The Heavenly Chorus Sings for the Rich

Unequal Representation and the Right-Wing Populist Vote in Europe

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Summary
Populists often claim to be the only true representatives of the people. However, it remains unclear why this assertion would resonate with citizens if they felt well represented. In this article, we claim that populist parties succeed because they can capitalize on a real deficit in the workings of representative democracy. Recent research has shown that political decisions are actually biased in favor of better-off citizens across rich democracies. The perception of less resourceful citizens that politics is working against their interests has a real foundation since policies parliaments enact are often not congruent with their own political preferences. Hence, populists point at real existing biases and address groups who feel poorly represented. We show that the perception of a lack of responsiveness helps to explain abstention as well as the vote for right-wing populist parties. We use data of the European Social Survey for 15 European countries. In addition, we look at the German case in more detail. Unequal responsiveness, we conclude, creates the breeding ground for populism.

1 Introduction

Many rich democracies witness a rising tide of populism. With very few exceptions, populist parties have scored electoral successes and often entered national parliaments. In Poland and Hungary, for example, populist parties dominate the respective party system, and in Austria, the FPÖ is part of the government coalition. For the first time since the fall of the Nazi regime, a right-wing (populist) party entered the *Bundestag* after the 2017 general election in Germany. The most spectacular instance of populist success is probably the presidency of Donald Trump, who won the 2016 US Presidential election to the surprise of many observers. Even where populist parties are less successful on Election Day, they sometimes have a strong impact on policies. BREXIT is just the most far-reaching example. In reaction to the rise of populism, a great deal of research has emerged. It deals with the most suitable definition of populism, the programmatic outlook of populist parties, supportive attitudes, or the social base of the populist vote. Despite the richness of this research, we argue that most approaches to the study of populism fail to integrate fully the insights on unequal representation that have emerged in recent years.

At the heart of populism is the claim that representative democracy has fallen short of its promises. Political decisions, so they say, do not reflect what ordinary citizens want. Although Canovan (1982, 543) doubted that a theoretical account of populism was possible at all, most observes today follow Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017) and Müller's (2016) definition of populism. From their perspective, core features of populism as a "thin ideology" are anti-elitism combined with anti-pluralism. The defining elements translate into a stark opposition between "the people" on the one side and "the elite" on the other (Mudde 2004, 543). Populisms differ, however, in their understanding of the people. It can refer to a nativist or a cultural concept of who rightly belongs to the people. In each version, however, populists draw a clear line between "them" and "us." Anti-elitism is not just a critique of specific decisions but means more fundamentally that those in power betray ordinary citizens because they are supposedly corrupt or detached from real-live experiences. Against established parties, populists claim to represent the true will of the people. Because they know and fight for the unmediated truth, there can be no deviating opinions. Those who hold different views either are misguided or, even worse, ill intentioned.

Even if populists assert to be the only true representatives of the people, it remains unclear why this bold claim should resonate with citizens at all. In this article, we claim that populist parties succeed because they can capitalize on a real deficit of representative democracy. Recent research has shown that political decisions are biased in favor of better-off citizens across rich democracies. The perception of less resourceful citizens that politics is working against their interests has a real foundation since their own political preferences and the policies parliaments enact are not well aligned. Hence, populists point at real existing biases and address groups who feel poorly represented. Unequal responsiveness creates the breeding ground for populism.

2 Voice of the unrepresented

In general, we do not lack theoretical or empirical accounts of various aspects of the rise of populist parties. Still, many of these studies fall short of a fully convincing account of the phenomenon because they do not connect populism to biases in political representation. Although many studies note that voters of populist parties feel poorly represented, they usually do not link these claims to the literature that deals with unequal responsiveness. This is surprising because one of the rallying cries of populists is that the deck of politics is stacked against ordinary citizens—which it indeed is, as a number of studies show. In the empirical part of this paper, we will show that the perception of unequal responsiveness has a significant impact on the likelihood of voting for populist parties, even if we take a range of other variables into account. In what follows, we will first summarize the new responsiveness research before we engage with different approaches to the study of populism. We

can distinguish between demand-side explanations that stress either cultural or economic grievances of 'modernization losers' on the one hand side and supply-side explanations that focus on party system change on the other. While these three perspectives have much improved our understanding of populism, they arguably underemphasize the political biases in the reaction to broad societal changes. To comprehend fully why citizens support populist parties, we have to take their subjective perceptions of objective distortions in political decision-making into account.

2.1 Unequal Responsiveness

In recent years, the study of political responsiveness has focused on the question of *whose* preferences political representatives take into account. Several studies on the American case document selective responsiveness on the part of political decision-makers, in favor of the better-off (Bartels 2008; Gilens 2005; 2012; Jacobs and Page 2005). For example, Gilens (2005; 2012) uses nearly 1,800 survey questions on policy preferences, covering a wide array of policies, and compares the opinions of different income groups with political decisions made within four years after the questions were asked. He finds that political decisions reflect poor citizens' opinions only if these coincide with the preferences of the rich. Low and even middle-income groups seem to have no influence once their preferences diverge from those of top income groups. Other studies corroborate these findings. Bartels (2008) compares senators' votes with the preferences of their constituents and concludes that their voting decisions are skewed in favor of the rich. Examining political responsiveness at the states' level, Flavin (2012) shows that citizens with lower incomes get less substantial representation in the field of general liberalism and on some highly controversial social topics like abortion.

Gilens and Page (2014) compare not only the influence of average citizens' opinions (i.e., those of the median income group) to those of economic elites, but also examine the impact of interest groups on policy change. They observe that both economic elites and business interest groups have an independent effect on political decision-making, while they find only limited or no impact of average citizens' opinions and mass-based interest groups. Taken as a whole, these findings show a strong representational bias towards economically powerful actors in the US, leading the authors to conclude that "America's claims to being a democratic society are seriously threatened" (Gilens and Page 2014, 577).[1]

Focusing on European democracies, several authors have shown that party positions and politicians' attitudes are more congruent with those of richer citizens (Adams and Ezrow 2009; Bernauer, Giger,

[1] Some authors have argued that the potential for selective responsiveness towards richer citizens might be limited, since income groups have similar preferences on many political issues Branham, Soroka, and Wlezien (2017); Soroka and Wlezien (2008); Ura and Ellis (2008), at least when it comes to relative priorities for different issues Enns (2015). However, differences in preferences do not occur randomly, but often concern fundamental questions of taxing and redistribution Gilens (2009); Page, Bartels, and Seawright (2013) in which better-off citizens achieve their goals far more often Gilens (2015).

and Rosset 2015; Giger, Rosset, and Bernauer 2012; Lehmann, Regel, and Schlote 2015; Schakel and Hakhverdian 2018). Studies that analyze the link between constituents' preferences and policy *outcomes* also point to unequal representation. Peters and Ensink (2015), for example, compare preferences on redistribution with aggregate levels of social spending (as a percentage of GDP) and find a better match between the preferences of the rich and actual spending levels. Donnelly and Lefkofridi (2014) and Bartels (2017) compare preferences and policy outputs for various topics in a range of European countries and report similar biases. In sum, a growing body of research shows that parties and parliaments respond unequally to different social classes—the deck of politics is, indeed, stacked against the poor and in favor of the rich. With Schattschneider (1975), we can say that the "heavenly chorus" sings tunes for the rich. Populist parties capitalize on representation failure and maintain that they are the only ones who can correct these political inequities.

2.2 Explaining populism

Many observers have noted that populists exploit the perception that established parties do not adequately represent "the people." For example, Weyland (2001, 14) argues that populists win support "by 'representing' people who feel excluded or marginalized from national political life and by promising to rescue them from crises, threats, and enemies." Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017, 51) note that "… populist political parties use populism to challenge the establishment and to give voice to groups that feel unrepresented." Similarly, Mény and Surel (2002, 11) maintain that ". . . feelings of powerlessness, of not being able to voice dissatisfaction effectively, of not being able to make oneself heard, are all fertile ground for populist parties." Thus, while the disconnect between representatives and citizens seem to drive populism, most studies stop short of linking political grievances to *unequal representation*.

In the current debate about the "populist challenge" (Kriesi 2014), most authors consider structural transformations in both economic and cultural realms of society as the main drivers behind the growing electoral support for right-wing populism. According to these accounts, globalization, value change and "modernization" in general induce changes that create grievances among "losers" (Kriesi et al. 2008) of these processes, leaving them open to the appeals of the far right (Golder 2016). In particular, (male) low-skilled workers belong to the group of "modernization losers." As a result, the working class is overrepresented in the electorate of most far right parties in Europe (see the contributions in Rydgren 2013). However, this group is also the least well represented, as studies on unequal representation show.

The study of populism distinguishes between demand-side and supply-side arguments. Existing demand-side explanations provide different answers to the question of whether economic or cultural factors nourish support for RWPP. Proponents of the "cultural backlash" thesis (Inglehart and Norris

2016) argue that new social movements have led to the rise of cultural liberalism and universalist values that many (New) Left parties adopted in the 1980s and 1990s. This "silent revolution" (Inglehart 1977) alienated citizens with more traditionalist worldviews. According to this argument, particularistic and traditionalist preferences drive the electoral support for the populist right. Other authors see "cultural grievances" stemming mainly from the perception of immigration as a threat to national or cultural identity (Lucassen and Lubbers 2012; Oesch 2008). They argue that anti-immigrant attitudes are the decisive factor for explaining the vote choice for the far right (Ivarsflaten 2008; Minkenberg 2000).[2]

In contrast, a second strand of demand-side arguments stresses economic grievances of lower-skilled citizens. Globalization intensifies economic competition, which makes in particular the locally-bound "somewheres" (Goodhart 2017) vulnerable and creates feelings of (relative) deprivation (Kitschelt and McGann 1997). An abundance of low-skilled workers within a country or abroad makes it easier to lower wages or to offshore tasks altogether. Parties of the far right exploit these grievances because they link economic hardship to the presence of ethnic minorities and migration, using them as scapegoats for socio-economic developments (Golder 2003). In a related argument, Inglehart and Norris (2017) state that the increase in income inequality and the decline of existential security leads to an "authoritarian reflex" in contemporary societies. Empirical studies supporting this argument examine factors such as (perceived) job insecurity, fear of downward social mobility or welfare populism and their relationship to the vote for the populist right (Koster, Achterberg, and van der Waal 2013).

A third strand looks at changes in the way parties are organized (and financed) to explain citizens' frustration. Mainstream parties have become "cartel parties" (Katz and Mair 1995) that are less responsive to their voters because they have shifted their attention from representation to governing. Since governments have to fulfill many obligations at the same time, parties no longer champion the views and interest of any particular group. This approach sees a widening gulf between parties and their constituencies: "Responsible" government trumps "responsiveness" (Mair 2009). However, while the cartel thesis could explain low overall levels of responsiveness, it does not easily fit to the empirical pattern of unequal responsiveness.

Although these approaches help to understand the populist tide, they largely neglect the role of political agency to bring about the oft-mentioned grievances. While we accept the general reasoning of these approaches, we think they miss the mechanism that links structural changes and citizens' disaffection with established parties. Governments can respond and have responded in a variety of

[2] As Golder (2016) argues, however, anti-immigrant attitudes may also result from the perceived threat of economic competition and not necessarily from concerns with national identity.

ways to globalization or post-material value change.[3] However, if politics is biased in favor of the better off, the translation of general challenges into specific policies can produce the kind of grievances that the literature on populism highlights. Unequal responsiveness teaches low-income and low-skilled citizens, in particular, that their preferences have a low chance of realization. These citizens (correctly) perceive that mainstream parties no longer represent them, which is why their grievances lead them to turn to the populist right who claims to speak for them.

3 Identifying right-wing populist parties

Any analysis of right-wing populist parties must identify these parties at first. Ideally, one would be able to capture three dimensions: anti-pluralism, anti-elitism, and the position on the cultural dimension of the two-dimensional space. Right-wing populist parties should be critical of elites, opposed to opinion pluralism, and culturally conservative. In contrast, their positioning on the traditional state-market-axis is less clear because some of these parties have recently adopted welfare chauvinist positions. Unfortunately, it is not easy to capture all three dimensions with one dataset. In particular, the party stance on opinion diversity does not seem to figure prominently in the different endeavors to compare parties. Thus, we will rely on the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES), which measures parties' positions on several dimensions. The CHES was launched in 1999 and has interviewed country experts on the positions of parties in their respective countries in a three-year cycle since then.[4]

We will rely on the 2014 dataset, which includes data for all the parties of the 15 countries that we analyze later. The CHES includes one question about the salience of "anti-establishment and anti-elite rhetoric" of parties, which seems well suited to capture one aspect of populism. Moreover, the survey also askes experts to evaluate the

> *"position of the party in 2014 in terms of their views on democratic freedoms and rights. 'Libertarian' or 'postmaterialist' parties favor expanded personal freedoms, for example, access to abortion, active euthanasia, same-sex marriage, or greater democratic participation. 'Traditional' or 'authoritarian' parties often reject these ideas; they value order, tradition, and stability, and believe that the government should be a firm moral authority on social and cultural issues."*

This so-called GALTAN measure captures the cultural dimension of the policy space that has a particular high salience for right-wing populist parties. It correlates very highly ($r > .85$) with parties' positions on immigration, homosexuality, and multiculturalism. However, it does not correlate strongly with the salience of anti-elite positions ($r=-.22$, $p=.012$, $N=137$) because left-libertarian

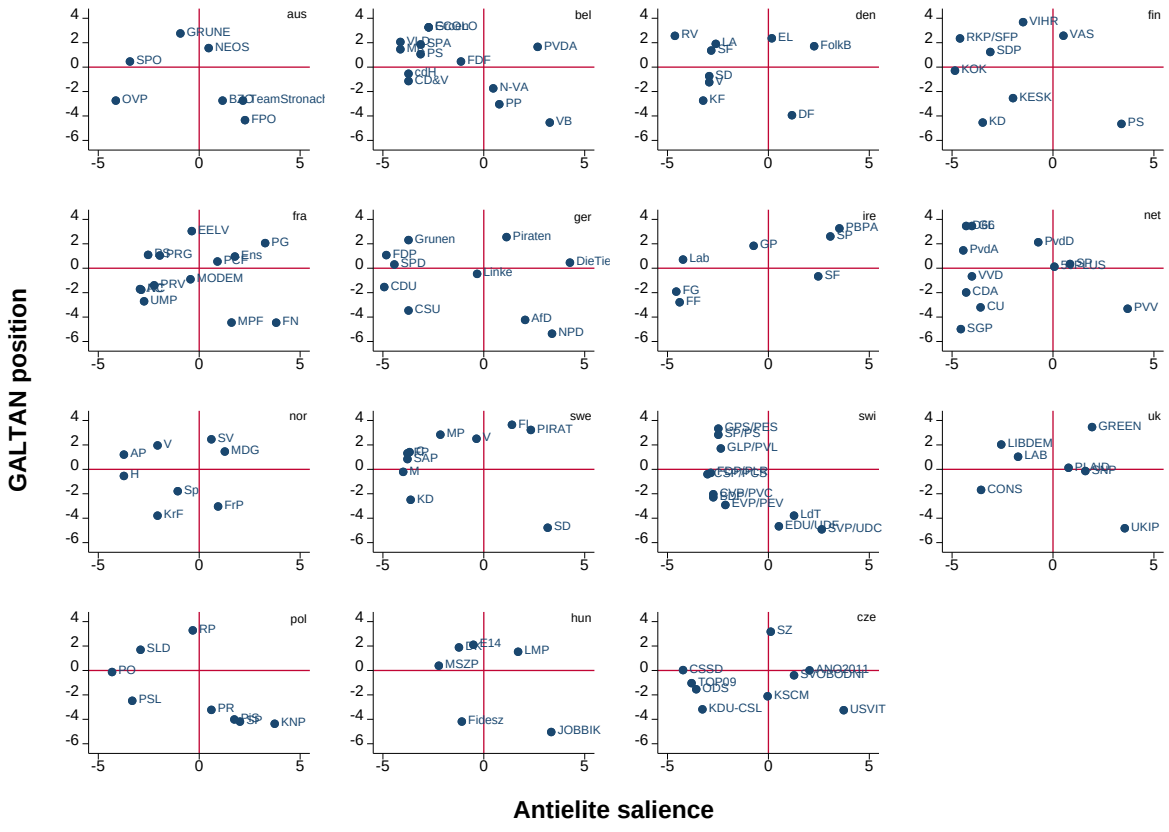
[3] A rich political science literature on inequality, welfare state change, or tax policy demonstrates that parties do indeed still matter.

[4] For more details see https://www.chesdata.eu/.

parties can also employ anti-elite rhetoric. Unfortunately, the dataset does not include any measure that specifically captures anti-pluralism. Therefore, we use these two dimensions to identify right-wing populist parties in Europe.

In a first step, we z-standardize each variable for each country so that the mean position of each country is "0" and a standard deviation "1" to facilitate comparisons. Parties that score below zero on the GALTAN dimension and above zero in anti-elite rhetoric count as RWPP. In a second step, we plot the parties of the 15 countries we analyze (*Figure 1*). Right-wing populist parties are positioned in the southeastern corner of each subplot. Overall, this way of identifying right-wing populist parties has a high plausibility. Parties that usually belong to this group are included. For example: AfD, Front National, FPÖ, PVV, (True) Finns, Sweden Democrats, and Vlaams Belang. In contrast, socialist, social democratic, green, Christian democratic or mainstream conservative parties are not part of the list.[5] Based on this assessment, we identified 28 parties from 15 countries as RWPP (see *Table A- 1* in the Appendix for a complete list). In the next step of our analysis, we use this information to code individual vote choice in the last general election in each country.

Figure 1: Party positions on two dimensions



Data: Chapel Hill Expert Survey, 2014.

[5] The only party that might be debatable is the Hungarian FIDEZ because many perceive Viktor Orban's party as highly populist. However, its score on the anti-elite dimension is below the threshold. In 2014, this was the predominant view of the Chapel Hill experts.

Note: The GALTAN position delimits the degree of cultural liberalism and the anti-elite salience captures how important anti-establishment and anti-elite rhetoric is for a party. Higher values on the y-axis indicate more liberalism; higher values on the horizontal axis indicate a stronger anti-elite salience. Both variables have been standardized (z-transformation).

4 Data and Methods

We analyze survey data from 15 countries to explain why people cast a ballot for right-wing populist parties. To do so, we combine two waves from the European Social Survey (2012 and 2014). In each wave, respondents were asked to indicate which party the voted for in the last general election in their respective country. If they voted for one of the parties identified in Section 3, they were coded as voters of a right-wing populist party. In section 5, this is our dependent variable. On average, 13 percent of the respondents voted for a RWPP (*Table A- 3* in the Appendix entails the descriptive statistics for all variables).

In the subsequent analyses, we control for basic demographic variables such as gender, age, social class, belonging to an ethnic minority, residing in an urban area, and coming from an Eastern European country. The measure of social class is adapted from Daniel Oesch who constructed a scheme for earlier waves of the European Social Survey.[6] In addition, we include respondents' self-placement on the left-right axis. The literature on the populist vote has identified a number of variables that influence voting behavior. Three variables relate to the *economic grievances* of "modernization losers:" The experience of an extended period of unemployment (more than three months), living on social benefits, and the feeling that living on the present income is "difficult" or "very difficult." The trust variable captures the degree to which respondents trust in political institutions (parties, parliaments, EU and UN). It is meant to pick up the degree to which people have lost their faith in decision-making bodies at the national and international level. We also include a variable that measures attitudes towards migration, which is constructed from three different items (see *Table A- 2* in the Appendix).

Since our main argument is that the perception of unequal responsiveness triggers the vote for right-wing populist parties, we need to include a suitable variable. We combine two items: "Political system allows people to have influence on politics" and "Political system allows people to have a say in what government does" (see *Table A- 2* in the Appendix). Both items ask if the political system is responsive to the preferences of citizens and thus measure external efficacy. In the subsequent analyses, we do not seek to explain variation between countries. Rather, we hope to show a general pattern that explains the populist vote in Europe. Therefore, in the logistic regression models that follow, we always use both design and population weights.

[6] See http://people.unil.ch/danieloesch/scripts/.

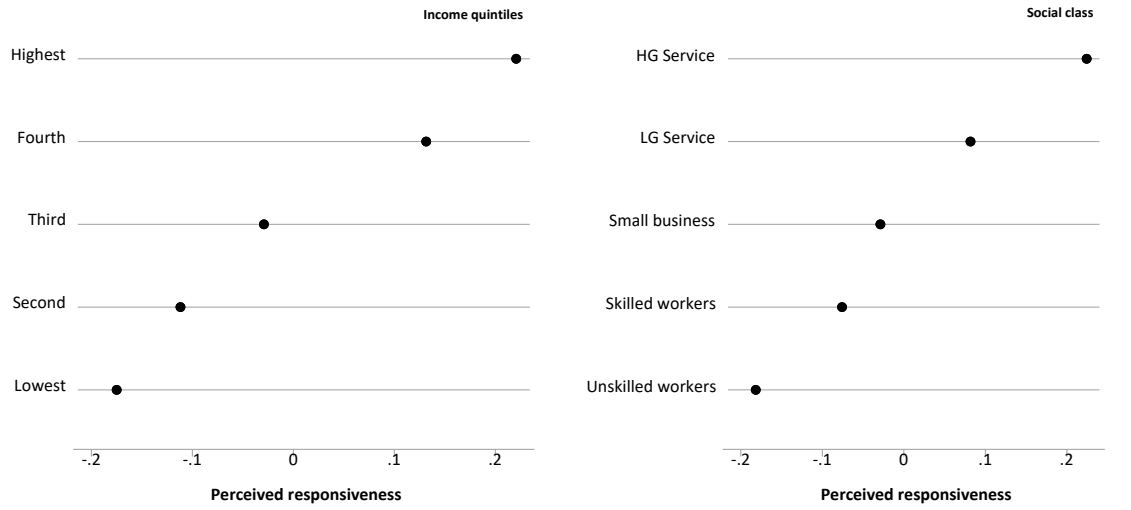
5 Perceived responsiveness and the populist vote

In this section, we will first analyze data for 15 European countries to investigate if the perception that politics is unresponsive makes voting for right-wing populist parties more likely. In a second step, we will have a closer look at the German case. As in the United States, political decisions of the *Bundestag* reflect more closely the preferences of more resourceful citizens than of the poor. But are citizens who feel poorly represented more likely to vote for the *Alternative für Deutschland*? We will first show that the perception of unequal responsiveness mirrors the actual pattern and that it is, indeed, one reason to support the right-wing populists even if we control for a host of other factors.

5.1 RWPP vote in Europe

Recent research on unequal responsiveness shows that less resourceful citizens have little impact on political decision—in particular, if their opinions diverge from those of the better off. However, to what extent do these groups perceive politics as unresponsive? We will use our measure of external efficacy as a proxy for perceived responsiveness (see *Table A- 2*). *Figure 2* shows that respondents with higher incomes and from higher status social classes more strongly believe that the political system is responsive. In contrast, respondents with little resources doubt that the political system responds to citizens' preferences. This difference in the perception of how responsive the political system fits well to the empirical pattern of actual biases—poorer citizens correctly think that political decisions favor the better off.

Figure 2: Perceived responsiveness by income and social class

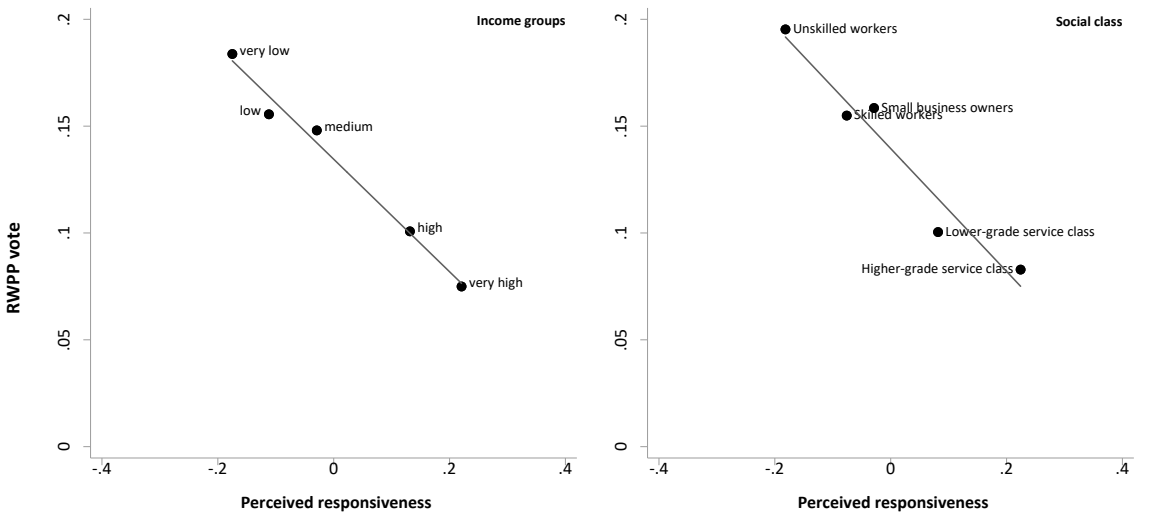


Data: European Social Survey, wave 7 & 8, weighted data. Perceived responsiveness corresponds to the measure of external efficacy that was constructed from two survey items. See Table A- 2 in the Appendix for more details.

In the next step, we check whether perceived responsiveness corresponds with the right-wing populist vote in Europe. *Figure 3* plots the share of RWPP voters against the perception of

responsiveness. Again, we find a clear pattern. The more strongly respondents think that political decisions are unresponsive, the higher the share of RWPP voters among them. While less than 8 percent of the highest income group—which perceives politics as much more responsive—report having voted for a populist party, this share rises to 18 percent in the lowest income quintile. Within the higher-grade social service class, 8 percent say that the voted for a RWPP, whereas almost 20 percent of unskilled workers report having done so. On average, those who think that the political system is unresponsive vote more than twice as often for populist parties than those who do not think so. At least in part, the perception of unequal responsiveness drives working-class support for right-wing populist parties.

Figure 3: Perceived responsiveness and the RWPP vote

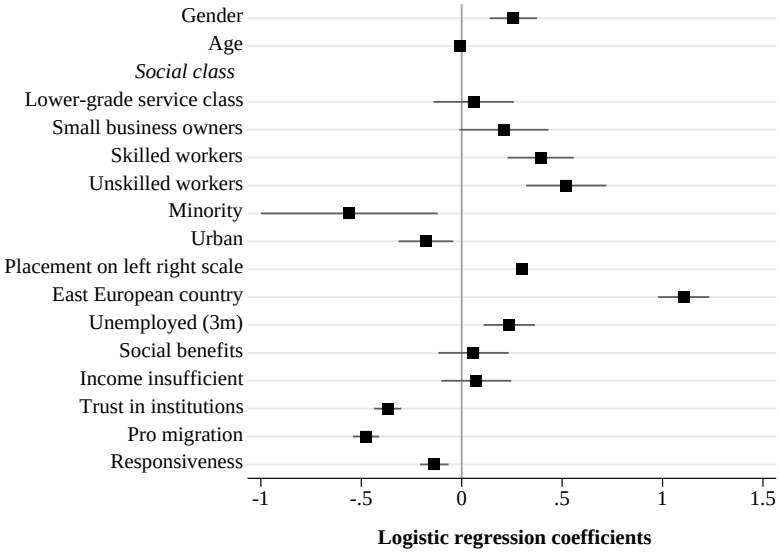


Data: European Social Survey, wave 7 & 8, weighted data. Perceived responsiveness corresponds to the measure of external efficacy that was constructed from two survey items. See Table A- 2 in the Appendix for more details.

We now move from descriptive patterns to multivariate analyses to see whether this pattern holds even if we take into account other important variables that explain the populist vote. Besides demographic variables, we also include measures of personal economic hardship, attitudes towards immigration, and trust in political institutions. These control variables capture economic and cultural grievances as well as the general attitude towards decision-making bodies. The first model in *Table A-4* (in the Appendix) confirms basic results of other studies of the right-wing populist vote. Men are more likely to vote for these parties than women, age has a small negative effect, whereas lower social classes have a higher probability to vote for RWPP. Belonging to an ethnic minority and living in an urban area reduces the probability to vote for RWPP, while respondents who place themselves further to the right on the left-right axis support RWPP in greater numbers. Finally, citizens from East European countries vote in higher proportions for populist parties. In sum, these results strengthen our confidence that we have identified RWPP correctly.

Model 2 also includes variables that capture economic hardship. Those who have been unemployed in the past and who feel that it is difficult to make ends meet on their current income are significantly more likely to vote for populist parties. Receiving social benefits is not related to this vote choice, however. Finally, model 3 adds the theoretically most interesting variables. *Figure 4* shows the results. Trust in political institutions, attitudes towards migration, and perceived responsiveness all exert a statistically significant influence on vote choice. Respondents who have higher levels of trust, those who support a liberal migration policy, and those who perceive the political system as more responsive are far less likely to vote for RWPP.

Figure 4: Explanatory factors of the vote for RWPP



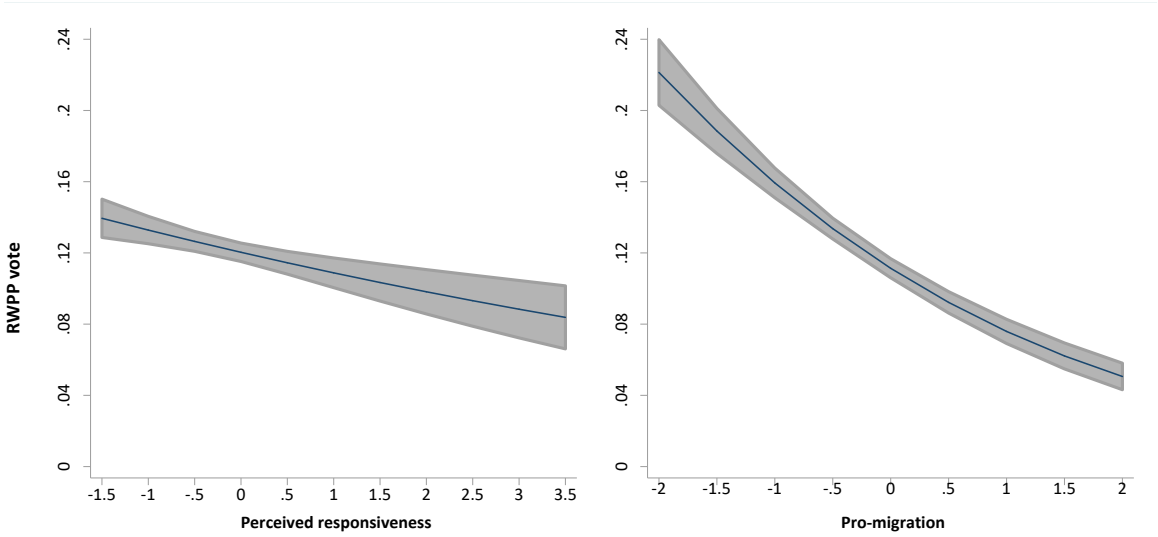
Note: This figure shows the coefficients and 95% confidence intervals of a logistic regression model that estimates the probability of voting for a right-wing populist party in Europe. See Table A- 4 (Model 3) for more details.

The results do not substantially change in a number of additional regression models (see *Table A- 5*). The first model excludes East European countries but this does not affect the results substantively. Trust, migration attitudes, and perceived responsiveness remain statistically significant even with fewer countries and observations. The second model in *Table A-5* includes respondents' level of education in addition to their social class as an explanatory variable. Higher-educated respondents have a lower probability to vote for RWPP. The magnitude of the coefficients for social class becomes smaller although workers still have a significantly higher probability to vote for a populist party. The effect of perceived responsiveness is robust to the inclusion of education. The third model substitutes social class for income. Higher-income respondents vote less frequently for RWPP than lower income groups but the inclusion of income does not affect other explanatory variables. Finally, model 4 is a multilevel logistic regression model that takes into account that observations cluster within countries. Again, this does not change any of the results. These tests indicate that the results

are robust to the inclusion of different variables and countries. In all model specifications, the index of perceived responsiveness is negative and statistically significant.

In the last step of the analyses, we compare the substantial effect of "perceived responsiveness" and "pro-migration attitudes." *Figure 5* shows the predicted probability to vote for a RWPP for different levels of these two variables. The substantial effect of attitudes towards migration is very large. Respondents who oppose migration strongly have a probability to vote for populist parties above 20 percent. The predicted probability drops to 5 percent for those with the most favorable views on migration. In comparison, the effect of perceived responsiveness is smaller but still substantially important. Respondents who strongly doubt that the political system is responsive have—all else being equal—a 14 percent probability of casting their vote for a RWPP. This number drops to 8 percent for those who perceive the political system as responsive. This 6-percentage point change in the predicted probability is larger than the difference between women and men or between members of the higher-grade service class and unskilled workers, respectively.

Figure 5: Substantive effect of perceived responsiveness and pro-migration attitudes on RWPP vote



Note: These figures show the predicted probability to vote for RRWP for different levels of two independent variables. The calculation is based on model 3 in Table A- 4.

5.2 Unequal responsiveness and AfD vote in Germany

In this section, we will look in more detail at the German case because we can check if the perception of unresponsive government matches the actual pattern of unequal responsiveness. We have assembled a data set that which includes information on public opinion and respective political decisions for 746 policy proposals. We selected questions from two German representative surveys *Politbarometer* and *DeutschlandTrend*. The former covers the period from 1980 to 2013 and the latter from 1998 to 2013. Each month, both surveys ask a representative sample of German citizens

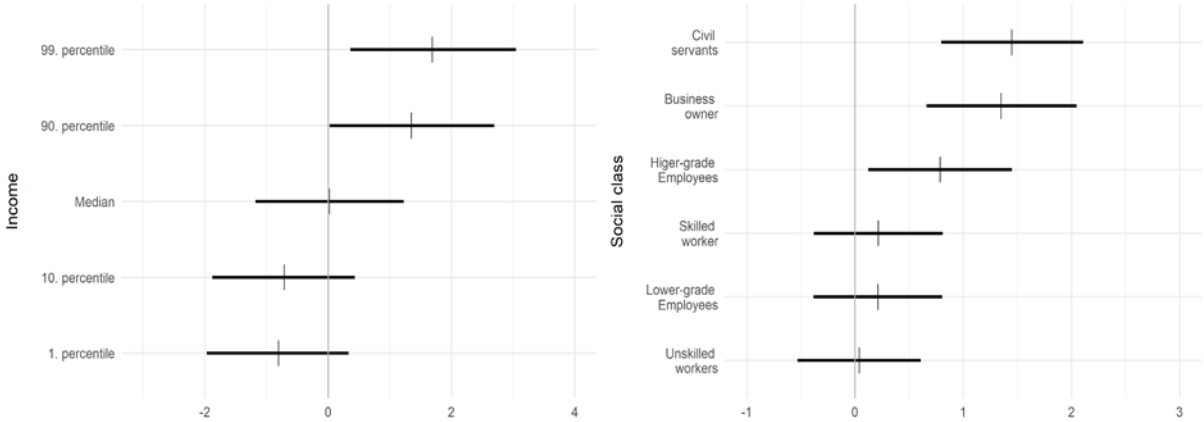
not only about their vote intention but also about a host of specific policy items. These usually deal with political decisions that were high on the political agenda at the time or that are of general public interest and ask about the respondents' agreement with a specific policy proposal. Our data include reform initiatives that either the government, opposition parties, or actors outside parliament, like trade unions, put forward. Issues range from the minimum wage or cuts in social insurance benefits to proposed changes in abortion rights or same-sex marriage.

For each question, we calculated the share of respondents with different levels of income or with different occupations who favor policy change.[7] In addition, we coded whether or not parliament implemented the proposed policy change in the four-year period after the question had initially been asked. Based on this information, we can calculate to what extent the degree of support for policy change makes its implementation more likely. *Figure 6* shows the coefficients for 11 separate models. The left panel shows that the preferences of poor but also of median income respondents do not significantly affect policy change. Whether few or many respondents within these income groups favor policy change does not make it any more likely to happen. In contrast, the preferences of the rich are significantly related to policy change. If a higher share of financially well-off citizens support a reform proposal, parliament is more likely to implement it.

The right panel of *Figure 6* replicates the analysis for occupation groups. Again, workers' and lower-grade employees' preferences do not have any impact on the likelihood of policy change, whereas higher-grade employees, business owners, and civil servants find that the *Bundestag's* decisions match their own preferences quite closely. The more respondents of these higher status occupations favor reforms, the more likely they are to happen. What is more, additional analyses show that if poor and rich respondents or workers and business owners hold opposing preferences, political decisions are even more clearly skewed in favor of the two latter groups. We have dealt with the topic in more detail elsewhere. Suffice it to note here that our data demonstrate a notable degree of unequal responsiveness in Germany that privileges better-off citizens over less privileged ones.

[7] Methodologically, we follow Gilens' (2005) work on the United States to keep results comparable.

Figure 6: Unequal responsiveness in Germany



Data: Responsiveness and Public Opinion in Germany data set, which includes detailed questions about policy change and subsequent policy change. For more details, see Elsässer, Hense, and Schäfer (2018). This figure shows coefficients of separate logistic regression models that seek to explain the likelihood of policy change. The independent variable is the respective share of respondents within each group who support policy change for each question. For more details, see *Table A- 6* and *Table A- 7* in the Appendix.

Given this pattern of unequal responsiveness, the question remains whether citizens recognize these biases. Therefore, we now look at survey questions that help to answer this question. The *German Longitudinal Electoral Study* provides suitable questions. Its fieldwork was conducted right after the general election of 2017, which gives us information on vote choices but also at a number of other items. The survey includes an item battery on populism and efficacy that entails exactly the type of questions we need. We will focus on the following three items, which load high on a single factor as an exploratory factor analysis show (see *Table A- 8*):

1. "Politicians only care about the interests of the rich and powerful."
2. "Politicians do not care for the opinion of citizens."
3. "Politicians care about what ordinary citizens think" (inverted).

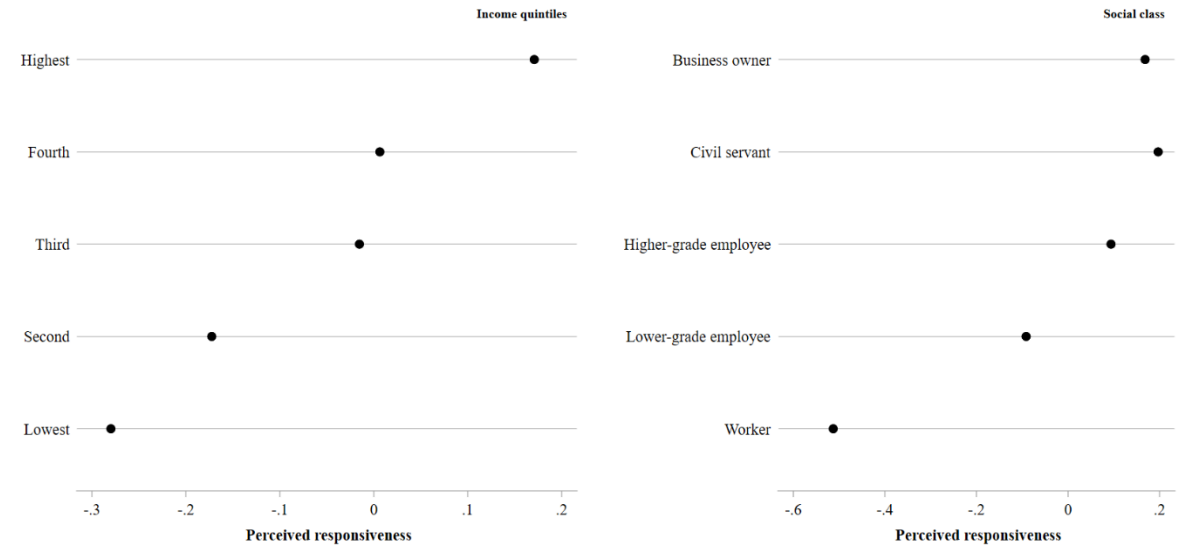
Taken together, these three items are our measure of the *perception of responsiveness*.[8]

Respondents with different incomes and from different social classes clearly differ in their assessment of how responsive politicians in Germany are, as can be seen in *Figure 7*. In particular, workers very much doubt that politicians are responsive towards ordinary citizens.[9] Well in line with the actual pattern of unequal responsiveness, better-off citizens have far more faith in politicians than less well-off groups. In fact, the poor and workers are most sceptical about the responsiveness of the political system, whereas the rich and business owners or civil servants have a far more positive perception—and these perceptions are broadly accurate as our previous analysis has shown.

[8] It is more common to speak of external efficacy. However, given our theoretical interest in linking this literature to the one on unequal responsiveness, we use a different terminology.

[9] With the GLES data set, we cannot distinguish between low-skilled and skilled workers.

Figure 7: Perceived responsivness of income and occupational groups



Data: Roßteutscher et al. (2017), weighted data. On the horizontal axis, the figure shows out measure of perceived responsiveness, which is based on a factor analysis of three survey items (see Table A- 8).

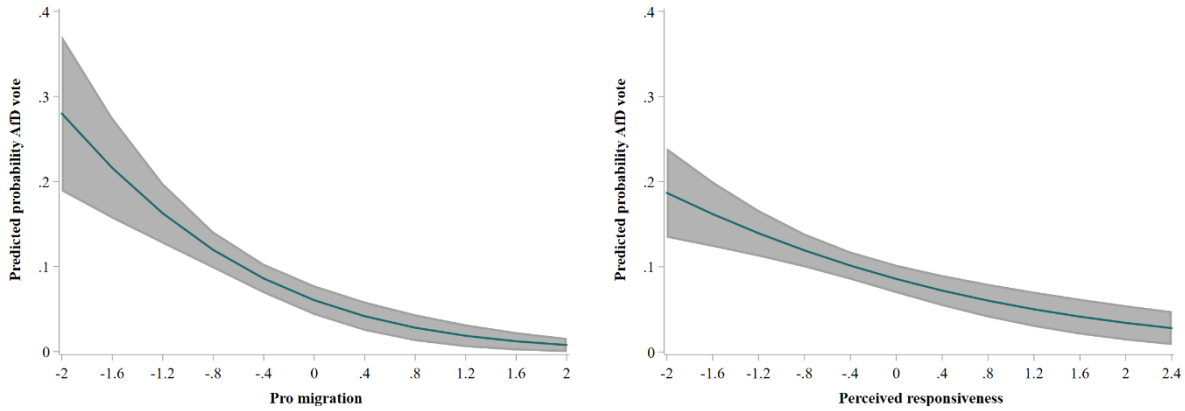
Perceived and actual biases of responsiveness are thus broadly in line with each other. In the final step, we analyse whether the former has an impact on voting behavior. We use the recall question, which party respondents voted for in 2017, to test if disappointed citizens are more likely to cast their vote for the *Alternative für Deutschland.* As far as possible, we include the same explanatory variables in Section 5.1.: Gender, age, social class, migration background, left-right self-placement, living in East Germany, experience of at least 3 months of unemployment during the last 10 years, the evaluation of one's own economic situation, attitudes towards European unification, attitudes towards migration and perceived responsiveness.[10]

Results are in line with the expectations (see *Table A- 10*). Men opted for the AfD more often than women, and respondents who place themselves further right were more likely to vote for this party, too. Those who are positively inclined towards the European Union vote for the AfD significantly less frequently. Once we control for additional variables, social class and living in East Germany are no longer significant predictor variables. In contrast, the attitude towards migration and perceived responsiveness are both highly significant. This is the case if we include them separately or jointly. Of course, it is not very surprising that respondents who strongly oppose migration and migrants cast their ballot for a new right-wing populist party that rallied on an anti-migration platform. However, even if we take this strong predictor of voting behaviour into account, there is an additional, strong effect of the perception of responsiveness. Interacting attitudes towards migration with perceived

[10] There are no equivalent measures for the trust in institutions available. See *Table A- 9* for descriptive statistics.

responsiveness does not yield a significant coefficient and there is no indication of multicollinearity. The Variance Inflation Factor is well below two for all variables of the model. We therefore conclude that those who perceive the political system as responsive are significantly less likely to vote for populist parties (see *Figure 8*).

Figure 8: Predicted probability to vote for the AfD, German general election 2017



Data: GLES 2017, Roßteutscher et al. (2017), weighted data. The figures show the predicted probability to vote for the *Alternative für Deutschland* based on of Model 4 in *Table A- 10*.

The results of this section confirm those of the previous one. Even if we consider other explanatory factors, both the attitudes towards migration and the perceived responsiveness of the political system predict the right-wing populist vote. We measure the perception of responsiveness somewhat differently in each section but this does not affect the results. Moreover, for the German case we could show that perceived biases are in line with actual ones. If less privileged citizens sense that in politics the deck of cards is stacked against them, they are not mistaken and, in reaction to this inequity, some of them choose to opt for protest parties.

6 Conclusion

A growing body of research demonstrates that political decisions do not reflect the interest of poor and rich citizens to the same degree. Instead, they are biased in favor of the better off. Drawing on these analyses, we have argued in this article that unequal representation at least in part explains the vote for right-wing populist parties in Europe. Citizens with fewer resources consider the political system as less responsive and those who do so vote more frequently for RWPP. Populist parties use a strong anti-elite rhetoric and try to picture themselves as the only representatives of ordinary citizens. They portray other parties as far-removed from the citizens. That is the reason why populists appeal to “real people” or the “forgotten heartland.” Populist rhetoric succeeds, we would argue, because the way representative democracies work is indeed distorted in favor of those with plentiful

resources. The “heavenly chorus” not only sings with an upper-class accent, as Schattschneider (1975, 35) noted,—but also sings those tunes the rich like best. Citizens with fewer resources realize that they have less influence and, as a result, are more prone to vote for protest parties, such as right-wing populists.

Of course, unequal responsiveness is not the only factor that explains the populist vote. Respondents who identify with the Right are more likely to vote for RWPP, attitudes towards migration and trust in political institutions also figure prominently as does economic hardship (in particular, the experience of prolonged spells of unemployment). However, in addition to and independently of these factors, respondents who perceive the political system as unresponsive vote in higher numbers for populist parties. At least some of the voters of RWPP protest against political inequality—and the perception of unequal responsiveness is much more prevalent amongst poorer citizens.

7 Appendix

Table A- 1: List of 28 Right-wing Populist Parties in 15 European countries

ABBREVIATION	PARTY NAME	ENGLISH NAME	COUNTRY
AFD	Alternative für Deutschland	Alternative for Germany	Germany
BZÖ	Bündnis Zukunft Österreich	Alliance for the Future of Austria	Austria
DF	Dansk Folkeparti	Danish People's Party	Denmark
EDU/UDF	Eidgenössisch-Demokratische Union	Federal Democratic Union	Switzerland
FN	Front National	National Front	France
FPÖ	Freiheitliche Partei Österreich	Freedom Party of Austria	Austria
FRP	Fremskrittspartiet	Progress Party	Norway
JOBBIK	Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom Jobbik	Movement for a Better Hungary	Hungary
KNP	Kongres Nowej Prawicy	Congress of the New Right	Poland
LDT	Lega dei Ticinesi	Ticino League	Switzerland
MPF	Mouvement Pour la France	Movement for France	France
NPD	Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands	National Democratic Party of Germany	Germany
NVA	Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie	New Flemish Alliance	Belgium
PIS	Prawo i Sprawiedliwosc	Law and Justice Party	Poland
PP	Parti Populaire	People's Party	Belgium
PR	Polska Razem	Poland Together	Poland
PS	Persussuomalaiset	True Finns	Finland
PVV	Partij voor de Vrijheid	Party for Freedom	Netherlands
SD	Sverigedemokraterna	Sweden Democrats	Sweden
SF	Sinn Féin	We Ourselves	Ireland
SNP	Scottish National Party	Scottish National Party	Great Britain
SP	Solidarna Polska	United Poland	Poland
SVOBODNI	Strana svobodných obcanu	Party of Free Citizens	Czech Republic
SVP	Schweizer Volkspartei	Swiss People's Party	Switzerland
TEAM STRONACH	Team Stronach für Österreich	Team Stronach for Austria	Austria
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party	United Kingdom Independence Party	Great Britain
USVIT	Úsvit prímé demokracie	Dawn of Direct Democracy	Czech Republic
VB	Vlaams Belang	Flemish Interest	Belgium

Table A- 2: Exploratory factor analysis for migration, responsiveness, and trust

Attitudes towards migration	Factor1
Immigration bad or good for country's economy	0.87
Country's cultural life undermined or enriched by immigrants	0.89
Immigrants make country worse or better place to live	0.90
Eigenvalues	2.34
Cronbach's Alpha	0.86
Perceived responsiveness (external efficacy)	Factor1
Political system allows people to have influence on politics	0.92
Political system allows people to have a say in what government does	0.92
Eigenvalues	1.71
Cronbach's Alpha	0.83
Trust in institutions	Factor1
Trust in the European Parliament	0.86
Trust in country's parliament	0.84
Trust in political parties	0.85
Trust in the United Nations	0.81
Eigenvalues	2.82
Cronbach's Alpha	0.86

Data: European Social Survey, waves 7 and 8. The table shows the output of an exploratory factor analysis with orthogonal rotation.

Table A- 3: Descriptive Statistics for the variables

	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Voted for RWPP	34,071	0.13	0.34	0	1
Male	34,062	0.49	0.50	0	1
Age	33,992	52.92	17.05	15	105
Education	33,907	2.45	1.23	0	4
Social class	32,854	2.96	1.41	1	5
Ethnic minority	33,925	0.03	0.16	0	1
Urban	34,014	3.00	1.22	1	5
Eastern Europe	34,071	0.14	0.35	0	1
Unemployed	33,986	0.26	0.44	0	1
Social benefits	33,724	0.35	0.48	0	1
Trade union member	33,989	0.76	0.83	0	2
Pro migration	32,752	0.06	0.99	-3	2
Perceived responsiveness	33,702	0.07	0.98	-2	4
Internal efficacy	33,660	0.10	1.00	-1	3
N	34,071				

Data: European Social Survey, waves 7 and 8. The table shows average descriptive statistics for 15 countries.

Table A- 4: Vote choice for right-wing populist parties (logistic regression)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Gender	0.232***	0.242***	0.258***
(0=female; 1=male)	(0.054)	(0.055)	(0.060)
Age of respondent	-0.005***	-0.006**	-0.009***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)
Social class			
(reference: higher-grade service class)			
Lower-grade service class	0.224*	0.200*	0.060
	(0.092)	(0.093)	(0.102)
Small business owners	0.398***	0.367***	0.210
	(0.099)	(0.101)	(0.113)
Skilled workers	0.705***	0.633***	0.393***
	(0.076)	(0.078)	(0.084)
Unskilled workers	0.972***	0.829***	0.520***
	(0.088)	(0.093)	(0.102)
Minority	-0.517*	-0.550**	-0.560*
(0=no; 1=yes)	(0.208)	(0.210)	(0.224)
Urban	-0.304***	-0.314***	-0.178*
(0=n0; 1=yes)	(0.062)	(0.063)	(0.070)
Placement on left right scale	0.331***	0.334***	0.302***
(0=Left; 10=right)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.014)
East European country	1.224***	1.187***	1.105***
(0=no; 1=yes)	(0.055)	(0.058)	(0.065)
Unemployed (3m)		0.308***	0.237***
(0=no; 1=yes)		(0.060)	(0.065)
Social benefits		0.097	0.059
(0=no; 1=yes)		(0.080)	(0.089)
Income insufficient		0.353***	0.073
(0=no; 1=yes)		(0.079)	(0.089)
Trust in institutions			-0.369***
			(0.035)
Pro migration			-0.476***
			(0.034)
Perceived responsiveness			-0.137***
			(0.036)
Intercept	-4.253***	-4.334***	-3.984***
	(0.129)	(0.144)	(0.161)
Observations	31,649	31,290	28,557
Pseudo R^2	0.142	0.144	0.195

Data: European Social Survey, wave 7 and wave 8.

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

This table shows the coefficients of three logistic regression models that estimate the probability to vote for a right-wing populist party in 15 European countries. In each model, design and population weights were used.

Table A- 5: Additional logistic regression models for RWPP vote choice

	Western Europe only	Education & Class	Income	Multilevel model
Social class				
(reference: Higher-grade service class)				
Lower-grade service class	0.089	-0.036		0.171*
	(0.124)	(0.107)		(0.069)
Small business owners	0.223	0.034		0.260***
	(0.144)	(0.121)		(0.077)
Skilled workers	0.456***	0.173		0.581***
	(0.100)	(0.095)		(0.062)
Unskilled workers	0.571***	0.227*		0.676***
	(0.120)	(0.113)		(0.071)
Education				
(reference: very low)				
Low education		0.193		
		(0.147)		
Medium education		-0.293*		
		(0.146)		
High education		-0.495**		
		(0.170)		
Very high education		-0.580***		
		(0.174)		
Income				
(reference: lowest quintile)				
Second quintile			-0.171	
			(0.094)	
Third quintile			-0.167	
			(0.099)	
Fourth quintile			-0.380***	
			(0.097)	
Highest quintile			-0.635***	
			(0.105)	
Trust in institutions	-0.354***	-0.368***	-0.376***	-0.365***
	(0.043)	(0.035)	(0.037)	(0.025)
Pro migration	**-0.655*** **	**-0.459*** **	**-0.523*** **	**-0.578*** **
	(0.042)	**(0.035)**	**(0.034)**	**(0.023)**
Perceived responsiveness	**-0.131****	**-0.134*** **	**-0.118****	**-0.109*** **
	(0.043)	**(0.036)**	**(0.038)**	**(0.026)**
Intercept	-3.572***	-3.064***	-3.046***	-3.503***
	(0.187)	(0.244)	(0.172)	(0.236)
lns1_1_1				
Intercept				-0.217
				(0.186)
Observations	24,915	24,821	23,897	28,557
Pseudo R^2	0.173	0.177	0.177	

Data: European Social Survey, wave 7 and wave 8.

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

This table shows the coefficients of for logistic regression models that estimate the probability to vote for a right-wing populist party in 15 European countries. In each model, design and population weights were used. All of the models include all the variables displayed in *Table A- 4* but for ease of presentation do not report all of the results since these are essentially the same as before.

Table A- 6: Responsiveness towards five income groups in Germany

	Income percentiles				
	1st	10th	50th	90th	99th
Logit coefficient	-0.673	-0.622	0.039	1.497+	1.895*
(Standard error)	(0.634)	(0.641)	(0.680)	(0.767)	(0.775)
Intercept	0.880*	0.853*	0.494	-0.314	-0.537
(Standard error)	(0.372)	(0.377)	(0.396)	(0.443)	(0.448)
N	222	222	222	222	222
p-value	0.286	0.330	0.954	0.049	0.013

Standard errors in parentheses; + $p<.1$, * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$

Note: Cases consist of survey questions about proposed policy changes asked between 1998 and 2013. The dependent variable is policy outcome, coded "1" if the proposed policy took place within four years of the survey data and "0" if it did not. The predictors are the imputed percentage of respondents at a given income percentile favoring the proposed policy change.

Table A- 7: Responsiveness towards six occupational groups in Germany

	Social class					
	Unskilled workers	Skilled workers	Lower-grade employees	Higher-grade employees	Civil servants	Business owners
Logit coefficient	0.160	0.283	0.345	1.000**	1.463***	1.571***
	(0.316)	(0.332)	(0.333)	(0.375)	(0.369)	(0.397)
Intercept	0.331+	0.266	0.232	-0.119	-0.383+	-0.437+
	(0.179)	(0.188)	(0.190)	(0.212)	(0.212)	(0.226)
N	746	746	746	746	746	746
p-value	0.613	0.394	0.301	0.007	0.000	0.000

Standard errors in parentheses; + $p<.1$, * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$

Note: Cases consist of survey questions about proposed policy changes asked between 1980 and 2013. The dependent variable is policy outcome, coded "1" if the proposed policy took place within four years of the survey data and "0" if it did not. The predictors are the percentage of each group favoring policy change.

Table A- 8: Exploratory factor analysis for migration, responsiveness and EU attitudes in Germany

Attitudes towards migration (pro migration)	Factor1
Immigrants are good for Germany's economy	0.73
German cultural life undermined by immigrants (inverted)	0.86
Immigrants increase criminality (inverted)	0.84
Eigenvalues	1.98
Cronbach's Alpha	0.74
Perceived responsiveness (external efficacy)	Factor1
Politicians only care about the interests of the rich and powerful	0.83
Politicians do not care for the opinion of citizens	0.86
Politicians care about what ordinary citizens think (inverted)	0.75
Eigenvalues	1.99
Cronbach's Alpha	0.74
Attitudes towards European unification	Factor 1
In favour of financial support for other EU member states	0.83
European integration should be further pushed ahead	0.83
Eigenvalue	1.39
Cronbach's Alpha	0.56

Data: GLES 2017, Roßteutscher et al. (2017). The table shows the output of an exploratory factor analysis with orthogonal rotation.

Table A- 9: Descriptive Statistics for the variables (German data)

	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Voted for AfD	1.690	0.10	0.29	0.00	1.00
Gender	2.112	0.52	0.50	0.00	1.00
Age	2.111	50.15	19.19	16.00	95.00
Social class	1.885	1.43	1.18	0.00	4.00
Minority	2.098	0.23	0.42	0.00	1.00
Left-right self-placement	1.964	4.19	1.93	0.00	10.00
East Germany	2.112	0.32	0.47	0.00	1.00
Unemployment	2.077	0.08	0.27	0.00	1.00
Own economic situation	2.105	2.73	0.82	0.00	4.00
Factor Pro EU	2.047	0.00	1.00	-2.75	1.69
Factor Pro migration	2.057	0.00	1.00	-2.30	1.91
Factor Perceived responsiveness	2.049	0.00	1.00	-2.03	2.67
N (average)	2.112				

Data: GLES 2017, Roßteutscher et al. (2017).

Table A- 10: Vote choice for the AfD, general election 2017

DV: AfD vote 2017	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Gender	0.860***	0.743*	0.680*	0.777*
(0=female; 1=male)	(0.227)	(0.311)	(0.296)	(0.326)
Age	-0.015**	-0.040***	-0.036***	-0.046***
(in years)	(0.005)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.009)
Social class (Reference: workers)				
Lower-grade employee	-0.437	-0.082	0.056	-0.044
	(0.258)	(0.367)	(0.346)	(0.384)
Higher-grade employee	-0.951**	-0.432	-0.319	-0.348
	(0.333)	(0.404)	(0.369)	(0.416)
Civil servant	-0.895	0.204	0.178	0.324
	(0.545)	(0.650)	(0.616)	(0.664)
Business owner	-0.883*	-0.037	-0.025	0.122
	(0.394)	(0.509)	(0.488)	(0.498)
Minority	-0.045	0.126	-0.002	0.101
(0=no; 1=yes)	(0.246)	(0.339)	(0.312)	(0.354)
Left-right placement	0.465*	0.452	0.665*	0.437
(0=extreme left; 10=extreme right)	(0.199)	(0.280)	(0.279)	(0.290)
East Germany	0.502	0.202	0.223	0.128
(0=no; 1=yes)	(0.331)	(0.437)	(0.408)	(0.429)
Unemployed (3m)		0.409***	0.472***	0.428***
(0=no; 1=yes)		(0.090)	(0.087)	(0.087)
Economic situation		0.041	-0.010	0.141
(0=very bad; 5=very good)		(0.162)	(0.141)	(0.161)
Factor Pro EU		-0.470***	-0.530***	-0.347*
(higher values=more in favor)		(0.141)	(0.126)	(0.153)
Factor Pro migration		**-1.468*** **		**-1.210*** **
(higher values=more in favor)		**(0.184)**		**(0.182)**
Factor Perceived responsiveness			**-1.044*** **	**-0.682*** **
(higher values=higher perceived responsiveness)			**(0.151)**	**(0.161)**
Intercept	-1.535***	-3.759***	-3.794***	-3.923***
	(0.407)	(0.749)	(0.740)	(0.749)
Observations	1547	1422	1431	1407
Pseudo R^2	0.065	0.402	0.353	0.428

Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.
Data: Roßteutscher et al. (2017), weighted data. The table shows the coefficients of logistic regression models that predict the choice for the AfD in the German general election in September 2017.

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