

Unions as Agents of Electoral Mobilization in Times of Inequality
Trade Union Membership, Redistribution Support, and Vote Choice

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For presentation at workshop on "Unions and the Politics of Inequality,"
University of Geneva, April 13-14, 2018

Introduction

All over Western Europe, income inequality has significantly risen over the past three decades. Even though several economic, political, and institutional factors fuel this development, research has shown that the almost ubiquitous decline in union strength is highly associated with rising levels of inequality (e.g., OECD 2011, Pontusson 2013, Kristal and Cohen 2016). To the extent that the union membership effect on electoral demand for redistribution is a positive one, the massive drop in unionization rates across Western Europe appears to be highly relevant when addressing the puzzle of why it is that we do not observe more cases of democratically elected governments responding to the rise in inequality by introducing new redistributive policies (see Pontusson 2013).

I believe the positive effect of union membership on electoral demand for redistribution to be threefold: First, union membership increases redistribution support among high-income individuals known for high political participation rates (Mosimann and Pontusson 2017). Second, union membership raises turnout among low-income individuals likely to support redistribution but known for low political participation rates (for the US, see Kerrissey and Schofer 2013). And third, union membership renders redistribution supporters more likely to translate their economic preferences into votes for social democratic parties.¹ While the first two effects have received some attention in the literature, the effect of union membership on the voting behavior of redistribution supporters has to my knowledge not been analyzed so far.

In a recent article, Arndt and Rennwald (2016) have shown that union members continue to vote for the Left despite the fact that radical right-wing parties try to mobilize voters around issues related to immigration and even though unions not historically linked to left-wing parties have gained importance in recent years.² According to Arndt and Rennwald, two mechanisms explain this finding: Ties between unions and social democratic parties remain strong in most West European countries, and unions shape their members' political attitudes in a way that makes them susceptible to support left parties.

In this article, I argue that union membership (partly) increases electoral support for the Left because it prevents voters from culturally realigning their vote choice. Since union members "think about economic issues as a major consideration in their vote [choice]" (Francia and Bigelow 2010: 142), they prioritize redistribution preferences over preferences on other issues such as immigration when cross-pressured in their vote choice, that is, if no party represents more than one of their preferences. Conversely, recent contributions have underlined the importance of attitudes regarding immigration for the vote choice of (non-unionized) individuals (e.g., Frank 2004, Kriesi et al. 2008). Since attitudes towards immigration, so the argument goes, outweigh economic preferences, opponents of immigration cast their vote in favor of radical right-wing parties irrespective of their redistribution preferences. The support for social democratic parties consequently decreases despite persisting levels of redistribution support (see Roemer, Lee, and Van der Straeten 2007).

I draw on data from the European Social Survey (ESS) for 17 West European elections that took place after the start of the Great Recession in 2008 to analyze how union membership

affects vote choice among redistribution supporters with ant-immigration attitudes and those with pro-immigration attitudes – where vote choice refers to their propensity to vote for a social democratic or radical right party as well as their likelihood to abstain. Results based on fixed-effects multinomial logit models show that union membership increases support for the Left and decreases support for the radical Right among redistribution supporters – especially among those opposing immigration and in countries in which the radical Right clearly opposes redistributive policies.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows: The next section outlines the theoretical argument. I then present the data, operationalization, and statistical method employed in this article. After presenting and discussing the empirical findings, I finish with some concluding remarks.

Theoretical argument

Only a few recent studies have examined the effect of redistribution preferences on individuals' vote choice. They invariably find, however, that redistribution support renders individuals more likely to vote for left parties (e.g., Fossati and Häusermann 2014, Rueda and Stegmueller 2014). Plausibly because these parties emphasize redistributive politics to a higher degree than parties in the center or to the right of the political spectrum (e.g., Korpi and Palme 2003, Allan and Scruggs 2004).

Research on the influence of redistribution preferences on individuals' vote choice has been mainly neglected in recent years because many studies of electoral behavior assume economic

policies to be more and more constrained by factors exogenous to national political systems and party choice therefore realigned along attitudes over immigration or the nation, that is, the cultural rather than the economic dimension (e.g., Kriesi et al. 2008, Kitschelt and Rehm 2014). Especially radical right-wing parties running on platforms that emphasize exclusionary immigration policies – often by simultaneously blurring their position on economic policies (e.g., Rovny 2013, Afonso 2015) – have been found to benefit from this cultural realignment by capitalizing on (or fueling) voters' anti-immigration attitudes (e.g., Mudde 2007, Akkerman and De Lange 2012). In as far as the saliency of economic preferences on the decision to support a radical right-wing party has been shown to be low (e.g., Oesch 2008), the radical Right is likely to attract voters with anti-immigration attitudes even if these voters simultaneously support redistribution (see Ivarsflaten 2005, Arzheimer 2012).

Finseraas (2012) has identified a significant share of the electorate as displaying such cross-cutting preferences when it comes to redistribution and immigration, that is, as supporting redistributive policies while opposing inclusionary immigration policies. He has also shown these voters to be significantly less likely to vote for the Left than voters with pure leftist preferences, that is, supportive of redistribution and immigration. Social democratic parties in pursuit of redistribution and inclusionary immigration policies are thus directly competing with radical right-wing parties (often) opposed to redistribution and supportive of exclusionary immigration policies where this non-negligible group of voters is concerned. In as far as preferences on the cultural dimension trump preferences on the economic dimension in the electorate at large, the Left is likely to lose this competition despite persisting levels of redistribution support.

As I will argue below, unionized voters are not only likely to display pure leftist preferences but also likely to base their vote choice on preferences on the economic rather than the cultural dimension if their preferences on these dimensions cross-pressure them in their vote choice after all. Union membership thus arguably alters voting patterns among redistribution supporters. Before I discuss these effects of union membership among redistribution supporters, it seems important to note that union membership is not only likely to affect the political behavior of redistribution supporters but redistribution preferences themselves. In a recent article, Mosimann and Pontusson (2017) have shown that union membership induces redistribution support among individuals across all income levels because union members internalize the distributive norms created by unions' solidaristic behavior and rhetoric towards wage compression. The effects of union membership on electoral demand for redistribution are, however, unlikely exhausted by its effect on preference formation. It seems rather plausible that union membership is also associated with translating these preferences into votes for specific parties.

It seems equally important to note that union membership might, moreover, increase individuals' likelihood to vote for the Left and decrease their likelihood to vote for a party to the right of the political spectrum irrespective of individuals' redistribution preferences. On the one hand, the decision to join a union might not be entirely independent from leftist predispositions (see Ebbinghaus, Göbel, and Koos 2011, Hadziabdic and Baccaro 2016). On the other hand, unions might directly mobilize their members for specific parties (see Francia and Bigelow 2010, Kerrissey and Schofer 2013) and unions' endorsement of specific parties is likely to

inform the vote choice of their members (see Brady and Sniderman 1985, Rapoport, Stone, and Abramowitz 1991).

As mentioned above, union members might be more likely to translate their redistribution support into votes for the Left than non-union members because the former are more likely to display pure leftist preferences and to prioritize preferences on the economic dimension over preferences on the cultural dimension than the latter. Historically, unions might have tried to control the supply of labor by restricting immigration (see Penninx and Roosblad 2000), but unions have been shown to heavily invest in anti-prejudice campaigns in recent years and the increasingly pro-immigration rhetoric of unions has been found to shape the immigration attitudes of their members towards more inclusionary immigration preferences (e.g., Donnelly 2014, Maraki and Longhi 2013). As indicated above, voters with leftist predispositions might, moreover, be more inclined to self-select into unions to begin with.

Individuals with pure leftist preferences on the economic and cultural dimensions are likely voting for the Left irrespective of union membership status. The effect of union membership on vote choice will therefore be limited to the effects of unions' general mobilization for the Left among these individuals. Union membership seems, however, likely to increase the saliency of redistribution preferences for party choice among voters with cross-cutting preferences. Union members should be less easily "distracted" (De La O and Rodden 2008) from voting according to their redistribution preferences by the radical Right's anti-immigration agenda than non-union members because unions have been shown to actively target political information that emphasizes economic issues at their members in the run-up to an election

(see Francia and Bigelow 2014). Union members are thus likely inclined to think of redistribution as an important issue when deciding which party to vote for. In line with this argumentation, Francia and Bigelow (2014) have found that union members are most likely to cite economic issues as their top concern before an election and consequently more likely to vote left than non-members who cite social and cultural wedge issues as the issues most important to them.³

Unionized redistribution supporters are consequently more likely to vote for social democratic parties and less likely to vote for radical right parties than non-unionized redistribution supporters and differences across membership status should be especially pronounced among voters with cross-cutting preferences.

Given the different historical trajectories of labor movements across Western Europe, these union membership effects might be stronger in countries with a predominantly socialist union movement. Unions with close ties to the respective country's Social Democratic party are likely encouraging their members to a higher degree to vote left than, for instance, Christian or white-collar unions (see Arndt and Rennwald 2016).⁴

One of the explanations for why the radical Right attracts (non-unionized) citizens with cross-cutting preferences as voters, rests on the assumption that the radical Right successfully blurs its position on economic policies (see, e.g., Rovny 2013, Afonso 2015). We lack, however, an explanation of how individuals could obtain the political information necessary to "de-blur" these parties' platforms. The acquisition of political knowledge is costly and cognitively

demanding, and the majority of voters have been repeatedly shown to lack political sophistication (e.g., Bartels 1996, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Union membership seems a plausible source of such electoral enlightenment.

As Iversen and Soskice (2015: 1790) have argued, union members are not only likely to actively acquire political information but also likely to be passively exposed to such information. Unions have been shown to target political information pertaining to party platforms and other election-related information at their members in the run-up to an election (e.g., Kerrissey and Schofer 2013), and the endorsement of political parties by unions has been found to help union members determine where parties fall on the ideological spectrum relative to their own position (see Fantasia 1988, Dixon, Roscigno, and Hodson 2004).⁵ In addition, union members are likely exposed to political information when interacting with their union peers (see Iversen and Soskice 2015).

Differences in voting patterns among union members with cross-cutting preferences and non-members with cross-cutting preferences should thus be most pronounced in contexts in which radical right parties are most opposed to redistribution and *vice versa*.

Data and variables

As shown in Table 1, I rely on data from rounds 5 to 8 of the European Social Survey (ESS) for West European elections that took place after the start of the Great Recession in 2008 to test my argument. My sample includes 17 elections from Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom

after selecting elections in which parties across the entire left-right spectrum are present and in which radical right parties have a somewhat substantial vote share.

[Table 1]

At the individual level, I not only limit the sample to citizens entitled to vote in their respective country, but also restrict it to labor force participants of working age and remove respondents with missing values on covariates from it. This full sample consists of 7,850 respondents. To simplify the evaluation of union membership effects among redistribution supporters, most of my models are, however, estimated on a sample restricted to respondents in support of redistribution. These are defined as those respondents who either "agree" or "strongly agree" with the following statement available in the ESS: "The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels."⁶ The test of my theoretical arguments is based on this restricted ESS sample that contains 5,430 survey respondents. Descriptive statistics can be found in the appendix.

Dependent Variable

I combine items on respondents' self-reported voting and self-reported party choice to measure the dependent variable vote choice.⁷ The coding of party choice is based on an ESS item that asks respondents to indicate which party they voted for in the last national election in their respective country. Respondents are presented with a country-specific list of parties that I recode into 1 "social democratic parties" and 2 "radical right parties" as shown in Table 2 to then drop voters of the remaining parties from the sample. Non-voting might be a viable third

option – especially among citizens with conflicting preferences on the economic and cultural dimensions. The dependent variable thus includes 3 "non-voting" as a third vote choice based on an ESS question that reads as follows: "Some people don't vote nowadays for one reason or another. Did you vote in the last national election?"

[Table 2]

Independent variables at the individual-level

The main independent variables of interest are union membership and immigration attitudes. The ESS allows the identification of union members by asking respondents to state whether they currently belong to a trade union, coded as 1, or not, coded as 0. Based on four ESS questions that have been used in previous studies, I identify respondents' immigration attitudes (see, e.g., Gorodzeisky and Richards 2015, Legewie 2013, Semyonov et al. 2008). A first set of questions asks respondents to state their attitudes towards *immigration*: (1) "To what extent do you think [country] should allow people of the same race or ethnic groups as most [country] people to come and live here," and (2) "how about people of a different race or ethnic group from most [country] people." Respondents react to these questions by stating whether their country should "allow none," "allow a few," "allow some," or "allow many" of these types of migrants to come and live in their respective country.

In a second set of questions, respondents' attitudes towards *immigrants* are measured: (3) "Would you say that [country]'s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from different countries," and (4) "is [country] made a worse or a better

place to live by people coming to live here from other countries." Respondents are asked to self-place between 0 (cultural life undermined/worse place to live) and 10 (cultural life enriched/better place to live) with regard to each of these two questions.

After having recalculated each variable so that it ranges from 0 to 1, I summarize the scores on the four questions and divide them by four to form an index of immigration attitudes that gives each question the same weight and ranges from 0 (anti-immigration attitudes) to 1 (pro-immigration attitudes).⁸

I control for a number of factors that have been shown to influence vote choice and might alter the effect of the main independent variables, especially union membership, on vote choice: Sex, age, place of residence, class, education, and income. Sex differentiates women, coded as 0, from men, coded as 1. Age measures respondents' age in years with the lower bound defined by the voting age in each country (mostly 18) and the upper bound fixed at 65. Place of residence distinguishes between different settings that range from (1) "a big city" to (5) "farm or home in countryside," and thus indicate an increase in rural living. Following Rennwald and Pontusson (2017), I rely on a simple dichotomy between the new and old middle class, coded as 0, and the working class, coded as 1, to measure class.⁹ Educational attainment is measured by a categorical variable differentiating between (1) "less than upper secondary education," (2) "upper secondary education," and (3) "tertiary education." Based on respondents' total net household income, the ESS sorts respondents into one of ten income deciles corresponding to deciles of their respective country's income distribution.

Finally, I estimate part of my models with and without an additional control for respondents' ideological self-placement measured on a scale from 0 (left) to 10 (right). With the type of survey data this article uses, it is not possible to properly distinguish between union membership effects on vote choice that result from unions' mobilization for the Left and union membership effects on vote choice that result from leftist voters' self-selection into unions. If union members are more supportive of social democratic parties and less supportive of radical right parties when I control for ideology, the idea that union membership is not a mere proxy for having a leftist ideology becomes, however, more credible and *vice versa* (see Mosimann and Pontusson 2017).

Moderating variables at the country-level

To assess whether or not the effects of union membership on redistribution supporters' political behavior are moderated by characteristics of national union movements and radical right parties, I create two dummy variables separating (1) countries in which the radical Right displays some form of redistribution support from those in which the radical Right does not display such support and (2) national union movements predominantly composed of socialist unions from those predominantly composed of other types of unions.

The classification of the radical Right's position on redistribution is based on the 2010 and 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Surveys (CHES) on party positions (Bakker et al. 2015, Polk et al. 2017). The CHES codes parties' positions on redistribution policy on a scale from 0, indicating that a party is fully in favor of redistribution, to 10, indicating that a party is fully opposed to

redistribution, with the value 5 separating pro-redistribution parties from anti-redistribution parties.¹⁰

Information in Arndt and Rennwald (2016) allows me to identify countries in which at least 50 percent of union members are organized by unions belonging to a trade union confederation with close ties to the respective country's social democratic party, coded as 1, as well as countries with union movements not predominantly composed of members belonging to this type of unions, coded as 0.

Method

I estimate multinomial logit models because the dependent variable is a nominal choice among vote options. These models simultaneously fit binary logits for all comparisons among the alternative vote choices. The available vote choices are (1) voting for a social democratic party, (2) voting for a radical right-wing party, and (3) non-voting with (1) as the reference group for the coefficients listed.¹¹ The main results thus consist of the estimated effects of all independent variables on the likelihood of non-voting or voting radical right rather than voting social democratic. To account for the nested data structure of the ESS, all models include country-election-fixed effects in the form of a dummy for each election.

Since the interpretation of multinomial logit estimates is complex, I assess the effects of the independent variables on vote choice by presenting average marginal effects for discrete changes on the independent variables from a start value to an end value. I display contrasts for categorical variables, a change from 0 to 1 for dichotomous variables, and a standard

deviation change for continuous variables. Moreover, the raw estimates of multinomial logit models do not make the union membership effects that I am interested in directly accessible. I thus test the theoretical argument by mainly presenting average predicted probabilities for each vote choice and differences in these average predicted probabilities conditional on union membership and other variables of interest (see Long and Freese 2014).

Findings

Redistribution support is very widespread in the eleven countries in the sample. About 70 percent of respondents agree with the notion that government should reduce differences in income levels. Moreover, 39 percent of these redistribution supporters are unionized and 46 percent of them are cross-pressured in their vote choice by simultaneously supporting redistribution and opposing immigration.¹² In line with previous findings in the literature, figures 1 and 2 also reveal that union members are about 6 percentage points more likely to support redistribution and slightly more opposed to exclusionary immigration policies than non-union members.¹³

[Figures 1 and 2]

Let us now turn to union membership effects on redistribution supporters' voting behavior by restricting the sample to respondents supportive of redistribution and estimating a multinomial logit model of vote choice that includes country-election-dummies as well as all individual-level variables except the control for ideology (full results in the appendix). Based on this model, panel (a) in Table 3 displays average marginal effects of union membership, a shift

towards pro-immigration attitudes, and other independent variables on respondents' vote choice.

[Table 3]

On average, unionized redistribution supporters are almost 13 percentage points more likely to vote for a social democratic party, 5 percentage points less likely to vote for a radical right party, and about 8 percentage points less likely to abstain from voting than non-unionized redistribution supporters. All these effects of union membership reach the 99.9%-level of statistical significance. The positive effect of union membership on the probability to vote left is about as substantial as the one of a simulated switch from the most rural to the most urban form of living and only slightly less substantial than the one of a simulated switch from the lowest to the highest level of educational attainment. While only this jump in education has a more substantial effect on non-voting than union membership, the union membership effect on radical right voting is about as pronounced as the one of sex.

A standard deviation shift in citizens' attitudes towards pro-immigration (about .24), increases their probability to vote for a social democratic party by more than 12 percentage points, decreases their probability to vote for a radical right party by 9 percentage points and minimizes their probability to abstain by over 3 percentage points. These effects not only reach the 99.9%-level of statistical significance, they are also very substantial: A simulated switch from being completely in favor of exclusionary immigration policies to being completely opposed to them, would render a redistribution supporter about 51 percentage points more likely to

vote left, 38 percentage points less likely to vote radical right, and 13 percentage points less likely to not vote at all. Across their full range, immigration attitudes thus affect the probability to vote left or radical right to a higher degree than any of the other variables in Table 3 (across their full range, age and education have, however, a bigger impact on non-voting).

As shown in panel (a) of Table 3, most of the other variables in the model also affect vote choice to a degree that clears the 95%-threshold of statistical significance.¹⁴ I find that radical right voting is more likely among high-income, rural, and male respondents than low-income, urban, and female ones. Earning more also increase respondents' probability to vote for the Social Democrats as being educated, older, female, and urban does. Meanwhile, income, education, and age positively affect citizens' likelihood to turnout and urban living affects it negatively.

Most of these effects persist when the model underlying the marginal effects in Table 3 additionally accounts for respondents' placement on the left-right axis as shown in panel (b) of Table 3.¹⁵ More importantly, union membership continues to increase respondents' likelihood to vote left and continues to decrease their likelihood to vote radical right or to abstain when I control for ideology. Even though the membership effects on radical right voting shrinks to about 3.5 percentage points and its effect on social democratic voting decreases to about 10 percentage points once ideological differences across union membership status are accounted for, union membership does not seem to be a mere proxy for having a leftist ideology.

To test my main argument – stating that union members with cross-cutting preferences are less likely to culturally realign their vote choice than non-members with such preferences – Table 4 lists average predicted probabilities for each of the three vote choices conditional on union membership and immigration attitudes. These predicted probabilities are based on a model identical to the one underlying panel (a) in Table 3 that additionally interacts union membership with immigration attitudes (full results in the appendix).

Unsurprisingly, citizens with pure leftist preferences are most likely to vote for a social democratic party and least likely to vote for a radical right party. Among cross-pressured voters, union members display a similar voting pattern (even though distances between the three options become much smaller and radical right voting becomes about as likely as non-voting) while non-union members are most likely to vote radical right and least likely to vote left. Table 4 also confirms that non-voting becomes significantly more likely among union members (9 percentage points, $p=.001$) and non-union members (5 percentage points, $p=.019$) alike as redistribution supporters become cross-pressured in their vote choice.

[Table 4]

Most important and in line with the theoretical expectations formulated above, Table 4 shows that union membership prevents cross-pressured redistribution supporters from culturally realigning their vote choice (at least to some degree). Among respondents with anti-immigration attitudes, union members are almost 10 percentage points less likely to vote for a radical right party and about 15 percentage points more likely to vote for a social democratic party than

their non-unionized counterparts and both these membership effects reach the 99.9%-level of statistical significance. At the same time, unionized redistribution supporters with pure leftist preferences are only 1.9 percentage points less likely to vote for a radical right party than their non-unionized counterparts and this union membership effects just about fails to clear the 95%-threshold of statistical significance. As expected, the effect of union membership on radical right voting among respondents with pure leftist preferences is not only substantially but also significantly smaller than the membership effect radical right voting among citizens with cross-cutting preferences (difference-in-difference of 7.9 percentage points, $p=.006$).

Table 4 reveals, however, that union membership effects with regard to the probability to vote for the Social Democrats are only 3.7 percentage points smaller among redistribution supporters in favor of immigration than those opposed to immigration and that this difference-in-differences across immigration attitudes is not statistically significant. The same is true for membership effects with regard to non-voting.

I finish this empirical section by analyzing how characteristics of national union movements and radical right parties moderate the effect of union membership on the political behavior of redistribution supporters with pro-immigration attitudes and, more importantly, the political behavior of redistribution supporters with anti-immigration attitudes.

To do so, Table 5 presents average predicted probabilities of the different vote choices for the same groups of redistribution supporters as Table 4. This table is based on models that re-estimate the interaction between union membership and immigration attitudes from Table 4

separately for (a) national union movements in which a majority of members is organized by socialist unions and (b) national union movements in which that is not the case.¹⁶

As in Table 4, I observe a positive effect of union membership on "pure leftists" probability to vote left and a negative effect of union membership on their probability to abstain in panel (a) and panel (b) alike. Conversely, I find that union membership has no effect on the probability to vote for the radical Right among pure leftists in either type of union movement.

More interesting is the finding that radical right voting is the most likely vote choice of union members with cross-cutting preferences in the context of a predominantly non-socialist union movement but not in the context of a predominantly socialist union movement (where they remain most likely to vote for the Social Democrats). While Table 5 shows that union members with cross-cutting preferences in panel (a) and panel (b) are more likely to vote left and less likely to vote radical right than non-members with such preferences, it also reveals that these effects are pretty similar across different types of national union movements and not significantly different from union membership effects among citizens with pure leftist preferences.

[Table 5]

Finally, Table 6 presents predicted probabilities of left voting, radical right voting, and non-voting conditional on union membership and immigration attitudes like tables 4 and 5 did. This table is based, however, on separate models for (a) the sample of radical right parties in favor of redistribution and (b) the sample of radical right parties in opposition to redistribution

(see appendix for full results).¹⁷ In the full sample, the radical Right's position on redistribution ranges from 2.5 (pro-redistribution) as displayed by the Norwegian radical right party before 2016 and 8 (anti-redistribution) as displayed by the Swiss radical right party before 2016.

[Table 6]

Focusing on redistribution supporters with anti-immigration attitudes, I observe a positive effect of union membership on the probability to vote social democratic in panel (a) and panel (b) but only find a negative effect of union membership on the probability to vote radical right in panel (b), that is, in the sample restricted to radical right parties opposing redistribution. While the former membership effects on left voting are not significantly bigger among opponents of immigration than supporters of immigration, the latter membership effect on radical right voting is 8.2 percentage points bigger among cross-pressured voters than pure leftists and reaches the 99%-level of statistical significance.

One other result from Table 6 is worth mentioning: Redistribution supporters with anti-immigration attitudes seem more likely to abstain in panel (b) than in panel (a), that is, when they are really cross-pressured in their party choice by the absence of a radical right party in favor of redistribution. Conversely, their probability to vote radical right is almost 45 percent among union members and almost 57 percent among non-members if the radical Right offers them exclusionary immigration policies *and* redistribution policies.

Conclusion

This article was motivated by the puzzle of why the rise in inequality since the early 1980s has not resulted in the introduction of more redistributive policies across Western Europe and by how drops in union density provide a partial answer to this puzzle. Another motivation concerned union membership's role as a source of political enlightenment in light of the radical Right's blurring of its economic policy position and a large body of literature hinting at generally low levels of political sophistication among voters. And finally, this article contributed to the literature on the cultural realignment thesis by contending that economic rather than cultural preferences inform union members' vote choice contrary to what the literature has shown to be the case for the electorate at large.

If individuals who support redistribution were to vote (solely) according to their economic preferences, I would expect them to vote for social democratic parties known to pursue redistributive politics to a higher degree than parties in the center or to the right of the political spectrum. This article has shown that redistribution supporters in favor of immigration are indeed most likely to support left-wing parties. The same goes for unionized redistribution supporters with anti-immigration attitudes in the absence of a radical right party in favor of redistribution but not for non-unionized redistribution supporters with cross-cutting preferences on the economic and cultural dimensions. This latter type of citizens is always more likely to abstain or to vote radical right than to vote left. This finding also highlights the fact that individuals tend to resort to non-voting if no party represents their preferences in a multidimensional issue space, that is, if they are cross-pressured in their party choice.

My analyses suggest that union membership matters to vote choice and the subsequent implementation of redistributive policies: First, union membership is generally associated with a higher probability to vote for the Social Democrats and a lower probability to abstain or to vote for the radical Right. Second, immigration attitudes do not seem to distract union members as easily from voting in line with their redistribution preferences as non-members and union members with cross-cutting preferences are significantly less likely to culturally realign their vote choice than non-members with the same preferences. Third, these union membership effects among citizens with cross-cutting preferences are barely affected by (my crude measure of) cross-national differences between union movements but are more significant where the radical Right strongly opposes redistribution.

This article shows that union membership continues to affect vote choice in Western Europe in the context of inequality and in the aftermath of the Great Recession. It also highlights that unionization is especially important in strengthening the link between support for redistribution and support for left parties. Moreover, it finds that union decline might affect electoral demand for redistribution by decreasing support for the Left among redistribution supporters opposed to immigration. The political representation of electoral demands for redistribution and, ultimately, the logic of politics in democratic capitalist systems change, however, if redistribution supporters abandon the Left.

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Notes

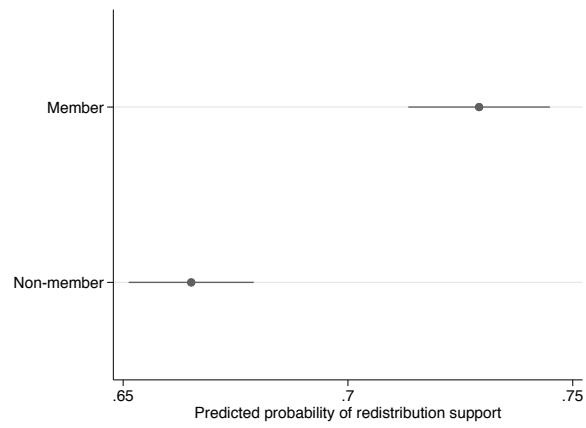
- ¹ Throughout this article, I refer to the Left, left-wing parties, the Social Democrats, and social democratic parties interchangeably even though different types of parties might compose the left-wing spectrum of a country's party system. Note that the results presented in this article are about the same when I include Communist and Green parties as left-wing parties into my models but that union membership effects on the probability to vote Communists or Greens do not show up if I code these parties into separate categories.
- ² On union membership and party choice, see also Juravich and Shergold (1988), Uhlaner (1989), Freeman (2003), Leigh (2006), Quinn (2010), and Parsons (2015).
- ³ For a next iteration of the paper, I plan to assess how union members and non-members rank different issues based on survey data for Western Europe.
- ⁴ Moreover, research also suggests that the relationships between social democratic parties and unions have changed in recent years and emphasizes increasing cross-national differences in the party-union-linkage (see, e.g., Allern and Bale 2012, Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013). A next iteration of this article will look more closely into these cross-national differences between union movements.
- ⁵ For the US Presidential Election in 2004, for instance, "some 92% of union members in battleground states reported that they had received political information from their union in the form of a pamphlet, flyer or letter, while 88% reported that they had received political information from a union newspaper, magazine or newsletter" (Francia and Bigelow 2010: 141).
- ⁶ Since redistribution support is widespread in most West European countries, it seems appropriate to treat respondents in the middle category "neither agree nor disagree" as implicit opponents of redistribution.
- ⁷ It has been shown that self-reporting tends to overstate voting (e.g., Ansolabehere and Hersh 2012) and underestimate voting for radical right-wing parties (e.g., Ivaldi 2001). As shown in Table A1 in the appendix, this seems to be the case in my sample as well. However, such misrepresentation is unlikely to be more common among union members than non-union members.
- ⁸ The rescaling is done by recalculating the score on each question as $(x - [\min x]) / ([\max x] - [\min x])$ with x indicating the variable to be rescaled.
- ⁹ Drawing on the classification of occupations by Oesch (2006) that discriminates vertically between more or less privileged positions and horizontally between different work logics, I define the working class as composed of "service workers" as well as "production workers" and the middle class as encompassing the other four classes characterized by dependent employment, that is, "office clerks," "socio-cultural (semi-) professionals," "technical (semi-) professionals" and " (junior) managers," as

well as the two classes characterized by independent employment, that is, "small business owners" and "self-employed professionals and large employers."

- ¹⁰ Since some radical right parties have been shown to pursue some kind of pseudo- and/or chauvinist welfare policies (see, e.g., Afonso and Rennwald 2018, Lefkofridi and Michel 2017), a next iteration of the paper will assess differences in the radical Right's stance on redistribution in a more fine-grained way.
- ¹¹ Multinomial logit models rely on an assumption regarding the independence of irrelevant alternatives (Long and Freese 2014: 207). A Hausman-McFadden test (Hausman and McFadden 1984) of this assumption provides no evidence that the odds of choosing between any two categories on the dependent variable are not independent.
- ¹² Opponents of immigration are defined as those respondents that fall below the median on the index of immigration attitudes on which higher values indicate a more pro-immigration stance.
- ¹³ Figures 1 and 2 are based on logistic and linear regression models that employ redistribution preferences (Figure 1) and immigration attitudes (Figure 2) as their respective dependent variables and include all individual-level controls except ideology as well as country-election-dummies (full results in the appendix).
- ¹⁴ However, age and education have no effect on radical right voting, sex has no impact on non-voting, and class fails to alter redistribution supporters' probability to go with *any* of the vote options.
- ¹⁵ Once I account for ideological differences across groups of respondents, a significant positive effect of education on the probability to vote radical right shows up and differences across the sexes with regard to the probability to vote social democratic disappear.
- ¹⁶ Countries in which a majority of union members belongs to socialist unions are Austria, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and Switzerland; countries in which a majority of members belongs to non-socialist unions are Belgium, Finland, France, and Sweden (see Arndt and Rennwald 2016). In a next iteration of the paper, I will try to employ a more precise measure of variances in unionism across countries.
- ¹⁷ Radical right parties in favor of redistribution (score below 5) are the radical right parties from Finland, Denmark, and Sweden. Radical right parties opposed to redistribution (score of 5 and above) are the radical right parties from the Netherlands, France, Austria, Norway, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

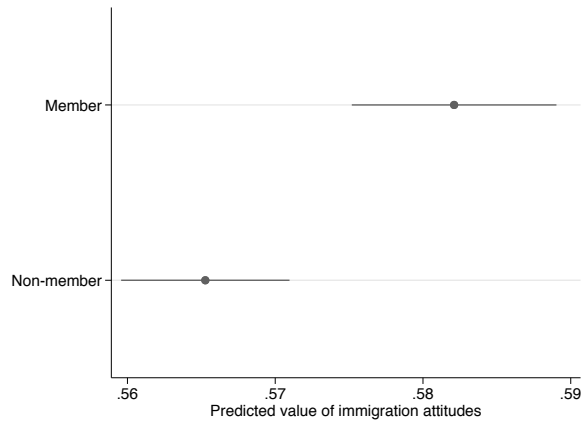
Figures

Figure 1. Predicted probabilities of redistribution support among union members and non-union members with 95% confidence intervals



Based on model 1 in Figure 1A in the appendix.

Figure 2. Predicted values of immigration attitudes among union members and non-union members with 95% confidence intervals



Based on model 2 in Figure A2 in the appendix. The index of immigration attitudes ranges from 0 to 1 with higher values indicating a more pro-immigration stance.

Tables**Table 1.** Elections included in the sample

Country	ESS 2010	ESS 2012	ESS 2014	ESS 2016
Austria	-	-	2013	2013
Belgium	2010	2010	2014	2014
Denmark	-	2011	2011	-
Finland	-	2011	2011	2015
France	-	2012	2012	2012
Germany	2009	2009	2013	2013
Netherlands	2010	2012	2012	2012
Norway	2009	2009	2013	2013
Sweden	2010	2010	2014	2014
Switzerland	-	2011	2011	2015
United Kingdom	2010	2010	2010	2015

Table 2. List of parties

Country	Social Democratic Parties	Radical Right Parties
Austria	Social Democratic Party of Austria, SPÖ	Alliance of the Future of Austria, BZÖ Freedom Party of Austria, FPÖ
Belgium	Socialist Party (Flemish), SP.A Socialist Party (French), PS	New-Flemish Alliance, N-VA Flemish Interest, VB National Front, FN ¹
Denmark	The Social Democrats, SD	Danish People's Party, DF
Finland	Social Democratic Party of Finland, SDP	True Finns, PS ²
France	Socialist Party, PS	National Front, FN
Germany	Social Democratic Party, SPD	Alternative for Germany, AfD National Democratic Party, NPD
Netherlands	Labour Party, PdVA	Party for Freedom, PVV/List Wilders
Norway	Norwegian Labour Party, A	Progress Party, FRP
Sweden	Social Democrats, S/SAP	Sweden Democrats, SD
Switzerland	Socialist Party, SP	Swiss People's Party, SVP
United Kingdom	Labour	UK Independence Party, UKIP Democratic Unionist Party, DUP

¹The party was dissolved in 2012.²2011 renamed into The Finns.

Table 3. Marginal effects of union membership, immigration attitudes and other variables on vote choice among supporters of redistribution

Variables	<i>(a) Without ideology</i>			<i>(b) With ideology</i>		
	Social Democrats	Radical Right	Non-voting	Social Democrats	Radical Right	Non-voting
Union membership	.129*** (.000)	-.051*** (.000)	-.077*** (.000)	.103*** (.000)	-.034** (.002)	-.069*** (.000)
Pro-immigration attitudes	.122*** (.000)	-.090*** (.000)	-.031*** (.000)	.085*** (.000)	-.065*** (.000)	-.020** (.002)
Class (ref. middle class)	-.011 (.438)	.006 (.609)	.005 (.729)	-.017 (.195)	.016 (.155)	.001 (.922)
Income	.030*** (.000)	.015* (.011)	-.045*** (.000)	.031*** (.000)	.013* (.029)	-.044*** (.000)
Education						
Tertiary vs. less than upper secondary	.151*** (.000)	.028† (.083)	-.179*** (.000)	.130*** (.000)	.037* (.015)	-.167*** (.000)
Sex (ref. female)	-.037** (.002)	.058*** (.000)	-.021† (.076)	-.023 (.051)	.036*** (.000)	-.014 (.242)
Age	.079*** (.000)	-.000 (.858)	-.078*** (.000)	.067*** (.000)	.009† (.064)	-.076*** (.000)
Place of residence						
Countryside vs. big city	-.131*** (.000)	.082*** (.000)	.045* (.040)	-.110*** (.000)	.062** (.002)	.048* (.047)
Left-right self-placement				-.135** (.000)	.129*** (.000)	.005 (.406)

Based on models 3 and 4 in Table A3 in the appendix. P-values in brackets, statistical significance of differences: *** significant at .01%, ** significant at 1%, * significant at 5%, † significant at 10%. For continuous variables, the discrete change for a standard deviation change is calculated, for dichotomous variables, a change from 0 to 1 is calculated and for categorical variables, contrasts are calculated. Only change between most extreme categories shown for ordinal variables education and place of residence.

Table 4. Average predicted probabilities of vote choice among supporters of redistribution conditional on union membership and attitudes towards immigration

		Social Democrats	Radical Right	Non- voting
Pro-Immigration	Union members	.723	.061	.216
	Non-members	.611	.080	.309
<i>diff</i>		.112*** (.000)	.019 [†] (.051)	.093*** (.000)
Anti-Immigration	Union members	.375	.317	.307
	Non-members	.226	.415	.359
<i>diff</i>		.149*** (.000)	.098*** (.000)	.052* (.022)
<i>diff in diff</i>		.037 (.311)	.079** (.006)	.041 (.213)

Based on model 5 in Table A3 in the appendix. P-values in brackets, statistical significance of differences: *** significant at .01%, ** significant at 1%, * significant at 5%, † significant at 10%, t test of equality hypothesis for differences. Pro-immigration attitudes correspond to a value of .85 on the index of immigration attitudes (9th decile), anti-immigration attitudes correspond to a value of .29 on the index of immigration attitudes (1st decile).

Table 5. Average predicted probabilities of vote choices conditional on union membership, attitudes towards immigration and national union movement characteristics

		<i>(a) Majority of union members organized in socialist unions</i>			<i>(b) Majority of union members organized in non-socialist unions</i>		
		Social Democrats	Radical Right	Non-voting	Social Democrats	Radical Right	Non-voting
Pro-Immigration	Union members	.764	.041	.195	.671	.089	.240
	Non-members	.639	.059	.302	.574	.104	.323
<i>diff</i>		.125*** (.000)	.018 (.111)	.107*** (.000)	.097** (.004)	.015 (.385)	.082** (.009)
Anti-Immigration	Union members	.376	.250	.374	.331	.413	.256
	Non-members	.243	.334	.424	.203	.505	.292
<i>diff</i>		.133*** (.000)	.084* (.011)	.050 (.137)	.128*** (.000)	.092* (.015)	.036 (.253)
<i>diff in diff</i>		.008 (.872)	.066* (.075)	.057 (.239)	.030 (.578)	.077* (.092)	.047 (.338)

Based on models 6 and 7 in Table A4 in the appendix. P-values in brackets, statistical significance of differences: *** significant at .01%, ** significant at 1%, * significant at 5%, † significant at 10%, t test of equality hypothesis for differences. Pro-immigration attitudes correspond to a value of .85 on the index of immigration attitudes (9th decile), anti-immigration attitudes correspond to a value of .29 on the index of immigration attitudes (1st decile).

Table 6. Average predicted probabilities of vote choices conditional on union membership, attitudes towards immigration and national union movement characteristics

		<i>(a) Radical right parties in favor of redistribution</i>			<i>(b) Radical right parties opposed to redistribution</i>		
		Social Demo- crats	Radical Right	Non- voting	Social Demo- crats	Radical Right	Non- voting
Pro-Immigration	Union members	.652	.073	.275	.751	.062	.186
	Non-members	.596	.086	.318	.612	.074	.313
	<i>diff</i>	.056 (.246)	.013 (.641)	.043 (.368)	.139*** (.000)	.012 (.275)	.127*** (.000)
Anti-Immigration	Union members	.366	.443	.191	.351	.292	.357
	Non-members	.192	.556	.252	.226	.386	.388
	<i>diff</i>	.174*** (.001)	.113 (.109)	.061 (.227)	.125*** (.000)	.094*** (.000)	.031 (.242)
<i>diff in diff</i>		.118 (.158)	.100 (.238)	.018 (.830)	.014 (.735)	.082** (.009)	.096* (.012)

Based on models 8 and 9 in Table A5 in the appendix. P-values in brackets, statistical significance of differences: *** significant at .01%, ** significant at 1%, * significant at 5%, † significant at 10%, t test of equality hypothesis for differences. Pro-immigration attitudes correspond to a value of .85 on the index of immigration attitudes (9th decile), anti-immigration attitudes correspond to a value of .29 on the index of immigration attitudes (1st decile).

Appendix

Figure A1. Determinants of redistribution support, estimated regression coefficients with 95% confidence intervals

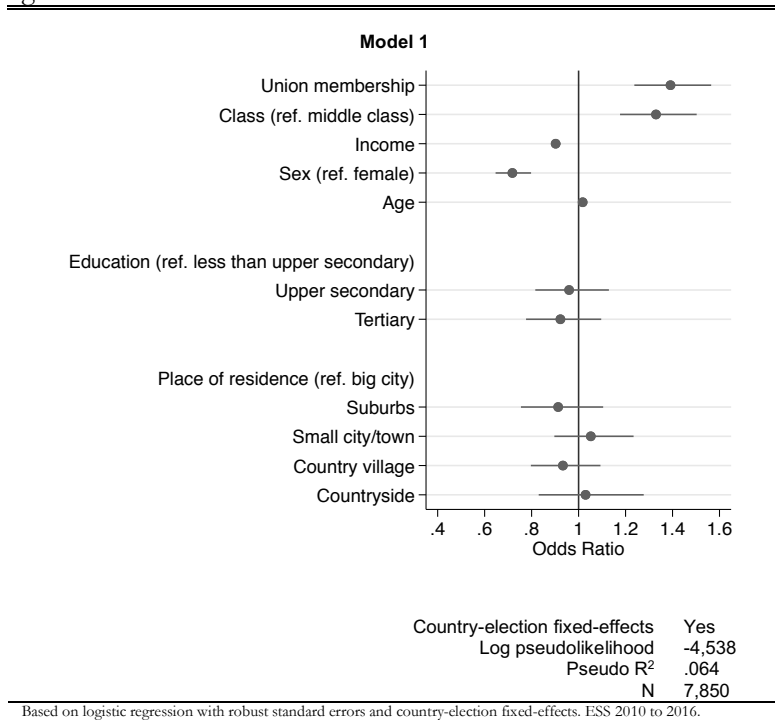


Figure A2. Determinants of immigration attitudes, estimated regression coefficients with 95% confidence intervals

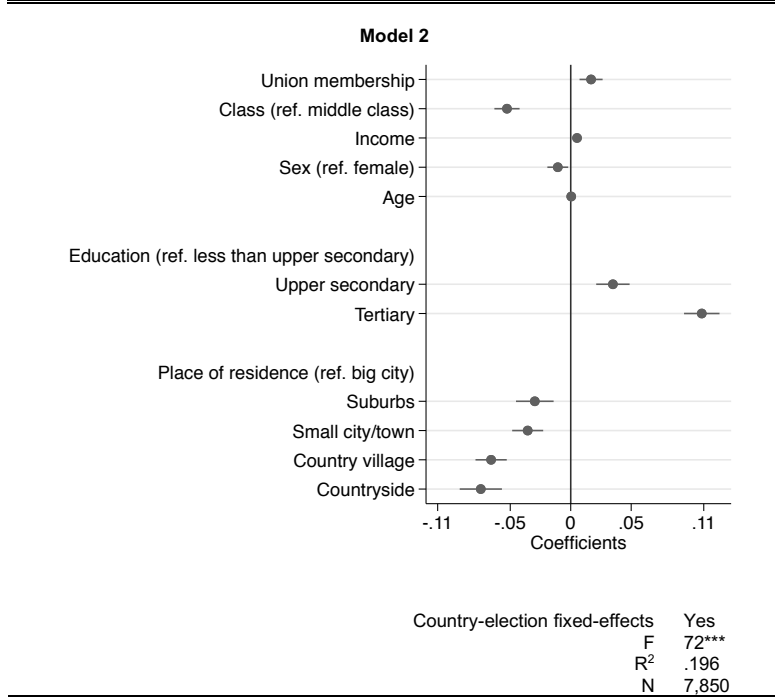


Table A1. Vote share of parties in sample in percent and actual vote share in percent

		Social Democrats		Radical Right		Non-voting	
		S	A	S	A	S	A
Austria	2013	22	27	10	24	22	25
Belgium	2010	19	21	22	25	9	10
Belgium	2014	19	20	20	24	6	10
Denmark	2011	24	25	8	12	5	12
Finland	2011	14	19	10	19	14	30
Finland	2015	11	17	11	18	16	33
France	2012	26	29	7	14	20	43
Germany	2013	20	29	4	4	15	28
Netherlands	2010	15	20	10	15	16	24
Netherlands	2012	20	25	5	10	10	24
Norway	2009	31	35	14	23	12	23
Norway	2013	27	21	11	16	10	22
Sweden	2010	23	31	3	6	6	15
Sweden	2014	26	31	4	13	6	14
Switzerland	2011	10	19	11	27	31	51
Switzerland	2015	11	19	13	29	26	51
United Kingdom	2015	24	30	6	27	14	34
<i>Total</i>		<i>20</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>27</i>

S = Vote share in sample; A = Actual vote share. Data for Austria from <http://wahl13.bmi.gv.at/> [last accessed March 31, 2018], for Belgium from <http://www.ibz.rn.fgov.be/fr/> [last accessed March 31, 2018], for Denmark <http://www.politicaldatayearbook.com/Chart.aspx/59/Denmark> [last accessed March 31, 2018], for Finland <http://tulospalvelu.vaalit.fi/indexe.html> [last accessed March 31, 2018], for France [http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Legislatives/electsult_I_G2012/\(path\)/LG2012/FE.html](http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Legislatives/electsult_I_G2012/(path)/LG2012/FE.html) [last accessed March 31, 2018], for Germany <https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/> [last accessed March 31, 2018], for the Netherlands <https://www.kiesraad.nl/> [last accessed March 31, 2018], for Norway <https://www.valgresultat.no/?type=st&year=2017> [last accessed March 31, 2018], for Sweden <https://data.val.se/val/val2010/slutresultat/R/nike/index.html> [last accessed March 31, 2018], for Switzerland http://www.politik-stat.ch/nrw2011CH_de.html [last accessed March 31, 2018], for the UK <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/our-work/our-research/electoral-data> [last accessed March 31, 2018].

Table A2. Descriptive statistics (restricted to redistribution supporters, ESS 2010-2016)

Variable	N	Mean	S.D.	Modus	Median
Vote choice	5,430	-	-	Social Democrats	-
Union membership	5,430	-	-	Non-member	-
Immigration attitudes	5,430	.582	.211	.633	.600
Income	5,430	7	3	7 th decile	6 th decile
Education	5,430	-	-	Upper secondary	Upper secondary
Sex	5,430	-	-	Male	-
Age	5,430	44	12	55	45
Place of residence	5,430	-	-	(4) Country village	(3) Town or small city
Left-right self-placement	5,283	5	2	5	5

Table A3. Determinants of vote choice, fixed effects multinomial logistic regression models

Variables	Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	Radical Right	Non-voting	Radical Right	Non-voting	Radical Right	Non-voting
Union membership	.496*** (.047)	.502*** (.043)	.548*** (.055)	.532*** (.047)	.349*** (.094)	.460** (.120)
Immigration attitudes	.007*** (.002)	.097*** (.020)	.021*** (.006)	.161*** (.036)	.005*** (.002)	.090*** (.023)
Class (ref. middle class)	1.074 (.107)	1.054 (.091)	1.118 (.126)	1.073 (.097)	1.073 (.107)	1.055 (.091)
Income	.995 (.018)	.898*** (.014)	.986 (.020)	.891*** (.014)	.996 (.018)	.898*** (.014)
Education (ref. less than upper secondary)						
Upper secondary	1.173 (.155)	.606*** (.069)	1.138 (.161)	.598*** (.070)	1.172 (.154)	.606*** (.068)
Tertiary	.744* (.107)	.332*** (.042)	.804 (.123)	.351*** (.046)	.743* (.106)	.332*** (.042)
Sex (ref. female)	1.585*** (.139)	1.042 (.078)	1.388*** (.131)	1.036 (.080)	1.589*** (.139)	1.043 (.078)
Age	.980*** (.003)	.954*** (.003)	.985*** (.004)	.955*** (.003)	.980*** (.003)	.954*** (.003)
Residence (ref. a big city)						
Suburbs or outskirts of big city	2.144*** (.356)	.942 (.134)	1.805*** (.322)	.900 (.133)	2.147*** (.357)	.941 (.134)
Town or small city	1.529** (.223)	1.058 (.114)	1.358† (.213)	.995 (.113)	1.531** (.224)	1.057 (.114)
Country village	2.224*** (.314)	1.013 (.114)	2.034*** (.312)	.967 (.114)	2.223*** (.314)	1.012 (.114)
Farm or home in countryside	2.673*** (.487)	1.831*** (.272)	2.424*** (.488)	1.807*** (.285)	2.682*** (.488)	1.831*** (.272)
Left-right self-placement			1.859*** (.052)	1.336*** (.031)		
<i>Interaction</i>						
Union membership * Immigration attitudes					1.971 (.902)	1.136 (.479)
Country-election dummies	Yes		Yes		Yes	
Log pseudolikelihood	-4,433		-3,963		-4,431	
Pseudo R ²	.216		.278		.217	
N	5,430		5,283		5,430	

Odds ratios based on multinomial logistic regression with robust standard errors, standard errors in brackets - *** significant at .01%, ** significant at 1%, * significant at 5%, † significant at 10% - cases with missing values removed from sample. Data from ESS 2010-2016.

Table A4. Determinants of vote choice with union movement characteristics as moderating variables, fixed effects multinomial logistic regression models

Variables	Model 6 ^a		Model 7 ^b	
	Radical Right	Non-voting	Radical Right	Non-voting
Union membership	.402* (.157)	.533† (.189)	.373** (.144)	.470† (.185)
Immigration attitudes	.005*** (.002)	.054*** (.018)	.007*** (.003)	.169*** (.064)
Class (ref. middle class)	1.359* (.196)	1.279* (.147)	.875 (.122)	.860 (.114)
Income	.991 (.025)	.896*** (.018)	.996 (.027)	.894*** (.021)
Education (ref. less than upper secondary)				
Upper secondary	.793 (.142)	.536*** (.080)	1.721** (.327)	.694* (.121)
Tertiary	.405*** (.083)	.279*** (.046)	1.284 (.260)	.406*** (.081)
Sex (ref. female)	1.484** (.188)	.939 (.094)	1.711*** (.209)	1.196 (.137)
Age	.978*** (.005)	.953*** (.004)	.983*** (.005)	.957*** (.005)
Residence (ref. a big city)				
Suburbs or outskirts of big city	2.632*** (.676)	.951 (.185)	1.824** (.407)	.952 (.204)
Town or small city	2.309*** (.514)	1.236 (.182)	1.010 (.199)	.869 (.142)
Country village	2.203*** (.483)	.926 (.140)	2.132*** (.408)	1.096 (.189)
Farm or home in countryside	2.426** (.686)	1.839** (.388)	2.636*** (.648)	1.738** (.375)
<i>Interaction</i>				
Union membership * Immigration attitudes	1.384 (.962)	.848 (.495)	2.126 (1.355)	1.254 (.782)
Country-election dummies		Yes		Yes
Log pseudolikelihood		-2,341		-2,053
Pseudo R ²		.218		.217
N		2,971		2,459

Odds ratios based on multinomial logistic regression with robust standard errors, standard errors in brackets - *** significant at .01%, ** significant at 1%, * significant at 5%, † significant at 10% - cases with missing values removed from sample. Data from ESS 2010-2016.

^a Sample restricted to countries with a majority of union members organized by socialist unions.

^b Sample restricted to countries with a majority of union members organized by non-socialist unions.

Table A5. Determinants of vote choice with characteristics of radical right parties as moderating variables, fixed effects multinomial logistic regression models

Variables	Model 8 ^a		Model 9 ^b	
	Radical Right	Non-voting	Radical Right	Non-voting
Union membership	.227* (.160)	.195* (.136)	.373*** (.114)	.653 (.187)
Immigration attitudes	.002*** (.002)	.085** (.072)	.006*** (.002)	.090*** (.024)
Class (ref. middle class)	.840 (.192)	.928 (.204)	1.164 (.130)	1.102 (.103)
Income	.886** (.036)	.859*** (.033)	1.025 (.021)	.905*** (.015)
Education (ref. less than upper secondary)				
Upper secondary	.797 (.227)	.614† (.179)	1.282† (.191)	.614*** (.075)
Tertiary	.651 (.204)	.407** (.134)	.763† (.123)	.323*** (.045)
Sex (ref. female)	2.256*** (.474)	1.149 (.222)	1.481*** (.144)	1.034 (.084)
Age	.984* (.007)	.951*** (.007)	.978*** (.004)	.955*** (.003)
Residence (ref. a big city)				
Suburbs or outskirts of big city	1.234 (.411)	.817 (.272)	2.512*** (.500)	.991 (.157)
Town or small city	1.285 (.376)	1.019 (.276)	1.643** (.283)	1.057 (.125)
Country village	1.606 (.512)	1.754† (.520)	2.465*** (.403)	.920 (.112)
Farm or home in countryside	2.126* (.700)	2.441** (.717)	2.980*** (.672)	1.695** (.305)
<i>Interaction</i>				
Union membership * Immigration attitudes	3.963 (4.608)	4.604 (4.938)	1.957 (1.042)	.594 (.280)
Country-election dummies		Yes		Yes
Log pseudolikelihood		-870		-3,536
Pseudo R ²		.238		.214
N		1,109		4,321

Odds ratios based on multinomial logistic regression with robust standard errors, standard errors in brackets - *** significant at .01%, ** significant at 1%, * significant at 5%, † significant at 10% - cases with missing values removed from sample. Data from ESS 2010-2016.

^a Sample restricted to countries with radical right parties in favor of redistribution.

^b Sample restricted to countries with radical right parties in opposition to redistribution.