES data set. If two were available in CSES, the more relevant with regard to vote

5 share in the latest election was selected (underlined).

6

7

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