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Political extremism and distrust: Does radical political orientation predict political distrust and negative attitudes towards European integration?

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ABSTRACT

Institutional and political distrust are often associated with the improved electoral performance of extremist parties. This study analyses to what extent political distrust and Euroscepticism are associated with extreme left and right ideological positions. We specifically examine voters in the Netherlands – a country with wide array of political parties spanning a broad ideological spectrum. The study utilises probability samples from the Dutch National Election Survey and the European Election Studies, as well as opt-in samples collected through Vote Advice Applications (VAAs), amounting to a total of 20,548 analysed respondents. By employing hierarchical regression analyses, we find that across multiple elections at the national and European level, both radical left and radical right respondents are more prone to be politically distrustful and Eurosceptic, than respondents who profess a centrist political ideology. In addition, our analyses suggest that distrust and Euroscepticism can be explained by respondents' party preference.

1. Introduction

Support for political parties located at either the far-right or far-left of the ideological spectrum is often seen as a protest vote against mainstream politics or the political system as a whole. However, political right-and left-wing voters are often presented as substantially different creatures, with fundamentally different worldviews, political beliefs and opinions, fears and anxieties, and a different sense of morality (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Haidt, 2012; Inbar & Lammers, 2012; Janoff-Bulman & Carnes, 2013). Studies have shown that the political left and right differ in their underlying psychological motives, needs, and emotions that drive political ideology, as well as their evaluations of societal and political structures and institutions (e.g. Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Napier & Jost, 2008; Roccato, Vieno, & Russo, 2013; Schlenker, Chambers, & Le, 2012; van Lange, Bekkers, Chirumbolo, & Leone, 2011). In this study, however, we focus on how similar the radical left and the right are to each other in terms of their psychological make-up and political attitudes. We specifically concentrate on how these two extremes—at both sides of the political spectrum—differ from political moderates in terms of political trust and Euroscepticism (e.g. Fernbach, Rogers, Fox, & Sloman, 2013; Inglehart, 1987).

With traditional social cleavages diminishing in salience and rising living standards in post-war Europe, an ever-increasing group of 'de-politicised' middle class voters with moderate political views

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emerged, to whom 'catch-all' parties appealed with relatively non-ideological political programmes (Kirchheimer, 1966). Yet, not all traditional parties and voters shifted to the centre. In most European democracies, several waves of political radicalisation led to the emergence of more extreme political parties on both the left and right, often mobilising discontent with the political establishment and the broad centrist consensus (Kselman & Niou, 2011; van der Brug, Fennema, & Tillie, 2000). These 'protest' parties politicise new issue-dimensions, with radical left-wing parties reinforcing the market-state antagonism by opposing welfare state retrenchment and defending the protection of workers' rights. Radical 'right-wing' parties emerged from the schism between those with cultural libertarian and cosmopolitan orientations and those who want to protect national sovereignty and traditional values against immigration and globalisation (Kriesi et al., 2006). These parties, located at the ideological extremes of both the economic left-right dimension and the cultural 'immigration' dimension, have been increasing their support across Europe (Startin & Krouwel, 2013).

Seeking to understand the appeal of radical politics, we analyse to what extent general political distrust and Eurosceptic sentiments are related to left-wing and right-wing extremism. We hypothesize that support for more radical politics of both the left and the right are associated with higher levels of general dissatisfaction and political distrust. It is thus important to examine what similarities and differences exist between the trust-systems of radical left and radical right supporters.

Employing the Netherlands as a case study, we utilize probability samples from both the Dutch National Election Survey and the European Election Studies (EES), as well as opt-in samples collected online through Voting Advice Applications (VAA's) developed by Election Compass (*Kieskompas*). The latter are used since large-N databases include many more extremist voters, compared to the much smaller probability samples. We argue that both extremes express stronger negative emotions about politics, and are less trustful towards institutions, than politically moderate respondents. Moreover, radical left-wing and radical right-wing voters have much less favourable attitudes towards European integration and EU institutions than moderate, centrist voters. This suggests that political radicalism/extremism is negatively associated with political trust and Euroscepticism, regardless of its specific ideological direction.

2. Political extremism, prejudice and trust

Extreme political beliefs are often seen as a coping mechanism to regulate feelings of fear, anxiety and uncertainty. People adopt rigid ideological beliefs and reductionist black-and-white thinking, as this allows them to espouse straightforward and simple solutions to complex societal and political problems (Fernbach et al., 2013; Midlarsky, 2011; see also Greenberg & Jonas, 2003; Hardin, 2002; van Prooijen & Krouwel, 2019). These rigid belief systems also translate into intolerance for other-minded groups and allow people to perceive the world as more predictable and thus less threatening (Kruglanski, Pierro, Mannetti, & De Grada, 2006; Neuberg & Newsom, 1993). Previous research has found that feelings of uncertainty are related to the need for strong leadership, strong norms of consensus and identification with radical groups (Hogg, Meehan, & Farquharson, 2010). Extremists at both the left and the right are also more convinced of the correctness of their own political beliefs compared to moderates (Toner, Leary, Asher, & Jongman-Sereno, 2013) and existential fear makes people at both sides of the political spectrum cling more strongly to their existing worldview (Anson, Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg, 2009).

Due to these processes, it stands to reason that political extremists are particularly prone to distrust other, competing political parties. Specifically, the rigid belief system that characterizes political extremists promotes a "crippled epistemology", meaning that they often trust information about the world only from their political ingroup, and are inherently suspicious of information coming from political outgroups (Hardin, 2002). Such a closed-minded perception of the world promotes a competitive 'us vs. them' style of thinking in a myriad of ways. For instance, it has been noted that both the left and the right are prejudiced towards, and hence suspicious of, societal

groups that are considered to be dissimilar – with the political right holding particularly negative attitudes about, for instance, immigrants and LGBT people, and the political left holding particularly negative attitudes about, for instance, business people, Christians, and bankers (Brandt, Reyna, Chambers, Crawford, & Wetherell, 2014; Chambers, Schlenker, & Collisson, 2013). These effects are particularly pronounced at the extremes (van Prooijen, Krouwel, Boiten, & Eendebak, 2015). Likewise, the political left is inherently suspicious of the political right, and vice versa (Inglehart, 1987). These processes also manifest themselves at the national level, as political extremism tends to be associated with increased nationalism, along with increased suspiciousness of ethnic, religious, or ideological outsiders (Midlarsky, 2011). Taken together, these considerations may be informative for how ideology is related to political trust, as well as to policies that may be considered threatening to one's national identity (i.e., the integration of EU member states). We make the case that political extremists—at both sides of the political spectrum—are more likely to be distrustful of the political establishment and are more likely to display high levels of Euroscepticism.

3. Political trust

It is logical to assume that when people are more fearful and prejudiced, they will not only distrust fellow citizens, but also the political establishment. Naturally, trust in politicians, and the political system as a whole, is always conditional and partial. People are unlikely to trust all politicians at the same time, and to believe that all political institutions are just and legitimate. Thus, in a more minimalist view of political trust, institutions and politicians are at least not perceived as detrimental to society, but as a simple necessity to maintain law and order. In this sense, political trust plays a decisive role on citizen's behaviour in response to governmental actions and demands (Levi, 1997; Lipset & Schneider, 1983; Scholz & Lubell, 1998; Tyler & Degoey, 1995; Zmerli, Newton, & Montero, 2007). Being politically trustful often means that one evaluates the performance of political institutions and politicians positively or at least regards them acceptable (Gambetta, 1988; Hardin, 1996; Misztal, 1996).

Studies show that, ideologically, radical left and radical right orientations are generally associated with lower trust levels, as for instance manifested in increased belief in conspiracy theories (Inglehart, 1987), but whether right-wing or left-wing individuals are 'more distrustful varies from one country to another' (Newton, 1999: 181). Political distrust also correlates strongly with policy evaluations and citizen's propensity to vote for opposition parties or candidates (Hetherington, 1999). Those who support incumbent parties or candidates are more likely to have higher levels of political trust than those who support the opposition. Candidates who use anti-governmental rhetoric and attack the policies of the government openly are particularly attractive to more distrustful voters (Hetherington, 1999; Luks & Citrin, 1997). Viable 'outsider' candidates can use political distrust to mobilize voters. There is a clear ideological rationality behind trust: right-wing individuals are more likely to express political distrust when the Left is in power, while left-wing individuals display less political trust when the Right governs. If the government is centrist, both radical left and radical right individuals are likely to become more distrustful (Miller, 1974). This supports the notion that social factors alone, such as membership in voluntary organizations, community involvement or social trust, does not automatically translate into general increase of political trust. Political trust appears to be shaped by political information and policy performance evaluations (Bianco, 1994), yet these are perceived through a 'perceptual screen' (Dalton, 2000; Greene, 1999; Zaller, 1992). It is the effect of this ideological perceptual screen that motivated the current research.

Political trust is not stable across societies and neither so for individuals; instead, politicians can earn the public's trust through the policies they endorse, their individual performance and their public image. Moreover, political trust is also dependent on the extent to which politicians conform to commonly accepted rules and regulations of how they should behave. The image of politicians, including their private lives, as portrayed in traditional and social media is crucial in defining the public opinion towards them.

With respect to the influence of political trust on participation, the literature contains two major distinct views. One view is that political participation, at least in elections, declines simultaneously with trust levels. This suggests that trustful citizens participate more than distrustful individuals, as the 'political culture' theories postulate (Almond & Verba, 1963; Stokes, 1962). This view, however, has been challenged by numerous empirical studies. Miller (1980), for example, finds no clear causal linkage between distrust and election participation, while Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) discover no association between high levels of political trust, interest in politics and the likelihood to engage in politics. The second view is that distrustful individuals, who are discontent and feel politically efficacious, will be more likely to get politically involved (Gamson, 1968, 1971; Bandura, 1982). Such political involvement resulting in deprivation or discontent is broader than simply voting and includes many forms of non-conventional political participation. Several studies confirm that the lack of political trust and increasing alienation stimulates active protest behaviour (Muller, 1977; Muller, Jukam, & Seligson, 1982; Pierce & Converse, 1989). In addition, studies found that approval of protest behaviour and involvement in protests are linked to distrust (Abravanel & Busch, 1975; Citrin, 1977). Further research has indicated that political participation is enforced by distrust solely among politically interested individuals (Luks in Levi & Stoker, 2010), among those who do not have other participatory motives (Shingles, 1981), among politically efficacious people dissatisfied with the policies of the incumbent government (Miller, 1974; Craig & Maggiotto, 1981), and among those who have favourable attitude towards opposition leaders (Nilson & Nilson, 1980).

Our study focuses on the Netherlands and tests whether radical voters are more likely to express distrust in politics than centrist voters. The Netherlands is a crucial case, as it has one of the most open electoral systems (PR without a threshold) which allows many parties to enter parliament (there are currently 13 parties represented in Dutch parliament). This allows voters, more so than in other countries, to express support for radical political alternatives, and indeed, both the radical left (the Dutch Socialist Party (*Socialistische Partij*, SP)) and radical right (the Dutch anti-immigrant Party for Freedom (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*, PVV)) are well-represented in parliament. Despite this political pluralism, however, post-war Dutch governments were mainly led by mainstream social democratic and Christian democratic parties which often governed in a coalition either with each other or with the liberals. Only for a relatively short 2-year period (2010–2012) did the radical right-wing PVV support a minority coalition government composed of the conservative liberal Party for Freedom and Democracy (*Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*, VVD) and the Christian democrats (*Christen-Democratisch Appèl*, CDA).

In addition to general political (dis)trust, this study also investigates a more specific manifestation of political mistrust, namely anti-European sentiments. In the following section, we theorize how Euroscepticism is related to radical and moderate political opinions.

4. Increasingly negative attitudes towards the EU

As European economies have struggled to overcome a prolonged recession, dissatisfaction with the EU is rising across the continent. Attitudes towards the EU have been increasingly negative since the 1990s, yet as the economic crisis protracted, dissatisfaction with the EU, or Euroscepticism, seems to be increasing at an ever-faster pace. The frequently used concept of Euroscepticism stands for negative and critical attitudes, or even outright opposition to the European Union. The object of discontent varies from the very idea of European integration, to EU institutions, EU policies or its politicians. In this sense, Eurosceptics often reject the very idea of any European integration, but also outright objection to the EU and its current form of integration, on the grounds of deeply held values (Krouwel & Abts, 2007). This acceleration of Euroscepticism could be ascribed – at least partly – to the referenda on the European Constitutional Treaty held in several countries (Startin & Krouwel, 2013). These referenda served as a stage for anti-integration parties to fully make their case to the public and mobilize discontent.

Despite a growing anti-European integration sentiment, the majority of political elites continue to be more pro-EU than their voters. Following the conventional wisdom, Euroscepticism should be strongest among politically right-leaning voters (Werts, Scheepers, & Lubbers, 2013). Yet, anti-EU feelings occur widely across the political spectrum (de Vries & Edwards, 2009). Between 1991 and 2003, the Netherlands had the steepest drop in EU support of all member states (Huijts & De Graaf, 2007; Lubbers & Scheepers, 2007, 2010Lubbers & Scheepers, 2007, 2010). In order to study this dynamic of increasing Euroscepticism among voters and the manner in which political parties on the flanks of the political system use these anti-EU sentiments, we zoom in on the Netherlands. Ray (2007) finds that on an individual level, ideological positions do not matter that much in defining the public's opinion towards the EU. On a party level, however, he finds robust and significant quadratic relationship between ideological extremity and negative attitude towards the EU. We believe this assertion needs to be re-tested by examining whether radical left and radical right voters share similar pro- or anti-EU sentiments alongside levels of general political mistrust.

5. The rise of the anti-European fringe parties in the Netherlands

Like elsewhere in Europe, the Netherlands has witnessed the rise of radical political parties challenging the traditional political establishment (Vossen, 2010). Yet, the level of electoral volatility and the success of both the radical left and right were more momentous than in other political systems. Particularly the Socialist Party and the anti-immigrant PVV have received substantial vote shares. These electoral shifts combined with a steep rise in anti-European sentiments makes the Netherlands a crucial case to study the association between ideological radicalism and political trust.

Dutch anti-EU parties were strengthened by the 2005 referendum, which deepened the conflict over EU integration and increased the issue salience of Europe for voters (Lubbers & Jaspers, 2011: 36). Already in the 1990s, the conservative liberal VVD voiced criticism against (German and French) plans to deepen the European integration process with a Monetary Union (EMU) and a single currency (NRC, 1997). The party experienced a split when in 2004 MP Geert Wilders left the VVD over issues related to immigration and European integration. Earlier, in 2002, newcomer Pim Fortuyn (*Lijst Pim Fortuyn*, LPF) had campaigned to replace the European Parliament with a Senate, against Turkish accession and for the 're-instatement of Dutch national sovereignty' (see Mudde, 2007).

Similar concerns were voiced on the other end of the political spectrum, where the radical left Socialist Party was very critical about mass labour immigration since the 1980s, when it urged immigrants (*gastarbeiders*, 'guest workers') to choose between adopting the Dutch nationality or returning to their country of origin (see van der Steen, 1994). Since the party first entered parliament in 1994, it has gradually moved away from its communist roots and transformed into an influential party within social protest movements and labour unions. In 2006 the SP won over 16% of the vote, becoming the third largest party in parliament. In 2010 and 2012 the SP remained strong enough to mobilize one in ten voters and is currently the sixth largest party with 14 seats. While the SP moderated their anti-immigration stance, it is still critical of labour migration from Central and Eastern Europe, highlighting the negative effects of a more competitive labour market and the decline of wages and labour conditions. The SP pays a somewhat ambivalent tribute to the benefits of 'Europe' in terms of peace, security and welfare, yet simultaneously criticizes the neo-liberal character of the EU. During the 2005 referendum campaign, both the SP and the PVV campaigned against Brussels' interference in national economic affairs.

Opposition to European integration also comes from other ideological directions. In the 2004 European Elections an anti-EU party (Transparent Europe, *Europa Transparant*) won over 7% of the vote. Fundamentalist confessional parties such as the Reformed Party – SGP (*Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij*) and the Christian Union – CU (*ChristenUnie*) have also consistently campaigned against (further) European integration. The gap between voter and elite opinions with regard to the EU slowly translates into the emergence of a Eurosceptic elite (see also Holsteyn & Ridder, 2005).

Overall, the Dutch electorate has become one of the most volatile in Western Europe, with large numbers of voters deciding very late in the campaign which party they are going to vote for. Most Dutch voters have a high vote propensity for two or even three parties and can easily switch their allegiance from election to election. Frequently they switch to more radical alternatives on the political flanks, instead of supporting the traditional mainstream centrist parties (VVD, CDA and the Labour Party (*Partij van de Arbeid*, PvdA)). For that reason, we believe that distrust and Euroscepticism tend to be both ideological and partisan. Therefore, this study assesses to what extent adherence to radical political ideologies and support for the political flanks is associated with rising levels of distrust in national and European political institutions.

6. Data and method

For our analyses we use eight datasets, of which four are probability samples: the Dutch National Election Survey (NKO) of 2010 and 2012, as well as the European Election Survey (EES) of 2009 and 2014. In addition, we utilise four non-probability, opt-in samples collected with online Voting Advice Application (VAA) websites during European election campaigns in 2009, 2010, and national election campaigns in 2012 and 2014. We compare these data for two reasons: first because in traditional surveys very few radical voters are reached, whereas large-N opt-in samples have a substantial number of them; and secondly, because the timing of the survey may influence the result. Traditional election studies are often conducted post-electorally as one-off samples and thus are unable to capture the mood of voters during the campaign. By combining post- and pre-election datasets, we can estimate with more certainty the extent to which distrust is related to support for radical politics. In addition, we believe that the timing of this study is important as the economic and financial crisis in Europe resulted in broad elite support for austerity measures, instead of anti-cyclical investment policies, even within the moderate left. This has pitted the anti-European parties on the radical left and right against mainstream centrist parties. The convergence of mainstream left and right parties on what is generally considered right-wing austerity policy has provided opportunities for the radical left to mobilize discontent. Moreover, the call for establishing a closer fiscal and monetary union in order to solve the financial and bank crisis has politicized European integration and provided opportunities for the radical right to mobilize against Europe. Given the difficulties on the part of established elites to bring economic stability and progress, discontent and declining system support should be more visible.

For the analyses on political trust, we use two non-probability opt-in samples collected by Kieskompas (a leading Dutch Voting Advice Application (VAA) developer) during the month prior to the parliamentary elections of 2010 and 2012. These datasets contain 800,742 and 757,052 respondents respectively, of which 8,676 and 23,741 answered an additional questionnaire on political trust and background characteristics. It is worth noting that in the 2010 Kieskompas dataset, only 1,524 respondents answered the left-right political orientation question. The two datasets contain the same twelve trust items which we use to create a trust index (see Table 1 in the online supplementary materials). Subsequently, we use two databases collected by the Dutch National Election Survey (NKO) in 2010 and 2012, consisting of 2,621 and 1,677 respondents respectively. These data also contain items, useful for creating trust indices.

Four additional databases are used to measure Euroscepticism: two probability samples of the European Election Studies (EES) survey from 2009 and 2014 with 1,005 and 1,101 Dutch respondents respectively. In addition, we use two non-probability samples collected prior to the 2009 and 2014 European elections containing 190,000 and 185,758 respondents, of whom 3,987 and 11,000, respectively, answered an additional questionnaire where they provided their background characteristics.

To measure Euroscepticism we create an index of seven items from the opt-in EU Profiler and EUvox datasets and six items from the EES datasets. We posted an overview of all the samples and the measures as Online Supplemental Materials on the Open Science Framework (http://https://osf.io/kt6uq/). All trust and Euroscepticism-items were recoded, so that lower scores measure less trust or less Euroscepticism and higher scores measure more trust or Euroscepticism.

Table 1. Political trust and political orientation: hierarchical regression analyses.

Dependent variable	Model	R^2	Adj. R^2	ΔR^2	ΔF	N	β
	NKO 2010						
Political Trust	*Step 1*						
	Female	.082	.080	0.082	50.79[***]	1716	0.06[**]
	Age						−0.01[***]
	Education						0.24[***]
	Step 2						
	Linear	.083	.081	.001	2.05		−0.03
	Step 3						
	Quadratic	.083	.080	.000	0.08		−0.03
	NKO 2012						
Political Trust	*Step 1*						
	Female	.089	.086	.086	41.05[***]	1271	0.02
	Age						−0.05
	Education						0.28[***]
	Step 2						
	Linear	.090	.087	.001	1.43		−0.03
	Step 3						
	Quadratic	.097	.093	.007	9.70[**]		−0.34[**]
	Kieskompas 2010						
Political Trust	*Step 1*						
	Female	.169	.167	.169	61.08[***]	902	0.08[*]
	Age						−0.26[***]
	Education						0.29[***]
	Step 2						
	Linear	.231	.228	.062	71.93[***]		−0.25[***]
	Step 3						
	Quadratic	.243	.239	.012	14.02[**]		−0.52[***]
	Kieskompas 2012						
Political Trust	*Step 1*						
	Female	.114	.114	.114	267.16[***]	6204	0.00
	Age						−0.17[***]
	Education						0.27[***]
	Step 2						
	Linear	.115	.115	.001	5.96[*]		−0.03[*]
	Step 3						
	Quadratic	.120	.119	.005	33.36[***]		−0.30[***]

Source: NKO, 2010, 2012; Kieskompas, 2010, 2012.
*p < .05.
**p < .01.
***p < .001.

As theorized above, we assume that political distrust and Euroscepticism are not only associated with party preference but are primarily a function of ideological extremism. We can test these assumptions outlined above with these datasets as seven of these surveys asked respondents to position themselves on a political left vs. right dimension ranging from 0 = extremely left-wing to 10 = extremely right-wing (the EUvox, Kieskompas 2010 and Kieskompas 2012 datasets used the same item, albeit ranging from 1 to 10). This allows for testing whether there are quadratic and/or linear effects between ideological extremism and political trust. As stated above, we predict a quadratic effect, as we assume that both the extreme left and extreme right are most inclined to political distrust and rejection of the European Union, compared to more moderate, centrist voters.

7. Results

7.1. *Hierarchical regression analyses*

Table 1 above shows the results of four hierarchical regression analyses in which the control variables are entered in Step 1, the linear term of ideology in Step 2, and the quadratic term in Step 3. These analyses test whether curvilinear (quadratic) and/or linear associations exist between ideological

extremism and political distrust. With the exception of the NKO 2010 and NKO 2012 datasets, the results confirm significant linear associations between extremism and trust: those who position themselves at the political right are less politically trustful than those who position themselves at the political left. In addition, the analyses confirm a statistically significant quadratic (curvilinear) effect on ideological extremism and political trust in all datasets, except for NKO 2010. For the linear term, $\Delta R^2 = .001$, $\beta = -0.03$, $p > .05$ (NKO 2010); $\Delta R^2 = .001$, $\beta = -0.03$, $p > .05$ (NKO 2012); $\Delta R^2 = .062$, $\beta = -0.25$, $p < .001$ (Kieskompas 2010); $\Delta R^2 = .001$, $\beta = -0.03$, $p < .05$ (Kieskompas 2012). For the quadratic term, $\Delta R^2 = .000$, $\beta = -0.03$, $p > .05$ (NKO 2010); $\Delta R^2 = .007$, $\beta = -0.34$, $p < .01$ (NKO 2012); $\Delta R^2 = .012$, $\beta = -0.52$, $p < .001$ (Kieskompas 2010); $\Delta R^2 = .005$, $\beta = -0.30$, $p < .001$ (Kieskompas 2012). The results suggest that both right-wing and left-wing extremists are less trustful than political moderates. With regard to the demographic variables, gender is statistically significant in the NKO 2010; Kieskompas 2010 datasets: females are more likely to be politically trustful than males. Age is a negative, significant predictor of political trust in all datasets, except for NKO 2012: older respondents are more likely to be distrustful than younger ones. Higher education invariably predicts higher levels of political trust: higher educated respondents are more politically trustful than lower educated ones.

Figure 1 below supplements the findings by graphically portraying the linear and quadratic association between political trust and ideological orientation in 4 datasets – the representative NKO datasets and the large-N opt-in samples of Kieskompas. The results suggest that there is both a linear and quadratic negative association between political trust and ideological orientation, with the effects being particularly strong for the two Kieskompas datasets. In a nutshell, the results indicate that individuals on the (far-) right are less likely to be politically trustful than those on the (far-) left. Moreover, both far-right and far-left respondents are less likely to be politically trustful than their centrist counterparts.

Table 2 reveals the results of four hierarchical regression analyses, which test whether curvilinear (quadratic) and/or linear associations exist between ideological extremism and Euroscepticism. In all four datasets, the results confirm a significant linear association between extremism and Euroscepticism: those who position themselves at the right are more Eurosceptic than those who position themselves at the left. In addition, the analyses confirm a statistically significant curvilinear (quadratic) effect on ideological extremism and Euroscepticism in all four datasets: both right-wing and left-wing extremists are more Eurosceptic than political moderates. For the linear term, $\Delta R^2 = .021$, $\beta = 0.15$, $p < .001$ (EES 2009); $\Delta R^2 = .025$, $\beta = 0.16$; $p < .001$ (EES 2014); $\Delta R^2 = .036$, $\beta = -0.19$, $p < .001$ (EUprofiler 2009); $\Delta R^2 = .104$, $\beta = 0.33$, $p < .001$ (EUvox 2014). For the quadratic term, $\Delta R^2 = .029$, $\beta = 0.55$, $p < .001$ (EES 2009); $\Delta R^2 = .031$, $\beta = 0.77$, $p < .001$ (EES 2014); $\Delta R^2 = .040$, $\beta = 0.65$, $p < .001$ (EUprofiler 2009); $\Delta R^2 = .026$, $\beta = 0.64$, $p < .001$ (EUvox 2014). With regard to the demographic variables, gender is statistically significant in the EUprofiler and EUvox datasets: females are more likely to be Eurosceptic than males. Age is a negative, significant predictor of Euroscepticism in EUprofiler, and is positive and significant in EUvox. Education predicts lower levels of Euroscepticism in all datasets except for EES 2009: higher educated respondents are less likely to be Eurosceptic than lower educated ones.

Figure 2 below supplements the findings by graphically portraying the linear and quadratic association between political trust and reveals the linear and quadratic association between political trust and Euroscepticism in 4 datasets – the representative EES datasets and the large-N opt-in samples of EUprofiler and EUvox. The results suggest very pronounced differences in terms of the degree of Euroscepticism: (far-) left respondents are much less Eurosceptic than those located on the (far-) right. In addition, respondents that have identified with radical left or radical right ideology are much more likely to be Eurosceptic than their centrist counterparts.

7.2. Linear regression analyses

The analyses above clearly indicate that respondents with extreme left or right ideology are most distrustful and Eurosceptic. In order to delve deeper into the association of party preference and
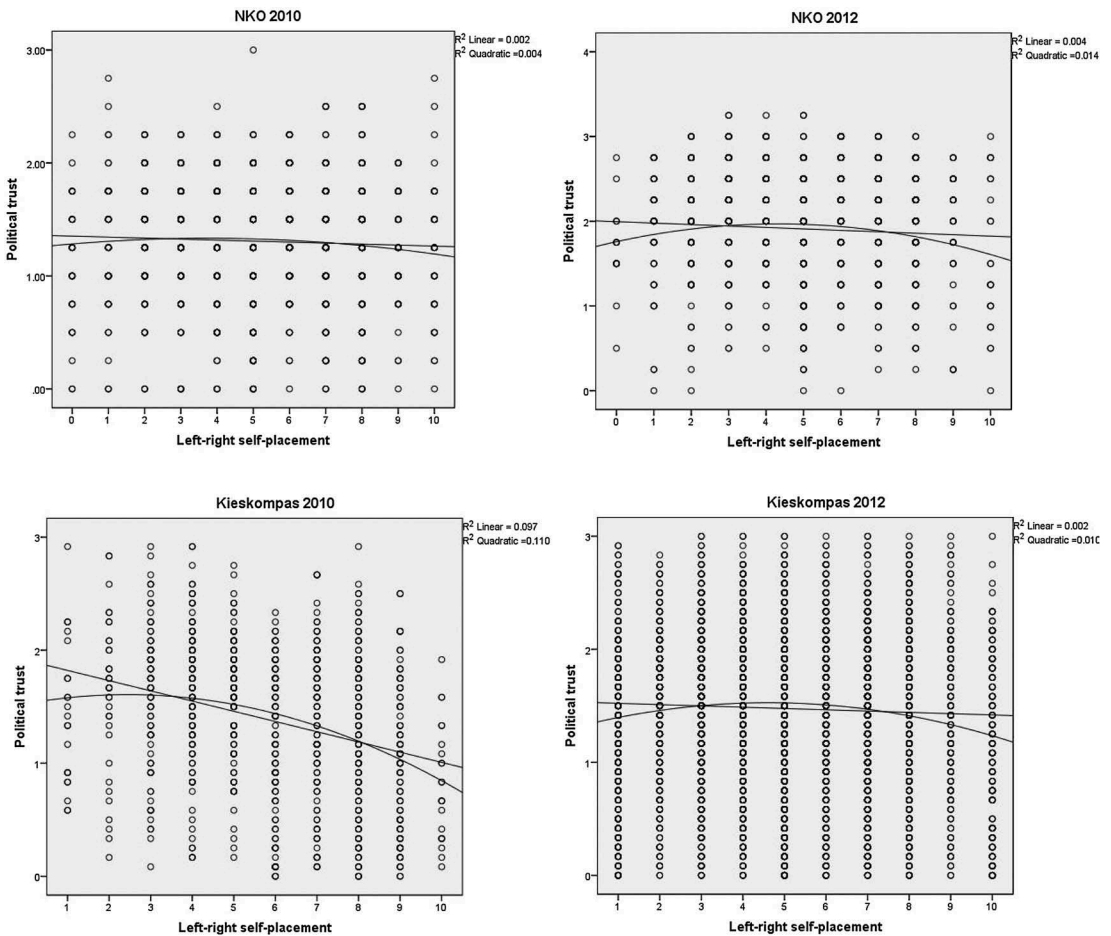
Figure 1. Linear and quadratic associations: political ideology and political trust.

political trust we also ran several multivariate tests. For the NKO and Kieskompas data we ran linear regressions (see Table 3) of the trust indices as dependent variables and vote propensities for each party as independent variables[1]. For the EES, EUvox and EUprofiler data, we ran linear regression analyses (see Table 4) using the Euroscepticism indices as the dependent variables and vote propensities as independent variables. In both cases, we employ respondents' gender, age and education as control variables.

The results in Table 3, taking into account statistically significant coefficients, show a consistent pattern across the datasets: higher trust levels are positively associated with increase in the vote propensities for the established centre left and centre right parties (CDA, except for the NKO 2012 data, VVD, except for the Kieskompas 2010 data and PvdA). Across all datasets, adj. R^2 range from .18 to .46. In addition, increase in the vote propensities for the progressive left and right (GreenLeft, in the opt-in samples, and D66, except for Kieskompas 2010) are also positively associated with political trust. For the SP, we also find consistent results across the various datasets, except for NKO 2012. The vote propensity for the socialists is negatively associated with trust, with statistically significant coefficients in three datasets. Those likely to vote for the far-right PVV are also invariably less politically trustful. Interestingly, there is also a strong negative effect on political trust, when it

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[1]Since the data are correlational, reversing the dependent and independent variables would produce similar results.

Table 2. Euroscepticism and political orientation: hierarchical regression analyses.

Dependent variable	Model	R^2	Adj. R^2	ΔR^2	ΔF	N	β
	EES 2009						
Euroscepticism	Step 1						
	Female	.005	.002	.005	1.532	861	−0.06
	Age						0.03
	Education						−0.04
	Step 2						
	Linear	.026	.022	.021	18.420[***]		0.15[***]
	Step 3						
	Quadratic	.055	.049	.029	25.915[***]		0.55[***]
	EES 2014						
Euroscepticism	Step 1						
	Female	.045	.042	.045	13.496[***]	859	−0.03
	Age						−0.03
	Education						−0.22[***]
	Step 2						
	Linear	.070	.066	.025	22.892[***]		0.16[***]
	Step 3						
	Quadratic	.101	.096	.031	29.738[***]		0.77[***]
	EUprofiler						
Euroscepticism	Step 1						
	Female	.047	.046	.047	52.272[***]	3178	0.09[***]
	Age						−0.04[*]
	Education						−0.19[***]
	Step 2						
	Linear	.083	.082	.036	125.435[***]		0.19[***]
	Step 3						
	Quadratic	.124	.122	.040	145.992[***]		0.65[***]
	EUvox						
Euroscepticism	Step 1						
	Female	.148	.148	.148	631.57[***]	10930	0.02[*]
	Age						0.09[***]
	Education						−0.36[***]
	Step 2						
	Linear	.251	.251	.104	1513.69[***]		0.33[***]
	Step 3						
	Quadratic	.277	.277	.026	386.00[***]		0.74[***]

Source: EES, 2009, 2014; Euprofiler 2009; EUvox, 2014.
[**]p < .01.
[*]p < .05.
[***]p < .001.

comes to potential voters of the pensioner party 50Plus. With regard to the demographic control variables, we find that older respondents are invariably less trustful than their younger peers, while those with higher education are more trustful than lower educated respondents. The effect of ideological self-placement is rather inconclusive, having a negative and weakly significant effect in Kieskompas 2010 and a strong positive effect in NKO 2012.

A similar pattern emerges for the datasets that were collected prior to the European elections of 2009 and 2014 (see Table 4). The least Eurosceptic voters are found among GreenLeft and D66 supporters. Increases in the vote propensities for two of the major mainstream parties (PvdA and CDA) are also negatively associated with Euroscepticism, meaning that potential voters of these parties are by and large supportive of European integration. Interestingly, increase in the vote propensity for the centre-right liberal party – the VVD – is producing different effects in different datasets: negative and non-significant effect for the 2009 EES data; a null effect in the EUprofiler data; a strong negative effect in the 2014 EES data and a strong positive effect in the EUvox data. This indicates that VVD voters evaluate national political institutions favourably but could be critical towards European integration. Again, we find that prospective voters of both PVV (all effects are positive and significant, except for in the EES 2014 data) and SP are among the most Eurosceptic Dutch voters. Across all datasets, adj. R^2 range from .24 to .67. Considering the demographic
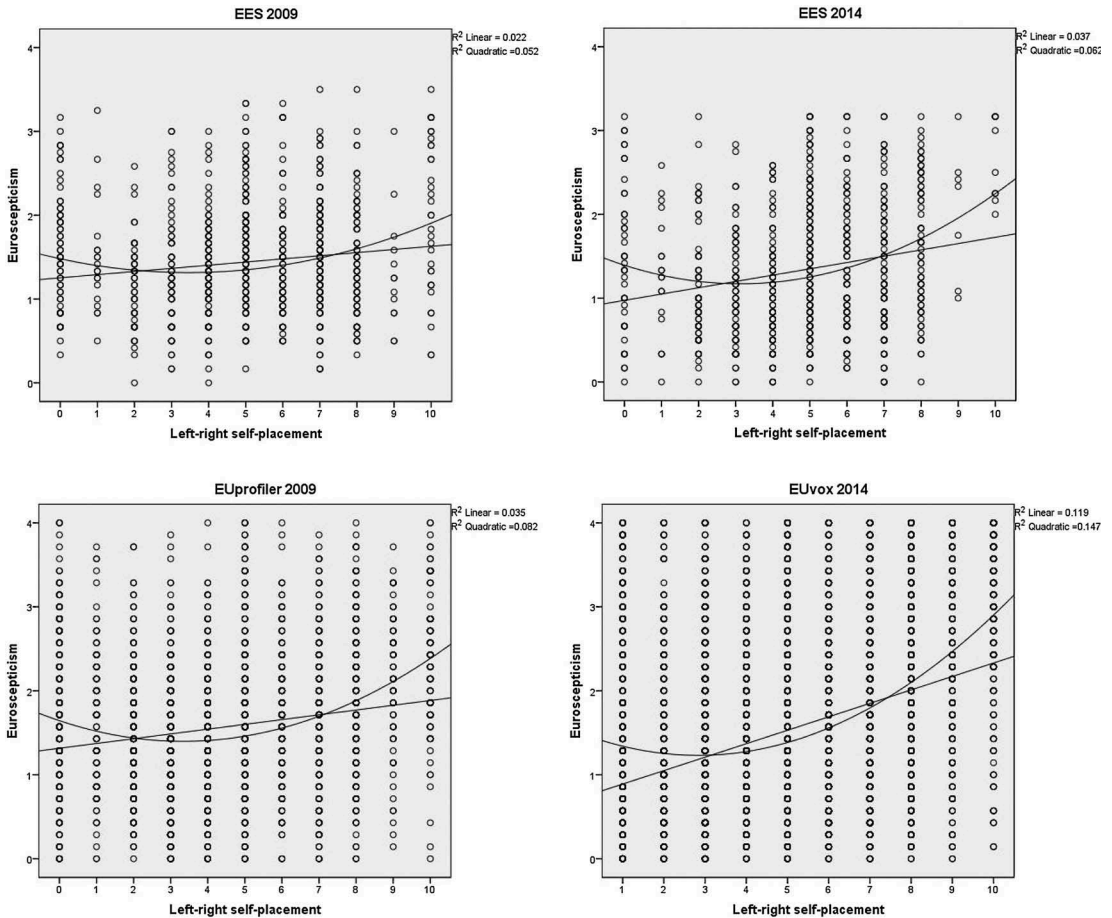
Figure 2. Linear and quadratic associations: political ideology and Euroscepticism.

variables, the results are rather varied: in all datasets except for EES 2014, gender is a positive and significant predictor of Euroscepticism. Higher levels of education are a negative, statistically significant predictor of Euroscepticism in all datasets except for EES 2009. Age is a significant determinant of Euroscepticism only in EUprofiler, where it has a negative effect, and in EUvox, where its effect is positive. Placing oneself more to the right is a strong, positive predictor of Euroscepticism in EUprofiler and EUvox, and a weak, negative predictor in EES 2009.

8. Conclusion

In this study we examined the notion derived from both the political science and psychology literature that extreme political ideology is associated with distrust in the political system. Departing from the idea that there is a similar underlying logic of extreme left-wing and extreme right-wing opinion structures and personality characteristics, we assumed a quadratic effect between ideological extremism and political trust: both extremes would be less trustful than moderate, centrist voters. Results supported these ideas. Moreover, both extremes are also more Eurosceptic than moderates.

We focused on the Netherlands as a crucial case, as this polity has a sufficiently strong radical left-wing party (SP) and a radical right-wing, anti-immigration party (PVV), which have persistently attracted a substantial number of votes. For our analyses we utilize eight datasets, four of which are

Table 3. Vote propensities as determinants of political trust.

	NKO 2010		Kieskompas 2010		NKO 2012		Kieskompas 2012	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
(Constant)	0.92	0.10	1.24***	0.11	1.31***	0.13	1.21***	0.05
Female	0.05*	0.02	0	0.04	−0.02	0.03	0.00	0.02
Age	−0.14***	0.00	−0.18***	0.00	−0.06*	0.00	−0.09***	0.00
Education	0.14***	0.01	0.13***	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.08***	0.01
Left–right self–placement	0.02	0.01	−0.08*	0.01	0.18***	0.02	−0.02	0.01
VVD	0.08*	0.01	0.05	0.01	0.20***	0.01	0.14***	0.00
PVDA	0.15***	0.01	0.24***	0.01	0.14***	0.01	0.19***	0.00
PVV	−0.20***	0.00	−0.29***	0.01	−0.31***	0.01	−0.21***	0.00
CDA	0.06*	0.01	0.18***	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.09***	0.00
SP	−0.09***	0.01	−0.25***	0.01	−0.05	0.01	−0.21***	0.00
D66	0.09***	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.08*	0.01	0.10***	0.00
GL	0.03	0.01	0.15***	0.01	0.06	0.01	0.15***	0.00
CU	0.08*	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.07	0.01	0.02	0.00
SGP	−0.02	0.01	−0.01	0.01	−0.03	0.01	0.03*	0.00
PVDD	−0.02	0.01	0.05	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.00
50PLUS							−0.11***	0.00
TON	0.05	0.01	−0.05	0.01				
N	1538		818		1176		5509	
Adj. R²	.18		.46		.26		.34	

Source: NKO, 2010, 2012; Kieskompas, 2010, 2012.
**p < .01.
*p < .05.
***p < .001.

Table 4. Vote propensities as determinants of Euroscepticism: linear regression analyses.

	EES 2009		EU profiler		EES 2014		EUvox	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
(Constant)	1.98***	0.12	1.85***	0.11	2.08***	0.05	1.40***	0.06
Female	0.06*	0.04	0.12***	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.08***	0.01
Age	−0.02	0.00	−0.10***	0.00	−0.01	0.00	0.04***	0.00
Education	−0.01	0.00	−0.04*	0.01	−0.12***	0.01	−0.09***	0.03
Left–right self–placement	−0.08*	0.01	0.11***	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.10***	0.01
VVD	−0.02	0.01	0.00	0.01	−0.21***	0.00	0.07***	0.00
PvdA	−0.16**	0.01	−0.11***	0.01	−013***	0.00	−0.12***	0.00
PVV	0.22***	0.01	0.19***	0.01	−0.01	0.00	0.41***	0.00
CDA	−0.17***	0.01	−0.09***	0.01	−0.05***	0.00	−0.05***	0.00
SP	0.19***	0.01	0.31***	0.01	0.02***	0.00	0.17***	0.00
D66	−0.10*	0.01	−0.21***	0.01	−0.05***	0.00	−0.19***	0.00
GL	−0.24***	0.01	−0.17***	0.01	0.08***	0.00	−0.21***	0.00
CU	0.05	0.01						
SGP	0.03	0.01						
PVDD	−0.04	0.01	0.02	0.01			0.01	0.00
CU/SGP			0.02	0.01	0.02	0.00	−0.02***	0.00
TON	0.05	0.01						
Newropeans			−0.09***	0.01				
50PLUS							0.07***	0.00
N	863		2180		864		7600	
Adj. R²	.24		.34		.43		.67	

Source: EES, 2009, 2014; Euprofiler 2009; EUvox, 2014.
*p < .05.
**p < .01.
***p < .001.

probability samples representative of the Dutch population (but contain very few extremist voters) and four non-probability, large-N opt-in samples collected through Vote Advice Applications (VAA's), which include large numbers of both mainstream and extreme respondents. Given that

we use both probability and opt-in samples for the analyses, and find similar results, we believe that the results can be generalised to the Dutch population.

Our findings indicate that voters on both the radical left and right share a common trait of having lower political trust than moderate, centrist voters, confirming the findings of Krouwel et al. (2017), who employ Sweden as a case study. This goes against findings that assert that only those on the radical right are distrusting and alienated from the political environment. The results suggest that it is political radicalism itself, independent of specific ideological direction that is associated with low trust levels. Similarly, we find that high levels of Euroscepticism are also associated with both radical right-wing and left-wing party preferences.

Yet, we also found evidence that, in general, voters who position themselves on the extreme right of the political spectrum are more politically distrustful and more Eurosceptic than those on the extreme left. This comes as a confirmation of the findings of Thorisdottir et al. (2007), who argue that both left and the right individuals may show increased rigidity compared to those in the middle, but in Western Europe it is more pronounced at the right. Above, we presented solid evidence that extreme political ideology is associated with lower political trust and higher Euroscepticism. This serves as a confirmation that radical political orientations induce negative attitudes towards both national and European politics. However, testing both linear and curvilinear (quadratic) associations between political extremism and trust revealed that voters who position themselves on the extreme right are considerably more prone to distrust politics and oppose European integration than those who position themselves on the extreme left. Nevertheless, the present study has its limitations – first of all, it is limited to analysing Dutch respondents. Secondly, the data was collected prior to unprecedented political upheavals in both Europe and beyond: The successful "Leave" vote in the 2016 "Brexit" referendum, and the subsequent election of Donald Trump for president of the United States. Moreover, parties on the far-right have assumed the role of governing coalition partners in Austria, while a political implosion in Italy has resulted in a governing coalition between two populist parties: the leftist Five Star Movement (*MoVimento 5 Stelle*) and the far-right League (*Lega*). Future research could utilise datasets with a larger number of identical variables and test these hypotheses in other polities with recently collected data and assess whether there are different patterns when a radical party supports or takes part in an incumbent government.

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