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## The impact of radical right parties on family benefits

Laurenz Ennser-Jedenastik 

Department of Government, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria

### ABSTRACT


Radical right parties have gained access to government across Europe, yet scholarly work on how they shape welfare states remains scarce. Therefore, this article examines how radical right parties affect family benefits. Combining pro-natalist views with a commitment to traditional gender roles, these parties seek to support family incomes without altering the traditional intra-family division of labour. Radical right governance should therefore correlate positively with spending on family allowances, but negatively with childcare expenditures. However, generous family allowances may become less attractive and childcare spending more attractive to the radical right as immigrant populations increase. An analysis of 26 European countries between 1980 and 2015 shows a negative, yet noisy, effect of the radical right on childcare expenditures. By contrast, effects on family allowances are negligible. Further analysis also uncovers that radical right governance is associated with larger gaps between spending on family allowances and spending on childcare.

**KEYWORDS** Radical right; welfare state; family benefits; gender

Radical right parties have been the most successful new entrants into European party politics during the past decades (Mudde 2013). Not only have they made significant electoral gains and thus restructured the political landscape in Europe (Oesch and Rennwald 2018), they have also propelled their mainstream competitors to shift their issue agenda markedly to the right (Abou-Chadi and Krause 2020; Bale *et al.* 2010). In a growing number of countries, radical right parties have entered government office, thus obtaining political positions to shape public policy directly.

Still, the number of studies on the radical right's policy impact is tiny in comparison with work on its electoral performance or ideological

**CONTACT** Laurenz Ennser-Jedenastik  [laurenz.ennser@univie.ac.at](mailto:laurenz.ennser@univie.ac.at)  Department of Government, University of Vienna, Kolingasse 14-16/6.31, 1090 Vienna, Austria

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profile. Moreover, since the radical right mobilises primarily on cultural issues such as immigration and immigrant integration, these were exactly the first places where scholars started looking for policy impact (Akkerman 2012; Minkenberg 2013; Schain 2006). More recently, however, the socio-economic profile of the radical right has come into focus. While debates about its position on economic and social policy issues are ongoing (de Lange 2007; Ennser-Jedenastik 2016; Otjes 2019; Rovny 2013), a number of studies have examined the effect of radical right governance in these areas, often finding a mix of expansion and retrenchment (Afonso 2015; Röth *et al.* 2018; Swank and Betz 2019). In addition, radical right parties typically leave a strong welfare chauvinistic imprint on government policy (Careja *et al.* 2016; Chueri 2020; Ennser-Jedenastik 2020).

One area that has not yet received too much scrutiny is family policy. This is a particularly glaring omission, as radical right parties tend to have very strong ideological commitments to specific (often very traditional) family and gender roles. Paradoxically, as the radical right has risen in strength and entered parliaments and government across Europe, the continent has also undergone a substantial shift towards more egalitarian gender attitudes (Knight and Brinton 2017). How, then, does the ascendant radical right affect family policy in an environment where public opinion moves away from socially conservative conceptions of the family?

In order to answer this question, this article presents the most comprehensive quantitative analysis of the radical right's impact on family benefits to date. The theoretical framework starts from the distinction between *familializing* and *de-familializing* policies and argues that the core principles of radical right ideology – nativism and authoritarianism – have very different implications for these two policy types.

Nativism prescribes that the continued existence of the nation hinges on the reproduction of the native population, however defined. Public policy should therefore take a pro-natalist approach and support the reproductive capacity of the nuclear family. Yet, the radical right's authoritarian leanings limit its pro-natalist thrust to policies that maintain traditional gender roles within the family. Empirically, this implies support for cash benefits (e.g. family allowances), but not for services provided out-of-family (e.g. childcare). However, both these expectations may change as ethnic diversity increases. Family allowances become less attractive as a larger proportion of benefits goes to nonnative recipients. Childcare services, by contrast, may become seen as a means to foster immigrant assimilation in terms of culture and language.

The empirical analysis covers public expenditures on family allowances and childcare in 26 European countries between 1980 and 2015. It

uncovers a negative relationship between radical right parties in government and spending on childcare. By contrast, the effects on family allowances are statistically insignificant. In addition, neither effect responds strongly to the size of the immigrant population. However, additional analyses show that radical right governance correlates with shifts in spending from one category to the other: The *gap* between family allowances and childcare spending is positively associated with radical right governance.

The next sections introduce the theoretical argument and present the hypotheses. After that, the empirical strategy is outlined, and an overview of the data given. The analysis then tests the hypotheses in a multivariate framework. The final section concludes with a brief summary and a discussion of implications for further research.

## **Two dimensions of family policy: familialization and de-familialization**

Public policies aimed at families consist of a myriad of benefits and services subsidised or provided by the state. They can be classified in multiple ways. One useful approach for the purpose of this article is Leitner's (2003: 358) 'varieties of familialism' typology, a two-by-two matrix with strong vs. weak *familialization* and strong vs. weak *de-familialization* as the two dimensions (see also Lohmann and Zagel 2016; Saraceno and Keck 2010). Familializing policies are those that support and enhance the capacity of families to care for their dependents (e.g. children or elderly family members). Family allowances, child tax credits, parental leave schemes, or pension rights for caregivers are examples of such policies. All these policies strengthen the ability of families to care for children or the elderly, while – in and of themselves – offering no alternative provision of care through the state or the market. By contrast, de-familializing policies provide care alternatives *outside* the family and thus relieve families of the duty to care (and decrease the dependence of those being cared for on their family). Examples of such policies are the provision or subsidy of institutional childcare, institutional care for the elderly, or the financing of home help services (Javornik 2014; Saraceno 2016).

The distinction between familializing and de-familializing policies is crucial, since radical right parties take very different positions on these two dimensions (see section below). Their pro-natalist worldview leads them to promote strong familialization, while their adherence to traditional gender roles means that their support for de-familialization is lacklustre at best. In Leitner's typology, radical right parties can therefore

be classified as pursuing ‘explicit familalism’: strengthening the care capabilities of families while insisting that families (which, in practice, means mostly women) remain the ones responsible for conducting the care work. This relates to the argument that Hieda (2013) makes in one of the most comprehensive analyses of the political determinants of childcare expenditures in advanced industrial democracies (even though the author does not address radical right parties explicitly). Hieda (2013: 490) argues that party competition has become two-dimensional (with an economic and a cultural dimension), and that we should expect childcare expansion especially from governing parties that combine pro-redistributionist stances with socially liberal (and hence feminist) values. Therefore, parties with socially conservative ideologies – such as the radical right party family – should not be expected to increase childcare provision, even if those parties do not object to redistributive social programs in principle. By extension, such an ideological position should be easily compatible with generous cash transfers to families.

In the terminology of the literature on welfare state recalibration (Häusermann 2018; Van Kersbergen and Hemerijck 2012), the radical right endorses generous consumption policies to support family incomes, but does not favour generous investment policies that would alleviate the caring burden for families. In practice, radical right parties in government are therefore likely to push for more generous cash benefits such as family allowances, while seeking to limit, or even shrink, the provision of, for instance, childcare services. While the traditional spending gap between cash and in-kind family benefits has narrowed considerably over the past decades,<sup>1</sup> we should expect radical right governance to work against that trend.

### **The ideological foundations of the radical right’s approach to family policy**

The ideology of the radical right has two core elements: nativism and authoritarianism (Mudde 2007), often combined with populism (which is of lesser importance here). Both, nativism and authoritarianism have strong implications for how radical right parties view the role of families and gender relations in society. These two principles thus form the starting point of this article’s theoretical discussion of the impact of radical right governance on family policy.

First, nativism is a combination of nationalism and xenophobia that identifies all nonnative ideas or persons as a threat to the nation (Mudde 2007: 19). Based on this exclusionary premise, the preservation of the nation can only be achieved through native reproduction, not through immigration. Hence, the native nuclear family has traditionally played a

vital role in the worldview of the radical right (Norocel 2010), constituting the nation's smallest building block or 'the ultimate cell of society' (Bruter and Harrison 2011: 71). Therefore, maintaining and enhancing its reproductive capacity is crucial to guaranteeing the future existence of the nation.

Second, authoritarianism is a view that prefers a 'strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely' (Mudde 2007: 23). The 'strict order' that is characteristic of authoritarian thinking encompasses many traditional social hierarchies, including gender hierarchies. Radical right ideology therefore endorses a clear division of labour between men and women. Whereas the public sphere and paid employment are viewed as male domains, the private sphere and unpaid labour remain the prerogative of women (Mudde 2007: 93). In addition to their ideological leanings, the overrepresentation of men among their voters (Harteveld *et al.* 2015; Immerzeel *et al.* 2015) and activists (Rashkova and Zankina 2017; Sundström and Stockemer 2015; Whiteley *et al.* 2019) has earned radical right parties the label *Männerparteien* (men's parties).

Yet while some radical right parties espouse a strictly conservative stance on gender relations, many subscribe to a 'modern conservative' perspective that still views women as the primary caregivers, but at the same time condones women's pursuit of paid employment. At least rhetorically, radical right ideology has thus not been completely immune to changing attitudes towards gender and family roles, notably in areas such as gender equality and gay rights (Erzeel and Rashkova 2017).<sup>2</sup> More recently though, some authors have noted that support for these ideas among radical right parties is not necessarily intrinsic, but motivated by nativist opposition to (especially Muslim) immigrants with very conservative views on gender and family (Krizsán and Siim 2018; Moffitt 2017; Spierings and Zaslove 2015).

In general, the empirical evidence confirms the expectation that radical right parties adopt strongly pro-natalist positions and promote policies that support and reward having children (Minkenbergh 2001). In her analysis of six West European radical right parties, Akkerman (2015) finds that all of them are in favour of familializing policies such as financial support for (large) families, while some are even reluctant to fully endorse the public provision of childcare – a stance that has also been reported for the Austrian Freedom Party (Ennser-Jedenastik 2020: 7). While there is some variation in the degree of traditionalism (with the Dutch and Danish parties taking more liberal stances), Akkerman (2015: 52) shows that radical right parties on the whole are notably more conservative on family policy than their center-right competitors. These findings are echoed by de Lange and Mügge (2015) who report that radical right ideology in Belgium and the Netherlands is dominated by

traditionally familialistic views, although some liberal positions can be found as well. In another analysis, Fenger (2018: 198) shows that the primary thrust in family policy among radical right actors is to improve the financial situation of families through increases in child allowances or tax credits for parents.

Certainly, some deviations from this pattern do occur. The Sweden Democrats, for instance, emphasise the importance of high-quality childcare (Fenger 2018), as do some parties in Belgium and the Netherlands (de Lange and Mügge 2015). In addition, the radical right's view of the family as highly deserving is not necessarily limited to the stereotypical two-parent family. As Ennser-Jedenastik (2016) shows, the Austrian Freedom Party has consistently advocated for greater financial support for single mothers. These more modern stances notwithstanding, radical right party policy in general seeks to provide generous consumption policies for families (direct or indirect cash transfers) but remains much less enthusiastic about investment policies (care services). This is also what Enggist and Pinggera (in this volume) find. The first two hypotheses thus capture these stances:

H1 Radical right governance is associated with increased spending on family allowances.

H2 Radical right governance is associated with decreases (or at least no increases) in spending on childcare provision.

## **Native families first: welfare chauvinism as a moderating factor**

Gender relations and the family are certainly important in the ideology of the radical right, yet no element is as central as nativism (Mudde 2007). In fact, the centrality of nativism is such that it colours almost all other aspects of the radical right's policy platform. In the realm of social policy, this implies that welfare chauvinism is a crucial characteristic (Ketola and Nordensvard 2018; Norocel 2016). Welfare chauvinism can be best understood as the application of nativism to social policy. Typically, radical right parties envisage generous policies for the native population, while nonnatives should receive limited benefits, if any (Rathgeb 2021).

Welfare chauvinistic attitudes are pervasive among European electorates (Cappelen and Midtbø 2016; Hjorth 2016; Kootstra 2016), with immigrants consistently ranking as the group viewed as least deserving of support (van Oorschoot 2006; 2008). It is no surprise then that welfare chauvinism has become pervasive among many radical right parties since the 1990s (Careja *et al.* 2016; Ennser-Jedenastik 2020), and has sometimes

even spread to their mainstream competitors (Schumacher and van Kersbergen 2016). As Ennser-Jedenastik (2018) shows, cash benefits for families are a particularly likely target of welfare chauvinistic appeals, because they are often (though not always) designed as universal programs.

In part, welfare chauvinism is a response to rising levels of migration in Europe. The average member state of the erstwhile EU-28 has seen its foreign-born population more than double between 1990 and 2019 (United Nations 2019). As immigrants are typically younger than the native population and often have higher fertility rates (OECD 2015: 44), rising immigrant populations mean that a growing share of family benefits is consumed by nonnatives. In some cases, this has led radical right parties to propose cuts to family benefits. The Dutch People's Party (PVV), for instance, has proposed limiting family allowances to the first two children (PVV 2012: 25). The Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), by contrast, has advocated a cost-of-living indexation of family allowances paid to parents whose children live abroad (a policy that mainly targets labour migrants from new EU member states and reduces benefit levels by up to 50 percent). This proposal was put into law during the party's government participation in 2018/19 and is currently being challenged before the European Court of Justice by the European Commission and private plaintiffs (Ennser-Jedenastik 2020).

Implementing openly welfare chauvinistic policies thus often runs up against legal or practical barriers – especially in the European Union where social rights for migrant workers are a corollary of the freedom of movement (Lenaerts and Heremans 2006). After all, one of the major concessions that David Cameron extracted from the EU-27 as part of a deal to persuade the British public to remain inside the European Union, was the option of limiting child benefits for immigrants whose children live abroad (Boer *et al.* 2019). Yet due to the victory of the 'Leave' campaign, the legal changes necessary to allow members states such flexibility were never implemented. Given the high legal and political hurdles to restrict benefits to immigrants, radical right parties may conclude that generous transfers to families incur too much native-to-nonnative redistribution and hence tamper their enthusiasm for lavish cash benefits.

By contrast, high immigration levels may soften radical right parties' stance on public childcare provision – especially as it becomes clear that immigrants and their descendants will be permanent rather than temporary residents. Education has long been an instrument of nation-building and immigrant assimilation (Bandiera *et al.* 2019; Lleras-Muney and Shertzer 2015). Along those lines, early childhood education may be seen by the radical right an instrument for the native majority to ensure its cultural and linguistic dominance. In fact, some countries have introduced



mandatory kindergarten periods for exactly that purpose (Gruber *et al.* 2016: 72). Since early childhood education can improve immigrant children's acquisition of linguistic and cultural competences (Melhuish *et al.* 2015) and thus further immigrant assimilation, it is plausible that radical right parties begin to view investment in childcare as worthwhile as the proportion of immigrants in a country increases.

H3 The positive impact of radical right governance on spending on family allowances decreases as the stock of immigrants in a country goes up.

H4 The negative impact of radical right governance on childcare spending decreases as the stock of immigrants in a country goes up.

Any analysis of the policy effects of radical right governance assumes – together with a large literature in comparative social policy – that the partisan composition of governments will have a measurable impact on policy outcomes. As Bandau and Ahrens (2020) have shown recently for the classic left–right dimension, this has become less and less true over time. Whether the same trend applies to radical right parties (who have a much shorter and sketchier history of government participation), is unclear. Hence, even though the ideology of the radical right provides clear expectations about its impact on family policy, there are important constraints (coalition government, fiscal rules, European integration, etc.) that may act against these hypotheses.

## Empirical strategy

In order to test the hypotheses, the analysis uses OECD data on public expenditures for family allowances and childcare ('early childhood education and care') in 26 European countries between 1980 and 2015 (see [www.oecd.org/social/expenditure.htm](http://www.oecd.org/social/expenditure.htm)). These two expenditure categories represent the bulk of spending on cash and in-kind benefits for families in Europe. The case selection (see Table A1 in the online appendix for a list of countries) is simply a result of the attempt to maximise empirical coverage. The sample spans most of Western Europe and much of Central and Eastern Europe during the past four decades. Therefore, the analysis covers the most important episodes of European radical right parties entering government office.

Figure 1 plots the expenditure data per country over time. Spending on family allowances is typically higher than spending on childcare, but the gap has narrowed in the recent past. In the Nordic countries, childcare spending has long been higher than spending on family allowances. More recently, this has also been true elsewhere (e.g. the Baltic region,

**Table 1.** Radical right governance (incl. supporting parties of minority cabinets).

Country	Parties	Years in government
Austria	FPÖ (radical right from 1986), BZÖ	2000–06
Denmark	DFP	2002–11*, 2015*
Finland	PS	2015
Greece	LAOS	2012
Hungary	KDNP, FIDESZ (radical right from 2006)	1990–94, 2010–15
Italy	LN	1994, 2001–06, 2008–11
Latvia	TB	1996–97
Netherlands	PVV	2011–12
Norway	FrP	1985–86*, 1990*, 2003–05*, 2013–15
Poland	PiS, LPR	2006–07
Slovakia	SNS	1992–98, 2006–10
Slovenia	SDS (radical right from 2003)	2005–08, 2012–13
Sweden	NyD	1992–94*
Switzerland	SVP (radical right from 1999)	2000–2007, 2009–2015

Note: Asterisks (\*) denote supporting parties of minority cabinets; only country-years with radical right government participation longer than three months included. The Swiss People's Party (SVP) has been classified as radical right starting with the 1999 election, the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) starting with the 1986 election (consistent with the coding in Röth *et al.* 2018). Fidesz is classified as radical right from 2006 and the Slovenian SDS from its name change in 2003.

France, or Italy). The tendency to shift spending from cash transfers to in-kind family benefits is clearest in countries such as Iceland and Norway that have seen a complete reversal in the focus of expenditures (Eydal and Rostgaard 2011). Yet even unlikely cases such as Germany under Christian democrat-led governments have moved in that direction (Häusermann 2018).

The central independent variable in the analysis is the government participation of radical right parties, a dichotomous variable coded as indicated in Table 1. This variable takes on the value 1 for country-years in which a radical right party was included in government or acted as a supporting party for at least three months. Radical right parties were identified as those classified as 'far right' (thus belonging either to the radical or the extreme right) by Rooduijn *et al.* (2019). Table 1 presents an overview of all parties and country-years coded as cases of radical right governance between 1980 and 2015.

The second independent variable that is relevant to testing the hypotheses above (specifically, H3 and H4) is the migrant stock in a country. These data are provided by the United Nations Population Division (United Nations 2019) in five-year intervals. Therefore, imputations of missing time points have been conducted by applying local polynomial smoothing (using Stata's *lpoly* command). In addition, the variable has been logged to eliminate skewness.

A number of control variables will also be specified. The first is a set of political characteristics. *Cabinet partisanship* is a potential confounder because radical right parties are more likely to enter cabinet with other

right-wing parties than with left-wing parties. Therefore, the regression models include variables capturing the proportion of portfolios taken by left-wing and centrist (e.g. Christian democratic) parties (leaving the proportion of right-wing cabinet seats as reference). Information on cabinet shares is taken from the Comparative Political Data Set (CPDS) (Armingeon *et al.* 2019).

A potential alternative to this measure based on party families would be to include a direct measurement of government ideology, typically cabinet-weighted left–right averages based on manifesto or expert survey data (Garritzmann and Seng 2020; Hieda 2013). The advantage of such a measure would be to account for ideological differences between parties of the same party family (e.g. Mitterand’s *Parti socialiste* and Tony Blair’s New Labour). The disadvantage would be that manifesto-based measures of ideology can be quite noisy, and that the validity of the underlying documents varies substantially (Gemenis 2012; Hansen 2008). Therefore, this article includes in the online appendix (Table A4, Figure A1) a robustness check with government ideology measures similar to Hieda’s (2013) two-dimensional approach, but based on the V-Party dataset (Lührmann *et al.* 2020). The results are very similar to those presented in the main analysis.

*Trade union density* measures the organisational power of organised labour and is an important predictor of social policy outcomes. While family benefits have arguably not been the core concerns of unions, at least the provision of childcare can affect (especially female) labour supply substantially. Therefore, the strength of unions is an important factor to be included in the analysis (data source: Visser 2019).

*Female political representation.* Family benefits have a strong gender dimension, and thus their design and generosity depend on how political power is distributed between men and women (Bolzendahl 2011; Bratton and Ray 2002; Ennser-Jedenastik 2017). To capture this logic, the analysis includes the proportion of female members of parliament for each country-year, again taken from Armingeon *et al.* (2019). A similar logic would dictate the inclusion of female labour force participation as a control variable. However, since this covariate correlates highly with female political representation ( $r=0.63$ ), only one of the two variables was entered into the regression models. (The empirical results do not hinge on this decision; also, female political representation has somewhat better temporal and spatial coverage).

The final set of controls represents demographic and economic factors. The *proportion of the population under 15* is a simple measure of how many (potential) benefit recipients there are. It thus reflects demand for benefits and may therefore drive policy and spending decisions (Gauthier 2007; Luci-Greulich and Thévenon 2013). A standard set of economic

indicators is included to capture the macro-economic situation in a country at any given point in time: *GDP per capita* (in US Dollars, constant prices, 2015 purchasing power parities), *real GDP growth* and the *unemployment rate*. These measures may not directly affect spending on family benefits, but they can have indirect effects, for instance, by capturing the size and growth of the pie to be distributed, or by measuring demand for social expenditures that may compete with spending on family benefits (e.g. unemployment insurance or active labour market policy). A table with summary statistics for all variables used in the analysis is included in the online appendix.

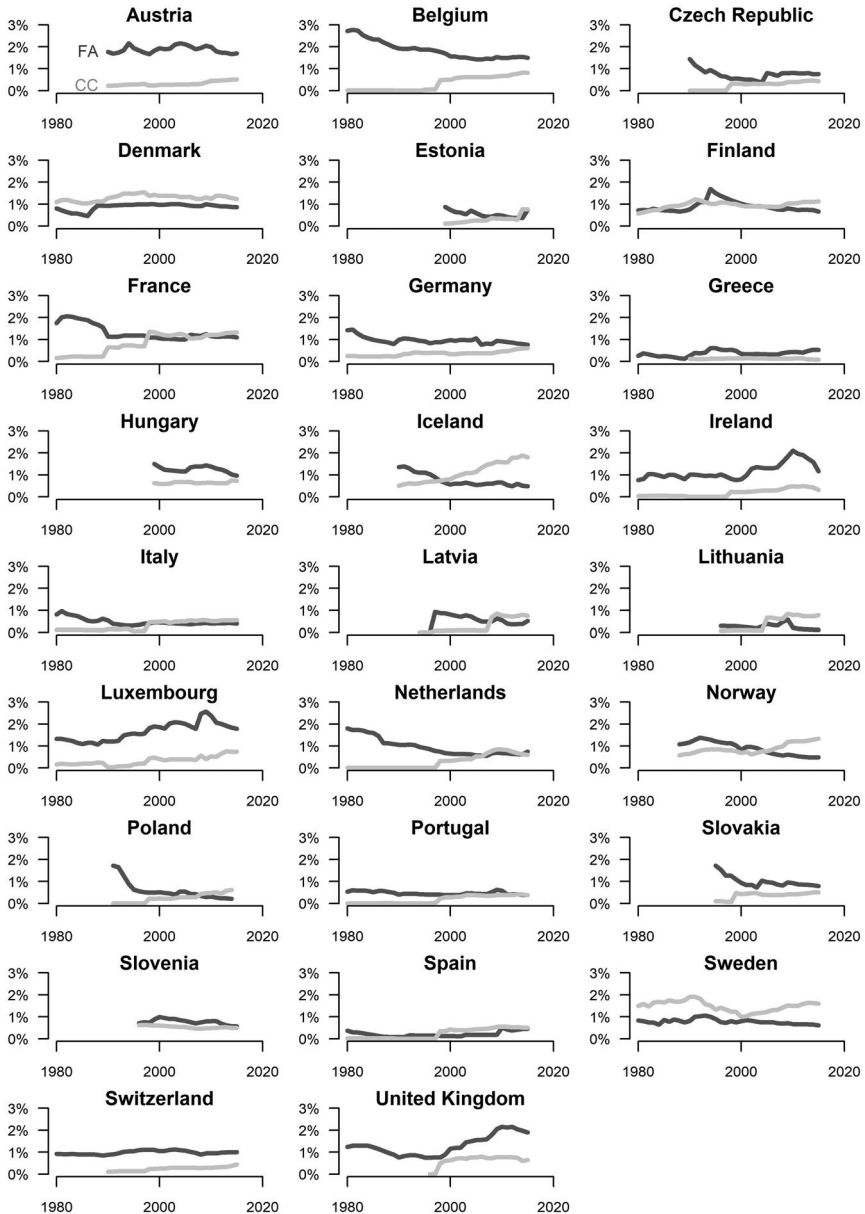
The modelling strategy follows Garritzmann and Seng (2020) who argue that partisan effects on welfare spending should be estimated using mixed-effects models (MEMs) with cross-nested random effects at the level of countries, cabinets and years. Cubic splines are included to capture time trends and thus account for secular trends in the dependent variables (e.g. the overall increase in childcare expenditures over time, see Figure 1).

## Analysis

Table 2 presents the regression models, with spending on family allowances (Models 1 and 2) and childcare (Models 3 and 4) as the dependent variables. Model 1 tests the first hypothesis: that radical right governance increases spending on family allowances. It displays a positive coefficient for radical right governance, thus indicating that radical right parties in government are, indeed, associated with higher expenditures on family allowances. According to Model 1, having a radical right party represented in (or supporting) the cabinet correlates with an average increase in spending on family allowances by 0.028 percentage points in the following year. However, the coefficient estimated in Model 1 is not statistically significant ( $p=0.216$ ). The variance around the point estimate is therefore too large to support the first hypothesis.

Model 3 evaluates the impact on childcare spending (H2). As expected, the coefficient for radical right governance is negative, indicating an average annual decrease of childcare spending of 0.028 percentage points of GDP. The coefficient reaches statistical significance at the ten-percent level ( $p=0.078$ ). While noisy, it still provides some evidence in support of the hypothesis that radical right parties produce decreases in childcare spending. This is all the more remarkable since both, the radical right's presence in government and expenditures on childcare have increased markedly during the period of observation.

Hypothesis 3 assumed that the radical right's impact on family allowances would be positive but weaker when the number of migrants in a



**Figure 1.** Public spending on family allowances (FA) and childcare (CC) as percent of GDP in 26 countries (1980–2015). Note: Data from the OECD Social Expenditure Database.

country is high. To evaluate this claim, Model 2 includes an interaction between radical right governance and the migrant stock. In this model, the coefficient for radical right governance (representing the effect at a hypothetical migrant stock of zero) is positive but insignificant ( $p=0.127$ ),

**Table 2.** Determinants of spending on family allowances (FA) and childcare (CC).

Model	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dependent variable	FA	FA	CC	CC
Radical right governance	0.0273 (0.0220)	0.0925 (0.0606)	-0.0274# (0.0155)	-0.0303 (0.0428)
Radical right governance × migrant stock (logged)		-0.0326 (0.0282)		0.00147 (0.0200)
Migrant stock (logged)	0.172** (0.0455)	0.174** (0.0455)	-0.0932** (0.0337)	-0.0934** (0.0338)
Left-party share of cabinet seats	0.0566** (0.0197)	0.0580** (0.0197)	0.0522** (0.0141)	0.0521** (0.0142)
Center-party share of cabinet seats	0.0434 (0.0311)	0.0468 (0.0312)	0.0175 (0.0221)	0.0173 (0.0222)
Trade union density	0.240 (0.191)	0.234 (0.190)	0.741** (0.136)	0.742** (0.136)
Share of female legislators	-0.273 (0.216)	-0.281 (0.216)	0.435** (0.154)	0.436** (0.154)
Share of population under 15	1.009 (0.865)	1.067 (0.867)	-1.624* (0.647)	-1.628* (0.648)
GDP per capita (USD, divided by 1,000)	0.0209** (0.00267)	0.0209** (0.00267)	0.00309 (0.00190)	0.00308 (0.00190)
Unemployment rate	0.0163** (0.00304)	0.0166** (0.00305)	-0.00705** (0.00223)	-0.00707** (0.00224)
Real GDP growth	-0.00916** (0.00210)	-0.00914** (0.00210)	-0.00299# (0.00163)	-0.00300# (0.00163)
Spline 1	-0.0329** (0.00591)	-0.0329** (0.00591)	0.00315 (0.00488)	0.00315 (0.00488)
Spline 2	0.0275* (0.0131)	0.0283* (0.0131)	0.0316** (0.0110)	0.0315** (0.0110)
Spline 3	-0.0868# (0.0484)	-0.0902# (0.0484)	-0.0948* (0.0406)	-0.0946* (0.0407)
Constant	65.08** (11.77)	65.23** (11.75)	-5.918 (9.707)	-5.927 (9.713)
$\sigma_{\text{country}}$	0.408** (0.0622)	0.406** (0.0619)	0.262** (0.0395)	0.262** (0.0395)
$\sigma_{\text{cabinet}}$	0.215** (0.0101)	0.215** (0.0101)	0.158** (0.00748)	0.158** (0.00748)
$\sigma_{\text{year}}$	0.0260** (0.00681)	0.0257** (0.00684)	0.0304** (0.00506)	0.0304** (0.00506)
$\sigma_{\text{residual}}$	0.0833** (0.00295)	0.0833** (0.00295)	0.0579** (0.00209)	0.0580** (0.00209)
N (countries)	26	26	26	26
N (cabinets)	307	307	297	297
N (observations)	760	760	727	727

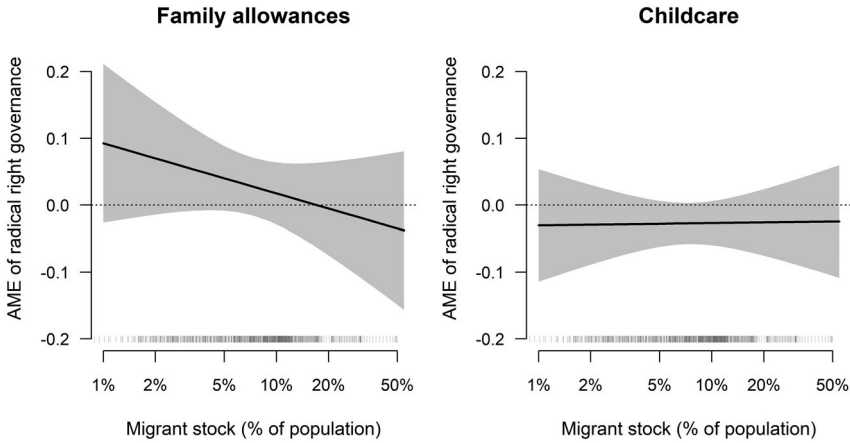
Estimates from cross-nested mixed-effects models, using restricted maximum likelihood estimation; all independent variables lagged by one year; standard errors in parentheses.

# $p < 0.1$ .

\* $p < 0.05$ .

\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

and the interaction term is negative (as expected), with  $p = 0.171$ . As in Model 1, the coefficient of migrant stock is positive and significant. Yet, interaction effects are difficult, if not impossible, to interpret from the regression coefficients alone (Brambor *et al.* 2006). To aid the interpretation, Figure 2 plots the average marginal effect of radical right governance by migrant stock. The left-hand panel ('Family allowances') shows



**Figure 2.** Average marginal effects of radical right governance by migrant stock. Note: AMEs with 95-percent confidence intervals. Grey bars at the bottom show distribution of the migrant stock variable. Note that this variable has been logged to eliminate right-skewness.

that – in accordance with H3 – the radical right coefficient is positive at low migrant stock levels but turns smaller at higher levels. However, while the average marginal effect of radical right governance is significant at the ten-percent level for some levels of the migrant stock variable (roughly between two and five percent migrant stock), the 95-percent confidence intervals include zero at all times. Model 2 thus provides only limited support for H3 – the notion that welfare chauvinistic considerations keep radical right parties from expanding family allowances when migrant populations are large.

Model 4, finally, examines the interaction between radical right governance and migrant stock on childcare spending. Here, the interaction term is close to zero and insignificant ( $p = 0.941$ ). In addition, the right-hand panel in Figure 2 shows that the effect of radical right governance on childcare spending is small and statistically insignificant across the empirical range of the migrant stock variable. The stock of immigrants in a country thus does not affect the impact of radical right governance on childcare expenditures. H4 must therefore be rejected.

Taken together, there is little evidence from the models in Table 2 that radical right parties in government alter spending on family benefits on a large scale. To be sure, these regressions only model the short-term impact of radical right governance. Effects can add up over time, as radical right parties occupy positions of influence for extended periods. Re-running the models with a cumulative indicator of radical right governance (the number of years of radical right governance since 1980)

yields evidence that is consistent with H2 ( $b = -0.023$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), but shows no support for H1, H3, or H4. This suggests that, if radical right parties get to occupy cabinet positions for an extended period, their likely impact is to limit expenditures on childcare.

In sum, the statistical analyses suggest that political actors other than the radical right may have a greater impact on family benefits.<sup>3</sup> Left-party strength in cabinet is associated with a notable boost to spending on both, family allowances and childcare. The latter spending category is also positively associated with trade union density, suggesting unions push for the expansion of childcare provision, possibly to improve the labour market position of working parents, especially mothers. The strength of centrist parties, however, does not correlate with higher or lower levels of spending. Importantly, when removing the variables left-party and center-party strength, the radical right dummy becomes strongly significant for childcare spending ( $b = -0.044$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ). Thus, cabinets that include radical right parties spend less on childcare (as per H2), yet this is in part because such cabinets are more right-wing overall (note, however, that the cabinet partisanship variables and the radical right indicator do not correlate very strongly ( $r < 0.2$ )).

While the analysis has thus far presented only limited evidence of radical right influence on family benefits, the coefficient signs in [Table 2](#) are often in the expected direction (e.g. positive in Model 1, negative in Model 3). Therefore, another set of regressions is specified, this time not taking spending *levels* as the dependent variable but *differences* between them. More specifically, the dependent variable is calculated as expenditures on family allowances minus childcare expenditures. The rationale behind this approach is that real-world budget constraints are often such that spending increases in one area have to be compensated by spending decreases in others. Given these constraints, pro-natalist but gender-conservative parties such as the radical right may use their influence in government to keep the gap between spending on family allowances and childcare as wide as possible (or, if childcare spending is higher, limit the gap from widening).

This is exactly what Model 5 shows. The coefficient for the radical right indicator is positive and statistically significant ( $p = 0.045$ ). While radical right parties in government thus have no clear *direct* effects on overall family-related expenditures, they produce somewhat larger gaps between spending on family allowances and spending on childcare. What is more, Model 6 suggests that this gap shrinks (and eventually becomes indistinguishable from zero) as the immigrant population in a country goes up (thus displaying essentially the same behaviour as the marginal effect displayed for family allowances in [Figure 2](#)). Radical right parties may thus not have a strong impact on how much money is spent on



**Table 3.** Determinants of the margin between spending on family allowances (FA) and childcare (CC).

Model	(5)	(6)
Dependent variable	FA–CC	FA–CC
Radical right governance	0.0557* (0.0278)	0.126# (0.0764)
Radical right governance × migrant stock (logged)		–0.0353 (0.0356)
Migrant stock (logged)	0.262** (0.0610)	0.265** (0.0610)
Controls (see Table 2)	YES	YES
$\sigma_{\text{country}}$	0.507** (0.0800)	0.505** (0.0796)
$\sigma_{\text{cabinet}}$	0.282** (0.0133)	0.282** (0.0133)
$\sigma_{\text{year}}$	0.0367** (0.00884)	0.0366** (0.00884)
$\sigma_{\text{residual}}$	0.104** (0.00377)	0.104** (0.00378)
N (countries)	26	26
N (cabinets)	297	297
N (observations)	727	727

DV: FA spending minus CC spending; estimates from cross-nested mixed-effects models, using restricted maximum likelihood estimation; all independent variables lagged by one year; standard errors in parentheses.

# $p < 0.1$ .

\* $p < 0.05$ .

\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

families overall (although there is some evidence to support H2), but Table 3 presents evidence that they shift the distribution of family spending towards greater ‘explicit familialism’.

## Conclusion

What is the impact of radical right governance on European welfare states? This question has increasingly attracted scholarly attention over the past years. To this emerging field of inquiry, the present article contributes the most comprehensive study to date of the association between radical right parties in government and spending on family benefits.

The (small) existing literature on the radical right and socio-economic policy making has shown that the welfare state is of secondary importance for the radical right (Afonso 2015; Ennser-Jedenastik 2016). Therefore, its policy positions are often perceived as ambiguous (Rovny 2013) and its effects on policy outcomes may point into opposite directions (Röth *et al.* 2018; Swank and Betz 2019). Since its approach to the welfare state is subordinate to its primary ideological principles (nativism, authoritarianism, sometimes populism), the radical right prefers generous benefits for some groups and programs, while seeking to limit benefits in other cases.

This article argues that family benefits are no exception to this more general pattern. Combining a pro-natalist ideology (based on its nativism) with a traditional perspective on gender roles (based on its authoritarianism), the radical right seeks to support families and their reproductive capacity, yet is wary of government intervention that has the potential to weaken the family's caring role and the traditional intra-family division of labour.

The analysis of spending patterns in 26 European countries over three-and-a-half decades shows that the radical right's direct effects on expenditure levels are limited. The positive effect assumed for spending on family allowances is noisy and found only for cases with relatively small immigrant populations. Similarly, a noisy effect on childcare spending could be detected. The final step in the analysis highlighted that radical right governance is associated with larger gaps between expenditures on family allowances and childcare expenditures. While radical right parties do not necessarily have a strong influence on the level of spending for family benefits, they may affect the balance between different expenditure categories.

Certainly, the analysis presented above has important limitations. First, expenditure data have the advantage of enabling large-scale comparisons, but not all relevant changes to family policies will have a discernible impact on spending. Second, there are categories of family policies that are not captured by the expenditure types analysed here. One important area is parental leave policies, where ideological conceptions of family and gender roles may play an even greater role. Third, the analysis above cannot possibly account for all the constraints and conditionalities that the influence of radical right parties on government policy is thus subject to across countries and periods.

Yet some of these constraints are worth exploring in future research. For example, attitudes to gender roles and family structures vary widely across Europe, and thus present very different strategic contexts to which competitive political parties need to respond. Strict adherence to explicitly familialistic policy prescriptions may be easier to maintain in, say, Hungary or Poland than in Sweden or the Netherlands. In addition to such demand-side driven conditions, supply-side factors should be considered. For example, contemporary radical right parties vary quite substantially in how open they are to women's activism and female representation (Erzeel and Rashkova 2017). Some parties have had long stints of female leadership (e.g. in Norway, Denmark, or France), whereas others remain strongly dominated by men. Given the empirical link between female political representation and family policy (Bratton and Ray 2002), it is certainly worthwhile to examine variation in radical right parties' policy prescriptions and policy impact as a function of how well women are represented in their ranks.

## Notes

1. In 2000, spending on family allowances was 80 percent higher than spending on childcare in the average country in our sample (0.87 vs. 0.49 percent of GDP); by 2014, this gap had almost disappeared (0.82 vs. 0.76).
2. We test this assumption by presenting alternative analyses in the online appendix that exclude these somewhat more gender-egalitarian parties from our coding of radical right governance (specifically, the Danish People's Party and the Dutch Freedom Party, see Table A3). Yet the results remain very similar to our main models. These unchanged findings are consistent with the notion that these parties' gender egalitarianism is mostly instrumental.
3. Interpreting control variables is typically not advisable, since they may include the effects of (correlated) confounders (Cinelli and Hazlett 2020). However, since the political variables are similar in nature to the central independent variable of interest, I include a brief discussion of their effects.

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## Notes on contributor

*Laurenz Ennser-Jedenastik* is an Assistant Professor of Social Policy at the University of Vienna's Department of Government. His research focuses on welfare states, social policy, political parties and political elites. His work has appeared in the *American Journal of Political Science*, *Comparative Political Studies* and *European Journal of Political Research*, among others. [laurenz.ennser@univie.ac.at].

## ORCID

Laurenz Ennser-Jedenastik  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0107-5093>

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