


RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Individual- and party-level determinants of far-right support among women in Western Europe

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## Abstract

Support for Western Europe's far-right is majority-male. However, given the sweeping success of the party family, literature on this 'gender gap' belies support given to the radical right by millions of women. We examine differences between men and women's support for far-right parties, focusing on workplace experience, positions on economic and cultural issues, and features of far-right parties themselves. We find that the received scholarship on blue-collar support for far-right populists is a largely male phenomenon, and women in routine nonmanual (i.e. service, sales, and clerical) work are more likely than those in blue-collar work to support the far-right. Moreover, while men who support the far-right tend to be conservative on other moral issues, certain liberal positions predict far-right support among women, at both the voter and party level. Our analysis suggests that gender differences may obscure the socio-structural and attitudinal bases of support for far-right parties and have broader implications for comparative political behavior and gender and politics.

**Keywords:** far-right populism; parties; gender; Western Europe

## Introduction

Photographs of Pegida protests in Germany and Austria, or White supremacists marching in Charlottesville, suggest anecdotally what scholars have demonstrated empirically: supporters of contemporary far-right movements tend to be younger, hypermasculine men drawn from the 'White working class' and dissatisfied with 'politics-as-usual' (Lubbers *et al.*, 2002; Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Gest *et al.*, 2018; Kimmel, 2018). Indeed, far-right party support exhibits a persistent cross-national 'gender gap', whereby men support far-right parties at higher rates than women (Givens, 2004; Hartevelde and Ivarsflaten, 2018; Hartevelde *et al.*, 2019). There is also a stereotype associated with male supporters, that of the White working class, who hold anti-immigrant views and express economic anxiety about being 'left behind' (Ford and Goodwin, 2014; Gest, 2016). Women are rarely featured in these depictions or stereotypes, yet we know sometimes upward of 40% of far-right party support comes from women. Given the sweeping success of far-right parties in Western Europe, this amounts to millions of women's motivations for far-right support largely left unconsidered and demonstrates the need for further research.

In this paper, we examine women's support for far-right parties in Western Europe. Women are variously thought to be inoculated against far-right support by different occupational profiles, sociocultural progressivism, greater religiosity, more favorable attitudes toward the welfare state, and an aversion to extremism and social stigma (Funk and Gathmann, 2006; Arzheimer and Carter, 2009; Abendschön and Steinmetz, 2014; Hartevelde and Ivarsflaten, 2018; Hartevelde

*et al.*, 2019). However, many women do support the far-right, and explanations for the so-called ‘gender gap’ largely sidestep their motivations for doing so, including how their interests and concerns may differ from their male copartisans.

Here, we take an inductive approach to identify motivations for women in supporting the far-right, focusing on attitudinal, occupational, and party-level factors. Beginning at the individual level, we consider a host of sociocultural and economic attitudes and how they relate to far-right support differently for men and women. Anti-immigrant motives for far-right support are well known, but when far-right parties castigate Islam in Europe, they often do so with a rhetorical defense of ‘liberal’ or ‘European’ values, explicitly including attitudes toward women (Zúquete, 2008). Thus, we examine an expansive suite of attitudinal correlates including and beyond immigration. We also build upon an existing literature that shows the far-right has made inroads among women in nonmanual labor positions and service work (Mayer, 2013), in contrast to the largely blue-collar image of male far-right support (e.g. Betz, 1994; Rydgren, 2013). Then, moving from the individual to the party level, we consider characteristics of far-right parties and their leaders directly. Descriptive representation of women by women may matter for women’s radical right support, given several prominent female party heads. Moreover, party positions on moral and economic issues beyond immigration can affect support from female and male voters, reflecting and reinforcing the role of attitudes at the voter level.

Employing multilevel models using pooled data from the European Social Survey (ESS) and party manifesto data, we find far-right support among *women* correlates with culturally progressive positions at both the individual and party level. While both men and women hold anti-immigrant views, we can contrast this profile with the other socially conservative positions predictive of far-right support among men, consistent with seminal arguments to ‘working-class authoritarianism’ (e.g. Lipset, 1981). Second, building on existing insights, we find *inter alia* the blue-collar occupational structure of far-right support is a largely male phenomenon (e.g. Coffé, 2013; Rydgren, 2013), where women’s far-right support appears to be drawn from those in routine nonmanual (i.e. clerical, service, and sales) work.

Our findings provide important evidence of variation in voter motives by gender as far-right parties continue to gain support across Europe and elsewhere. We discuss the implications of this ranging attitudinal profile in the context of far-right party development from single-issue parties to an ideologically cohesive and sociostructurally rooted party family (Ennser, 2012). We suggest the far-right’s widening appeal is a result of successfully framing xenophobia as a type of progressive chauvinism: rights for me, not for thee. We also point to new avenues for research that explore wider occupational characteristics of far-right supporters, individual attitudes, preferences, as well as party-level studies on issue positioning to attract liberal voters.

### Why do women support the far-right?

‘New’ far-right parties emerged in the 1980s, beginning with France’s National Front (FN) European Parliament breakthrough in 1984 and Jörg Haider’s takeover of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) in 1986 (Rydgren, 2005).<sup>1</sup> From diverse origins, the new far-right represents a durable addition to Western European politics and coherent party family (Ennser, 2012). Ideologically, the party family has converged on a mixture of populism, authoritarianism, and nativism (Mudde, 2007). These elements appear in the electorate as anti-immigrant attitudes,

<sup>1</sup>There are a wide variety of labels applied to the far-right party family under examination here, including ‘extreme right’ (Ignazi, 2003), ‘populist radical right’ (Mudde, 2007), ‘new radical right’ (Kitschelt and McGann, 1995), and ‘anti-immigrant parties’ (van der Brug *et al.*, 2000). Apart from a few edge cases (like the Italian *Lega Nord* in the early 2000s, or the Dutch *Lijst Pim Fortuyn*), these labels generally identify the same set of political parties (Kitschelt, 2007). For the sake of brevity, we rely on the comparatively less sensational ‘far-right’ label for this party family, while excluding parties that are more explicitly neofascist or Neo-Nazi, like the Greek Golden Dawn, the British National Front, or the National Democratic Party of Germany (Ellinas, 2020).

distrust of the political establishment, and Euroskepticism (Gomez-Reino and Llamazares, 2013). They have particular purchase among sociodemographic groups concerned with declining status in post-industrial society, or who are ill equipped to handle the pressures of globalization (Ignazi, 2003; Gest *et al.*, 2018). For this subset of voters, immigration and European integration – not to mention out-of-touch, sclerotic mainstream parties – are threatening. This heightens the appeal of the far-right.

Scholarship on Western Europe's new far-right identified a gender gap early on, suggesting that 'as if following some unwritten law, radical right-wing populist parties have consistently attracted a considerably higher number of male than female voters' (Betz, 1994: 142). In traditional accounts of far-right support, disparate educational and occupational profiles, which are correlated with gender, mean that men are more susceptible to both authoritarianism and the insecurities attending globalization and European integration. Men exhibit concerns regarding perceptions of declining status (Rydgren, 2013; Immerzeel *et al.*, 2015; Gest *et al.*, 2018), perceived competition with immigrants (Arzheimer, 2009), and work situation, where men are more exposed to the globalizing pressures that stimulate support for right-wing parties (Kitschelt and McGann, 1995; Givens, 2004; Mayer, 2013).

In this construction, women's support for the radical right is more commonly accounted for as a 'control' dummy variable in regression analyses. But women are not a residual category and exhibit distinct sociodemographic characteristics and attitudes that differentially account for partisanship. To get at an account of why women support far-right parties, we build on a growing literature that examines both the aforementioned gender gap as well as explanations for women's support directly. We consider each in turn.

First, far-right gender gap accounts locate men as a more available audience to far-right appeals than women. Where younger, educated, professional women gravitated to support parties on the left, given their emphases on gender equality and reproductive rights (Abendschön and Steinmetz, 2014), less educated, blue-collar men were susceptible to far-right appeals under these political opportunity structures (Kitschelt and McGann, 1995). The postmaterial ideological package offered by New Left parties, emphasizing gender and reproductive rights, similarly pitted younger, educated women against 'identity defending' men available to far-right parties espousing traditional, authoritarian values (Ignazi, 2003). Far-right parties' emphasis on national identity also meant that far-right parties had an interest in maintaining the structure of traditional families, including birthrates, that are an anathema to the priorities of young, educated, women (Givens, 2004).

Beyond relevant attitudes and sociodemographic structure, women also appear more concerned with the potential social stigma associated with far-right parties (Harteveld *et al.*, 2019), as well as an internal motivation to control prejudice (Harteveld and Ivarsflaten, 2018), resulting in disproportionately male far-right electorates. Scholarship has also suggested that men have a greater sense of self-efficacy than do women and, thus, are more likely to support nontraditionalist parties (Mudde, 2007; Mayer, 2013) and engage in adversarial politics like those of the far-right (Gidengil *et al.*, 2005; Harteveld *et al.*, 2015). The implication, then, is women are more deferential to traditional patterns of authority and therefore less likely to defect from a 'traditional' party (Kitschelt and McGann, 1995). Women are also more religious than men on aggregate, and attendance at religious services 'inoculates' right-of-center voters against far-right support (Arzheimer and Carter, 2009).

Second, moving from accounts of the gender gap to explanations for women's outright support requires theorization that considers distinct socioeconomic, demographical, and attitudinal explanations. Here, we build on an important foundation of scholarship that examines why women support right-wing conservative parties, focusing on different values to their male counterparts (de Geus and Shorrocks, 2020). For example, Coffé (2019) finds gendered personality traits explain support for the far-right among men, but not women. Women also exhibit different values from other women who might vote for parties on the left (Shames *et al.*, 2020), such as resisting traditional gender roles in child rearing (Celis and Childs, 2014) or needs

for descriptive representation (on left preferences, see Kittilson, 2006).<sup>2</sup> Finally, there is evidence that highlights occupational differences between men and women to explain far-right support (Rippeyoung, 2007). This groundwork establishes a potentially unique set of attitudinal characteristics of far-right women.

Building on these insights, we explore sociocultural attitudes specifically to develop a richer profile of *what issues matter to the female far-right voter and how parties appeal to these issues*. That is, this paper offers a theory for female far-right support that considers mass opinion and context, requiring a model that takes into account both attitudinal and context or party-level theorizing.

### **Attitudinal**

Our *de facto* ‘meta-hypothesis’ suggests that correlates of far-right support are statistically different and substantively distinct between women and men. Although the gender gap itself is at least in part predicated on different socialization experiences for men and for women, rather than obvious attitudinal differences as regards the far-right’s flagship immigration issue (Harteveld *et al.*, 2015), other attitudes may be relevant for female far-right support. Moreover, characteristics of far-right parties might make them more or less appealing to men and women at different rates. The empirical implication, then, is that the far-right gender gap is not simply the result of composition (e.g. women are less likely to be engaged in blue-collar work and therefore less likely to support the radical right) or aversion to social stigma, but distinct attitudes and sociodemographics.

The most predictive attitude for far-right support generally is on immigration. More broadly, the far-right tends to evoke nostalgia, reacting against progressive trends such as greater gender equality, multiculturalism, and postindustrialism (Ignazi, 2003; Rydgren, 2013). Cultural values extend beyond ethnocentrism, and the strength of anti-immigrant views may mask variation along other sociocultural attitudes that may differ across men and women. We allow the possibility here that sociocultural values are configurational.

To wit, there is newer evidence that suggests not all far-right voters are entirely conservative. Erzeel and Celis (2016) find right party positioning on postmaterial issues is a strong predictor for attention to gender issues. That is, women that care about postmaterial issues are not precluded from supporting far-right parties nor are far-right parties precluded from incorporating postmaterial values into their political agenda. As such, one of the fastest growing groups of supporters of far-right parties are what Lancaster (2020) labels ‘sexually-modern nativists’ (the other groups being conservative nativists and moderate nativists). The nativist component reflects traditional anti-immigrant and nationalism positions. And recent overtures toward women’s equality, gay rights, and freedom of speech by far-right parties against Islam – for example, framing a burqa ban not as anti-religious but as a stance in support of female emancipation (Scott, 2009; Zúquete, 2008) – confirm that women who support far-right parties might be culturally to the left of men who do the same. Indeed, Dalton (2017) demonstrates a ‘cultural’ dimension related to immigration, or crime and punishment, that is separate from a ‘moral’ dimension (i.e. same-sex marriage and abortion) operating in many EU member states. This leads us to generate two hypotheses about moral values, distinct from positions on immigration (or Euroskepticism) – one on conservatism and – unique to this study – one on cultural progressivism.

Hypothesis 1A: *Cultural conservatism correlates with far-right support for both men and women.*

Hypothesis 1B: *Cultural progressivism correlates with far-right support among women.*

<sup>2</sup>On the left, women’s support for left parties is correlated with postmaterial values related to gender and reproductive rights (Conover, 1988; Inglehart and Norris, 2000).

Second, we test a set of attitudinal preferences about the economy and redistribution preferences. Early accounts suggesting that far-right voters held right-wing economic preferences have been widely criticized as either misguided or historically contingent (De Lange, 2007). Moreover, in assuming that women support the far-right at lower rates because of their occupation or economic preferences, the relationship between class profiles and preferences on redistribution with female support assumes that economic drivers of far-right support operate the same for men and for women. This assumption deserves to be problematized given the ambiguous and ambivalent economic platforms of far-right parties (Ivarsflaten, 2008; Rovny, 2013; Röth *et al.*, 2018). Our supposition is that *far-right* supporting women and men will have different economic preferences related to occupation, reliance on the welfare state, and perceived competition with immigrants for scarce resources. As such, Kitschelt and McGann's (1995) seminal but historically contingent right-wing authoritarian 'winning formula' might be reassessed through a gendered lens, with right-wing economic preferences among men predicting support at a greater rate than among women. Indeed, it is possible that the ambiguous profile of far-right supporters' economic preferences uncovered in subsequent analyses stems from differences in economic preferences between male and female far-right voters. Hence, we hypothesize

Hypothesis 2: *Right-wing economic preferences toward redistribution will correlate with far-right support among men more so than among women.*

### **Sociodemographics**

To appropriately contextualize these sociocultural and economic preferences, we also account for a variety of sociodemographic characteristics. The relationship between the working-class and far-right politics is well documented (Betz, 1994; Rydgren, 2013). Explanations for the relationship tend to evoke the perceptions of declining status (Rydgren, 2013), hierarchical workplace environments (Kitschelt and McGann, 1995), and perceived competition with immigrants (Arzheimer, 2009).

Among these, declining status is of particular importance for working-class *men*, for whom trends toward greater gender equality as well as occupational insecurity are doubly threatening (Gest, 2016). Beyond that, workplace environment and immigrant competition explanations for far-right support predict little difference between men and women engaged in blue-collar work in their propensity to support far-right politics (cf. Rippeyoung, 2007; Coffé, 2013). Indeed, we might expect routine service, sales, or clerical workers of either gender to support far-right parties, if the mechanism is perceived competition with immigrants. Far-right parties have made inroads among women in routine nonmanual occupations where the gender gap has narrowed given the deteriorating situation of women in the service proletariat (Mayer, 2013). Absent the narrative on declining status impacting men in blue-collar and trade professions, there is no obvious reason to believe women in routine manual or nonmanual work should have different propensities to support far-right parties. Thus, with regard to occupation, we hypothesize

Hypothesis 3A: *Participation in blue-collar and trade work correlate with far-right support among men more so than among women.*

Hypothesis 3B: *Women engaged in routine nonmanual work will support far-right parties at the same rates as women in blue-collar work.*

There are additional sociodemographic factors for which we do not have *ex ante* predictions about gender differences in far-right support, or over which the voting literature conflicts. Education is perhaps the most important variable in predicting far-right support (Mudde, 2007; Allen, 2017), but no existing literature suggests that the relationship between education and far-right support differs by gender, especially independent of occupation. Similarly,

Christianity – and especially church attendance – seems to prevent right-wing voters from supporting far-right parties (Arzheimer and Carter, 2009), and accordingly, the difference between men and women on this score may simply be due to women attending church at higher rates. Age and union membership are also important predictors of political behavior, and while the ‘modern’ gender gap suggests younger women will be on average to the left of both older women and men in general (Inglehart and Norris, 2000), youth is also an important predictor of male far-right support in the climate of declined partisanship. Similarly, the changed size and composition of unions paint an ambiguous picture, especially once occupation is included in regression analyses.

### **Party level**

In addition to voter characteristics, our approach also considers contextual factors at the party level. That is, voter choice is not merely a function of individual preferences but party positioning. We consider two types of position taking. First, parties may court female supports by featuring female leadership. Despite the gender gap at the level of voters, there is no conspicuous gender gap among far-right politicians, relative to other party families (other than the Greens; Mudde, 2007).<sup>3</sup> As such, despite adherence to broadly similar policy programs cross-nationally (Ennsner, 2012), it is possible that women are more likely to support female far-right leaders than male far-right leaders. This could be due to descriptive representation (Givens, 2004), or if female far-right leaders are perceived as less extreme than their male counterparts, even if their platforms are similar (O’Brien, 2019).

Hypothesis 4: *Far-right parties with female party heads will garner more support from women than far-right parties led by men.*

Second, parties may court voters programmatically. While the far-right parties under study are all ‘extreme’ in their anti-immigrant platforms, there is variation with respect to their economic and sociocultural positions. For instance, despite an electorate that looks very much like far-right parties elsewhere, Dutch far-right parties are more liberal on issues of gay equality (Rydgren and Van Holsteyn, 2005). The Danish People’s Party is more committed to the welfare state than are many of its counterparts, so much so that a new ‘far-right party’ – *Nye Borgerlige* – has emerged to compete for its voters with a more economically conservative platform. Historically, these parties also have different origins as either neoliberal vs. welfare chauvinist, or ethnopluralist vs. traditionalist, that may matter for the gender gap (e.g. Art, 2011).<sup>4</sup> Hence, we propose two hypotheses about sociocultural and economic dimensions of party competition:

Hypothesis 5: *Women will be more likely than men to support far-right parties that articulate left-wing economic positions.*

Hypothesis 6: *Women will be more likely than men to support far-right parties with culturally progressive positions.*

### **Data and methods**

We test these hypotheses using all available waves of the ESS (1–8), covering years 2002–2016. The ESS includes a variety of questions on attitudes and voting behavior and has been frequently used

<sup>3</sup>That is, far-right parties are not distinguishable from other party families in this respect; women remain generally underrepresented in Western European parliaments.

<sup>4</sup>There is also evidence from other contexts that candidate gender may color voters’ perceptions of candidate ideology (e.g. Koch, 2000; O’Brien 2019), thus, our interest in the *ceteris paribus* impact of female far-right leadership necessitates some ideological controls.

**Table 1.** Far-right parties and leaders in Western Europe

Country	Parties	Leaders	Elections covered
Austria	FPÖ	Heinz-Christian Strache, Jorg Haider	2002, 2006, 2008, 2013
Belgium	VB	Filip Dewinter/Frank Vanhecke	2003, 2007, 2010, 2014
Switzerland	SVP	Ueli Maurer, Toni Brunner, Christian Blocher ( <i>de facto</i> )	2003, 2007, 2011, 2015
Germany	AfD	Bernd Lucke, <b>Frauke Petry</b>	2013
Denmark	DF	<b>Pia Kjaersgaard</b> , Kristian Thulesen Dahl	2001, 2005, 2007, 2011, 2015
Finland	PS	Timo Soini	2003, 2007, 2011, 2015
France	FN	Jean Marie Le Pen, <b>Marine Le Pen</b>	2002, 2007, 2012
United Kingdom	UKIP	Nigel Farage	2005, 2015
The Netherlands	LPF, PVV	Pim Fortuyn, Geert Wilders	2002, 2003, 2006, 2010, 2012
Norway	FrP	Carl I. Hagen, <b>Siv Jensen</b>	2001, 2005, 2009, 2013
Sweden	SD	Jimmie Akesson	2006, 2010, 2014

in studies on the far-right (e.g. Ivarsflaten, 2008; Lucassen and Lubbers, 2012). This dataset is also highly comparable across waves, enabling us to combine multiple waves across time and space (Bohman and Hjerm, 2016). We consider only country-years that include at least one far-right party. A list of parties and their leaders, along with elections in the sample, are available in Table 1. These parties are drawn from Mudde's (2007) classification scheme, updated to reflect post-publication party formation. Female party heads are shown in boldface.

To capture party positions, we use the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP). The CMP has several advantages for this study over expert surveys or other measures of party position and issue salience.<sup>5</sup> First, manifestos are a good way to assess issue positions for smaller or newer parties like those on the far-right, as they are less susceptible to isomorphism induced by expert assessments (Bornschieer, 2010). Perhaps more importantly, CMP enables a more granular examination of particular issue dimensions, unlike aggregate measures of cultural, moral, or economic conservatism or liberalism present in expert surveys, which combine attitudes about immigration with other impressionistic assessments of party positions. Moreover, because far-right parties are so hierarchically organized, manifestos are a reliable articulation of party preferences, whereas there may be more variance for larger, older, and more horizontally structured parties. Manifestos also better reflect the content of a party platform during an election, as opposed to expert surveys which are collected at regular intervals, but do not always coincide with an election (or the intervals used by the ESS). As with ESS, CMP data are also used regularly on studies of the radical right (e.g. Alonso and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015; Bohman and Hjerm, 2016).<sup>6</sup>

We are interested in support for far-right parties. The ESS contains two measures of political party support: recalled vote from the previous national election and reported closeness to a particular political party. Because the ESS is not an election study – and hence recalled vote might refer to elections many months or even years in the past – we build our dependent variable from the 'closeness' measure, following the coding scheme of Lucassen and Lubbers (2012).<sup>7</sup> Voters that report feeling 'close' to a far-right party are coded as a '1', and all others are coded as '0'. Where respondents did not report closeness to any party, recalled vote was used as a proxy (see Lucassen and Lubbers, 2012: 556).<sup>8</sup> This measure correlates strongly with recalled vote in the sample

<sup>5</sup>Although, we recognize recent criticism (e.g. Dalton and McAllister, 2015).

<sup>6</sup>We replicate the full model (below) using data from the North Carolina Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) in Appendix C.

<sup>7</sup>This also increases the number of cases we can use in our sample, as sometimes multiple ESS waves refer to the same election (e.g. recalled vote in both ESS round two and three would refer to the 2003 Dutch general election). Using contemporaneous attitudes sidesteps that issue, which is important because far-right support is a comparatively rare positive outcome (Table 2).

<sup>8</sup>That is, respondents who recalled voting for a far-right party but felt close to a different party are coded as a '0'.

**Table 2.** Far-right support by gender in sample

Country	Total N in sample	Male far-right supporters	Female far-right supporters	Total far-right supporters	% of far-right male supporters
Austria	8281	373	275	648	58%
Belgium	11,823	340	296	636	53%
Switzerland	11,819	968	762	1730	56%
Germany	5213	138	72	210	66%
Denmark	9324	478	329	807	59%
Finland	13,756	561	268	829	68%
France	12,946	199	166	365	55%
UK	5833	178	137	315	57%
Netherlands	13,440	469	461	930	50%
Norway	11,691	1011	595	1606	63%
Sweden	5958	186	95	281	66%
Total	110,084	4901	3456	8357	59%

Data from ESS. Social desirability and nonresponse likely result in the undercounting of far-right voters (Oesch, 2008; Allen 2017). Data are weighted with ESS design weights.

( $r = 0.74$ ) but more accurately reflects the relationship between contemporaneous attitudes.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the closeness measure interrupts some of the epiphenomenal mechanisms blocking far-right support among women, like social stigma described above. The resulting sample is shown in Table 2.

We measure our individual-level demographic predictors of far-right support using demographic variables in the ESS, including age and education which are continuous variables measured in years. We also include measures of union and church membership, given their historical significance in structuring mass politics. To measure church membership, a dichotomous measure for belonging to a Christian religion was created and interacted with another variable for attendance at religious services. Voters who attend a Christian church at least monthly are scored as '1'; all others as '0'.<sup>10</sup> We also include an indicator variable for union membership. To record respondents' occupations, we adopt the nine major groups of the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO), narrowing them to four, given our interest in a somewhat narrower range of occupations. The first group corresponds to those in professional, technical, or higher administrative work (groups 1–3), the second corresponds to routine nonmanual work (e.g. service, clerical, sales; groups four and five), and the third is reserved for blue-collar and trade occupations (groups 7 and 8). A fourth category is reserved for elementary occupations and part-time work (group 9), which captures economic precariousness but less so the perceptions of declining status (Rydgren, 2013).

We use ESS attitudinal variables to test our attitudinal hypotheses. We measure economic positions with a single variable asking respondents to gauge whether the government should do more to reduce differences in income levels, where low numbers are the conventionally left-wing position (five-point scale). The question most appropriate for assessing a sociocultural dimension unrelated to immigration, available in all eight rounds, asks whether gays and lesbians should be able to live as they wish. Dalton (2017) finds that this issue, along with abortion and woman in the labor force, are highly correlated and constitute a distinct issue dimension. Thus, we use attitudes on gay equality to represent cultural values. This variable is also measured

<sup>9</sup>Using recalled vote instead of our dependent variable yields few substantive differences. The full model below is duplicated with the recalled vote-dependent variable in Appendix B.

<sup>10</sup>This is because actual attendance at religious service is part of the mechanism whereby religion impacts vote choice (Arzheimer and Carter, 2009). Only the effect of Christianity is evaluated, insofar as – given Islamophobia and a history of anti-Semitism – voters of minority religions seem unlikely to cast a vote for the far-right. Moreover, of those who identify with a faith, nearly 95% in the sample identify as some version of Christian.



on a five-point scale, where higher values are more conservative. Relatedly, far-right parties have been rhetorical defenders of gay rights *qua* European values in their castigation of Islam (Zúquete, 2008). As such, we include a variable measuring the perceived cultural impact of immigration. While ESS asks several questions about immigration policy and perceived effects of immigration, the question of cultural impact most directly accesses the noneconomic dimension of interest here. This item is measured on an 11-point scale. We also include a four-point measure of political interest as well. All of the measures are grand mean centered in the models below, so that interpretations are comparable across indicators, and descriptive statistics split by gender are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 does not reveal stark differences between men and women with respect to political attitudes, consistent with Hartevelde et al (2015), or many ascriptive characteristics. Table 3 does provide insight into the occupational differences between men and women, where women are clearly overrepresented in clerical work, service, and sales. Men are overrepresented in blue-collar work, including craft and trade professions. It is possible on superficially that far-right parties have greater support among men is simply due to the fact that there are more men in blue-collar work. However, among the occupational categories, 49% of female far-right support comes from non-manual routine work, despite only 38% of women in the sample being employed in those professions. The 7% of female far-right support coming from blue-collar workers is comparable to the 6% of blue-collar women overall.<sup>11</sup> As such, we expect occupational composition not to be the gender gap's primary driver.

Our final three measures relate to party-level characteristics. The presence of a female far-right leader is a dichotomous measure, which takes the value of '1' if a far-right party had a female leader when the ESS questionnaire was given (year and month). Female leaders are listed in boldface in Table 1. We are also interested in assessing – and controlling for – how moral and economic positions inform support. Using CMP data,<sup>12</sup> a 'welfare' position scale is compiled by subtracting leftist positions from rightist ones, whereas the moral dimension is measured by a single variable indicating support for moral progressivism (or negative mentions of traditional morality).<sup>13</sup> This metric includes support for divorce, abortion, secularism, and 'general support for modern family composition' and is the party-level counterpoint to the individual attitudes toward gay equality above. Finally, we control for far-right party vote share, to account for the possibility that women are just supporting more popular parties (Hartevelde *et al.*, 2019), and that those parties are led by women.

Moving to our analytical strategy, we estimate a series of multilevel logistic regression models as we are interested in the association of a dichotomous outcome – support for a far-right party – with a schedule of predictor variables for both individuals and parties. The sample is divided by gender and we specify three sets of two models. This specification has the appeal of not using male supporters as the default from which female voters differ and otherwise avoids a more cumbersome model loaded with interaction terms.<sup>14</sup> Model 1 includes sociodemographic predictors only for men and women. Model 2 includes all voter-level sociodemographic and attitudinal variables. Model 3 adds the contextual factors of party leader, party position, and far-right vote share. The utility in 'restarting' with the baseline sociodemographic model is that the independent effects of these variables can be examined, as it is expected political attitudes correlate with occupation and other sociodemographic traits. Each model is presented separately for both men and women

<sup>11</sup>This cell makes the smallest contribution to a Pearson's chi-squared test in a table displaying far-right support by occupation among women.

<sup>12</sup>Including a measure of far-right parties' position on immigration is not especially useful, as it is effectively adding a constant to the model, as all far-right parties are staunchly anti-immigrant.

<sup>13</sup>Variables per504 and per505 in the codebook are used to measure positions on expanding or limiting welfare expenditure. Positive references to traditional morality are measured by variable per603. Using a single measure also avoids some scaling issues afflicting CMP (Gemenis, 2013).

<sup>14</sup>The fully interacted model with a mediating variable for gender is presented in Appendix B. Note that gender is an insignificant predictor in that model, implying the gender gap is largely accounted for when other variables are held to their means. Additional models using recalled vote as a dependent variable, and CHES data instead of CMP are presented as well.

**Table 3.** Demographic and attitudinal data for men and women in the sample

Trait	Women			Men		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Age (years)	56,750	48	17	53,334	48	17
Education (years)	56,750	13	4	53,334	13	4
<i>Occupations</i>	56,750			53,334		
Prof/tech/admin	–	0.41	–	–	0.47	–
Service, sales, and clerical	–	0.30	–	–	0.16	–
Blue collar	–	0.06	–	–	0.28	–
Elementary occupations	–	0.12	–	–	0.08	–
Church member	56,750	0.13	–	53,334	0.09	–
Union member	56,750	0.17	–	53,334	0.21	–
Immigration undermine (1) or enrich (11) culture?	56,750	6.1	2.4	53,334	5.9	2.4
Government should reduce differences in income (1 = agree, 5 = disagree)	56,750	2.2	1	53,334	2.4	1.1
Homosexuals should be free to live as they wish (1 = agree, 5 = disagree)	56,750	1.7	0.9	53,334	1.9	1
Political interest (1 = uninterested, 4 = very interested)	56,750	2.5	0.8	53,334	2.2	0.9

Weighted data from ESS.

with differences in coefficient estimates tested using a cross-model Wald test (significant differences appear in boldface and italics). Because the relatively short period of time under study implies a constellation of time-invariant institutional arrangements impacting party preference at the country level,<sup>15</sup> we also include country-fixed effects. We include a random effect for country\*year, which approximates the stochastic events around each relevant election of which there are too many to model and adjusts for disparate sample sizes and interdependence of observations within a given cluster. There are 69 clusters (country-years) in the sample. We use an unstructured covariance structure to allow for correlation between random effects, as elections in a particular country may not be independent over time, or European-wide phenomena like the ‘Great Recession’ may impact multiple elections at once. The results for the three pairs of models are summarized in Table 4 (country effects are located in Appendix A).

## Results

Model 1 comports to theoretical expectations of the sociodemographic correlates of far-right support, confirming it as a valid baseline model. We see education showing a negative relationship for both men and women, albeit with a consistently steeper negative slope for women. We also find that church membership reduces far-right support among both men and women, suggesting the ‘inoculation’ effect – whereby church membership entails loyalty to Christian democratic or conservative parties – remains part of the male narrative of far-right support (Arzheimer and Carter, 2009). By contrast, union membership is uncorrelated with far-right support in any model, likely reflecting the specific attributes of the trades currently unionized.

As expected, sociocultural and technical professionals are less likely than blue-collar and service sector workers to support the far-right irrespective of gender. However, although blue-collar men support far-right parties at higher rate than the reference category, the same is not true for blue-collar women. This is compelling evidence that the narrative surrounding the status decline is perceived by *men* in this sort of work and is supportive of Hypothesis 3A above. In subsequent models, findings supportive of Hypothesis 3B suggest service, clerical, and sales work predicts support for far-right parties among women over technical and professional work *and* over

<sup>15</sup>These include factors like electoral system or thresholds for entering parliament. The results do not substantively change if a model with clustered standard errors is specified instead of the mixed effects model.

**Table 4.** Results from multilevel logistic regression models for men and women

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
DV: far-right support	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se
Age	<b>-0.003</b> (0.00)	<b>0.005</b> (0.00)	-0.01* (0.00)	-0.002 (0.00)	-0.01** (0.00)	-0.001 (0.00)
Years ed.	<b>-0.09***</b> (0.01)	<b>-0.06***</b> (0.01)	<b>-0.06***</b> (0.01)	<b>-0.03*</b> (0.01)	<b>-0.06***</b> (0.02)	<b>-0.02*</b> (0.01)
Prof/tech/admin	-0.48*** (0.09)	-0.34*** (0.09)	-0.38*** (0.08)	-0.28*** (0.09)	-0.38*** (0.08)	-0.30*** (0.08)
White collar (Ref.) Blue collar Elementary occ.	<b>-0.08</b> (0.12)	<b>0.38***</b> (0.09)	<b>-0.19</b> (0.13)	<b>0.24**</b> (0.08)	<b>-0.24**</b> (0.08)	<b>0.26**</b> (0.09)
Church member	-0.02 (0.07)	-0.04 (0.14)	-0.09 (0.07)	-0.13 (0.16)	-0.09 (0.07)	-0.13 (0.15)
Union member	-0.40** (0.11)	-0.37*** (0.14)	-0.30* (0.12)	-0.41** (0.15)	-0.30* (0.12)	-0.41** (0.15)
Immigration attitudes	-0.14 (0.07)	-0.04 (0.08)	-0.09 (0.07)	-0.00 (0.08)	-0.09 (0.07)	0.00 (0.08)
Redistribution attitudes			<b>-0.33***</b> (0.02)	<b>-0.30***</b> (0.02)	<b>-0.33***</b> (0.02)	<b>-0.30***</b> (0.02)
Gay equality attitudes			-0.03 (0.03)	0.05 (0.03)	-0.04 (0.03)	0.05 (0.03)
Political interest			<b>-0.11***</b> (0.03)	<b>0.09**</b> (0.03)	<b>-0.11***</b> (0.03)	<b>0.09*</b> (0.03)
Female far-right head			0.16** (0.06)	0.09 (0.05)	0.16** (0.06)	0.09 (0.05)
Far-right position: welfare					-0.76*** (0.15)	-0.49 (0.51)
Far-right position: morality					-0.06*** (0.02)	-0.06** (0.02)
Far-right vote share					<b>0.07*</b> (0.03)	<b>0.04</b> (0.04)
					0.10*** (0.01)	0.09*** (0.01)
Intercept	-1.42*** (0.34)	-1.68*** (0.30)	-2.32*** (0.34)	-2.46*** (0.29)	-4.49*** (0.36)	-4.33*** (0.29)
RE: country*round	<b>0.24***</b> (0.07)	<b>0.30*</b> (0.12)	<b>0.25***</b> (0.07)	<b>0.26***</b> (0.08)	<b>0.05**</b> (0.02)	<b>0.08*</b> (0.04)
N	56,750	53,334	56,750	53,334	56,750	53,334
N (cluster)	69	69	69	69	69	69
LR test with full model	1158***	1354***	72***	56***		
AIC	16,372*	19,698	15,280	18,345	15,209	18,296

Data from ESS and CMP. \* $P < 0.05$ , \*\* $P < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $P < 0.001$ . Logits presented. The bolded and italicized coefficients differ significantly between men and women from cross-model Wald test for equality of coefficients at  $P < 0.05$ . Country-fixed effects omitted and are also included in Appendix A. A full interaction model is specified in Appendix B. Robustness check using North Carolina Chapel Hill Expert Survey available in Appendix C.

blue-collar and trade work. This suggests a clear difference in occupational profile among women who support the far-right, altogether different than the blue-collar occupations from which far-right parties derive their male support.

Model 2 introduces attitudinal characteristics in addition to the sociodemographics. Inclusion of these variables does not change our substantive conclusions about demographic factors but does produce other useful insights. We do not find support for Hypothesis 2, as the relationship between respondents' positions on wealth redistribution and far-right support is neither significant nor statistically different between men and women. This is consistent with a range of scholarship suggesting cultural grievances motivate far-right support rather than economic preferences (e.g. Ivarsflaten, 2008). However, Model 2 provides unambiguous support for Hypothesis 1A. As hypothesized, conservative positions on gay equality – used as a proxy for a noneconomic,

moral dimension of politics – are a significant predictor of far-right support among men. This, along with the sociodemographic profile outlined in the discussion of Model 1, suggests both a social and political situation in the party space for men who support far-right parties, somewhat akin to the ‘working-class’ authoritarianism discovered by Lipset (1981) or the more recent ‘transnational’ cleavage in which far-right parties have been shown to be situated (Kriesi *et al.*, 2008). Conversely, tolerant, ‘liberal’ positions on gay equality predict support among women, demonstrating support for Hypothesis 1B as well. This suggests that any apparent right-wing noneconomic attitudes among female far-right supporters is wrapped up in attitudes toward immigrants and does not reflect a more general sociocultural conservatism. More importantly, however, coupled with the findings in Model 3 below, this result suggests that the far-right’s castigation of Islam as incompatible with European values toward women and gays (e.g. Zúquete, 2008), as well as more generally (Mayer, 2013; Akkerman, 2015), may find purchase among a subset of the female electorate.<sup>16</sup>

Model 2 also controls for political interest to approximate the effect of lower subjective self-efficacy found to reduce women’s propensity to support far-right parties (e.g. Kitschelt and McGann, 1995; Mudde, 2007; Hartevelde *et al.*, 2019). Interest is a necessary but not sufficient component of efficacy; as such, it is a useful lower-bound proxy.<sup>17</sup> Political interest is a significant predictor of female far-right support *ceteris paribus*, while it is not for men in the sample; however, the estimated coefficients are not statistically different (although  $P < 0.1$ ). As above, if women are less politically confident than men, they may accordingly be less likely than men to buck a traditional mainstream party to support a party on the radical right, or more likely to concern themselves with social stigma. The positive relationship between political interest and far-right support among women may suggest that women require a higher level of political interest to engage with far-right politics, if their politics are less politically assertive on average (Mayer, 2013; see Table 3). Our interpretation of this difference remains provisional, however, and warrants further study.

Model 3 adds information on party platforms and leadership to existing voter-level variables. There are several noteworthy results. First, contrary to the prediction of Hypothesis 4, female leadership appears to *negatively* predict far-right support among women. There are several plausible explanations for this result. First, there are only four far-right parties led by women in the sample, one of which – the Norwegian FrP – has a notoriously pronounced gender gap (Immerzeel *et al.*, 2015). More substantively, this suggests descriptive representation may not be especially meaningful to the type of women likely to support far-right parties.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, earlier research has suggested individual rather than contextual effects are more important in explaining the gender gap (Immerzeel *et al.*, 2015). Thus, we suggest individual characteristics better explain women’s motivations for far-right support as well. However, because there are only four female far-right party heads in the study, this finding too warrants further consideration.

The next two rows added to Model 3 address Hypothesis 5 and Hypothesis 6. We find no support for Hypothesis 5, as positions advocating welfare state expansion are positively associated with far-right support for both men and women. One explanation for these results might be that far-right parties have maintained ambiguous economic platforms for much of their existence (De Lange, 2007; Ivarsflaten, 2008), and CMP may simply be capturing more mature and better organized far-right parties with their count of positive mentions of government programs.<sup>19</sup> More

<sup>16</sup>This interpretation is tentative and requires further investigation.

<sup>17</sup>Moreover, political interest correlates with other operationalizations of self-efficacy, like trust in parliament ( $r = 0.24$ ) (Campbell and Erzeel, 2018).

<sup>18</sup>Donald Trump famously won a majority of votes from White women.

<sup>19</sup>As above, party platforms on welfare are estimated by subtracting the CMP variable per504 from per505, which is consistent with how other indices are created in the dataset but attempts to remove consideration like ‘special protections for under privileged social groups’ from the existing welfare measurement. If per505 and per504 are added together, to create a more pure ‘salience’ measure, there is a positive effect for both men and women, thus, the finding on welfare here may really suggest that far-right parties with more comprehensive platforms – perhaps a proxy for resources or competitiveness, even beyond vote share – are likely to garner more support than single issue far-right parties.

tellingly, however, we find that far-right parties that exhibit support for divorce, abortion, and secularism are more likely to earn support from women. That is an important finding in and of itself, suggesting together with the above that any narrative account of far-right support invoking ‘working-class authoritarianism’ derives chiefly from our understanding of why *men* support the radical right. Indeed, reflecting on the individual-level findings suggests a relationship between conservatism, workplace situation, and far-right support among men. The apparent sociodemographic situation of prospective male far-right voters also corresponds to conservative positions more generally at the individual level as moral conservatism, blue-collar work, and a relative lack of formal education are all also consistent with the extant image of the ‘left-behind’ (male) far-right voter (e.g. Rydgren, 2013; Ford and Goodwin, 2014). For women, Model 3 tells a different story. Rather than blue-collar work, there is a correlation between routine nonmanual (service, sales, and clerical) work and far-right support, undermining the generalizability of the blue-collar, ‘left-behind’ archetype of far-right supporters (see Roodujin, 2018), and suggesting the possibility of a female, ‘left-behind’ counterpart in the service proletariat (Mayer, 2013).

Although the predictive power of anti-immigrant attitudes is (unsurprisingly) strong among both men and women, other covariates similarly imply a different voter profile. As compared with support for other parties, sociocultural progressivism predicts far-right support among women at both the individual and party level. Thus, the significant covariates for women in the sample suggest women who support far-right parties differ from both men who support the far-right and women who support conservative parties. Considering individual and contextual covariates, the findings above suggest that far-right parties’ strategic use of Islam as a foil to European values might have some purchase among women in Western Europe. Other accounts of far-right Islamophobia have speculated as to this possibility (Zúquete, 2008; Scott, 2009; Campbell and Erzeel, 2018), but little empirical progress has been made on that score heretofore. Finally, these findings control for far-right party vote share in the most recent election, which is unsurprisingly significant for both men and women, simply indicating that more successful far-right parties have a larger number of supporters.

## Discussion

This analysis is an early scholarly step toward elucidating the complex relationship between voting behavior, gender, and far-right populism. We have suggested that the sometimes murky picture of far-right party voters is actually due to an incomplete treatment of gender. As our analysis shows, multiple characteristics predicting far-right support differ between men and women. Where there is a consistent relationship between blue-collar work and far-right support among men, most of the women who support far-right parties are employed in routine nonmanual (service, sales, and clerical) work.

Moreover, while anti-immigrant attitudes are correlated with far-right support among both men and women, other forms of social conservatism – operationalized here as attitudes toward gay equality – only predict support among men. Strikingly, tolerance toward gays and lesbians predicts *greater* far-right support among women. This, coupled with the finding that negative mentions of traditional morality (i.e. support for divorce, abortion, and secularism) in far-right party platforms predict support among women but not men, suggests some far-right parties’ cultural progressivism – often but not exclusively paired with castigation of Islam as anti-modern and an anathema to European values – might attract women to the far-right (Akkerman, 2015; Campbell and Erzeel, 2018). Indeed, this might suggest the strategy by which some far-right parties have rhetorically defended liberal values in the first place. Future research might clarify this interaction with analyses of campaign data, or voter studies at the national level where larger samples for particular parties and candidates are available.

These findings unsettle dominant narratives about support for far-right parties. Existing work paints a picture of culturally, morally conservative men in certain occupations expressing support for radical right parties based on perceptions of declining status – implying a fixed group of male voters (perhaps, ‘working-class authoritarians’) available to right-wing populists. But the correlates of female support are different. Blue-collar work and cultural conservatism seem to only predict far-right support among men. For women, a picture emerges of someone engaged in routine nonmanual work – service, sales, or clerical occupations – for whom cultural progressivism on issues outside of immigration might resonate.

How do we reconcile this voter profile, between nativism and individual progressivism? It suggests the prevalence of a type of progressive chauvinism: ‘equality and tolerance for me, not for thee’. Far-right parties, for example, the Danish People’s Party, have gained a lot of traction in support by advocating policies scholars have described as welfare chauvinism, wherein individuals support broad social safety nets so long as they exclude immigrants from accessing entitlements (Careja *et al.*, 2016). This is a strategy adopted by the far-right that successfully diffuses to mainstream parties (Schumacher and Van Kersbergen, 2016). That far-right parties simultaneously offer what we term progressive chauvinism may broaden their base, attracting a new type of (female) supporter just as the social democratic parties of the left experienced historically unprecedented declines. Further research in this area might examine far-right policy framing, issue linkages and ownership within party systems, and voter mobilization. By examining the socio-structural roots of the party family, and taking seriously the large number of female supporters who have heretofore largely been overlooked in analyses of far-right support, we have identified several important predictors of female far-right support distinct from their male compatriots. As far-right parties gain in popularity, it is essential that comparative approaches to voting behavior push beyond simplistic narratives of far-right supporters as simply jackbooted radicals or ‘angry young men’. The results suggest that men and women have different profiles and motivations for supporting the far-right, and that the way gender has been encoded in research on the far-right may have obscured important features of the party family. A more nuanced view of far-right supporters – and party positioning to expand their base – reveals distinct, gendered dimensions.

**Supplementary material.** To view supplementary material for this article, please visit <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773920000405>.

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