

The Norwegian Progress Party in the European Context: Not Only Young Men Drive the Electoral Success of Right-Wing Populist Parties

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Author: [Alexander Verdoes](#), Researcher ESS Norway

INTRODUCTION

The Norwegian Progress Party (FrP) has obtained a record-high vote share in the 2025 elections, polling at 23.9%, 12.3 percentage points more than in 2021. Moreover, the FrP has become the largest right-wing party in these elections, something that has not occurred since 2009. The FrP is considered a right-wing populist party, and similar parties across Europe have recently gained substantial electoral support. Before the elections, considerable attention was paid to the growing gap between young men and young women, with the former being much more likely to vote for the FrP, while young women have become more left-wing. In this short note, we adopt a comparative approach to examine the extent to which younger generations, and especially young men, are more likely to support right-wing populist parties in 18 Western European countries, and how Norwegian voters compare with voters elsewhere in Europe. In addition, we assess the extent to which young male voters have contributed to the recent electoral success of right-wing populist parties.

DATA AND METHOD

We use the European Social Survey (ESS) to study whether young men have become more likely to vote for right-wing populist parties and to what extent this has contributed to their success in Western Europe. The ESS documents the background, attitudes, and electoral behavior of the population. Our analysis includes all Western European countries that participated in the ESS at least once (Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, Great Britain, Greece, Ireland, Iceland,

Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and Sweden). Since 200X, the ESS has fielded 11 survey rounds. Across these 18 countries, a total of 326,787 respondents were interviewed over 20 years, of whom 204,599 reported voting in the last national election. We focus on these voting respondents, code their vote choices, and align the parties with the *PopuList*,¹ which provides an expert-coded classification of populist parties across Europe. This list includes both left-wing populist parties (e.g., Rødt) and right-wing populist parties (e.g., FrP). In our analysis, we exclude left-wing populist parties and focus only on right-wing populist parties.

RESULTS

First, we observe that there has always been a gender gap in support for right-wing populist parties in Europe: men are consistently more likely to vote for them than women, and this gap has been increasing. While in the early 2000s this gap was between 2-3 percentage points, this gap has increased to 4-5% percentage points more recently. The FrP is no exception and throughout the studied period, men have always been more likely than women to vote for the party, meanwhile in Norway the gender gap fluctuates over time with men being about between 5-10 percentage points more likely to vote for the FrP.

When comparing generations over time, a clear European-wide trend emerges. In the early 2000s, about 5–8% of voters supported right-wing populist parties, with little variation across generations. By the late 2010s and early 2020s, this had increased to 16–18%, still without large generational differences. Norway, however, shows a different pattern. The FrP, established in the 1970s, already enjoyed higher levels of support in the early 2000s (around 15% across all generations). After the 2005 elections, when the FrP polled 22.1%, support among the youngest generation reached almost 33%, compared to 15% among the oldest generations and 22% among Generation X. Following these elections, FrP support fluctuated between 7.5% and 15% without notable generational gaps.

Turning to gender within generations, no major changes emerge beyond the patterns described above. Men have consistently been more likely than women to support right-

¹ Rooduijn, M., Pirro, A. L., Halikiopoulou, D., Froio, C., Van Kessel, S., De Lange, S. L., ... & Taggart, P. (2024). The PopuList: A database of populist, far-left, and far-right parties using expert-informed qualitative comparative classification (EiQCC). *British Journal of Political Science*, 54(3), 969-978.

wing populist parties, and support has increased across both genders and generations. In the latest ESS round, however, a clear gender gap is visible among Generation Z: about 20% of young men supported right-wing populist parties, compared to around 12.5% of young women. A similar gender gap can be found among the oldest generations and Generation X, whereas among Baby Boomers and Millennials the gap was smaller (around 3–4%). Thus, while Generation Z shows a noticeable gender divide, this is not unique to them. In Norway, however, the 2021 election revealed a smaller gap: about 8% of Generation Z men voted for the FrP, compared to about 2% of women. Among older generations, support was higher, roughly 10% of male Baby Boomers and Generation X voters supported the FrP in 2021, while support among women ranged from 2% to 8%. It should be noted, however, that the most recent ESS data only cover those eligible to vote in the 2021 election. For Generation Z, this includes only a small group of voters. It is thus possible and, given the recent studies focusing on young voters, highly likely that the gender gap among first-time voters in 2025 has increased substantially.

Finally, we assess to what extent the recent success of right-wing populist parties can be attributed to generational renewal and young men's support. In Europe, young men make up about 5% of the current voter base of right-wing populist parties, which still draw most of their support from mainly men from older generations. In Norway, the picture is similar after the 2021 elections: about 5% of FrP voters were men from Generation Z, while male Baby Boomers and Generation X together accounted for roughly 45% of the FrP electorate. This suggests that while generational replacement brings in new male voters, right-wing populist parties continue to rely heavily on older generations.

CONCLUSION

Overall, support for right-wing populist parties in Europe has increased across all age groups and both genders. Gender gaps are visible in all generations, with a particularly pronounced gap among Generation Z in the most recent ESS data. Norway stands out from the rest of Europe primarily because the FrP has long been an established party and therefore did not undergo the steep growth experienced by newer right-wing populist parties elsewhere. Notably, after the 2005 *Stortingsvalg*, younger voters were far more likely to support the FrP than older generations, though no clear gender gap was observable at that time.

To fully understand the recent electoral success of right-wing populist parties in Europe, it is not enough to focus solely their support among young men. While it is important to understand why young men are more likely to vote for right-wing populist parties, the growing salience of new political divides has mobilized support across all age groups.