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To cite this article: Anders Backlund & Ann-Cathrine Jungar (2019) Populist Radical Right Party-Voter Policy Representation in Western Europe, *Representation*, 55:4, 393-413, DOI: [10.1080/00344893.2019.1674911](https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2019.1674911)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2019.1674911>



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Published online: 11 Oct 2019.



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Populist Radical Right Party-Voter Policy Representation in Western Europe

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ABSTRACT

In this study we assess policy representation by populist radical right (PRR) parties in ten West European countries. Going beyond aggregate left-right or socio-cultural (GAL-TAN) dimensions of political conflict, we study representation on policy issues related to the PRR parties' core ideological features *nativism*, *populism*, and *authoritarianism*. Analysing data from party expert and voter surveys, we find that the PRR parties provide largely unique policy positions that are congruent with their voters' preferences in terms of their opposition to immigration and the European Union. By contrast, the parties are less representative in terms of their value conservative and authoritarian positions on gay rights and civil liberties. The findings have relevance for our understanding of party strategy, voter behaviour, and the dimensionality of political competition.

KEYWORDS

Policy representation;
populist radical right; issue
congruence; party strategy

Introduction

One of the most notable changes to West European party systems in recent decades is the rapid growth of *populist radical right* (PRR) parties (Mudde, 2007). At the heart of the PRR parties' mobilising strategies lies the claim that mainstream political representatives are unresponsive to the voters' demands, together with a promise to bridge the gap between the people and the political establishment by providing voters with neglected policy alternatives (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012). Empirical research has shown the PRR vote to be driven mainly by policy concerns, primarily on the issue of immigration (Eatwell, 1998; Van der Brug, Fennema, & Tillie, 2000; Ivarsflaten, 2008; Arzheimer, 2008; Zhirkov, 2014; Rooduijn, 2018). As such, the presence of PRR parties may have positive effects on democratic participation (Huber & Ruth, 2017), constituting one potentially positive aspect – or 'corrective to representative democracy' – provided by the populist radical right (Canovan, 1999; Kaltwasser, 2012). Less scholarly attention has been paid, however, to another crucial aspect, namely the question of how well the PRR parties actually deliver on their promise of improved policy representation.

In this study, we assess how populist radical right parties in ten West European countries affect policy representation in their respective party systems and the extent to

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which they are representative of their own voters. Going beyond aggregate left-right or socio-cultural (GAL-TAN) dimensions of political conflict (e.g., Huber & Ruth, 2017; Lefkofridi & Casado-Asensio, 2013), we assess representation on policy issues related to the PRR parties' core ideological features *nativism*, *populism*, and *authoritarianism* (Mudde, 2007). Focusing on specific policy issues allows us to show how PRR party-voter representativeness varies across issues commonly included in a single dimension. We use data from the Chapel Hill Expert Surveys (2006–2014) and the European Election Study (2014) to analyse party positions and voter preferences on the policy issues of immigration, the European Union, gay rights, and civil liberties. Unlike studies that rely only on measurements of absolute congruence between parties and (mean) voters, we also assess voter dispersion on the four policy issues and find this to be a crucial parameter when analysing populist radical right policy representation.

The results show that the populist radical right parties improve representation at the party system level by filling a largely empty policy space in terms of their opposition to immigration and the European Union. On these issues, the positions of the parties also correspond well to the preferences of their voters. By contrast, we find that the parties are less representative of their voters in terms of their value conservative and authoritarian positions on gay rights and civil liberties, where their voters tend to be highly polarised. As we discuss in the final section, the findings have relevance for our understanding of populist radical right party strategy, voter behaviour, and the dimensionality of political competition.

Theory and Hypotheses

Populist radical right parties voice a populist critique of representative democracy by stating that the political representatives are unresponsive to the voters and turn a blind eye to the beliefs and preferences of ordinary people (see e.g., Canovan, 1999; Taggart, 2000; Mudde, 2004). The populist promise, by contrast, is the resurrection of the popular will by overcoming the distance between the representatives and the represented. In other words, the populist claim is to bridge the gap between the political establishment and the people by formulating positions on issues neglected or under-politicised by the established political parties. This is also one of the potentially positive effects of populism identified in the literature: 'Populism can give voice to groups that do not feel represented by the elites by putting forward topics relevant for a "silent majority"' (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012, p. 21). Formulated differently, populism 'encourage[s] the articulation of suppressed cleavages and expectations by raising and combining disparate and/or ignored political issues' (Schmitter, 2007, p. 7).

Populism is a multifaceted concept, but whether it is conceived of as a set of ideas (Canovan, 1999; Mudde, 2004; Stanley, 2008) or a communication style (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Aslanidis, 2016) the people-centred and anti-elite conceptions of politics are considered central. According to Cas Mudde, populism is 'an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite", and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people' (Mudde, 2004, p. 543). The focus on fulfilling the unmediated popular will leads Caramani (2017) to argue that the core representation feature of populism is responsiveness, i.e., 'substantive

representation' in the widely used terminology of Pitkin (1967). Populism is not, however, a feature that is unique to populist radical right parties, but rather a 'thin ideology' that can be associated with substantive demands linked to a more elaborate ideology (Kriesi, 2014). Scholars comparing right-wing and left-wing populist parties have indeed found that host ideology, rather than populism, determines the parties' parliamentary behaviour (Otjes & Louwerse, 2015) and their effect on democratic quality (Huber & Schimpf, 2017). In line with the above, our analysis focuses not on populism per se but on a specific party family – namely the populist radical right – and conceives of representation in substantive terms as the correspondence between party policies and voter preferences on issues related to the ideology of this party family. While the policies offered by populist radical right parties are primarily a function of their radical versions of right-wing politics, their (populist) vision of democracy distinguishes them from both the undemocratic extreme right and the non-populist (i.e., elitist) radical right (Mudde, 2007).

Research on party-voter policy representation is commonly informed by some version of the 'responsible party' model of representation (see e.g., Dalton, 1985; Thomassen, 1994; Powell, 2004; Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007; Mair, 2009). The responsible party model assumes that parties present policy programmes and (diverging) policy positions to the voters, who in turn vote for the party that most closely represents their policy preferences. According to Kitschelt and Rehm (2011, p. 23), 'if established parties fail to represent preference configurations for which there is demand in the electorate, sooner or later new political entrepreneurs may spot the market niche and successfully enter the political fray'. Such a dynamic of supply and demand can explain both the rise of green parties in many European countries in the 1980s and more recently that of the populist radical right. Seizing on favourable opportunity structures (e.g., increased salience and neglected policy positions), populist radical right parties have attempted to establish issue ownership on socio-cultural issues such as corruption, immigration and security (Mudde, 2010). The extent to which these parties have managed to remain electorally successful following their initial breakthrough, however, largely depends on internal factors such as organisation and leadership (Carter, 2005; Mudde, 2010; van Kessel, 2013). Based on the argument above, we hypothesise the following:

- H1: *Populist radical right parties improve representativeness at the party system level by providing unique policy positions.*

While populist radical right parties are sometimes described as 'protest parties', empirical research has shown that voters primarily cast their ballots for the radical right in order to be represented in terms of policy, most notably opposition to immigration (Eatwell, 1998; Van der Brug et al., 2000; Ivarsflaten, 2008; Arzheimer, 2008; Zhirkov, 2014; Roo-duijn, 2018). Starting with Kitschelt's (1997) argument that the combination of economically neoliberal and socio-culturally authoritarian policies was an electorally successful strategy for the radical right, there has been scholarly debate on which programmatic appeals constitute a 'winning formula' (Mudde, 1999; Eatwell, 2003; De Lange, 2007; Rovny, 2013; Jungar & Jupskås, 2014). While Kitschelt's original argument assumes a two-dimensional political space (economic vs. socio-cultural issues), others have suggested positioning on the European Union to be a distinct and cross-cutting dimension, with

Euroscepticism to be found at both the left and right extremes (Hooghe, Marks, & Wilson, 2002; Bakker, Jolly, & Polk, 2012).

When there are multiple uncorrelated dimensions of political conflict, there is a risk that voters cannot cast their ballot for a party that represents them on all issues (Van der Brug & Van Spanje, 2009; Thomassen, 2012). In this case, voters are likely to prefer the party that represents them on the policy issue(s) s/he finds most important, or salient (Giger & Lefkofridi, 2014). For example, Lefkofridi, Wagner, and Willmann (2013) have shown that left-authoritarian voters – who typically cannot be well represented both on their authoritarian and their economic left-wing views – cast their ballot according to which of these dimensions is more salient for them. If Hypothesis 1 is correct and the PRR parties provide unique policy positions on certain issues, these parties should be attractive for voters for whom these issues are important, since no other party can provide them with representation. We assume here that voters vote for the populist radical right primarily to be represented on such unique policy positions, while other policies are of secondary concern. Therefore, we hypothesise the following:

- H2: *Populist radical right parties are more representative of their voters on issues on which they provide unique policy positions than on issues on which they do not.*

Case Selection and Methods

Populist Radical Right Parties: The Cases

Populist radical right parties constitute a heterogeneous group, but their ideological core features have been defined as *nativism*, *authoritarianism* and *populism* (Mudde, 2007). These are briefly described in the following since they define the boundaries of the party family and are used to derive the policy issues used in the analysis. *Nativism* is defined as ‘an ideology, which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (“the nation”) and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state’ (Mudde, 2007, p. 22). This feature is related to the protection of national values and traditions, welfare

Table 1. Cases included in the analysis.

Country	Party name (English)	Abbrev.	Votes (%)		N
			Best (year)	Recent (year)	
Austria	Freedom Party of Austria	FPÖ	26.9 (1999)	26.0 (2017)	154
Belgium	Flemish Interest	VB	12.0 (2007)	12.0 (2019)	26
Denmark	Danish People’s Party	DF	20.6 (2015)	20.6 (2015)	174
Finland	Finns Party	PS	19.1 (2011)	17.5 (2019)	82
France	National Front ^a	FN	15.0 (1997)	13.2 (2017)	101
Germany	Alternative for Germany	AfD	12.6 (2017)	12.6 (2017)	52
Italy	Lega Nord	LN	17.4 (2018)	17.4 (2018)	40
Netherlands	Party for Freedom	PVV	15.5 (2010)	13.1 (2017)	55
Sweden	Sweden Democrats	SD	17.5 (2018)	17.5 (2018)	62
United Kingdom	UK Independence Party	UKIP	12.7 (2015)	1.8 (2017)	117

Notes: N denotes the number of respondents in the EES 2014 survey with stated vote intention for each party and with valid responses for all items used in this study. Votes (%) indicate the share of votes won by the party in its best ever national elections and the most recent national elections.

^aChanged its name to National Rally (*Rassemblement national*) in June 2018.

chauvinism, and opposition to immigration, Islam, and the European Union. *Authoritarianism* is defined as ‘the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely’ (Mudde, 2007, p. 23). This feature most notably relates to questions of law and order, where the parties favour an uncompromising approach to combatting crime and terrorism. Their *populism*, as discussed earlier, is understood as a vision of democracy that favours the fulfilment of the unmediated will of the people; it is therefore primarily a vessel for more substantive claims linked to nativism and authoritarianism.

The ten political parties analysed here, presented in Table 1, have all been classified as populist radical right parties in the literature (see e.g., Kitschelt, 1997; Minkenberg, 2000; Mudde, 2007; Art, 2011; Jungar & Jupskås, 2014; Akkerman, de Lange, & Rooduijn, 2016; Odmalm & Hepburn, 2017).¹ As can be seen, many of the parties have either noted their best or more or less matched their best ever electoral results in the most recent elections, suggesting a sustained demand for their policies. A notable exception is UKIP, which was deprived of its primary *raison d’être* following the 2016 referendum for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union. While the nature of the electoral system also means that UKIP (and to a lesser extent the Front National) has not held legislative seats in proportion to its vote share, it has been argued that the UKIP’s agenda-setting powers has granted it significance far exceeding its parliamentary representation (Evans & Mellon, 2019).

Populist radical right parties in Central and Eastern Europe share the core ideological features of the West European counterparts, but these features have different implications for policy positions. For example, the nativism of the PRR parties in Central and Eastern Europe has predominantly been reflected as resentment of national minorities rather than immigrants (Minkenberg, 2015). Since such differences create problems for cross-regional comparative studies, we restrict the cases in this study to Western Europe.

Data and Methods

To assess populist radical right party-voter policy congruence, we require data on party positions and voter preferences on relevant policy issues. To estimate party positions, one of the most straightforward approaches is to use survey data for party representatives as a proxy for party positions (e.g., Dalton, 1985; Huber & Powell, 1994), but for our purposes we are constrained by lack of data for many PRR parties. A second commonly used source of party positions is the Manifesto Data Collection (Volkens, Lehmann, Mertz, Regel, & Werner, 2013), based on the content analysis of election manifestos. There is, however, disagreement about how these data are best treated in order to reflect *positions* rather than *salience* (Benoit & Laver, 2006, pp. 99–100), and it has been argued that the coding scheme used is unsuitable in assessing positions on immigration policy (Ruedin & Morales, 2012). A third approach is to have voters estimate the positions of parties (e.g., Van der Eijk & Franklin, 1991; Blais & Bodet, 2006), but such measurements are typically limited to a single-left right dimension.

Because of the problems described above, we rely here on party data from expert surveys. As described by Benoit and Laver (2006, p. 73), such surveys seek to ‘collect the best knowledge and wisdom of a population of experts, based on their evaluation of all the evidence at their disposal, and summarize their consensus in a set of tractable estimates’. Positions are estimated along a number of policy dimensions by party experts in

each country, which are then averaged across experts. While expert surveys have faced some criticism (e.g., Budge, 2000), it has also been shown that different sets of expert data collected at around the same time are highly correlated (Marks, Hooghe, Steenbergen, & Bakker, 2007; Hooghe et al., 2010). Our source of party data in this study is the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES), one of the most widely used sources for ideological party positions. For the policy issues relevant for our study, the CHES data provide party estimates for the years 2006, 2010 and 2014 (Bakker et al., 2015; Polk et al., 2017), meaning that we can also assess changes over time. This interval is partly chosen because of data availability, but it also captures a period where PRR parties across Europe have increased their presence in national parliaments. Our choice of party data means that we treat parties as unitary actors that hold a single policy position on any given issue. This is a conceptual simplification, since candidates from the same party could, in principle, offer voters representation on a variety of policy positions (Blumenau, Eggers, Hangartner, & Hix, 2017). Nevertheless, it constitutes a tractable measurement that works well in a cross-national research design.

While there are several ways in which to estimate the policy positions of parties, voter positions are typically based on mass survey data. In this study, we use data from the 2014 wave of the European Election Studies, abbreviated here as EES (Schmitt, Hobolt, & Popa, 2015a; Schmitt, Popa, Hobolt, & Teperoglou, 2015b). This survey has the advantage of being well matched with the party data both in time and in terms of the wording of questions. Four policy issues related to the ideology of the populist radical right are shown in Table 2. Opposition to *immigration* and the *European Union* stems primarily from the parties' nativism, reflecting an aversion to non-native elements and infractions against national sovereignty. The conservative positions on *gay rights* held by most PRR parties can have multiple sources. Mudde (2007, pp. 67–78) argues that the parties' nativism leads them to favour traditional family values and gender roles, while others point to the link between authoritarianism and homophobia (Poteat & Mereish, 2012). Opposition to gay rights may also have a distinct populist component, where e.g., same-sex marriage is described as opposed to the values of 'common people' and a violation of the rights of the majority (Jungar & Edenborg, 2018). The *civil liberties* issue, finally, entails a trade-off with law and order and is therefore closely related to the authoritarianism feature.

Throughout this study, we define a 'voter position' as the mean position of all respondents that have stated vote intentions for a certain party in elections to the national parliament.² We assess the correspondence between party positions and voter preferences in two ways. First it is measured as the absolute (Euclidian) distance between parties' and voters' positions, where a greater distance implies that the parties are less representative of their

Table 2. Policy issues and variable matching.

Policy issue	Party variable (CHES 2014)	Voter variable (EES 2014)
Immigration	Position on immigration policy [0–10]	Opposed – in favour of a restrictive policy on immigration [0–10]
European Union	Overall orientation of the party leadership towards European integration [1–7 rescaled to 0–10]	Opposed – in favour of European unification [0–10]
Gay rights	Position on social lifestyle (e.g., homosexuality) [0–10]	Opposed – in favour of same-sex marriage [0–10]
Civil liberties	Position on civil liberties vs. law and order [0–10]	Opposed – in favour of privacy rights even if they hinder efforts to combat crime [0–10]

voters. Such a research design makes for easily comparable numerical positions where party-voter congruence can be quantified in a straightforward manner (Dalton, 1985; Thomassen & Schmitt, 1997; Wessels, 1999). For the absolute measurement we also present weighted aggregate results to account for the uncertainty related to the small sample sizes of some of the parties.³ One concern with directly comparing party and voter positions, however, is that ‘there is no way to be sure that the local experts and the citizens really have the same things in mind when they assign themselves, or parties, a position’ (Powell, 2009, p. 3). It has also been argued that voters cast their ballots for parties holding more extreme positions than themselves in anticipating that their vote is watered down in multiparty bargaining (Kedar, 2005; Duch, May, & Armstrong, 2010).

Because of these problems, our second congruence measurement consists of the share of voters that hold a policy attitude in the same direction as the party for which it voted. Given that a party holds a restrictive position on immigration policy, for example, the directional measurement means that the party is taken to be representative of all its voters that are in favour of restrictive immigration policy (i.e., not neutral or opposed), regardless of the absolute position of each voter.⁴ Although this means that the measurement is less precise, it makes fewer assumptions about the comparability of voters and parties. Furthermore, to the extent that voters are polarised on a given policy issue, the mean (or the median) position is a flawed summary statistic. We therefore believe that it is appropriate to include two different measurements of policy representation, where agreement between the two speaks to the robustness of the results. Whichever measurement is used, the results should be interpreted with some caution, and we pay more attention to the general patterns of representation rather than the absolute values of each party-voter dyad. After all, ‘perfect agreement is unlikely in the real world [and] what is interesting here is the manner in which the pattern departs from the ideal’ (Thomassen & Schmitt, 1997, p. 177).

Analysis

Supplying Unique Policy Positions?

We start by assessing the policy positions of the populist radical right parties and whether or not they provide voters with unique positions within their respective party systems.

Table 3. Populist radical right party positions (2014) and changes (2006–2014).

Country	Party	Immigration	European Union	Gay rights	Civil liberties
Austria	FPÖ	0.1 (−0.1)	1.5 (+0.3)	1.1 (+0.6)	1.5 (+0.5)
Belgium	VB	0.4 (+0.3)	2.7 (+0.2)	2.8 (+2.5)	1.4 (+1.3)
Denmark	DF	0.3 (−0.5)	1.5 (−0.7)	3.8 (+0.2)	1.4 (+0.2)
Finland	PS	1.0 (−0.9)	1.0 (−0.1)	0.9 (−1.2)	1.4 (−1.7)
France	FN	0.2 (−1.2)	0.4 (+0.4)	2.0 (+0.7)	0.8 (+0.5)
Germany	AfD	0.7 (N/A)	1.0 (N/A)	1.9 (N/A)	1.3 (N/A)
Italy	LN	0.5 (−1.3)	0.2 (−0.6)	0.8 (−0.6)	1.0 (+0.7)
Netherlands	PVV	0.1 (−0.5)	0.2 (+0.2)	6.3 (+2.1)	0.7 (−0.1)
Sweden	SD	0.2 (+0.0)	0.5 (+0.3)	1.8 (+0.6)	0.7 (+0.0)
United Kingdom	UKIP	0.0 (−0.4)	0.2 (+0.3)	1.5 (−1.5)	1.1 (−1.4)
<i>Mean position</i>		0.4 (−0.5)	0.9 (+0.0)	2.3 (+0.4)	1.1 (+0.0)
<i>Standard dev.</i>		0.3 (0.5)	0.8 (0.4)	1.7 (1.4)	0.3 (1.0)

Source: CHES 2006–2014.

Notes: Positions scaled from 0–10, where 0 = highly opposed and 10 = highly in favour. Figures in parentheses denote position change since 2006. For AfD, only one data point is available. For SD, change is computed from 2010–2014 due to the lack of data in 2006.

Table 3 shows the positions of the ten PRR parties on the four policy issues as measured in the Chapel Hill Expert Survey. The parties are highly opposed to immigration and European integration, and these positions have either been consistent over time or increasingly radicalised (shown in parentheses in Table 3).⁵ On the issue of gay rights there is somewhat larger variation between the parties, some of which corresponds to non-trivial changes in a more liberal direction. The Dutch Party for Freedom, for example, has moved from moderately conservative to moderately liberal, while Flemish Interest has distanced itself from the value conservative extreme. Both parties ‘couch their positions [on gender issues] explicitly in the rhetoric of enlightenment, humanism and modernity’, put in opposition to immigration and Islam (De Lange & Mügge, 2015, p. 70). If change is computed from 2010 to 2014, the French National Front also displays a more substantial repositioning (+1.7, not shown here) coinciding with the new party leader Marine le Pen taking the party in a less conservative direction by linking value liberal positions to anti-Muslim policies (Ivaldi, 2016).

By contrast, two parties have adopted more conservative and authoritarian positions in terms of gay rights and civil liberties: the Finns Party and the United Kingdom Independence Party. These two cases have in common relatively recent ideological transformations and radicalisation. In the Finns Party, the radical right faction increasingly gained an advantage over the conservative faction from 2011 onwards (Jungar, 2016), culminating in a party split in 2017. The changes in UKIP have been described as a ‘transition from a single-issue Eurosceptic party, which it had campaigned as in 2010, to a more fully fledged member of the populist radical right’ (Dennison & Goodwin, 2015, p. 186). Overall, the ten parties conform well to our expectations for the populist radical right party family.

We illustrate the uniqueness of PRR party positions using two-dimensional plots, with full details being available in Table A1 in the appendix. Starting with the issues of immigration and the EU, the positions of all parties in the ten countries are shown in Figure 1. On average, the closest rival of each PRR party is positioned almost three points away on

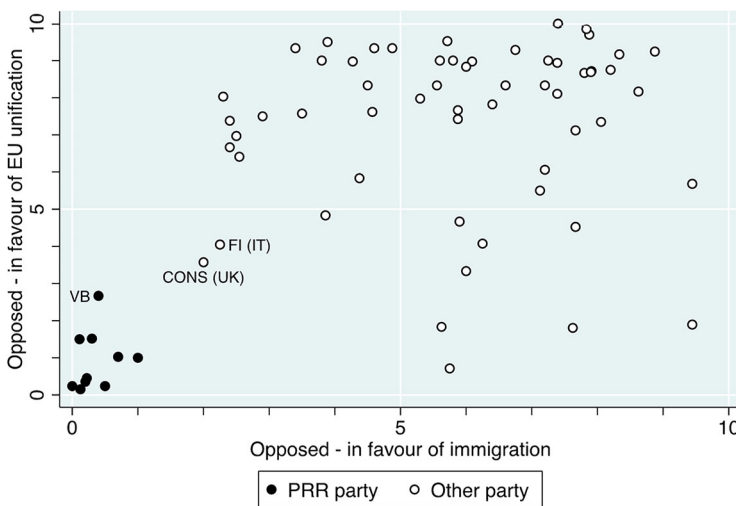


Figure 1. Party positions on immigration and EU unification. Source: CHES 2014.

both these issues. Furthermore, the policy rivals that share the EU-scepticism of the radical right tend to have a favourable view of immigration, as indicated by the parties in the bottom-right quadrant. Likewise, the rivals that hold restrictive positions on immigration policy tend to be pro-EU, as indicated by the parties in the top-left quadrant. These two groups mainly consist of parties from the socialist and conservative party families, respectively. By contrast, the populist radical right parties largely monopolise the lower left anti-immigration/anti-EU quadrant. The exceptions are the British Conservatives and Forza Italia, which both combine EU-scepticism with restrictive immigration policies, although they are less radical than the PRR parties.

Moving on to gay rights and civil liberties, party positions for all ten countries are shown in [Figure 2](#). As can be seen, positions along the two issues are strongly related (Pearson's $r = 0.84$), reflecting an underlying liberal-conservative dimension. Here, the average distance between the PRR parties and their closest policy rival is roughly half that of the distance on the immigration/EU issues (see [Table A1](#) for details). Furthermore, the PRR parties are outnumbered by policy rivals in the lower-left conservative quadrant – primarily by Christian and conservative parties – with all PRR parties except Vlaams Belang and UKIP having a rival in this quadrant.⁶ Being a liberal outlier, the Dutch PVV has multiple liberal policy rivals. Overall, we consider these results to support Hypothesis 1 for two of the four policy issues related to the core characteristics of PRR parties: they provide unique policy positions on immigration and the European Union, but not on gay rights and civil liberties. Consequently, the PRR parties improve the representativeness of their respective party systems on the two former issues by offering voters representation on a policy configuration that would otherwise be largely absent.

Party-Voter Policy Representation

Moving on to Hypothesis 2, then, we expect the PRR parties to be more representative of their voters in terms of immigration and EU policies than on policies relating to gay

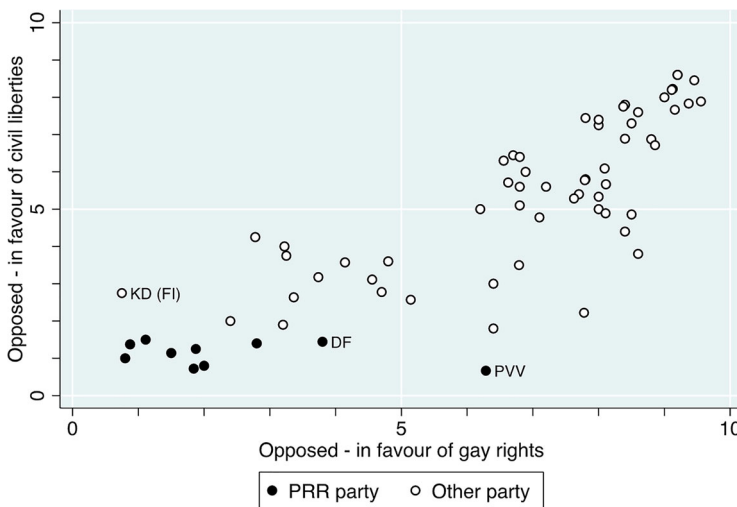


Figure 2. Party positions on gay rights and civil liberties. Source: CHES 2014.

Table 4. PRR party-voter congruence (absolute distance).

Country	Party	Immigration	European Union	Gay rights	Civil liberties
Austria	FPÖ	4.2	1.0	3.4	3.8
Belgium	VB	1.3	1.3	3.9	3.8
Denmark	DF	2.3	1.2	3.4	2.9
Finland	PS	1.7	1.9	4.1	2.0
France	FN	1.6	1.6	3.5	3.1
Germany	AfD	2.3	1.1	2.9	4.7
Italy	LN	1.4	3.6	2.3	2.2
Netherlands	PVV	2.3	2.2	2.1	3.1
Sweden	SD	0.7	1.7	4.6	3.1
United Kingdom	UKIP	1.1	0.9	3.1	2.7
<i>Mean</i>		1.9	1.7	3.3	3.1
<i>Weighted mean</i>		1.8	1.4	3.3	3.1
<i>Standard deviation</i>		1.0	0.8	0.8	0.8

Source: CHES 2014 and EES 2014.

Notes: Lower values indicate closer correspondence between parties and voters. The weighted means are weighted by inverted standard error of voter mean position estimate.

rights and civil liberties. The absolute distances between the populist radical right parties and their mean voters on all four policy issues are shown in Table 4.⁷ As expected, there is on average closer correspondence between parties and voters on the immigration and EU issues (less than two points) than on gay rights and civil liberties (more than three points). For most of the individual cases, the distance between party and mean voter is smaller on the former than on the latter, and often substantially so. There is one clear outlier in the immigration column: the Freedom Party of Austria. We are inclined to questioning the validity of the Austrian data for this variable,⁸ but even if we take the poor congruence of the FPÖ on the immigration issue at face value, the overall pattern for all parties studied changes very little. The weighted results do not differ much, suggesting that there is no strong overall relationship between congruence and sample size.⁹

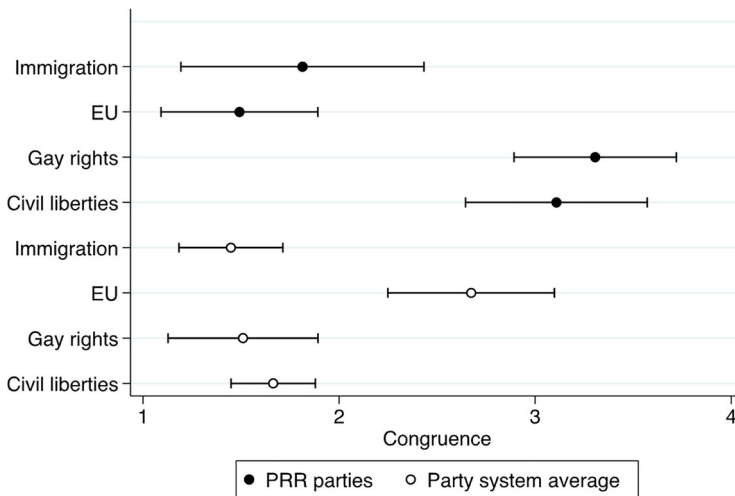


Figure 3. Weighted congruence estimates and 95% CIs. Source: CHES 2014 and EES 2014.

Notes: Lower values indicates better party-voter congruence. Details available in Table A3 in the appendix.

To put these distances into context, [Figure 3](#) shows the PRR congruence estimates together with party system averages. On the two issues where the populist radical right parties are least congruence with their voters – gay rights and civil liberties – they are about twice as far from their respective mean voter as the party system average. For the EU, the pattern is instead reversed, with the PRR parties performing significantly above average. The large party system distances indicate that the pro-EU positions held by most other West European parties (cf. [Figure 1](#)) tend not to be shared by their voters. On immigration, congruence does not differ significantly between the two groups.¹⁰ Note, however, that while the PRR parties are more strongly opposed to immigration than their mean voters, the other parties instead tend to deviate from their respective mean voter in the opposite direction; out of the 58 non-PRR parties included, 69% hold positions that are more highly in favour of immigration than the party's mean voter (not shown here).

Turning to our second measurement of policy representation, shown in [Table 5](#), the results largely confirm those obtained above. On the immigration and EU issues the PRR parties are representative of roughly three quarters of their voters, with all individual parties representing a majority of their voters, in most cases with a substantial margin. On gay rights and civil liberties, by contrast, the average share of voters represented drops to about 40–50%. Alternative for Germany stands out with poor representativeness in terms of civil liberties, which could be a result of the party not contesting the 2013 federal elections as an unequivocal populist radical right party. On the gay rights issue, seven out of the ten parties are unrepresentative of a majority of their voters, and the party that is by far most congruent with its voters is in fact the value liberal Dutch Party For Freedom.

This difference between the two pairs of issues largely reflect differences in voter polarisation. To further illustrate this, the distribution of voter positions is shown in [Figure 4](#). These histograms show the average percentage of respondents that hold each position, but the pattern is similar across the ten cases and voter dispersions for individual parties are summarised numerically in [Table A5](#) in the appendix. As can be seen in [Figure 4](#), the immigration and EU distributions are highly skewed towards opposition, with the most extreme categories being by far the most densely populated. Looking at gay right and civil liberties, by contrast, the overall pattern is one of

Table 5. Share of PRR voters represented.

Country	Party	Immigration	European Union	Gay rights	Civil liberties
Austria	FPÖ	52%	77%	51%	36%
Belgium	VB	92%	54%	26%	44%
Denmark	DF	77%	70%	20%	50%
Finland	PS	76%	75%	33%	69%
France	FN	80%	76%	33%	49%
Germany	AfD	75%	82%	39%	29%
Italy	LN	87%	63%	63%	60%
Netherlands	PVV	73%	79%	83%	67%
Sweden	SD	95%	80%	24%	53%
United Kingdom	UKIP	88%	92%	36%	53%
<i>Average share</i>		80%	75%	41%	51%
<i>Standard dev.</i>		0.12	0.11	0.20	0.13

Source: EES 2014.

Notes: Share of voters with policy attitude in same direction as party.

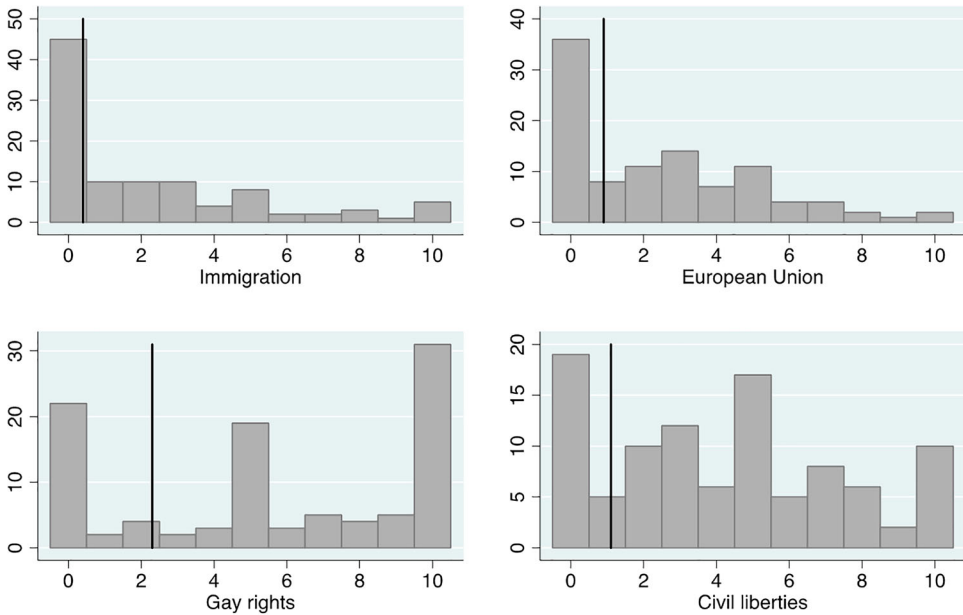


Figure 4. Average PRR voter dispersion (percent). Source: EES 2014.

Notes: Average dispersion for all ten cases (see Table A5 in the appendix for full results). Vertical lines indicate average party positions.

polarisation, with substantial shares of voters at both extremes as well as the neutral position. We argue that the results in this section overall provide strong support for Hypothesis 2: the populist radical right parties are highly representative of their voters on the issues on which they provide unique policy positions, i.e., opposition to immigration and the EU, but less representative in terms of their conservative positions on gay rights and civil liberties.¹¹

Conclusions and Discussion

The aim of this study has been to analyse populist radical right party-voter policy representation on policy issues related to the ideological core characteristics of this party family: *nativism*, *populism*, and *authoritarianism*. Despite claims about a ‘programmatically contagious’ by the radical right (e.g., Downs, 2002; Minkenberg, 2002; Bale, Green-Pedersen, Krouwel, Luther, & Sitter, 2009; Van Spanje, 2010), we find that the populist radical right parties provide unique policy positions in terms of their opposition to immigration and European integration. While mainstream conservative parties may have approached the radical right in terms of restrictive immigration policies, their positions remain distinctly more moderate – and combined with a pro-EU stance. Consequently, populist radical right parties improve political representation at the party system level by filling a largely empty policy space. On these issues, the positions of the PRR parties also tend to correspond well to the preferences of their voters, which is not surprising given that the unique positions of the parties should make them attractive for voters that find these issues to be important. For the mainstream parties, co-

opting these positions may not be a viable electoral strategy, however, since it could further increase the support for the radical right by legitimising its policies (Arzheimer & Carter, 2006; Dahlström & Sundell, 2012; Minkenberg, 2013). We also find that the populist radical right parties are less representative of their voters in terms of their value conservative and authoritarian positions on gay rights and civil liberties. We suspect that this representation gap to a large extent is the result of the parties being more ideologically motivated, while their voters are more interested in representation on specific policy issues that they find salient. For the same reason, we would expect the voters to be more supportive of strict law and order policies that are not explicitly pitted against their own civil rights.

A limitation with our study is that the data do not allow us to directly measure how the salience of an issue impacts vote choice. Nevertheless, the findings are in line with recent research showing that voters that cannot be represented by any party on all issues tend to choose the party that represents them on the issues they find to be most important (Giger & Lefkofridi, 2014). Our results thus suggest that many voters are casting their ballots for populist radical right parties despite disagreeing with their value conservatism and authoritarianism, in order to be represented on the more salient immigration and EU issues. Although currently available cross-national surveys tend not to include measurements for policy salience, further research on salience-based congruence would be a valuable addition to the study of party-voter policy representation. Furthermore, favouring a high degree of comparability between party and voter data has allowed us to analyse representativeness on specific policy issues, but being limited to a single point in time means that we have not been able to address the question of party-voter responsiveness. Studying cross-temporal data, others have shown that niche parties are responsive to their supporters, but such analyses tend to be limited to the left-right dimension (e.g., Ezrow, De Vries, Steenbergen, & Edwards, 2011; Adams, Clark, Ezrow, & Glasgow, 2006). Ideally, future research may be able to achieve both goals.

The representation gaps we have identified on certain issues indeed lead us to expect further long-term changes in the PRR parties' policy positions. As other scholars have observed, the populist radical right may fit more culturally liberal policies into its core ideological framework by linking liberal views on e.g., gender equality and gay rights to a Western 'cultural heritage' that is taken to be at odds with values held primarily by Muslim immigrants (Akkerman, 2005; Akkerman, 2015; Betz & Meret, 2009; De Koster, Achterberg, Van der Waal, Van Bohemen, & Kemmers, 2014). Our results thus suggest that in terms of non-economic issues the 'winning formula' for populist radical right parties in Western Europe may increasingly entail nativist policies combined with value liberal policies. As we have shown, however, not all parties fit this pattern (e.g., UKIP and the Finns Party), and the determinants of this variation merit further study. Finally, our findings are also in line with recent research that has called for disaggregation of the socio-cultural ideological dimension into different components (Kitschelt, 2012; Daenekindt, de Koster, & van der Waal, 2017). Regardless of how different policy items are correlated at the national level, our findings suggest that we need to distinguish between voter preferences on different non-economic issues when analysing the representativeness of the populist radical right.

Notes

1. The most disputable case is Alternative for Germany (AfD), which at the time when the data used in this study were collected (2014) more closely resembled a single-issue Eurosceptic party than a full-fledged populist radical right party (Arzheimer, 2015). However, already in the 2013 federal elections the newly formed AfD mainly attracted voters on the basis of opposition to immigration (Schmitt-Beck, 2017). In addition to a predominantly Eurosceptic message, the party also campaigned on opposition to multiculturalism and non-heteronormative lifestyles, leading Berbuir et al. (2015, p. 154) to argue that the party ‘can be regarded as a functional equivalent for a right-wing populist party in a country where right-wing politics are strongly stigmatised’.
2. The intended vote question is phrased as follows: ‘And if there were a general election tomorrow, which party would you vote for?’. Replacing the intended vote variable with a variable indicating which party a respondent actually voted for in the most recent national elections does not substantially change the reported results, speaking to their robustness. The EES data have been weighted using the included post-stratification weights (based on gender, age, urbanisation and region) in order to reduce sampling error and potential non-response bias. The results from unweighted data do not differ substantially from those reported here.
3. These congruence means are weighted by the inverted standard error of the mean voter position for each party, meaning that less weight is given to parties with fewer respondents and larger variance.
4. While this measurement is more in line with *directional* rather than *proximity*-based theories of voter behaviour (e.g. Rabinowitz, 1989), we view it here as a way of relaxing the assumptions made by the latter.
5. Vlaams Belang stands out as less Eurosceptical than the other parties, which may be related to its separatist agenda (cf. Laible, 2008) and the weak salience of the EU among Belgian parties, including VB (Van Hecke et al. 2012).
6. The British Conservatives, the second most conservative party in its sparsely populated party system, holds a neutral position on gay rights. In Belgium, all non-PRR parties in fact hold distinctly liberal positions on gay rights, which is attributed by Eeckhout and Paternotte (2011, p. 1077) to ‘an overall ethical “modernization process”’ triggered by the collapse of the Christian Democrats in the 1999 federal elections.
7. Voter positions and associated standard errors are shown in Table A2 in the appendix.
8. In a cross-check with the European Social Survey (2014), mean values for the variable ‘immigrants make country a better place to live’ (0–10) are correlated with the EES means (Table A2 in the appendix) at Pearson’s $r = 0.44$ if the FPÖ is excluded, and at -0.09 if it is included (for the eight PRR parties present in both surveys).
9. The largest change can be found on the EU issue, where it is primarily a result of the poor congruence of the Lega Nord.
10. While confidence interval overlap does not necessarily imply a null result (Schenker & Gentleman, 2001), the difference for immigration is in fact not significant at the 95% level if computed from the two point estimates and their standard errors (not shown here). Furthermore, most of the (insignificant) difference between the two – and the wide confidence intervals for the PRR parties – is driven by a single case, the Austrian FPÖ anomaly.
11. As a robustness check, we also estimate the linear effect of distance to the closest policy rival on party-voter congruence in Table A4 in the appendix. Controlling for issue and party differences, a one-point increase in the distance to the closest policy rival corresponds to about a 0.3 point increase in party-voter congruence ($p = 0.010$).

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Annika Werner, Heiko Giebler, and two anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on this paper.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This research was supported by the Marianne and Marcus Wallenberg Foundation [grant number MMW 2013.0010].

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Appendices

Table A1. Distance to closest policy rival.

Country	Party	Immigration	European Union	Gay rights	Civil liberties
Austria	FPÖ	3.8	6.8	2.1	2.5
Belgium	VB	2.0	4.0	3.4	0.4
Denmark	DF	2.0	3.2	0.9	1.3
Finland	PS	2.9	3.8	0.1	1.4
France	FN	2.2	1.4	1.4	1.8
Germany	AfD	1.8	2.3	1.3	0.6
Italy	LN	1.8	0.5	1.6	1.0
Netherlands	PVV	2.4	1.7	0.6	1.6
Sweden	SD	7.2	1.4	1.9	2.5
United Kingdom	UKIP	2.0	3.3	3.6	1.4
<i>Mean distance</i>		2.8	2.9	1.7	1.5
<i>Typical rival party</i>		Conservative	Socialist	Christian	Conservative

Source: CHES 2014.

Notes: Absolute distance between the position of each PRR party and the closest policy rival.

Table A2. Voter positions, by party and policy issue.

Country	Party	Immigration	European Union	Gay rights	Civil liberties
Austria	FPÖ	4.3 (0.300)	2.5 (0.207)	4.5 (0.277)	5.3 (0.232)
Belgium	VB	1.7 (0.492)	4.0 (0.575)	6.7 (0.654)	5.2 (0.719)
Denmark	DF	2.6 (0.225)	2.7 (0.177)	7.2 (0.265)	4.3 (0.237)
Finland	PS	2.7 (0.266)	2.9 (0.262)	5.0 (0.399)	3.4 (0.321)
France	FN	1.8 (0.266)	2.0 (0.244)	5.5 (0.379)	3.9 (0.298)
Germany	AfD	3.0 (0.426)	2.2 (0.316)	4.7 (0.529)	5.9 (0.364)
Italy	LN	1.9 (0.404)	3.8 (0.430)	3.1 (0.494)	3.2 (0.382)
Netherlands	PVV	2.4 (0.355)	2.3 (0.326)	8.4 (0.347)	3.7 (0.415)
Sweden	SD	0.9 (0.200)	2.1 (0.316)	6.4 (0.503)	3.8 (0.373)
United Kingdom	UKIP	1.1 (0.195)	1.1 (0.162)	4.6 (0.335)	3.8 (0.292)
<i>Mean position</i>		2.2	2.6	5.6	4.3
<i>Standard dev.</i>		1.0	0.9	1.6	0.9

Source: The 2014 European Election Studies.

Notes: Positions scaled from 0-10, where 0 = highly opposed and 10 = highly in favour. Standard errors in parentheses.

Table A3. Weighted party system congruence levels (absolute distance).

Country	Immigration	European Union	Gay rights	Civil liberties
Austria	1.7	3.5	1.6	1.7
Belgium	1.7	3.5	1.2	2.1
Denmark	1.3	3.2	1.5	1.4
Finland	1.1	3.0	1.7	1.6
France	1.0	3.1	1.4	1.9
Germany	1.3	2.5	0.9	1.7
Italy	2.0	2.8	1.9	1.9
Netherlands	1.8	2.5	1.2	1.9
Sweden	1.6	2.6	0.9	1.2
United Kingdom	0.9	2.1	1.7	1.3
<i>Mean</i>	1.4	2.9	1.4	1.7
<i>Standard dev.</i>	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.3

Source: CHES 2014 and EES 2014.

Notes: Lower values indicate closer correspondence between parties and voters.

Table A4. OLS regression models for dependent variable party-voter congruence.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Distance to closest policy rival	-0.392*** (0.0481)	-0.204** (0.0653)	-0.294** (0.106)
Party size (vote %)	0.0568* (0.0292)	0.0411 (0.0236)	
Issue: Immigration		-0.978** (0.301)	-0.817** (0.392)
Issue: EU		-1.292*** (0.381)	-1.135*** (0.364)
Issue: Gay rights		0.218 (0.364)	0.232 (0.364)
Issue: Civil liberties		(reference category)	
Party: FPÖ			1.525** (0.632)
Party: VB			0.619 (0.527)
Party: DF			0.368 (0.289)
Party: PS			0.434 (0.492)
Party: FN			0.317 (0.310)
Party: AfD			0.612 (0.573)
Party: LN			0.125 (0.634)
Party: PVV			0.267 (0.518)
Party: SD			0.722 (0.469)
Party: UKIP		(reference category)	
Constant	2.637*** (0.259)	2.960*** (0.325)	3.037*** (0.316)
<i>Observations</i>	40	40	40
<i>R-squared</i>	0.335	0.596	0.674

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses (in models 1 and 2 clustered by party). Observations are party-issues, weighted by the inverted standard error of the voter mean of each party. Unweighted or nested models do not produce substantially different results. Party size omitted in model 3 due to collinearity with the party variable.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table A5. Voter dispersion, by party and policy issue.

Country	Party	Immigration	European Union	Gay rights	Civil liberties
Austria	FPÖ	-0.02	0.47	-0.02	0.16
Belgium	VB	0.59	0.19	0.25	-0.08
Denmark	DF	0.40	0.38	0.33	0.06
Finland	PS	0.46	0.41	0.03	0.29
France	FN	0.57	0.54	-0.17	0.11
Germany	AfD	0.29	0.54	-0.12	0.22
Italy	LN	0.54	0.23	0.24	0.27
Netherlands	PVV	0.44	0.49	0.62	0.19
Sweden	SD	0.79	0.55	0.05	0.18
United Kingdom	UKIP	0.74	0.77	-0.14	0.09
<i>Mean</i>		0.48	0.46	0.11	0.15
<i>Standard dev.</i>		0.22	0.16	0.24	0.10

Notes: Dispersion measured as Van der Eijk's (2001) coefficient of agreement which ranges from -1 (perfect polarisation) to 1 (perfect agreement).