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Euroscepticism and the electoral success of the far right: the role of the strategic interaction between center and far right

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Abstract   The appeal of far-right parties' ideologies is one of the key drivers of such parties' electoral wins in Europe. Most studies, however, have focused on the far right's anti-immigrant or anti-minority discourse as the defining feature of this party family. In this article, we examine: (1) The conditions under which far-right parties benefit electorally from their Eurosceptic discourses, and (2) How center-right parties' responses to the far right affect the latter's electoral outcomes. The results of multilevel regression models show that when the distance between far-right and center-right parties' positions toward European integration narrows, the vote share of far-right parties increases—but only up to a point. When the distance continues to narrow, without reaching zero, the far right's vote share decreases. Our empirical analysis relies on the Chapel Hill Expert Survey series dataset and examines 75 cases of far-right parties in 22 European countries between 1999 and 2014. The findings suggest that center-right parties face a difficult strategic dilemma as they compete for votes with the far right: moving incrementally closer to the far right's position can benefit the far right by intensifying competition over the issue of European integration. An almost full cooperation of the far right's agenda, however, dampens the success of the far right. The center right must strike a balance that allows it to be responsive to Eurosceptic voters while retaining a centrist identity.

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Introduction

Research on Europe's far-right parties suggests that ideology drives their electoral support (e.g., Rydgren 2005). However, there is an ongoing debate on the specific ideological stances that comprise the far right's "winning formula." Kitschelt and McGann (1995) were the first to outline the elements of a winning formula that brought early electoral wins to the far right, a combination of: (1) right-wing, neoliberal economic policies, and (2) authoritarian and nationalist sociocultural policies. Since Kitschelt and McGann's (1995) classic study, more recent research has questioned whether right-wing economic policies are a <u>necessary</u> part of a successful appeal (Carter 2005; Ivarsflaten 2005; Mudde 2000). Neoliberal economic policies, once the cornerstone of early far-right parties in the 1980s, have since virtually disappeared from their electoral platforms (Rydgren 2005). Beginning in the 1990s, far-right parties, particularly in Western Europe, tended to drop neoliberalism from their economic agendas and have moved to a more centrist economic position (Kitschelt 2004; de Lange 2007). Today, most emphasize economic protectionism and redistributive policies restricted to the native population (Mudde 2007). Rovny (2013) has argued that far-right parties deliberately blur their economic positions, as economic issues are secondary to the cultural and identity issues that drive their support. By keeping their specific economic policies ambiguous, far-right parties are able to attract voters with a broad range of economic preferences.

Recent literature also emphasizes the importance of nativist ideologies for driving the far right. Nativism purports that nation states should be comprised of a group of ethnically and or religiously homogenous "natives" and that external groups and ideas threaten native society (Mudde 2007). Empirical research has thus focused on the role of immigration—both as a reality and ideological framing—in determining the far right's electoral success (Rydgren 2005, 2008). Ivarsflaten (2008) argues that an anti-immigration stance is what connects successful far-right parties across Western Europe. In Eastern Europe, on the other hand, national minorities have been a much more important issue at least until the onset of Europe's refugee crisis in 2015. Anti-immigration and anti-minority stances, however, feed the same nativist far-right narrative: that outsider groups (defined in various ways) threaten the entire notion of the nation state (defined by the overlap of ethnic identities and political borders). It is this sense of status loss, induced by rapid societal change and increasing multiculturalism, that far-right parties have been able to capitalize on (Bustikova 2014; Karácsony and Róna 2011).

Far-right parties' nativist ideologies also feed into their broader skepticism and antipathy toward international cooperation, in general, and toward supra-nationalism, in particular. Euroscepticism, and often open anti-EU rhetoric, defines the far right's politics just as much as anti-immigrant sentiments. It is this Eurosceptic discourse, propagated first and foremost by the far right, that seems to be seeping in the mainstream. While most studies in the field have focused on the anti-immigrant stances of the far right, this article assesses the conditions under which a Eurosceptic stance benefits the far right electorally over multiple election cycles.

We argue that far-right parties will benefit from adopting Eurosceptic positions under two conditions. First, far-right parties have to take issue ownership by emphasizing their Eurosceptic position and politicizing European integration (see e.g., Hooghe and Marks 2009; Hutter and Grande 2014). To achieve issue ownership and mobilize the electorate, Euroscepticism must be a core feature of the far right's political identity. Second, the strategies adopted by centrist parties must produce a conducive opportunity structure for the far right (see e.g., Arzheimer and Carter 2006; Kitschelt and McGann 1995; Spies and Franzmann 2011; van der Brug et al. 2005). Specifically, we examine the strategies of center-right parties, as they are the main competitors of the far right with regard to the issue of European integration. We expect that the strategic interaction between the center-right and far-right parties on the issue of European integration has an impact on the electoral success of the far-right.

The paper proceeds in five parts. First, we outline the role of European integration in far-right parties' ideologies. Then, we discuss the development of far-right parties' positions on European integration over time and the strategic interaction of center- and far-right parties in the politicization of European integration. Based on this discussion, we formulate four hypotheses for how far-right parties can successfully mobilize the electorate by relying on an anti-EU appeal. The third section presents the research design of our empirical analysis. We measure our main independent variables using the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) series dataset and control for a range of other factors that might have an influence the electoral success of the far right. Our dependent variable is the vote share of the electorally most successful far-right party in a country. In the fourth section, we start with the presentation of the results of descriptive analyses of far-right parties' positions on European integration and the salience of the issue European integration for them. Then, we discuss the results of our multilevel regression models based on a dataset comprising 75 cases of far-right parties in 22 European states between 1999 and 2014. The last section summarizes the significant findings and suggests future avenues for research.

Euroscepticism and the far right

As Mudde (2007) points out, the most striking commonality in the rallying cries of far-right parties are various takes on the slogan, "France for the French!" or "Bulgaria for the Bulgarians!" This ubiquitous motto speaks directly to the distinguishing feature of far-right parties, namely nativism. This nativist ideology feeds both the xenophobic and the anti-EU appeal of the far right. According to this ideology, the state exists to promote the interests of the titular ethnicity group. Thus, multilateral institutions that constrain nation states' ability to set independent economic policies, control political borders, and purport a multicultural approach present a threat to the nation. Far-right parties' Eurosceptic positions are thus framed around how the EU dilutes national culture and identity and how the EU neuters the nation states' capacity to set its own vision of national belonging (Helbling et al. 2010).

Particularly since the Brexit referendum, the far right's Eurosceptic stance has become so taken for granted as defining feature of this party family that it is largely

forgotten that it has not *always* been so. In the 1980s, for example, the French Front National (FN) styled itself as economically liberal party and thus supported EU integration. By the time of the signing of the Maastricht treaty in 1992, however, the FN became an advocate for national sovereignty and rejected supra-nationalism (Mudde 2007). It is not only that the FN became (more) Eurosceptic, but it also increasingly devoted more space to EU-related topics in its manifesto, especially when compared to other French parties (Reungoat 2015). According to Reungoat (2015), Eurosceptic political discourse allowed the FN to differentiate itself from mainstream parties. In addition, it was also a resource for cohesion-building within the party. Drastic calls to exit the Eurozone and the EU helped Marine Le Pen present herself as a strong and uncompromising leader who was no less tough than her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, founder of the FN. Rejection of the EU became a central element of FN's identity under Marine Le Pen, which facilitated political recruitment and mobilization.

Euroscepticism, it should be said, does not necessarily mean a complete rejection of the European integration process (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008).[1] Parties' positions on the EU exist on a spectrum. Some far-right parties are skeptical about the benefits of European integration, but they still adhere to the basic idea behind the EU, namely that political cooperation and a common market without tariffs is a "good" thing. Other far-right parties, however, tend to reject the EU as a whole (see e.g., Table 3 in Vasilopoulou 2011). However, none of the current far-right parties are enthusiastic supporters of European integration. Cross-national quantitative evidence shows that far-right parties have become even more skeptical over the last decade (Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2016). Euroscepticism is also not solely confined to far-right parties in EU member states. In non-member states like Switzerland, Euroscepticism forms a key part of the Swiss People's Party (SVP) platform (McGann and Kitschelt 2005). Thus, the far right has become the dominant Eurosceptic party family (Gómez-Reino and Llamazares 2013).

In addition, Euroscepticism is both a political discourse and an individually held attitude. There is an agreement among scholars that Eurosceptic attitudes positively affect the propensity to vote for the far right across European countries (Arzheimer 2009; Lubbers et al. 2002; Lubbers and Coenders 2017; Van Der Brug et al. 2005; Werts et al. 2012). Werts et al. (2012) have shown how Euroscepticism "contributes to explaining far right-wing voting, over and beyond other relevant socio-political attitudes, such as perceptions of ethnic threat and political distrust."

Far-right parties drive the politicization of European integration in domestic political competition by their Eurosceptic discourse. Hooghe and Marks (2009) argue that these parties tend to emphasize and campaign on the EU "issue," adopting an adversarial position toward the EU and often appealing to cultural identity in their discourse (i.e., the EU as a threat to national culture and identity). These arguments have been empirically supported by recent research. Hutter and Grande (2014) have shown that the presence of electorally strong far-right parties partially explains the growing politicization of European integration. Hoeglinger (2016) finds

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[1] In this paper, we use the terms Eurosceptic and anti-EU interchangeably.

that parties holding an extreme position on the cultural dimension of party competition favoring traditional, authoritarian and nationalist (TAN) values put more emphasis on the issue of European integration. Finally, De Vries and Hobolt (2012) find that challenger parties, such as far-right parties that have never been part of a government, can benefit electorally from an entrepreneurial issue-focused strategy that emphasizes an extreme adverse stance toward European integration. Thus, challenger parties that take an extreme Eurosceptic position achieve better electoral results than challenger parties that do not engage in such entrepreneurial strategies.

Based on the existing literature, we thus argue that far-right parties can reap electoral benefits if Euroscepticism is one of the most important issues emphasized in their electoral campaigns. In addition, if Euroscepticism is the core defining feature of a far-right party's ideology, voters are then more likely to identify the party as a defender of national rights and sovereignty. In a political environment of increasing disenchantment and doubt in the European project, this strategy is likely to benefit parties that position themselves on the side of the nation and against the EU. Therefore, we formulate the following two hypotheses on the role of Eurosceptic discourse on far-right parties' electoral wins.

H1 The less far-right parties support European integration, the greater their vote share.

H2 The less far-right parties support European integration and the more emphasis far-right parties place on the issue of European integration, the greater their vote share.

Far-right parties have long staked their fortunes on an anti-establishment rhetoric, positioning themselves as outsiders to the political mainstream. When new wave far-right parties first emerged in Western European democracies in the 1980s and 1990s, they were dismissed by scholars and politicians as "single issue" parties, which would fade away as soon as their grievance issue was no longer politically salient (Mudde 1999). Initially, centrist parties chose to exclude the far right from politics, refusing to acknowledge their agenda or cooperate. The so-called *cordon sanitaire* approach toward the far right did not succeed in marginalizing the far right electorally. Rather, the far right's use of national cultural frames and identity politics has proved to be remarkably salient, particularly on the issue of European integration (Hutter and Grande 2014). In emphasizing the potential threat that EU integration poses to national culture, identity, sovereignty, and even Christian values and heritage, the far right has succeeded in politicizing the increase in decision-making power at the European level.

Far-right parties have gained at the polls across the EU since the 2008 economic crisis on an anti-EU pro-nationalist agenda (Hernández and Kriesi 2016). They have begun to siphon votes away from the center right, forcing centrist parties on the defensive. Under such conditions, a *cordon sanitaire* policy of non-engagement is not an effective strategy for center-right parties, because it leaves an opening to the far right to co-opt disgruntled voters. In fact, there is little evidence to support the

notion that exclusion of challenger parties hurts these parties at the polls. According to Goodwin (2011), the opposite tends to be true: blocking challenger parties lead to more grievances by supporters and more extremist ideological positions by the parties.

The far right is proving itself to be more than a flash-in-the-pan movement, and the mainstream or center-right in many counties has been forced to calibrate its position in response to the far right. Growing Euroscepticism among European voters since the economic crisis has also exerted pressures on the center right to respond for voters' grievances (Werts et al. 2013). Center-right parties are then faced with a several options: to ignore the far right's anti-EU rhetoric and keep distance from it, move incrementally closer to the far right, or fully cooperate the far right's agenda? Studies have shown that exclusion (the *cordon sanitaire*) does not work. Mounting evidence shows that mainstream parties, particularly in Western Europe, have become less enthusiastic about the European project over the last decade (Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2016), partially in response to the far right's ability to mobilize support on the basis of this issue. Meijers (2015) demonstrated that far-right parties could influence center-right parties to shift their position on the EU when the far right emphasized EU issues in its own platforms. When center-right parties adopt the Euroscepticism of the far right, competition for issue ownership increases and EU integration becomes a hotly debated issue in political discourse. Far-right parties stand to benefit from such intensified issue competition as they often have a reputational advantage over the mainstream right as the "true" Eurosceptics (Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2016). In addition, the center-right incrementally legitimizes the concerns of the far right and makes thereby the far right a more acceptable choice. Therefore, this strategy likely backfires: if the center-right copies the far right, voters are likely to rewards the original 'issue owners'—i.e., the far right. This leads us to the following hypothesis:

H3a The closer far-right and center-right parties' positions are toward European integration, the greater the vote share for far-right parties.

A center-right party's full cooperation of a far-right party's Eurosceptic position might lead to the transfer of issue ownership to the center right, with the potential result of dampening the far right's ability to mobilize support on the basis of its Euroskpetic position (Meguid 2008). But this strategy also brings risks. The trick for the center right is to strike a balance between taking up the far right's Eurosceptic agenda just enough to show responsiveness to voters' grievances while at the same time keeping its own centrist image. Therefore, we argue that when a center-right party fully cooperates the far right's Euroskepticism, this amounts to a center-right party acknowledging the importance of this issue and legitimizing the far right. As a result, the competition over issue ownership intensifies and the far right, as the original issue owner, becomes more appealing. This follows the logic of "why take the copycat when you can have the original." At the same time, if the center-right party manages to gain ownership of Euroscepticism while maintaining its identity, the far right becomes less successful. Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis

suggesting a negative quadratic relationship between the distance of center-right and far-right parties' positions toward European integration and the electoral success of the far right.

H3b If the distance between center-right and far-right parties' positions toward European integration is initially large but then becomes smaller, vote share of far-right parties increases. If, however, the distance continues to decrease, the vote share of far-right parties also decreases.

Research design

We rely on the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Bakker et al. 2015; Polk et al. 2017) series to measure the independent variables. The CHES is conducted every 4 years since 1999 in Western European EU member states and every 4 years since 2002 in Eastern European EU member states. In addition, the survey included Croatia, Norway and Switzerland in 2010 and 2014. Since we analyze the impact of far-right and center-right parties' position on European integration on their electoral success, we only include cases in our analysis where a far-right party has already entered the political scene and participated in national elections. In addition, we limit our analysis to the most successful far-right party in each country.

We use the term far right to define the parties under consideration, acknowledging that that there is significant variation in these parties' stances vis-à-vis democracy and fascism. Extreme-right parties reject democracy and are also inclined to use violence to pursue their goals. Radical-right parties accept democracy but are typically illiberal. We identified the relevant far-right parties by relying on Mudde's (2007) and Immerzeel et al.'s (2016) comprehensive classifications. We deviate from Mudde's selection—as Immerzeel et al. (2016) did—in that we also include neoliberal populist parties in our selection. We assess that these parties have more in common with the far-right party family than other party families. We also added two parties that were not included in Mudde's (2007) and Immerzeel et al.'s (2016) selection: Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Dawn—National Coalition (Czech Republic). We follow the argument by Berbuir et al. (2015) that the AfD is the functional equivalent of a far-right party in a country where for historical reasons right-wing politics is strongly stigmatized. The far-right party Dawn did not exist at the time of Mudde's (2007) and Immerzeel et al.'s (2016) selection. We include this party in our analysis because it has been identified as part of the far-right party family by the CHES and Manifesto Research on Political Representation (MARPOR) (Lehmann et al. 2017). Altogether, then, our dataset includes 75 far-right parties in 22 countries between 1999 and 2014.[2] We provide a list of far-right parties included in the analysis in "Appendix 1".

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[2] These are the following countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

Dependent variable the dependent variable is the vote share of the electorally most successful far-right party in a country. We use the ParlGov dataset (Döring and Manow 2016) and the reports of national election committees to measure this variable.

Key independent variables

Position of the far-right party on European integration The CHES expert survey measures parties' position toward European integration by asking for their overall orientation of the party leadership toward European integration in year x on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly against) to 7 (strongly in favor).

Salience of European integration for the far-right party The CHES expert survey also measures the salience of the issue of European integration for each party by asking for the relative salience of European integration in the party's public stance in year X. Parties' salience score is measured on a scale ranging from 0 (European Integration is of no importance, never mentioned) to 10 (European Integration is the most important issue).

Distance between the far-right and the center-right parties' position on European integration We define center-right parties as the most electorally successful party in a given election with a position higher than 5 on a general left–right dimension, ranging from 1 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right). We again use the CHES dataset for measuring parties' position on an overall left–right dimension. We then subtract the position of the far-right party on European integration from the position of the center-right party on European integration to calculate the distance between these two parties.

Control variables[3]

Presence of radical-left parties in the parliament Radical-left and far-right parties' ideology and electorate partially overlap (e.g., March and Rommerskirchen 2015). Radical-left parties share their strongly Eurosceptic discourse with far-right parties. Therefore, we expect that if radical-left parties are successful in gaining representation in the parliamentarian arena, far-right parties are less successful. We include therefore a dummy variable presence of radical-left parties that takes the value 1 if a radical-left party gained at least one seat in the parliament and 0 otherwise. We included a list of radical-left parties represented in parliaments in "Appendix 2".

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[3] As we discussed in the introductory part of our article, the anti-immigration appeal of far-right parties is another component of their ideological 'winning formula'. We do not control for parties' position on immigration in our analysis because the CHES only measures parties' position on immigration since 2006. Therefore, controlling for parties' position on immigration would strongly limit the number of cases of our analysis.

Unemployment the unemployment rate defined as the percentage of civilian labor force. We rely here on the Comparative Political Data Set 1960–2013 (Armingeon et al. 2015) to measure this variable.[4]

Share of foreign-born population using World Bank data (2016a, b), we calculate the share of the foreign-born population as the ratio of the international migrant stock (total)[5] and the population (total)[6].

Unemployment X foreign-born population the interaction effect between unemployment rates and the share of the foreign-born population following Golder (2003) who argues that unemployment fuels far-right parties' success only when immigration levels are high.

Debt the level of debt is measured as the gross general government debt (financial liabilities) as a percentage of GDP using the Comparative Political Data Set 1960-2013 (Armingeon et al. 2015).

Electoral system far-right parties are less likely to succeed in more disproportional electoral systems (Golder 2003). We measure the level of disproportionality of electoral systems by invoking Gallagher's (1991) index. This index takes into account the difference between the percentage of votes a party receives in an election and the percentage of seats it is allotted in the legislature. We rely on ParlGov the dataset (Döring and Manow 2016) to measure the disproportionality of the electoral system.

The summary statistics of the dependent, independent and the control variables are presented in "Appendix 3".

Descriptive analysis

Figure 1 shows the position of the electorally most successful far-right party on European integration in a given election in a country. The average position of far-right parties across countries and time is 2.26. We have only five observations of far-right parties with a neutral or friendly position toward European integration: New Democracy (NyD) in 1999 in Sweden, Party of Great Romania (PRM) in 2006 and National Alliance (NA)[7] in Latvia in 2002, 2006, 2010 and 2014. The case of Latvia is a special one as the question of European integration is connected to the stance toward Russia. Euroscepticism is not a part of the nationalist discourse of NA as it considers Russia as the main threat to the Latvian nation (Cianetti 2014). As EU membership is perceived as a protection of Latvia's sovereignty and from Russia's interference, far-right NA is in favor of European integration. The results of a

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[4] Following Golder (2003), Arzheimer (2009) and Spies and Franzmann (2011), we do not control for other measures of economic wealth.

[5] International migrant stock is the number of people born in a country other than that in which they live. It also includes refugees.

[6] Total population is based on the de facto definition of population, which counts all residents regardless of legal status or citizenship—except for refugees not permanently settled in the country of asylum, who are generally considered part of the population of their country of origin.

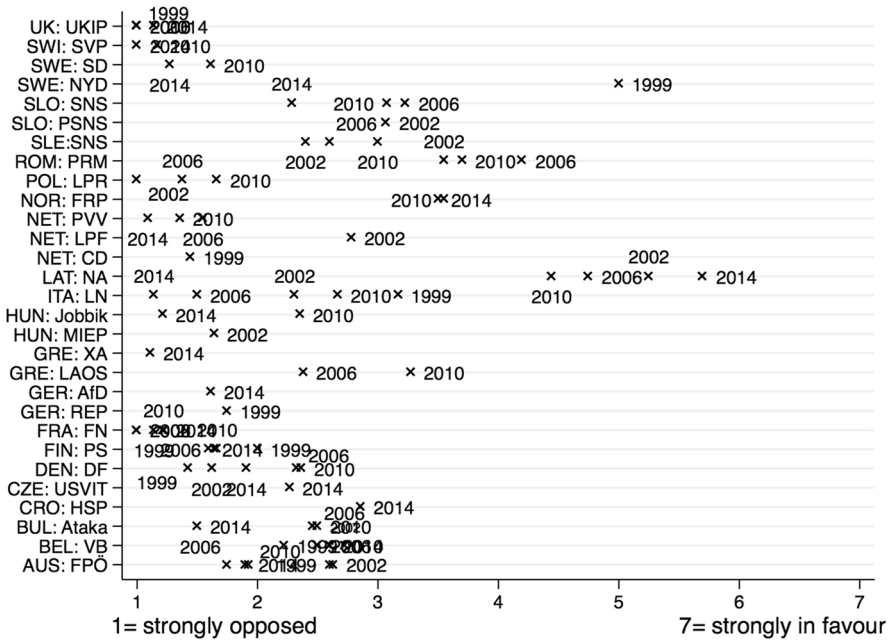[7] This party existed until 2011 under the name For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK (TB/LNNK).

Fig. 1 Position on European integration of far-right parties
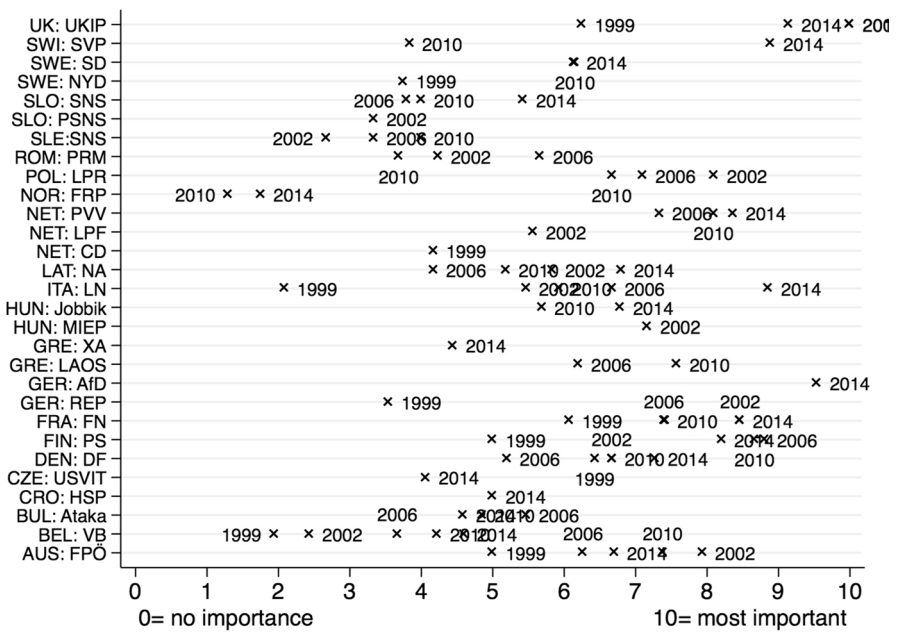

Fig. 2 Salience of European integration for far-right parties

descriptive analysis show that far-right parties have become more Eurosceptic over time across Europe. In Western Europe, the far right's position on European integration dropped from 2.2 in 1999 to 1.6 in 2014. In Eastern Europe, it has become only slightly more Eurosceptic moving from 2.8 in 2002 to 2.6 in 2014.

Figure 2 shows that the salience scores of the issue of European integration for far-right parties. The salience scores have a higher dispersion than the far-right parties' position on European integration. The mean salience score of the issue European integration is 5.87 for far-right parties. The results of an analysis of the average salience scores of far-right parties show that the issue of European integration has become more important for far-right parties over time and across Europe. Whereas the salience score of European integration was 4.4 in 1999, it has become 7.1 in 2014 in Western Europe. The results do not show such a clear increase of importance for Eastern European far-right parties. The mean salience score in Eastern Europe was 5.2 in 2002 and slightly increased to 5.4 in 2014.

Results

In this section, we test the hypotheses estimating multilevel regression models with the vote share of the electorally most successful far-right party in a given election in a country as the dependent variable. Our data are hierarchically structured as parties are nested in years. Therefore, we estimate two-level random intercept models using a restricted maximum likelihood function (REML).

The results of Model 1 and 2 (see Table 1) show that neither the positioning nor the interaction effect between positioning and emphasis placed by far-right parties on European integration has a significant positive impact on their electoral results. Therefore, H1 and H2 cannot be confirmed.

Model 3 (see Table 1) tests whether the distance between the positions of the far right vis-à-vis the center-right parties has an impact on far-right's electoral success. Following the results, there is no significant relationship between the distance between the positions of these two parties and the electoral success of the far-right. Thus, we are not able to confirm H3a.

Model 4 includes the squared distance between the positions of center-right and the far-right has as the main independent variable. The results show that it has a significant impact on the electoral success of the far-right.[8] After the discussing the impact of the control variables, we return to analyze the impact of this variable in depth.

With regard to the impact of the control variables, the results of all four estimated models confirm an interaction effect between the share of foreign-born population and the levels of unemployment. Following the results, the impact of the share of the foreign-born population on the electoral success of the far-right significantly

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[8] Model 3 and 4 have been estimated based on only 73 cases because in two cases the position of the center-right party is not covered by the CHES and therefore the distance between the center- and far-right party cannot be calculated.

Table 1 The results of multilevel regression models on far-right parties' electoral success

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Fixed effects				
EU position	0.348 (0.82)	− 0.517 (2.53)		
EU salience		− 0.414 (1.03)		
EU position#EU salience		0.144 (0.44)		
EU distance			0.573 (0.65)	8.218** (3.00)
Squared EU distance				− 1.191* (0.47)
Disproportionality	− 0.061 (0.15)	− 0.035 (0.16)	− 0.038 (0.20)	0.006 (0.13)
Debt	0.002 (0.02)	0.001 (0.02)	0.015 (0.03)	− 0.001 (0.02)
Foreign-born population	0.931** (0.34)	0.948** (0.35)	1.064** (0.40)	0.860** (0.32)
Unemployment	0.315 (0.37)	0.312 (0.37)	0.537 (0.43)	0.203 (0.35)
Unemployment#Foreign-born population	− 0.072* (0.03)	− 0.074* (0.03)	− 0.083* (0.04)	− 0.065* (0.03)
Presence of radical left	0.224 (1.51)	0.241(1.53)	1.006 (2.03)	0.276 (1.44)
Constant	3.077 (5.26)	5.581 (8.10)	− 1.723(5.03)	− 7.639 (5.61)
Variance components				
Year	1.599 (3.15)	1.912 (3.54)	1.465 (3.01)	1.675 (2.96)
Party	37.865 (6.75)	38.796 (7.03)	37.213 (6.73)	34.187 (6.225)
ICC (years)	0.0405	0.047	0.038	0.047
Log restricted-likelihood	− 245.469	− 245.238	− 238.46	− 235.201
N	75	75	73	

Dependent variable: the vote share of the most successful far-right party in a given election
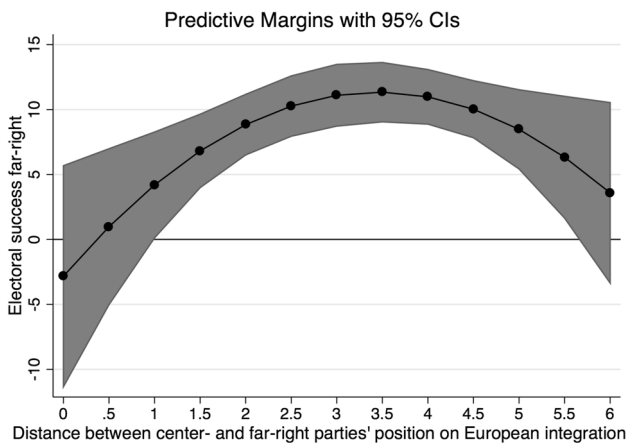
*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$

Fig. 3 The predictive margins of the squared distance between center-right and far-right parties' positions on European integration

decreases with rising levels of unemployment. This is in line with Spies and Franz-mann's (2011) and Arzheimer's (2009) findings but in contrast to Golder's (2003). The share of government debt, the disproportionality of the electoral system and the presence of radical-left parties in the parliament do not exert a significant influence on the success of far-right parties in any of the estimated models.

Figure 3 shows that on the margins (small and large distance between party positions), the effect on the far right's vote share is more difficult to predict. However, the curvilinear relationship shows that there is a middle ground in which the center right's calibration vis-à-vis the far right affects the latter's electoral support. For example, when the distance between center-right and far-right parties' position on European integration narrows, voters favor the far right, likely because movement of a center-right toward the far-right party legitimates the far right's agenda. Such a situation could appear when a center-right party is slightly adjusting its position to the position of the Eurosceptic far-right party after the electoral break-through of a far-right party with a strong Eurosceptic position. But, if the center right continues to push into the far right's issue area, there is a point at which the far right starts to lose votes. This could happen if the center right decides to compete with the far right for issue ownership. Once the far right no longer dominates the political discourse, it loses appeal among voters. Figure 3 therefore confirms H4. When center-right parties respond to the far right and enter into direct competition over issue ownership, the far right becomes more successful. If they move even closer to the far-right parties' position, they dampen the success of it. They however have to do this carefully so as not to become indistinguishable from the far right.

Conclusion

Far-right parties' nativist ideologies drive them to defend national sovereignty rights. Therefore, these parties are typically skeptical of the merits of European integration, which inherently transfers some state rights to supranational authorities. This skepticism toward the EU has become more salient in far-right parties' politics since the signing of the Maastricht Treaty. European voters in some EU countries have also become less enthusiastic about the EU since the economic crisis. As a result of this match in political ideology and voters' attitudes, Euroscepticism continues to be a core aspect of the far right's mobilization strategies and electoral campaigns. But as far-right parties begin to compete for the center right's constituencies, the center right is faced with a strategic dilemma of how to respond to the far right's in roads. In this article, we examined how the center right's strategies affect electoral support for far-right parties.

The results of multilevel regression models have confirmed a negative impact of the squared distance between center-right and far-right parties' position on European integration. In addition, we took into account a number of factors that may also facilitate far right success such as economic indicators (unemployment and debt) and the share of the foreign-born population. Our results clearly show that a Eurosceptic discourse can serve as an additional resource to successfully mobilize the electorate.

The findings are more nuanced than suggested by the existing literature. Far-right parties can benefit from center-right parties' attempts to become more critical of the EU, because far-right parties have developed 'brand dominance' on Euroscepticism. As the center right moves incrementally closer to the far right, the far right's anti-EU positions enter the mainstream, which legitimates the far-right agenda. The most interesting finding, however, is that there is a limit to how much the center right's incremental accommodation benefits the far right. At a certain point, which depends on the national context, the center right's direct competition for issue ownership starts to hurt the far right electorally. It is, however, a difficult balance for the center right to strike: to retain its own identity while also responding to the voter concerns driving citizens to vote for the far right. As competition for voters intensifies, our results suggest that if center-right parties will start to behave more like the far right by taking on the far right's Eurosceptic agenda, the far right becomes less successful.

As far-right parties become the norm rather than the anomaly in most European countries and center-right parties adopt more far-right policy stances in an attempt to compete, our understanding of what far right means will also have to shift. Far-right parties may not remain on the fringes of politics for much longer as Euroscepticism and worries over immigration continue to grow. Rather, these self-defined anti-establishment challenger parties may become part and parcel of the mainstream as coalition members, as is the case in Austria, and even governing parties. The most successful far-right parties have shifted their stances away from the racist ethnic nationalism of the past toward more "acceptable" policy frames. In redefining the far-right party family, future research will have to focus on the nativist cultural agenda that, for now, separates these parties from the center right.

Appendix 1

See Table 2.

Table 2 List of the most successful far-right parties

Abbr.	Original name	English name	Country	Years	References
FPÖ	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs	Freedom Party of Austria	Austria	1999/2002/2006/2010/2014	Immerzeel et al. (2016)
VB	Vlaams Belang	Flemish Interest	Belgium	1999/2002/2006/2010/2014	Immerzeel et al. (2016)
Ataka	Nacionalno Obedinenie Ataka	National Union Attack	Bulgaria	2006/2010/2014	Immerzeel et al. (2016)
HSP	Hrvatska stranka prava	Croatian Party of Rights	Croatia	2014	Immerzeel et al. (2016)
Úsvit	Úsvit – Národní koalice	Dawn – National Coalition	Czech Republic	2014	CHES, MARPOR
DF	Dansk Folkeparti	Danish People's Party	Denmark	1999/2002/2006/2010/2014	Immerzeel et al. (2016)
True Finns	Persussuomalaiset	True Finns	Finland	1999/2006/2010/2014	Immerzeel et al. (2016)
FN	Front National	National Front	France	1999/2002/2006/2010/2014	Immerzeel et al. (2016)
REP	Die Republikaner	Republicans	Germany	1999	Mudde (2007)
AfD	Alternative für Deutschland	Alternative for Germany	Germany	2014	Berbuir et al. (2015)
LAOS	Laikós Orthódoxos Synagermós	Popular Orthodox Rally	Greece	2006/2010	Immerzeel et al. (2016)
XA	Laikós Sýndesmos—Chrysí Avgí	Popular Association—Golden Dawn	Greece	2014	Immerzeel et al. (2016)
MIÉP	Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja	Hungarian Justice and Life Party	Hungary	2002	Immerzeel et al. (2016)
JOBBIK	Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom	Movement for a Better Hungary	Hungary	2010/2014	Immerzeel et al. (2016)
LN	Lega Nord	Northern League	Italy	1999/2002/2006/2010/2014	Immerzeel et al. (2016)
TB-LNNK, NA	Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK, Nacionālā apvienība "Visu Latvijai!"—"Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK" since 2011	For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK	Latvia	2002/2006/2010/2014	Mudde (2007)
CD	Centrumsdemocraten	Center Democrats	Netherlands	1999	Mudde (2007)
LPF	List Pim Fortuyn	List Pim Fortuyn	Netherlands	2002	Mudde (2007) as neoliberal populist party
PVV	Partij voor de Vrijheid	Party for Freedom	Netherlands	2006/2010/2014	Immerzeel et al. (2016)
FrP	Fremskrittspartiet	Progress Party	Norway	2010/2014	Immerzeel et al. (2016)
LPR	Liga Polskich Rodzin	League of Polish Families	Poland	2002/2006/2010	Immerzeel et al. (2016)

Table 2 (continued)

Abbr.	Original name	English name	Country	Years	References
PRM	Partidul Romania Mare	Party of Great Romania	Romania	2002/2006/2010	Immerzeel et al. (2016)
SNS	Slovenska nacionalna stranka	Slovenian National Party	Slovenia	2002/2006/2010	Immerzeel et al. (2016)
PSNS	Prava Slovenská národná strana	Right Slovak National Party	Slovakia	2002	Mudde (2007)
SNS	Slovenská národná strana	Slovak National Party	Slovakia	2006/2010/2014	Immerzeel et al. (2016)
NyD	Ny Demokrati	New Democracy	Sweden	1999	Mudde (2007) as neoliberal populist party
SD	Sverigedemokraterna	Sweden Democrats	Sweden	2010/2014	Immerzeel et al. (2016)
SVP/UDC	Schweizerische Volkspartei	Swiss People's Party	Switzerland	2010/2014	Immerzeel et al. (2016)
UKIP	UK Independence Party	UK Independence Party	United Kingdom	1999/2006/2010/2014	Immerzeel et al. (2016)

Appendix 2

See Table 3.

Table 3 List of the radical-left parties represented in the parliament

Abbr.	Original name	English name	Country	Years	References
–	–	–	Austria	–	–
–	–	–	Belgium	–	–
–	–	–	Bulgaria	–	–
–	–	–	Croatia	–	–
KSCM	Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy	Communist party of Bohemia and Moravia	Czech Republic	2014	March and Rommerskirchen (2015)
SF	Socialistisk Folkeparti	Socialist People's Party	Denmark	1999, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014	Gomez et al. (2016)
VAS	Vasemmistoliitto–Vänsterförbundet	Left Alliance	Finland	1999, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014	Gomez et al. (2016)
PCF	Parti communiste française	French Communist Party	France	1999, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014	Gomez et al. (2016)
LP	Die Linke	Left Party	Germany	2014	Gomez et al. (2016)
SYN/SYRIZA	Synaspismós Rizospastikís Aristerás	Coalition of the Left	Greece	2006, 2010, 2014	Gomez et al. (2016)
–	–	–	Hungary	–	–
PRC	Partito della Rifondazione Comunista	Party of Communist Refoundation	Italy	1999, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014	Gomez et al. (2016)
–	–	–	Latvia	–	–
SP	Socialistiese Partij	Socialist Party	Netherlands	1999, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014	Gomez et al. (2016)
SV	Sosialistisk Venstreparti	Socialist Left Party	Norway	2010, 2014	Gomez et al. (2016)
–	–	–	Poland	–	–

Table 3 (continued)

Abbr.	Original name	English name	Country	Years	References
–	–	–	Romania	–	–
KSS	Komunistická strana Slovenska	Communist Party of Slovakia	Slovakia	2006	March and Rommerskirchen (2015)
–	–	–	Slovenia	–	–
V	Vänsterpartiet	Left Party	Sweden	1999, 2010, 2014	Gomez et al. (2016)
PdA	Partei der Arbeit	Labor Party of Switzerland	Switzerland	2010	Gomez et al. (2016)
–	–	–	UK	–	–

Appendix 3

See Table .

Table 4 Summary statistics

Variable	Obs.	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Vote share far-right	75	9.53	6.65	0	29.4
EU position	75	2.24	1.09	1	5.7
EU salience	75	5.86	2.07	1.3	10
EU distance	73	3.32	1.28	0.6	5.57
Disproportionality	75	5.9	5.47	0.35	24.61
Debt	75	70	35.9	9.9	182.9
Foreign-born population	75	8.68	5.12	0.62	22.54
Unemployment	75	8.61	4.24	3.5	26.5
Presence of radical left	75	0.48	0.5	0	1

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