Do left-wing governments fuel far-right success?

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August 17, 2023

Abstract

In the last decades support for the far right has surged in countries all over the world. One of the explanations of this success alludes to voters' reaction to the policies implemented by mainstream parties, although it is unclear which are more likely to fuel their advance. In this paper we investigate the causal effect of the partisanship of the incumbent government on the electoral results of far-right parties. To do that, we use a threefold empirical strategy, combining cross-country over time comparative data, quasi-experimental RDD evidence in the case of Spain, and individual-level survey data to test the mechanisms behind the main effect. Overall, our results provide support for the thesis that radical-right success is the result of a backlash against left-wing governments and policies. The implications of these findings are important for democratic politics, as they raise the question of whether mainstream parties can do something to avoid this backlash or, rather, it is an inescapable consequence of how political competition in democracies works.

1 Introduction

Support for the far right has substantially increased in the last 20 years in many countries around the world, and many factors have been said to contribute to this recent success (for a review, see Golder 2016). Often, researchers seek to understand the role that mainstream parties play in fostering radical-right success. For example, the groundbreaking work of Meguid (2005) highlighted that the issue strategies of mainstream parties can determine the electoral fortunes of radical-right parties, while Ziblatt (2017) shows that the behavior of mainstream right politicians was key in determining the fate of the authoritarian right in Europe's pre-World War II democracies. Broader questions underlying these empirical analyses are whether –and which– mainstream actors are to blame for the rise of radical challengers and whether this rise could have been prevented.

In this paper, we focus on the partisan composition of governments and its effect on radical right success. Our research question is: does radical right support increase more when voters are exposed to moderate right or to moderate left governments and policies, and what are the mechanisms behind this effect?

There are good reasons to expect both types of effects. For one, existing evidence indicates that many voters of the far right previously voted for mainstream right parties (Abou-Chadi et al. 2021). When the mainstream right is in power, voters may feel disillusioned about the mainstream right and what it has been able to deliver. But does that mean that mainstream right governments and the policies they implement pave the way for the radical right?

There also exist convincing reasons to believe the opposite, that left governments and policies fuel far-right success. First, there could be ideological backlash, as conservative voters might respond to left-wing policies by moving toward the extremes and defending more radical points of view in reaction to the implementation of progressive policies (Bischof and Wagner 2019). Second, left-wing policies might increase the salience of issues in which the far right has a comparative advantage with respect to the mainstream right;

non-economic, cultural issues that the far right "owns" (Dahlström and Sundell 2012). Third, even holding constant voters' positions and salience perceptions, left-wing policies are likely to move the status quo toward the left, and conservative voters (even moderate ones) could opt for more extreme alternatives to compensate and more effectively return the status quo closer to their preferences (Kedar 2005). Finally, when the moderate left governs, this prevents the mainstream right from benefiting from an incumbency advantage that would help holding together the conservative vote and avoid leaks to the far right.

Our empirical strategy to causally identify the effect we are interested in is threefold.

First, we descriptively show the correlation between the ideological position of the incumbent and the performance of the radical right in the following election. We use the ParlGov database to provide descriptive comparative evidence across countries over time of the relationship between who is in government at time t and election results of the far right at time $t + 1$.

Second, we use data from close local elections in Spain where the likelihood of left-wing policies discontinuously change when the main conservative party wins/loses elections by a narrow margin. Through a regression-discontinuity approach, we examine whether support for the radical right party Vox depends on who is in government in the municipality. This allows us to provide quasi-experimental evidence on the effect of exposure to left policies at the local level on support for the far right at the national level.

Third, we conducted a survey in Spain to delve into the mechanisms underlying the relationship between the ideological position of the incumbent government and the likelihood of voting for the far right. We ran this survey using an original sampling strategy: respondents living in municipalities that are close to the RDD cutoff. This will allow us to provide micro-level evidence on the mechanisms through which the main effect takes place.

Overall, we find that the radical right does better when the left is in government. This finding holds both in our descriptive cross-national analyses and in our RDD analysis

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of Spanish municipalities. Our individual-level survey indicates that the mechanism of ideological backlash is particularly likely to explain this effect.

2 Theoretical expectations

Radical right party success has been a core concern of political science research in the past decades. Accordingly, theories of its rise span the range of social scientific approaches, with the emergence of the radical right linked to factors ranging from deeper social and economic transformations on the one hand to short-term political tactics on the other (Golder 2016). One key question implicit in this research is whether anything can be done to limit the electoral appeal of these parties, and here researchers often focus on mainstream party actors and how their decisions may affect the success of the radical right.

Most research on the effects of mainstream party behavior on radical party success focuses on issue competition and the programmatic strategies of mainstream competitors. Building on the work of Meguid (2005), researchers have studied whether mainstream parties increase the appeal of radical competitors by accommodating, opposing or dismissing their core topics, such as immigration. Essentially, the debate revolves around the salience parties devote to key issues as well as the positions they take on them.

As far as salience is concerned, research has shown that the importance of the immigration issue helps to explain why the radical right succeeds (Dennison and Kriesi 2023). As a result, mainstream parties cannot but lose by talking more about immigration, as the increase in the salience of the issue helps the radical right (Dahlström and Sundell 2012). In terms of positions, there is a vibrant debate concerning whether mainstream parties can benefit from accommodating and adversarial positions on the radical right's key issues (Spoon and Klüver 2020; Abou-Chadi et al. 2022; Hjorth and Larsen 2022). More generally, mainstream party convergence tends to lead to radical party success (Spoon and Klüver 2019; Hübscher et al. 2023).

In this paper, our focus is on the role of governments and the policies they enact. One frequently voiced claim is that there is a backlash effect among voters when the opposing side is successful. Ignazi (1992) and Norris and Inglehart (2019) argue that radical right success results from a backlash against liberal values. Bischof and Wagner (2019) present related evidence of a backlash effect, showing that voters polarize when the radical right is successful. This effect is partly due to those on the left moving further to the extreme when they witness radical right success. In work focusing on Central and Eastern Europe, Bustikova (2014) shows that radical-right success in that region is a reaction to policies that strengthen minority rights.

Overall, this literature implies that the radical right will experience more success when the Left is in power, as voters will turn to this more radical option. Hence, we expect that radical right parties will obtain a higher vote share when the incumbent government is on the left than when it is on the right.

Four mechanisms may explain this pattern. Specifically, these are:

- Ideological backlash: The policies implemented by left-wing governments will lead to ideological and issue polarization among voters (Bischof and Wagner 2019). As voters on the right become more extreme, they are more likely to opt for the radical right rather than the moderate right.

- Cultural issue salience: Under left-wing governments, the public agenda is on average more centered on second-dimension, cultural issues. This favors radical right over moderate right parties (Bustikova 2014), as the former holds more popular positions on these topics, emphasizes these topics more and holds issue ownership over them.

- Compensation: Left-wing governments and the policies they implement will induce voters to see the moderate left parties and the status quo as further to left. This will lead voters to opt for the radical right over the moderate right as a more convenient option to balance out and compensate this shift (Kedar 2005).

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- Center-right valence: A left-wing government could benefit from an incumbency advantage (Liang 2013), while the moderate right will appear less capable of winning elections and entering government. As a result, voters will opt for the radical right rather than the moderate right.

The first two mechanisms can be seen as demand-side explanations, as they focus on how issue importance and positions among voters are affected by left-wing governments. The second two mechanisms are supply-side explanations to the extent that they posit that (perceptions of) the parties competing are affected by left-wing governments.

A competing expectation, which we will also test with our data, is that right-wing governments harm party support for the moderate right more than left-wing governments. The main reason for this is based on the cost of governing: parties in government tend to lose support over time (Paldam and Skott 1995). To the extent that voters are ideologically right-wing but dissatisfied with the current government, they may opt for the radical right rather than, say, switching ideological blocks and voting for the left (Bartolini and Mair 1990).
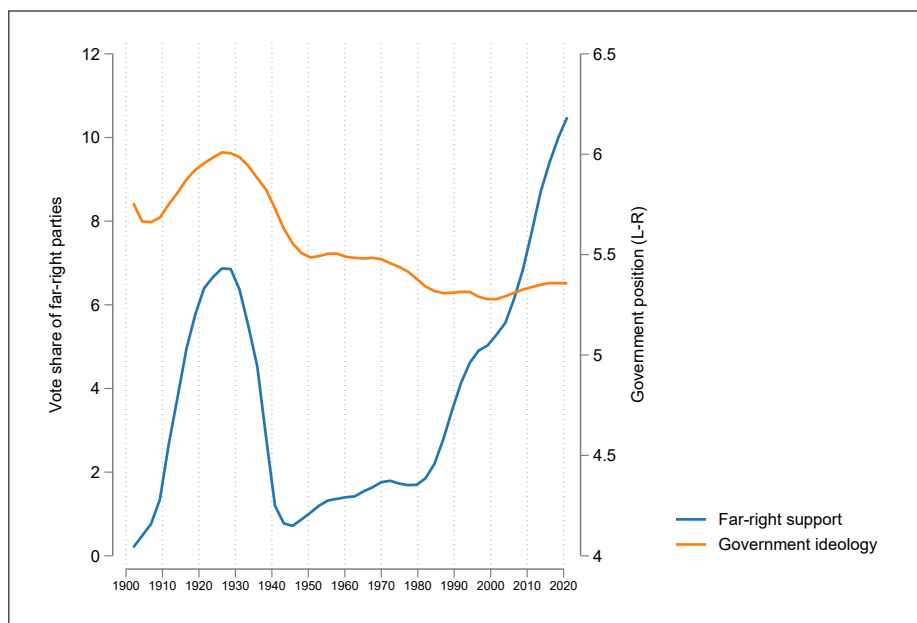
3 Comparative evidence

We first study the effect of the ideological position of the government on support for the far-right using comparative evidence across countries over time. To do that we use Döring et al.'s (2023) ParlGov data from all EU countries and most OECD democracies (37 countries), from 1904 to 2021.[1] To measure support for the far-right we use ParlGov's classification of parties into families based on their position in an economic (state/market) and a cultural (liberty/authority) left-right dimension classification, leading to eight party family categories: Communist/Socialist, Green/Ecologist, Social democracy, Liberal, Christian democracy, Agrarian, Conservative, and Right-wing. For each of the 854

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[1]The countries included are Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and United Kingdom.

democratic elections contained in the database, we add up the vote shares of the parties belonging to the latter category, *right-wing*, which essentially includes nationalist, fascist, and right-wing populist parties.[2] This is our outcome variable.

To measure the ideological position of the previous government we calculate the average left-right score of all the parties that were members of the government immediately preceding elections, weighted by their seat share contribution to the cabinet. We take the left-right position for each party from a time-invariant unweighted average of left-right scores from party expert surveys on a 0-10 scale compiled by ParlGov (Döring et al. 2023).[3].

Figure 1: Evolution of far-right support and government ideology over time

Note: Far-right support is calculated as the sum of vote shares of all far-right parties in each election and government ideology is measured as the average left-right position of all cabinet parties in the government in power when elections were held, weighted by seat share. Values are averages of all the available elections for each year.

In Figure 1 we show the evolution of far-right election results and government ideology since the early twentieth century until 2021, employing the measures described above.

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[2]See Table A1 in the appendix for a complete list of these parties, by country.

[3]The source expert surveys are Castles and Mair (1984), Huber and Inglehart (1995), Benoit and Laver (2006), and the Chapel Hill expert survey series (Bakker et al. 2015)

The pattern in support for the far right is clear: increasing until the 1930s, stable and low from the 1940s to the 1980s, and surging since then up to more than 10% of the total votes nowadays. The variation in the ideological position of the governments is also worth mentioning: on average, governments in the 1920s and 1930s were more right-leaning (reaching a 6 in a 0-10 scale), but quickly moved leftward after WWII, being rather stable since then. Of course, the countries for which we have data vary by year, and the averages hide a lot of heterogeneity across countries, but the plot shows a relationship between the two variables that is worth exploring further.

To further study the connection between government ideology and support for the far-right, we estimate OLS regression models of the following form:

$$FRSupport_{t,i} = \beta_1 FRSupport_{t-1,i} + \beta_2 PrevGov(L-R)_{t,i} + \gamma_i + \lambda_t + u_{t,i}$$

In this model $FRSupport_{t,i}$ is the sum of the percentage of votes obtained by far-right parties in election t and country i, $FRSupport_{t-1,i}$ is the lagged dependent variable, and $PrevGov(L-R)_{t-1,i}$ is the seat share weighted average left-right position of the parties that were members of the cabinet that was in power when election t was held in country i. In some specifications we also include a vector of country fixed effects γ_i and year fixed effects λ_t to account for any remaining heterogeneity across countries and years that might affect the relationship between the ideological position of the government and the election results of the far-right. We hence exploit variation over time within each country, net from potential country time-invariant and other temporal-specific confounders. Finally, $u_{t,i}$ refers to the error term.

We exclude caretaker governments from all the analyses and run the models in different samples: a full sample containing all countries and years, and restricted samples only considering i) elections after 1945, ii) parliamentary democracies, and iii) West European countries.

Table 1 summarizes the results from our analyses. The effect of the left-right position

is consistent across specifications, with more right-wing governments leading to poorer election results of the far right in the next elections. Support for the far right, therefore, seems to increase under left-leaning governments.[4]

Table 1: Effect of previous cabinet ideology on far-right support (comparative evidence)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Incumb. gov. L-R	-.333***	-.276**	-.388***	-.422***	-.325**	-.469***	-.474**
	(.123)	(.134)	(.134)	(.144)	(.137)	(.173)	(.185)
Lagged DV	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sample	All	All	All	All	Post-WWII	Parl.	West Eur.
N. of countries	37	37	37	37	37	29	20
N. of elections	854	854	852	852	710	715	608

Standard errors in parentheses
Note: OLS regression estimates. The outcome variable is the percentage of votes obtained by far-right parties. The key independent variable *Prev. cab. L-R* measures the position of the cabinet immediately preceding the election in a 0 to 10 left-right scale. $p<0.1$, $^{**} p<0.05$, $^{***} p<0.01$
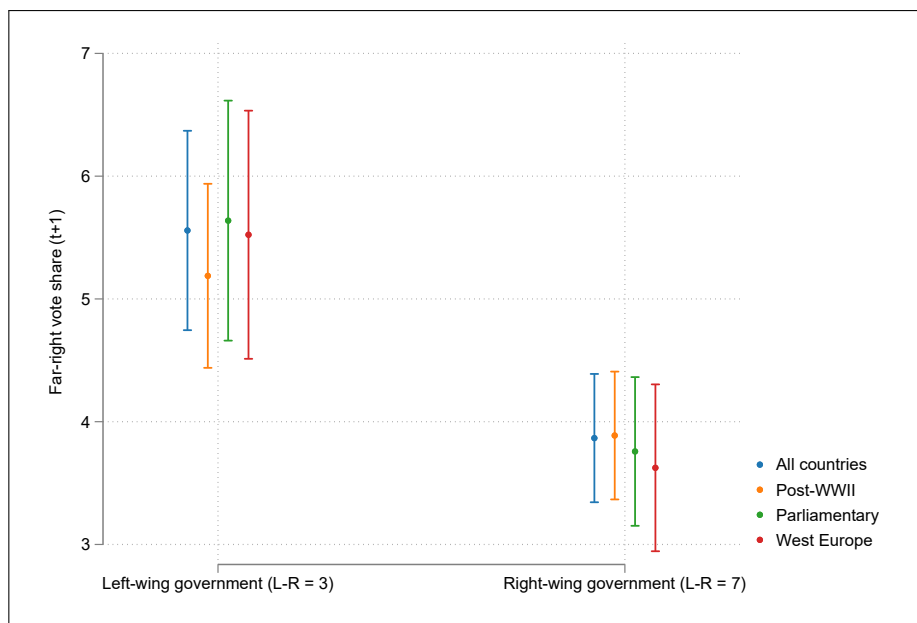
The magnitude of the association between the vote share of far-right parties and the ideological position of the previous government is illustrated in Figure 2. The predicted electoral support for the far-right when a right-wing government was in power (positioned at 7 in a 0-10 left-right scale) is less than 4%, but it increases almost 2 percentage points if elections were held under the rule of a left-wing government (positioned at 3). The magnitude of the effect is remarkably consistent whether we focus on the full sample or we focus on elections after WWII, parliamentary democracies, or West European countries.[5]

These results suggest that contexts where the left is in power are fertile grounds for far-right parties, who fare better in elections following a left-wing government than after a right-wing government was in office. However, even if the country and year fixed effects included in our estimations take care of some potential confounders of this effect, there

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[4]Table A2 in the appendix use an alternative coding of government ideology using an indicator variable that takes value '1' if the previous government had a weighted position below 5 on a 0-10 left-right scale, and '0' otherwise. Albeit a bit more inconsistent across specifications, the results largely hold: left-wing governments seem to raise support for the far right.

[5]Figure A1 in the appendix shows the similar predicted values with the categorical coding of left-wing governments.

Figure 2: Predicted far-right support after left-wing vs right-wing government (comparative evidence)

Note: Estimates from models 4, 5, 6, and 7 in Table 1.

could still be heterogeneity between contexts where the left or the right is more likely to govern, which at the same time might have an impact on the electoral prospects of the far right. We therefore take the above results as descriptive evidence suggestive of a relationship between left-wing governments and far-right success, across a large number of democracies over time. In the next section we aim to obtain a well-identified estimation of this effect, moving to the local politics of Spain as a testbed.

4 RDD evidence in Spain

To enhance the credibility of our estimation regarding the causal impact of left-wing governments on support for the far right, we now concentrate our analysis on local governments in Spain. By focusing on the formation of governments at the local level within a single country, we achieve two important objectives: 1) obtaining a substantial number of observations that provide adequate statistical power, and 2) effectively controlling for various potential confounding factors –such as institutional and cultural influences– that
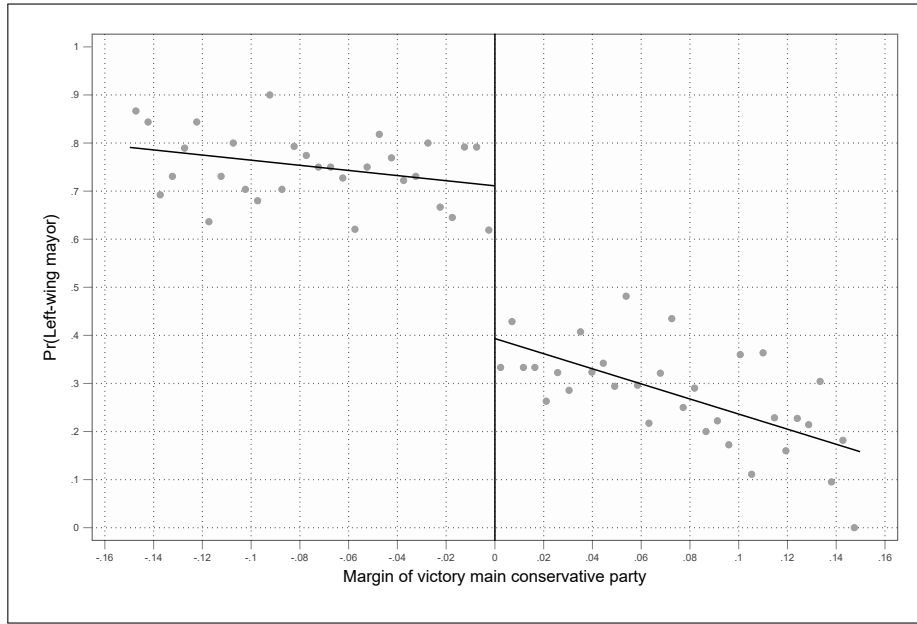
could affect the government formation process (Laver et al. 1987).

The local political context in Spain offers unique characteristics that are advantageous for our research design. Spain operates under a strongly decentralized political system with three tiers of government: national, regional, and local. Citizens elect local councils every four years in over 8,000 municipalities, employing a closed party list proportional representation (PR) system. These local elections are significant political events, with an average turnout above 70%. The PR system frequently results in situations where no single party holds an absolute majority of seats in the council. This triggers a negotiation period among the represented parties to elect the mayor, akin to the government formation process in traditional parliamentary democracies where the government requires the confidence of the majority of the parliament. Then, an investiture vote takes place, invariably, twenty days after the election. Importantly, if no candidate receives an absolute majority of favorable votes, the leader of the party that obtained the highest number of popular votes becomes the mayor, without the need for further support from other parties. Once the mayor is elected, she appoints the rest of the government, which can include members from the mayor's party or other parties.

In our identification strategy, we leverage the unique advantage provided by the Spanish local electoral system, which favors the party that receives the highest number of votes in forming the government. We focus on close elections in which the main conservative party in Spain, the *Partido Popular* (PP), narrowly either won or lost. To instrument our treatment variable –the presence of a left-wing mayor– we employ the margin of victory or defeat for the PP. Consequently, our key comparison is thus between municipalities where the PP barely lost (increasing the likelihood of a left-wing mayor) and municipalities where the PP barely won (reducing the likelihood of a left-wing mayor).

Figure 3 shows the first-stage of this fuzzy regression discontinuity design (RDD) approach for the 2015 local elections, which confirms the strength of the instrument (+32 percentage point change in the likelihood of having a left mayor for the 2015-2019 term, significant at $p < .001$).

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Figure 3: First-stage (Instrument strength)

Covariate balance around the cutoff and manipulation tests uphold the continuity assumption behind our RDD approach (see Figure B1 and Table B1 in the appendix).

Our analysis will examine support for Vox at the municipal level during the first general elections in which the party emerged as a viable contender. These elections took place in April 2019 and were repeated in November 2019 due to the failure of the government formation process. An alternative approach could have been to focus on Vox's results in the local elections held in May 2019. However, given the party's limited organizational structure and territorial presence at that time, Vox only ran in approximately 10% of the municipalities. Consequently, this strategy is not feasible for our study. Instead, we will utilize Vox's level of support in the 2019 general elections, measured at the municipal level, as an indicator of far-right support. Importantly, data for all Spanish municipalities are available for this election, allowing for comprehensive analysis.

Table 2 provides evidence of the main effect we are interested in. We see that support for Vox is between 4 and 5 percentage points higher in municipalities with a left-wing mayor (instrumented with a narrow defeat by the PP). The effect is therefore both large and statistically significant.

Complementary tests offered in the appendix confirm the robustness of key result. It

Table 2: Effect of left-wing mayor (2015-2019) on support for VOX (2019)

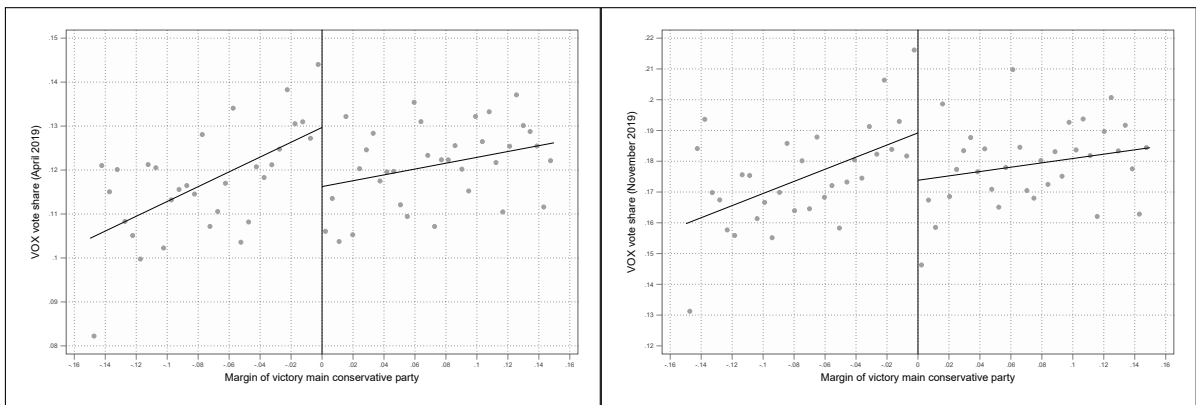|	Apr. 2019	Nov. 2019
Left mayor 2015 (2SLS)	0.042***	0.048**
	(0.015)	(0.020)
First-stage	-.317***	-.317***
Bandwidth	.15	.15
Effective N	1,647	1,647
N	4,699	4,700

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.

does not hinge on the choice of weights for observations (Table B2) or the size of the bandwidth (Figure B2). In addition, as shown in Table B3, falsification tests corroborate that prior far-right support is not affected by government formation processes occurred later.

Further evidence of this effect can be seen in Figure 4, which shows the results of the reduced-form of the instrumental variable approach (equivalent to a sharp RDD). The direct effect of a tight loss of the main conservative party is around 1.5 percentage points, both in April 2019 –when Vox obtained 10% of the votes nation-wide (left plot)– and in November 2019 –when support for Vox increased to around 15%–.

Figure 4: Reduced-form (Sharp RDD)

Interestingly, we find no systematic effect on the vote shares of other parties or turnout, which makes it difficult to adjudicate between the main effect being due to voters changing

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parties or due to the (de)mobilization of certain groups of voters (see Table B4 in the appendix).

Lastly, we also explore the possibility that (part of) the main effect is driven by a symbolic reaction of voters in response to the mere fact that a left-wing mayor has assumed office, irrespective of the specific actions, projects, or initiatives undertaken by the government during its term. Table B5 in the appendix shows the results of the same fuzzy RDD approach, but this time employing the results of the 2019 local elections –and subsequent government formation process– that took place shortly before the (repeated) general election in November. The results suggest that voters do not exhibit an immediate response to the identity of the governing party that reached office just five months prior. It appears that voters need more time to see the policies implemented by the government to react accordingly.

5   Individual-level evidence

We complement the results of this study through a third empirical strategy: the individual-level analysis. We conducted a survey in Spain to assess the relationship between exposure to left-wing governments and attitudes toward the far right. The survey was conducted in the first three weeks of May, just before the elections that all city councils held on May 28th that closed the 2019-2023 local electoral term. The timing of the survey allows us to capture whether having been exposed to a left-wing government at the local level has an impact on any of the four mechanisms we introduced in out theoretical framework.
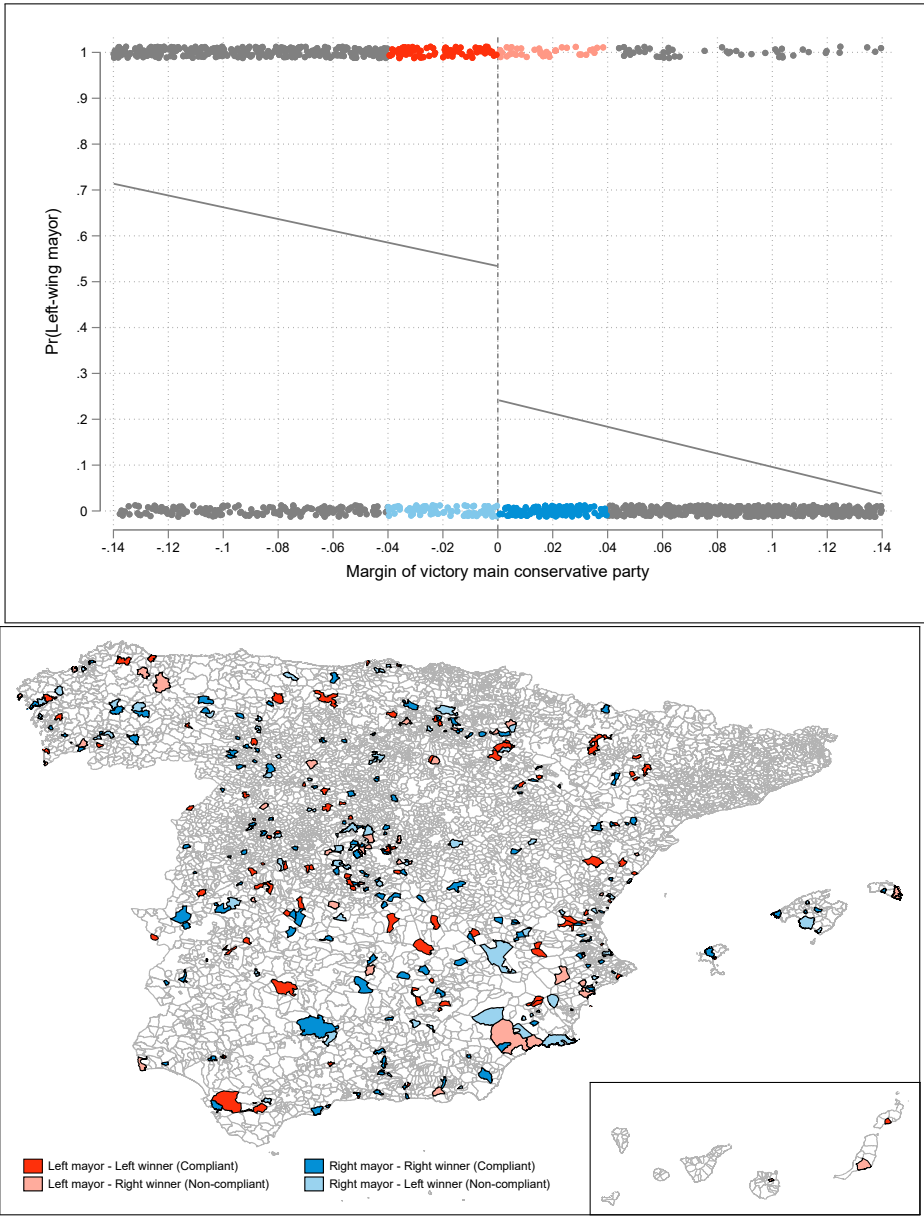
In order to delve into the mechanisms, we test if there is any relationship between the ideological position of the incumbent local government in which the respondents live and their ideological self-placement (*ideological backlash hypothesis*), perceptions of the salience of certain issues (*issue salience hypothesis*), beliefs about the status quo and the utility of extreme alternatives to change it (*compensational voting hypothesis*), and the opinions on mainstream right-wing parties' capacity to deliver the preferred policies

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(*valence hypothesis*).

To account for potential confounders of the relationship between the government in place in the municipality and its residents' attitudes toward the far right, our sampling strategy is based on the RDD approach of the previous section. We administer the survey to respondents that live in municipalities that are to the left and to the right of our RDD cutoff from the 2019 local elections, but within a small bandwidth (a margin of victory of the PP or a left wing government of ±4 percentage points). These municipalities are expected to be quite similar both in observable and unobservable characteristics. Figure 5 identifies the sampled municipalities with left-wing mayors (in red) and right-wing mayors (in blue). Darker colors indicate compliant municipalities –i.e. left-wing (right-wing) governments where the PP lost (won)– and softer colors refer to non-compliant municipalities –i.e. left-wing mayors where the PP won and right-wing mayors where the PP lost–. The map shows that that these municipalities are widely spread across the Spanish territory.

Following the mechanisms we proposed above, we first measure whether left-wing governments can create ideological backlash: with six survey items that measure political positions on a ten-point scale. Four of these items tap into economic position in the left-right dimension and the other four capture cultural issues. We create three measures: economic left-right ideology, cultural left-right ideology, and left-right ideology. The first two variables are measured in a scale of 0-30 (by adding the three corresponding variables), where higher values indicate more left-wing ideology. The economic left variable captures the degree of agreement with three statements in a 0-10 scale: *The government must increase spending to improve public services, even if it increased the deficit, Unemployment benefits should be reduced so that the unemployed have more interest in finding a job*, and *The government should regulate companies less so that they can generate economic activity*. All statements are recoded so that higher values indicate more pro-left positions. In the cultural dimension, a similar process is followed. The three statements are: *Policies of historical memory Historical memory only divide the Spanish people, Sometimes feminism*

Figure 5: RDD-based sample

has gone too far to achieve equality between men and women, and *The government must apply more measures to contain climate change*. Additionally, we also add up the scores of the economic and cultural dimensions in an aggregate measure of pro-left positions.

We capture issue salience by asking respondents about how important they find a battery of issues using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 –not important at all– to 5 –very important–. We create two variables: *left issues salience* captures how importantly are perceived some issues considered to be typically owned by the left in Spain (climate change, feminism and historical memory) while *right issues salience* captures the perception of salience of four issues owned by the right (immigration, security, and Spanish unity).

The third mechanism refers to whether voters use a more compensational logic when voting. This means that they are more likely to vote for a radical-right party to compensate that the status quo has moved to the left. We capture this with three variables. First, we asked respondents what was their perception about the ideological position of the PSOE, which is the main left-wing party and the one leading most of the left-wing municipal councils. This variable is measured in a 1-7 left-right scale [6] Second, citizens were also asked whether they agreed with the statement that local politics in their municipality was radicalized. Finally, we also ask whether respondents agree with the statement that *in politics it is necessary to be moderate to achieve what one wants.*[7]

Finally, the fourth mechanism captures whether a left-wing government erodes the valence dimension of the main moderate-right party. We measure this with two variables that ask whether the PP is well-prepared to govern nationally and whether it will have the opportunity to form the national government after the next elections.[8]

Having proposed these four mechanisms, our analysis regresses all these variables on the partisanship of the local level during the last four years. As covariates, all the models

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[6]The variable ranges from 1 –extreme left– to 7 –extreme right–.

[7]The response to both statements range from 1 –totally disagree– to 5 –totally agree–.

[8]Both variables are measured in a four-point scale. The first one ranges from 'The PP is a party that is not prepared at all to rule' to 'the PP is a party that is very well-prepared to rule'. The second one ranges from 'The PP is a party with little chances to rule' to 'The PP is a party with high chances of ruling'.

include gender, age, ideology (in a 0-10 left-right scale), political interest, and political information.

We run three types of models. In all of them the main independent variable is whether the local incumbent is a left-wing mayor. The first model only includes the compliant municipalities of our RDD and the second model includes all individuals, both from compliant and non-compliant municipalities. The final model also includes individuals from all municipalities, but the left-wing government treatment is instrumented with whether the PP was the most voted party in the 2019 local election.

Results are shown in Table 3. We only find systematic and robust evidence in favor of the first mechanism. The positions over typical issues that divide the Spanish right and left shift towards the right in municipalities where there has been a left-wing government during the last four years. It is important to emphasize that these results arise controlling for self-declared ideology. Hence, the results show that for a given ideology, individuals in municipalities where the left has ruled tend to ideologically backlash and hold more overall conservative positions on a variety of issues that structure the political agenda in Spain.

We do not find, however, evidence in favor of any of the other mechanisms. The rest of coefficients in Table 3 are generally insignificant and have inconsistent signs.

6   Concluding Remarks

Our results provide support for the thesis that radical-right success is the result of a backlash against left-wing governments and policies. This is the clear finding of our large-n descriptive analysis that correlates radical-right vote share and the ideology of the preceding government: the more left-wing a government, the greater the subsequent vote share of the radical right. The same result is obtained in our RDD analysis of Spanish municipalities: those municipalities where the PP narrowly lost see a greater Vox vote share in the subsequent national elections. Finally, our individual-level survey of Spanish

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Table 3: Individual-level mechanisms

Ideology

	Left (Economy)			Left (Cultural)			Left (Total)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Left mayor	-0.973**	-0.595*	-2.054**	-0.754*	-0.602*	-1.173	-1.727**	-1.197*	-3.227*
	(0.410)	(0.337)	(1.002)	(0.398)	(0.329)	(0.974)	(0.784)	(0.647)	(1.916)
Sample	Compl.	All	All	Compl.	All	All	Compl.	All	All
Model	OLS	OLS	IV	OLS	OLS	IV	OLS	OLS	IV
Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Observations	1045	1555	1555	1045	1555	1555	1045	1555	1555

Salience

	Left Issues Salience			Right Issues Salience		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Left mayor	-0.198*	-0.150	-0.273	-0.00358	-0.00371	-0.0419
	(0.118)	(0.0967)	(0.286)	(0.0998)	(0.0823)	(0.243)
Sample	Compl.	All	All	Compl.	All	All
Model	OLS	OLS	IV	OLS	OLS	IV
Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Observations	1045	1555	1555	1045	1555	1555

Compensation

	Perceived PSOE ideology			Radical local politics			Moderation necessary		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Left mayor	0.00283	0.0212	-0.0967	-0.0433	0.0277	-0.240	0.0863	0.0528	0.164
	(0.0594)	(0.0475)	(0.140)	(0.0682)	(0.0561)	(0.167)	(0.0630)	(0.0510)	(0.151)
Sample	Compl.	All	All	Compl.	All	All	Compl.	All	All
Model	OLS	OLS	IV	OLS	OLS	IV	OLS	OLS	IV
Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Observations	1021	1516	1516	1045	1555	1555	1045	1555	1555

Valence

	PP likely to rule			PP prepared to rule		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Left mayor	0.00877	0.0119	-0.0466	0.0110	-0.0370	0.127
	(0.0519)	(0.0417)	(0.123)	(0.0495)	(0.0405)	(0.120)
Sample	Compl.	All	All	Compl.	All	All
Model	OLS	OLS	IV	OLS	OLS	IV
Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Observations	1045	1555	1555	1045	1555	1555

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

voters in close-run Spanish municipalities provides evidence of an ideological backlash: when the Left governs, voters become more right-wing in their policy preferences.

Overall, this paper provides strong evidence for a backlash theory of radical party success. The dynamics of political competition mean that, when the Left governs, the swing of the electoral pendulum can mean that radical parties benefit. At least in our study, this backlash emerges because of ideological polarization among the electorate. Of course, the additional mechanisms we suggest may apply in other contexts, so it is important to continue to study this question. Finally, our study raises the question of what can be done to prevent such backlash. Is radical right success an inevitable consequence of left-wing governments, or can mainstream parties –on both sides of the aisle– do something to weaken this reaction? This question deserves further attention in future work.

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Appendix for "Do left-wing governments fuel far-right success?"

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Contents

A Comparative evidence

A.1 List of far-right parties

Table A1: Far-right parties by country

Country	Party acronym	Party name (English)
Australia	NAT	Nationalist Party of Australia
Australia	ONP	One Nation Party
Austria	BZO	Alliance for the Future of Austria
Austria	DFP	Democratic Progressive Party
Austria	DNSAP	National Socialist Workers' Party
Austria	FPO	Freedom Party of Austria
Austria	GFOP	German Freedom and Order Party
Austria	HB	Homeland Block
Austria	L	Rural Federation
Austria	NDP	National Democratic Party
Austria	WB	Economic bloc
Belgium	DLB	Belgians, Rise Up!
Belgium	FN	National Front
Belgium	Rex	Rexist Party
Belgium	RvA-UpD	Respect for Labour
Belgium	VB	Flemish Block - Flemish Interest
Belgium	VU	People's Union
Belgium	WOW	Growing Old in Dignity
Bulgaria	Ataka	Attack
Bulgaria	BNOBN	Bulgarian National Unification - Bulgarian Summer
Bulgaria	BNRP	Bulgarian National Radical Party
Bulgaria	DG	George's Day Movement
Bulgaria	GERB	Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria
Bulgaria	NFSB	National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria
Bulgaria	R	Revival
Bulgaria	RZS	Order, Lawfulness and Justice
Bulgaria	Volya	Will
Canada	PPC	People's Party of Canada
Croatia	DP	Homeland Movement
Croatia	HB	Croatian Bloc
Croatia	HDSSB	Croatian Democratic Alliance of Slavonia and Baranja
Croatia	HGS	Croatian Civic Party
Croatia	HSP	Croatian Party of Rights
Croatia	HSP-1861	Croatian Party of Right of 1861
Croatia	HSP-AS	Croatian Party of Rights – Dr. Ante Starcevic

Table A1: Far-right parties by country

Country	Party acronym	Party name (English)
Croatia	ZDS	Democratic Party of Zagorje
Croatia	ZiZi	Human Shield
Cyprus	ADK	Fighting Democratic Movement
Cyprus	ELAM	National Popular Front
Cyprus	KINHMA	Solidarity Movement
Cyprus	NO	New Horizons
Cyprus	PAME	Pancypriot Militant Front
Cyprus	PL	People's Breath
Czech Republic	CNSP	Czech National Social(ist) Party
Czech Republic	DSSS	Workers' Party of Social Justice
Czech Republic	Ne	Independent
Czech Republic	PB	Right Bloc
Czech Republic	S-JB	Sovereignty – Jana Bobosikova Bloc
Czech Republic	SPD	Freedom and Direct Democracy
Czech Republic	SPR-RSC	Rally for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia
Czech Republic	SSO	Party of Free Citizens
Czech Republic	Tri	Tricolour Citizens' Movement
Czech Republic	VB	Free Bloc
Denmark	DF	Danish Peoples Party
Denmark	DNSAP	National Socialist Workers' Party of Denmark
Denmark	DS	Danish Union
Denmark	NB	The New Right
Denmark	SK	Hard Line
Estonia	EKo	Estonian Citizens
Estonia	TEE	Future Estonia - Independence
Finland	UVSIN	New Alternative - Blue Reform
France	FN	National Front
France	MNR	National Republican Movement
France	PFN	Party of New Forces
France	UR	Republican Union
France	ex-dro	other far-right
Germany	AfD	Alternative for Germany
Germany	BFB	Confederation of free citizens – Offensive for Germany
Germany	DNVP	German National People's Party
Germany	DRP	German Reich Party
Germany	DSP	German Social Party
Germany	DVU	German People's Union
Germany	GB/BHE	All-German Bloc / League of Expellees and Deprived of Rights
Germany	NPD	National Democratic Party
Germany	NSDAP	National Socialist German Workers' Party
Germany	Rep	The Republicans

Table A1: Far-right parties by country

Country	Party acronym	Party name (English)
Germany	WAV	Economic Reconstruction League
Greece	ANEL	Independent Greeks
Greece	EDE	National Democratic Union
Greece	EPEN	National Political Union
Greece	LAOS	Popular Orthodox Rally
Greece	LS-CA	Peoples Association – Golden Dawn
Hungary	Jobbik	Jobbik Movement for a Better Hungary
Hungary	MHM	Our Homeland Movement
Hungary	MIEP	Hungarian Justice and Life Party
Israel	Atid	Future
Israel	FS	Flatto-Sharon
Israel	HaLe-T	National Union–Tkuma
Israel	He-TnLe	Herut – The National Movement
Israel	Kach	Thus
Israel	MDLHH	National Religious Party - The Jewish Home
Israel	MLH	New Liberal Party
Israel	NH	New Hope
Israel	Tzomet	Crossroads
Israel	Y	Rightwards
Israel	YB	Israel Our Home
Israel	YaHa	New Right
Israel	Yachad	Together
Israel	Yiud	Mission
Israel	Z	Zehut
Italy	ASM	Social Alternative Mussolini
Italy	FdI	Brothers of Italy
Italy	LAM	Southern Action League
Italy	LN	North League
Italy	MSFT	Fiamma Tricolore
Italy	MSI	Italian Social Movement
Italy	PNM	Monarchist National Party
Japan	HRP	Happiness Realization Party
Japan	JaRep	Japan Innovation Party
Japan	PFG	Party for Future Generations
Latvia	KPV-LV	Who owns the state?
Latvia	LNNK	Latvian National Independence Movement
Latvia	NA/TB/LNNK	National Alliance / For Fatherland and Freedom / LNNK
Latvia	TB	For Fatherland and Freedom
Latvia	TKL-ZP	People's Movement for Latvia – Siegerist Party
Lithuania	JL	Young Lithuania
Lithuania	LCP	Lithuanian Centre Party

Table A1: Far-right parties by country

Country	Party acronym	Party name (English)
Lithuania	LLaS	Lithuanian Liberty Union
Lithuania	LTS	Lithuanian National Union List
Lithuania	Tpp	Party of National Progress
Luxembourg	NB	National Movement
Luxembourg	ONP	Independent National Party
Luxembourg	ONV	National Independent Union
Malta	IE	Imperium Europa
Netherlands	CD	Centre Democrats
Netherlands	CP	Centre Party
Netherlands	FvD	Forum for Democracy
Netherlands	JA21	Right Answer 2021
Netherlands	LN	Livable Netherlands
Netherlands	LPF	Fortuyn List
Netherlands	NSB	National Socialist Movement in the Netherlands
Netherlands	PVV	Party for Freedom
New Zealand	NC	New Conservative Party
Norway	Fr	Progress Party
Norway	NS	National Gathering
Poland	K	Kukiz'15
Poland	KPN	Confederation for Independent Poland
Poland	RKN	Catholic-National Movement
Poland	RN	National Movement
Poland	SP	United Poland
Poland	X	Party X
Portugal	CH	Enough
Romania	AUR	Alliance for the Unity of Romanians
Romania	PRM	Greater Romania Party
Romania	PRU	United Romania Party
Romania	PUNR	Romanian National Unity Party
Slovakia	LsNS	People's Party Our Slovakia
Slovakia	NDS	National Democratic Party
Slovakia	NaS-NS	Nation and Justice – Our Party
Slovakia	PSNS	Real Slovak National Party
Slovakia	SNS	Slovak National Party
Slovakia	SR	We are family – Boris Kollar
Slovakia	V	Homeland
Slovenia	DOM	Homeland League
Slovenia	LIPA	Party Lime Tree
Spain	UN	National Union
Spain	Vox	Voice
Sweden	NyD	New Democracy

Table A1: Far-right parties by country

Country	Party acronym	Party name (English)
Sweden	SD	Sweden Democrats
Switzerland	FPS	Automobile Party - Freedom Party of Switzerland
Switzerland	LdT	Ticino League
Switzerland	MCR	Geneva Citizens' Movement
Switzerland	NASD	National Action – Swiss Democrats
Switzerland	RB	Republican Movement
Switzerland	UDE	National Union
Switzerland	V	Vigilants
Turkey	BBP	Great Union Party
Turkey	GP	Young Party
Turkey	IYI	Iyi Party
Turkey	MDP	Nationalist Democratic Party
Turkey	MHP	National Action Party
United Kingdom	BNP	British National Party
United Kingdom	BP	Brexit Party
United Kingdom	IE	An Independence from Europe
United Kingdom	NDP	National Democratic and Labour Party
United Kingdom	NF	National Front
United Kingdom	NP	National Party
United Kingdom	UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party
United Kingdom	VUPP	Vanguard Unionist Progressive Party

Note: Parties classified as belonging to the 'right-wing' party family by ParlGov (Döring et al. 2023)

A.2 Alternative coding of left-wing governments

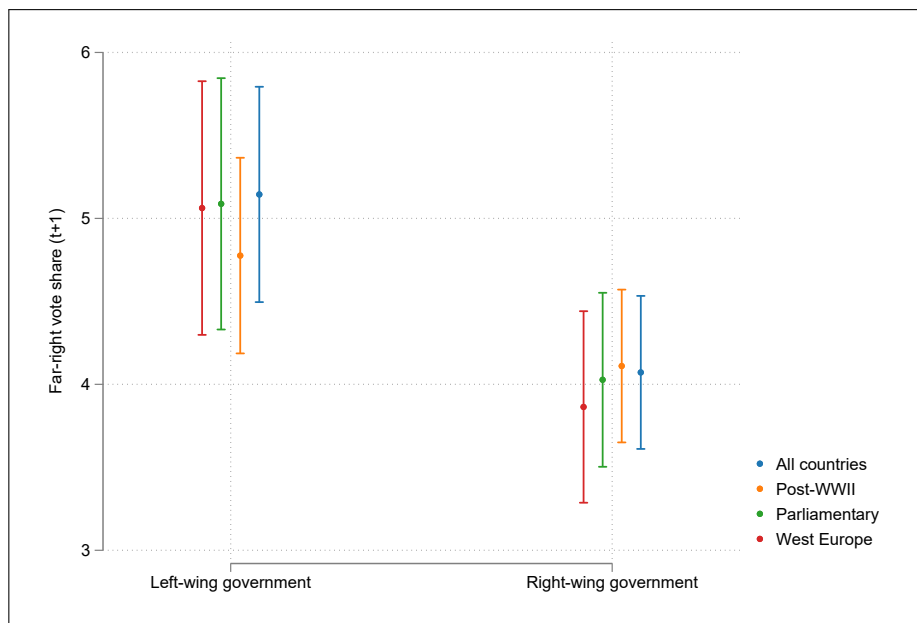Table A2: Effect of previous cabinet ideology on far-right support (comparative evidence)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Left government	0.699*	0.614	0.935**	1.072**	0.665	1.060**	1.199**
	(0.378)	(0.403)	(0.411)	(0.437)	(0.410)	(0.509)	(0.526)
Lagged DV	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sample	All	All	All	All	Post-WWII	Parl.	West Eur.
N. countries	37	37	37	37	37	29	20
N. obs.	854	854	852	852	710	715	608

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.

Note: OLS regression estimates. The outcome variable is the percentage of votes obtained by far-right parties. The key independent variable *Left government* is an indicator variable taking value '1' for left-wing governments (left-right position less than 5 in a 0-10 scale) and '0' for right-wing governments (left-right position 5 or more).

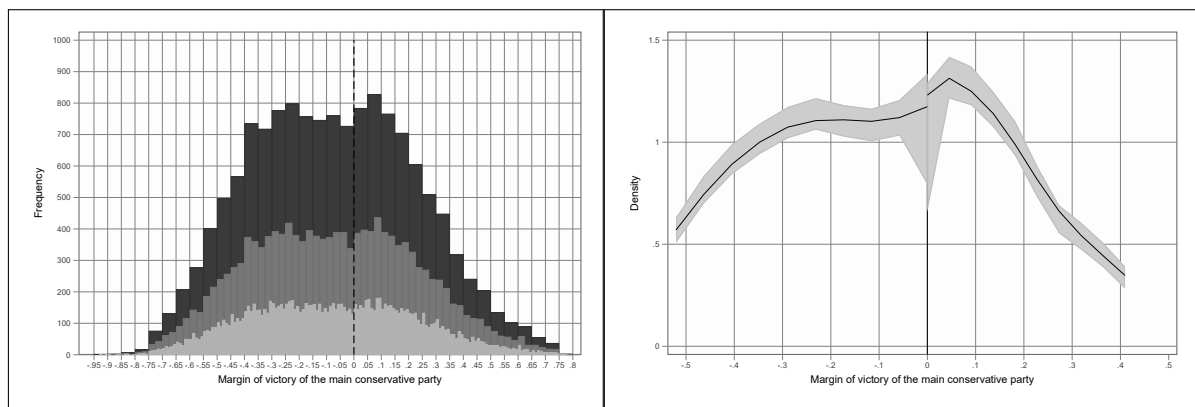Figure A1: Predicted far-right support after left-wing vs right-wing government (comparative evidence)

Note: Estimates from models 4, 5, 6, and 7 in Table A2.

B   RDD evidence in Spain

B.1   Continuity assumption

Continuity of the forcing variable

Figure B1: Continuity of the forcing variable (histogram and RD density)

Covariate balance

Table B1: Covariate balance at the cutoff

	RD Estimate	S.E.	P-value	Effective N	N
Population	22,397	12,614	0.0758	1647	4702
Population (log)	0.203	-0.157	0.196	1647	4702
Unemployment rate (2011)	-0.000587	-0.00422	0.889	1646	4695
Coastline municipality	0.0199	-0.0298	0.504	1646	4694
Rural municipality	-0.0371	-0.0427	0.385	1646	4687
N. of electoral parties s	0.345	-0.252	0.171	1647	4702
Turnout (t)	-0.00581	-0.00916	0.526	1647	4702
PP vote share	-0.0145	-0.00896	0.106	1647	4702
PSOE vote share	-0.0132	-0.0143	0.357	1647	4702

B.2 Sensitivity to different kernels

Table B2: Effect of left-wing mayor (2015-2019) on support for VOX (2019)
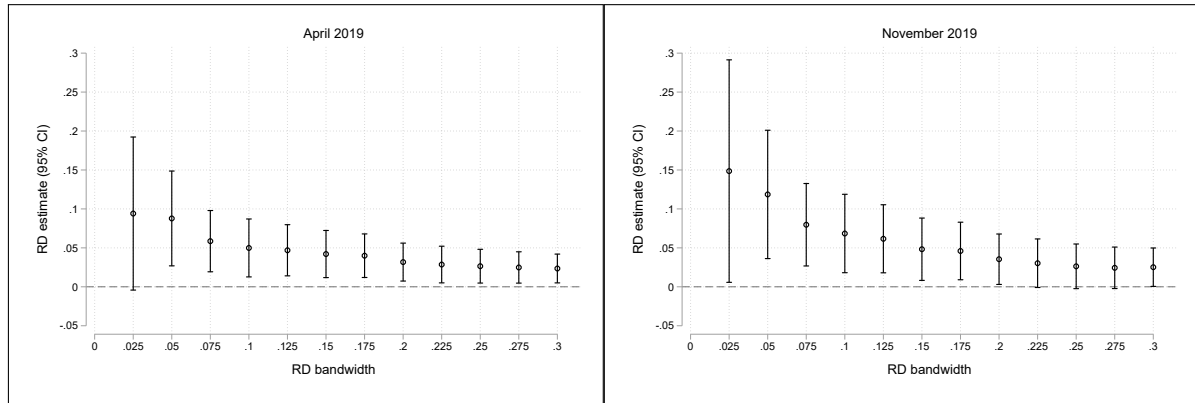
	Apr. 2019			Nov. 2019		
	Uniform	Triangular	Epan.	Uniform	Triangular	Epan.
Left mayor 2015 (2SLS)	0.042***	0.049***	0.041***	0.043**	0.056***	0.051***
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.014)	(0.018)	(0.020)	(0.020)
First-stage	-.317***	-.341***	-.328***	-.325***	-.332***	-.332***
Bandwidth	.15	.15	.18	.18	.18	.17
Effective N	1,647	1,647	1,960	1,960	1,960	1,839
N	4,699	4,699	4,699	4,700	4,700	4,700

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.

B.3 Sensitivity to multiple bandwidths

Figure B2: Continuity of the forcing variable (histogram and RD density)

B.4 Falsification test

Table B3: Effect of left-wing mayor (June 2019) on support for VOX (April 2019)

	Apr. 2019
Left mayor June 2019 (2SLS)	0.016
	(0.021)
First-stage	-.294***
Bandwidth	.13
Effective N	1,163
N	4,416

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.

B.5 Effect on other parties' vote shares

Table B4: Effect of left-wing mayor (2015-2019) on support for other parties (2019)

April 2019	Turnout	PP	PSOE	Podemos	Cs	Blank	Null
Left mayor (2SLS)	0.004	0.001	-0.008	-0.012	0.007	-0.001	0.000
	(0.015)	(0.024)	(0.026)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.001)	(0.002)
First-stage	-.317***	-.316***	-.317***	-.314***	-.316***	-.317***	-.317***
Bandwidth	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15
Effective N	1,647	1,645	1,647	1,624	1,645	1,647	1,647
N	4,700	4,646	4,699	4,344	4,646	4,699	4,699

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.

November 2019	Turnout	PP	PSOE	Podemos	Cs	Blank	Null
Left mayor (2SLS)	0.009	0.008	-0.006	-0.024	0.001	-0.000	-0.003
	(0.017)	(0.024)	(0.026)	(0.016)	(0.008)	(0.002)	(0.002)
First-stage	-.317***	-.316***	-.317***	-.314***	-.316***	-.317***	-.317***
Bandwidth	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15
Effective N	1,647	1,645	1,647	1,624	1,645	1,647	1,647
N	4,700	4,647	4,700	4,345	4,647	4,700	4,700

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.

B.6 Immediate reaction to government formation

Table B5: Effect of left-wing mayor (June 2019) on support for VOX (Nov. 2019)

	Nov. 2019
Left mayor June 2019 (2SLS)	0.025
	(0.029)
First-stage	-.294***
Bandwidth	.13
Effective N	1,163
N	4,417

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.

B.7 Long-term effect

Table B6: Effect of left-wing mayor (2011-2015) on support for VOX (2019)

	Apr. 2019	Nov. 2019
Left mayor 2011 (2SLS)	0.009	0.009
	(0.009)	(0.012)
First-stage	-.475***	-.475***
Bandwidth	.18	.18
Effective N	1,959	1,959
N	4,908	4,909

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.

B.8 Heterogeneity by size of municipality

Table B7: Effect of left-wing mayor (2015-2019) on support for VOX (2019), by size of municipality

	Apr. 2019		Nov. 2019	
	Pop. ≤ 1,000	Pop. > 1,000	Pop. ≤ 1,000	Pop. > 1,000
Left mayor 2015 (2SLS)	0.033**	0.052*	0.046**	0.053
	(0.015)	(0.030)	(0.018)	(0.039)
First-stage	-.574***	-.212***	-.574***	-.212***
Bandwidth	.15	.15	.15	.15
Effective N	499	1,148	499	1,148
N	1,726	2,973	1,727	2,973

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.