

Do Voters Polarize When Radical Parties Enter Parliament?



Daniel Bischof University of Zurich
Markus Wagner University of Vienna

Abstract: *Do voters polarize ideologically when radical views gain political legitimacy, or does the rise of radical voices merely reflect societal conflict? We argue that elite polarization as signaled by radical parties' first entrance into parliament leads to voter divergence. Immediately after the election, legitimization and backlash effects mean that voters on both ideological sides move toward the extremes. In the longer term, this polarization is solidified because of radical parties' parliamentary presence. A panel study of Dutch voters shows that the 2002 parliamentary entrance of a radical-right party indeed led to immediate ideological polarization across the political spectrum. Estimating time-series cross-sectional models on Eurobarometer data from 17 countries (1973–2016) shows an additional long-term impact of radical-right party entry on polarization. The presence of radical voices on the right has polarizing effects, illustrating how such institutional recognition and legitimization can have a far-reaching impact on society.*

Verification Materials: The data and materials required to verify the computational reproducibility of the results, procedures and analyses in this article are available on the *American Journal of Political Science* Dataverse within the Harvard Dataverse Network, at: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/DZ1NFG>.

A recurrent theme of democracies is the rise of radical and extreme parties. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the growing success of Socialist and Communist parties, and the 1920s and 1930s witnessed increasing support for National Socialism, in Weimar, Germany, and for Benito Mussolini's National Fascist Party in the Kingdom of Italy. More recently, (left-wing) Green parties rose to prominence in the 1980s in several European countries, and many party systems have recently experienced the entry of radical-right parties into parliament. In 2017, for example, the Alternative für Deutschland entered the German Bundestag, ending that country's long spell as one of the only Western European countries without an established radical-right party.

When parties and candidates that are more extreme than their competitors become relevant in democratic societies, observers regularly raise concerns about the consequences for public discourse and for societal norms more generally. For instance, Donald Trump's campaign and election led to such fears. In June 2016, Mitt Romney, the former Republican nominee for president, suggested that Trump's election could provide legitimacy to radical views through “trickle-down racism, trickle-down bigotry, trickle-down misogyny” (Schleifer 2016). The increased usage of racist/fascist symbols, the ensuing countermobilization (NPR 2016), and violent clashes between Trump supporters and other groups (Queally et al. 2017) all suggest that his election spurred both public mobilization by his supporters and a backlash against their extreme positions.¹

Daniel Bischof is Senior Researcher, Department of Political Science, University of Zurich, Affolternstrasse 56, 8050 Zurich, Switzerland (bischof@ipz.uzh.ch). Markus Wagner is Professor, Department of Government, University of Vienna, Rathausstrasse 19/1/9, 1090 Vienna, Austria (markus.wagner@univie.ac.at).

We are grateful for comments on previous versions of the article by Tarik Abou-Chadi, Jim Adams, Ryan Bakker, Martin Bisgaard, Elias Dinas, Lawrence Ezrow, Simon Fink, Florian Foos, Zac Greene, Silja Häusermann, Seth Jolly, Moritz Marbach, Kostas Matakos, Liam McGrath, Thomas Meyer, Tabea Palmtag, Bing Powell, Nils Redeker, Raphael Reinke, Ken Scheve, Henrik Seeberg, Roman Senninger, Marco Steenbergen, Lukas Stötzer, Denise Traber, Catherine de Vries, and Thomas Widmer. We also would like to thank all participants at the IPZ prepublication seminar, specifically our discussant Stefanie Walter. We are equally thankful for various comments shared by the audiences during the 2017 APSA, EPSA general conferences and seminars at the universities of Aarhus, King's College London, and Vienna. The article has also tremendously benefited from feedback by three anonymous reviewers and the editors of *AJPS*.

¹Higher levels of voter polarization are generally important because they can have broader societal consequences (Silva 2018). For instance, they can lead to lower political interest and lower satisfaction with democracy and government performance (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz 2006; Sørensen 2014), but they can also increase turnout and political engagement (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008).

American Journal of Political Science, Vol. 63, No. 4, October 2019, Pp. 888–904

©2019, Midwest Political Science Association

DOI: 10.1111/ajps.12449

The theory implicit in these observations is that voters become more ideologically polarized when extreme views are publicly and broadly expressed by parties and candidates who are endowed with some level of political legitimacy (Hetherington 2001; Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz 2006; Silva 2018). Here, we define an *extreme actor* as a new party or candidate who takes up more ideologically radical positions than current parties and politicians. Ultimately, the institutional presence and relevance of such new, more radical competitors is thought to increase ideological polarization among citizens (Mudde 2013; Silva 2018; Sprague-Jones 2011). In this context, we mean by polarization that ideological views become more distant from the political center: The variance of positions increases (Dalton 2008; Ezrow 2007). The polarization caused by the rise of radical voices is also often believed to occur on both sides: those who sympathize with the new party and those who oppose it (Bishin et al. 2016; Bustikova 2014; Tankard and Paluck 2016).

We put this implicit theory to the test by examining whether the institutional legitimization of parties located at the ideological extremes increases ideological polarization among voters. To study institutional legitimization, we focus on a specific, clearly identifiable type of event: radical party entry into parliament. These are events when new parties at the left or right extremes of the party system enter parliament for the first time.² In elections in multiparty systems, such events are a regular occurrence (Bolleyer 2014; Tavits 2008). The main examples we consider in this article are radical-right parties, but we also examine whether ideological polarization occurs when parties enter on the left.

We argue that first-time entry into parliament leads to an institutional recognition and legitimization of radical parties that has both short- and long-term effects on voter polarization. Immediately as a result of a party's successful entry into parliament, voters on both sides will publicly take up more radical positions. On the one hand, voters who sympathize with the party and its stances will see their own views as more socially acceptable (Bursztyn, Egorov, and Fiorin 2017; Tankard and Paluck 2016) and therefore be more likely to openly declare their ideological stance (*legitimization effect*). Voters on the opposite side of the political spectrum will react negatively to the perceived breaking of social norms and feel the need to distance themselves from the new competitors (*backlash effect*; Bishin et al. 2016). In the very

short term, polarization likely arises from changes in how voters present themselves rather than from persuasion.

However, in the longer term, the presence of radical parties in parliament will shape political debate in the country in parliament and the media (Dinas, Riera, and Roussias 2015), and this increased elite-level polarization should lead to further voter polarization. Possible mechanisms include persuasion (Lenz 2009), cueing (Brader, Tucker, and Duell 2012; Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013), and issue entrepreneurship (Hobolt and de Vries 2015). Hence, in the months and years after radical party entry, many voters may fundamentally change their political stances.

We test the expectation of short- and long-term voter polarization after the first radical party entry in three ways. In Study 1, we look at voter polarization after the first entry into parliament in 2002 of the radical-right Lijst Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands. Here, we take advantage of a pre–post panel study to compare voter polarization before and after the election.³ Second, we examine the patterns of left–right polarization after radical-right party entry in 17 countries from 1973 to 2016 based on Eurobarometer data. Using two-way fixed effects regression (Study 2) and synthetic control models (Study 3), we again find evidence that the public polarizes after extreme party entrance. Moreover, the size of this effect is substantial, at about half of a standard deviation. The results of our studies indicate that first-time radical-right party entry leads to voter polarization in both the short term and the long term.

Our focus in this article is on radical-right parties, as these are the most prominent new parties entering at the extremes of the party system. Radical-left parties either entered earlier (as Communist parties) or do so more rarely. However, relying on the same strategies, we also test whether similar patterns emerge after Green Party entrance, but we do not find evidence of an equivalent polarizing effect. We think that this may be for two reasons: First, radical-right party entrance breaks a greater historical “taboo” than Green Party entry (Van Spanje and Van Der Brug 2007); and second, radical-right parties may act more as issue entrepreneurs and successfully shift issue agendas (Hobolt and de Vries 2015).

Our results have important implications for the study of elite polarization and its impact on voters. Existing work has tended to focus on gradual, over-time changes in political discourse (e.g. Adams, De Vries, and Leiter 2012; Adams, Green, and Milazzo 2012; Fiorina and Abrams

²We use *extreme* as a spatial ideological description, so we do not use it in the sense of antidemocratic, anti-regime, or anti-party (see, e.g., Mudde 1996).

³Dinas, Hartman, and van Spanje (2016) recently used the same election study to test the effect of Fortuyn's murder before the election on projection bias, whereas Silva (2018) takes a longer-term view of polarization in the Netherlands.

2007; Gabel and Scheve 2007b; Hetherington 2001; Layman and Carsey 2002; Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz 2006). In contrast, we show how polarization can increase quickly through single, highly newsworthy events—such as elections—that place radical stances at the center of the political debate and provide legitimacy to them. In addition to being focusing events, elections can also have a longer-term impact by providing radical views with an institutionalized platform. Finally, our results address a common issue in studies of elite influence, namely, the causal direction of ideological position taking (Gabel and Scheve 2007a). By using a specific instance of elite polarization, radical party entry, we are able to better assess the direction and mechanisms of changes in polarization. Furthermore, we add to the findings of Gabel and Scheve (2007a) by showing that ideological polarization among voters is driven by the entrance of specific parties, but not necessarily by increasing party system fragmentation more generally.

Our results also provide new insight into the debate on the broader links between elite and voter ideologies (Adams, De Vries, and Leiter 2012; Adams, Ezrow, and Somer-Topcu 2011; Adams, Green, and Milazzo 2012; Down and Wilson 2010; Ezrow 2007; Hetherington 2009). Voters are often inattentive and fail to notice shifts in party positions (Adams, Ezrow, and Somer-Topcu 2011, 2014). Some observers also claim that radical-right parties, for example, have had little effect on voters' long-term attitudes (Mudde 2013). In contrast, other work shows that voters do react to elite positioning (Adams, Green, and Milazzo 2012; Fernández-Vázquez 2014; Seeberg, Slothuus, and Stubager 2017). Our findings highlight that newsworthy, legitimizing events such as elections have a focusing impact, perhaps leading voters to update their views more than after other, more subtle shifts. Elections, like leadership changes (Fernandez-Vazquez and Somer-Topcu 2019; Somer-Topcu 2017), manage to cut through the broader political debate and reach the general public. However, we also show that the informational, legitimizing effect of radical party entry may well be conditional on the existence of a taboo concerning a party's views and an ostracization of the party itself (Van Spanje and Van Der Brug 2007).

Short-Term Effects of Radical Party Entry: Legitimization and Backlash

The election of a new radical party into parliament is likely to be an important, attention-grabbing, and sometimes even shocking development for established politi-

cal parties, the media, and many citizens. In addition to shaping headlines, this event also provides voters with important information about the distribution of ideological preferences among voters and about the social and political acceptability of these views (Bursztyn, Egorov, and Fiorin 2017; Tankard and Paluck 2016). Research in social psychology shows that individuals learn about social norms over time, in a dynamic fashion (Paluck, Shepherd, and Aronow 2016; Tankard and Paluck 2016). As noted by Tankard and Paluck (2016, 184), “summary information about group opinions and behavior (indicated by the group’s voting tallies, or other announcements about the group)...update[s] our impressions of what the group typically does or what the group values.” Signal events such as Supreme Court decisions in the United States or referendum outcomes can thus lead individuals to update their perceptions of social norms (Bartels and Mutz 2009, 249; Hoekstra and Segal 1996; Tankard and Paluck 2017, 1334). Similarly, the electoral success of a party that is more extreme than its competitors provides voters with summary information about the distribution of preferences and norms among the population (Tankard and Paluck 2016).⁴ The election of the radical party thus tells voters that the views of the new radical party are no longer as socially frowned upon as before, and that many people support these views. Because of this, the entry of radical parties into parliament is likely to increase public polarization among voters on both sides of the political debate.

First, radical party entry will have a legitimization effect: People identifying with the new radical party will express more extreme views. This is not because of short-term persuasion, as voters are probably unlikely to change their ideological stances quickly simply because a new, radical party is elected. Instead, we believe that voters with extreme views will feel freer to declare and admit their preexisting (radical) positions (Bursztyn, Egorov, and Fiorin 2017).

One reason for this is that perceptions of social norms will shift due to this event. In most cases, the ideological positions held by radical parties were previously somewhat taboo. The entry of the radical party from outside the political mainstream will lead supporters and sympathizers to feel that their views have greater legitimacy and

⁴Of course, not all types of radical party entry will contain the same type and amount of information for voters. In some countries, radical party entry will be foreshadowed well by high poll ratings or by election into regional legislatures, weakening the additional informational content of entry into national parliament. Yet, we argue that even if there was prior success, the signaling effect of an electoral entry into national parliament adds substantially to comparable information from surveys or other elections.

social acceptance, even if these parties are still ostracized by their mainstream competitors (Van Spanje and Van Der Brug 2007; van Spanje and Weber 2017). The success of a party with radical views signals that the range of views that are voiced and deemed acceptable has changed (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989). This type of effect is akin to that posited by licensing theory, which states that public information on norms has a greater impact on those who are already in favor of those norms. Awareness of public support for certain views “may license supporters to act on their views in public” (Tankard and Paluck 2016, 198).

An additional reason to expect a legitimization effect is because the party’s success signals popular support for certain views. Before the radical party entered parliament, people identifying with the party may have felt unsure about how many people also hold their extreme views. The success of the new party may tell these voters that there is more popular support for their views than they previously thought, further encouraging them to state their views openly.

Overall, we therefore expect the following:

Legitimization Hypothesis: After a radical party enters parliament for the first time, people identifying with that party and its views will move further to the ideological extremes.

In addition to legitimizing radical views among party identifiers, the entry of a radical party will lead other individuals to strengthen their opposition to these views. In particular, the electoral success of a disliked party can act as a kind of “out-party cue” (Goren, Federico, and Kittilson 2009). People identifying with parties on the opposite side of the political spectrum will feel the need to act against the legitimization of radical positions. Focusing events may thus lead to a backlash among voters who fear changes to the status quo (Bishin et al. 2016; Flores and Barclay 2016). For example, some voters—such as minorities—are likely to feel threatened by the normalization of positions that threaten their rights. Even voters who are not likely to be directly affected by the normalization of radical views will want to actively speak out against radical positions they disapprove of. In reaction to the shifting norms, opposing voters may take even stronger stances toward the other side of the political spectrum (Bishin et al. 2016; Bustikova 2014). Given the findings in Goren, Federico, and Kittilson (2009), opposing voters may react just as strongly as sympathetic voters. Hence, we expect the following:

Backlash hypothesis: After a radical party enters parliament for the first time, people identifying with opposing parties will move further to the ideological extremes.

In sum, the entry of radical parties into parliament may have short-term effects on voters’ positions simply by legitimizing extreme views and by creating a backlash among opposing voters. Note that these short-term effects are not due to persuasion. Instead, voters on the same side of the radical party feel more comfortable professing radical views, whereas opposing partisans feel the need for public opposition to these views. By bringing hidden preferences into public view, these effects are no less consequential than actual persuasion.

Long-Term Effects of Radical Party Entry

The short-term effects of radical party entry are likely to be strengthened in the longer term through more deep-seated change. Getting into parliament can provide radical parties with a significant increase in various resources (Dinas, Riera, and Roussias 2015). They can use their parliamentary platform and improved financial means to present their views and gain attention for their positions. In addition, their competitors will also provide them with publicity. Rival parties will treat this new party as a significant threat and may decide to address the issues and positions of their new competitor, thereby raising the party’s prominence. For example, they may attack the new competitor more and take its positions into account when formulating campaign strategies. Moreover, the ability to win seats may also go hand in hand with increased media coverage (Dunn and Singh 2011). Parties with parliamentary representation are often provided with more and better access to the media, in particular by state broadcasters. As a result, parliamentary representation can be a boon for parties’ long-term chances of survival, amplifying the effect generated by their initial success in getting into parliament (Dinas, Riera, and Roussias 2015).

The increased resources and attention afforded to parties that manage to enter parliament will affect how voters perceive political debates and may thereby shift voter positions. In this article, we do not test the mechanisms that explain why radical party presence affects voter polarization. Yet, it is nevertheless helpful to think about plausible mechanisms of this effect. First, if radical views are increasingly prominent on both sides, this may shape voter positions through persuasion (Lenz 2009),

perhaps strengthened by biased information processing created by motivated reasoning (Taber and Lodge 2006) and by the activation of latent political values (Goren, Federico, and Kittilson 2009). Analogous to our short-term mechanisms outlined above, this will include perceptions of the types of views that are socially acceptable (Hogg 2010; Tankard and Paluck 2016). Second, elite polarization may lead voters to rely more on party positions as cues (Brader, Tucker, and Duell 2012; Lupia and McCubbins 1998), whereby voters simply decide to adopt the positions held by the parties they support (Bartels 2002; Zaller 1992). Motivated reasoning and cue taking increase when elite polarization rises (Brader, Tucker, and Duell 2012; Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Slothuus and de Vreese 2010; Steenbergen, Edwards, and de Vries 2007). Finally, radical party entry may change the content of political debates and lead to issue evolution (Carmines and Stimson 1986, 1989; Stevens 2013), changing the issue content of the left–right dimension. Polarization will then increase if partisan positions on the new issues are clearer and more distinct (Arndt 2016). With their increased presence in parliamentary debates and the media, radical parties may be important “issue entrepreneurs” (Hobolt and de Vries 2015) that introduce or emphasize innovative and divisive issues that have the potential to reshape party competition.⁵

These long-term effects will occur in addition to short-term effects hypothesized above and can be seen as accompanying the legitimization/backlash effect, strengthening the divisions between the two sides. In summary, our final hypothesis follows:

Long-Term Polarization Hypothesis: Voter-level ideological polarization will increase after a radical party enters parliament for the first time.

Research Design

We rely on three studies employing two different data sources to test how voters polarize in the short and long term after radical party entry. The first study makes use of an individual-level panel study conducted dur-

⁵Like the short-term impact of radical party entrance, the long-term effects may also occur on both sides of the political divide. Nicholson (2012) shows that the cues sent out by politicians primarily decrease support among opposing partisans rather than increasing support among the party faithful; similar findings are reported in Goren, Federico, and Kittilson (2009). Moreover, backlash often occurs when individuals feel threatened by change, particularly if they already hold negative views about the relevant group (Bishin et al. 2016). This holds for radical party entry.

ing the 2002 Dutch parliamentary elections. This study allows us to carefully evaluate the short-term legitimization/backlash mechanisms by exploiting the survey’s panel design. The second study then extrapolates these findings to a longer-term, macrolevel perspective. Based on Eurobarometer data, we test whether the entry of a radical party led to polarization, particularly in countries employing an electoral threshold, a methodological decision we elaborate on below. The third study uses synthetic control methods on the same data set to provide a better-identified causal estimate of the effect of extreme party entry.

To test our theoretical argument, we rely on respondents’ general left–right self-placement. We believe that this survey measure is appropriate to assess public polarization. First, general questions about left–right placement allow respondents to decide for themselves what they understand as left or right. This means that our study gets at the underlying ideological divisions between voters. For many studies, the shifting meaning of left and right is a disadvantage, but for our purposes—capturing summary ideological divisions between citizens—it is important to take into account how the policy content of debates shifts (De Vries, Hakhverdian, and Lancee 2013; Lachat 2018), for example, due to the efforts of “issue entrepreneurs” (Hobolt and de Vries 2015). Hence, in our view, polarization also increases if voter views on individual issues stay the same, but politics changes to revolve around more divisive issues. Certainly, making use of policy-specific questions would enrich our analyses and allow us to say more about the underlying structure of the ideological space. Yet, to the extent that left–right responses fail to capture shifts in the issue content of political debates, our findings should in fact underestimate polarization effects. Hence, from our perspective, using left–right polarization probably provides a conservative estimate of the impact of radical party entry.

Second, and most crucially, in contrast to issue-specific questions, respondents’ left–right placement is available across several countries and time periods. This allows us to test our argument on a large sample of countries and compare these findings to our findings based on the election panel study.

Results

Study 1: Election Panel Study in the Netherlands (2002)

We investigate the short-term effects of first-time radical party entry using the case of the Lijst Pim Fortuyn

(LPF), which entered the Dutch parliament at the 2002 election. This populist radical-right party focused on opposition to immigration and multiculturalism and criticized the political and cultural elite, while also taking a liberal stance on gay rights (Akkerman 2005; De Lange and Art 2011; Dinas, Hartman, and van Spanje 2016; Ennser 2010; Koopmans and Muis 2009; Silva 2018). The party gained prominence mainly due to its popular leader, who founded his new party about 3 months before the election.

The election of LPF is an ideal case to study our hypothesis (for a similar argument, see Silva 2018). First, the party’s late founding gave its leader little time to build a party brand and influence the media before getting into parliament. This means that the long-term mechanisms outlined in our theory are unlikely explanations for a short-term polarization effect after the election. Second, the party’s success has been described as “dramatic” (Koopmans and Muis 2009, 643) and “unprecedented” (van Holsteyn, Irwin, and Den Ridder 2003, 69), making this a good case of a shock-like event (Silva 2018). Third, as van Holsteyn, Irwin, and Den Ridder (2003) note, its success was not preceded by a public shift to the right prior to Election Day. To a certain extent, this reduces the possibility of the reversed causation that would arise if public polarization were a cause for, rather than the consequence of, the electoral success of the radical-right party.

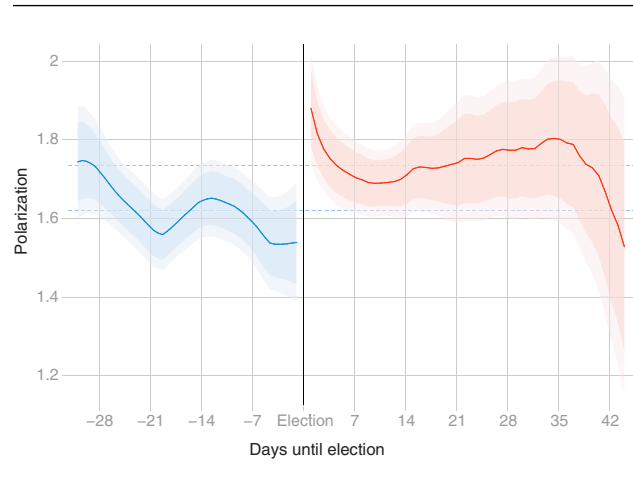
Specifically, we use the 2002 Dutch Parliamentary Election Study (DPES) to assess within-subject shifts in public attitudes.⁶ To our knowledge, this is the only election study that combines two key prerequisites to test our hypotheses: It was conducted before and after the first election of a radical-right party to parliament and includes repeated measures of left–right ideological self-placement. Most election panel studies only ask about respondents’ left–right placement prior to election.

The pre-election wave began interviewing citizens 31 days before Election Day, and the post-election wave interviewed the same respondents up until 42 days after the election. In total, the DPES interviewed 1,574 panel respondents before and after the 2002 election.⁷ The study allows us to compare the same respondents prior to and

⁶Some variables were reversed using the Stata ado by Longest (2007).

⁷A total of 1,907 respondents were interviewed before the election, of which 1,574 respondents were then also interviewed after the election. According to information in the DPES documentation, new innovations in data collection were introduced at this stage. Some respondents were allowed to use a different interview mode after the election ($N = 374$). This could bias our findings significantly. Yet, excluding these respondents does not change the results reported here.

FIGURE 1 Descriptives: Did Polarization Increase after the LPF Entrance? (Netherlands 2002)



Note: Comparison of polarization in pre- and post-election panel (within-person comparison) is shown. The figure presents local polynomial regression plots, surrounded by 95% and 83.4% confidence intervals; kernel = epanechnikov; degree of smooth = 0. Horizontal lines reported μ pre- (in blue) and post-election (in red) polarization. All graphs were made using Bischof (2017).

after experiencing the entrance of a radical party, enabling us to draw on the rare occasion of within-person comparisons. Hence, any time-invariant, subject-specific covariates such as gender or education can be controlled for by using subject-specific fixed effects. In addition, our design allows us to rely on covariates observed prior to the election to explain voter shifts on the general left–right scale after LPF entered parliament. So we can eliminate the alternative explanation that the shift in voters’ general left–right placement resulted from the fact that voters changed their party identification after the successful election of the LPF into parliament.

Respondents placed themselves on a general left–right scale ranging from 1 (*extreme left*) to 11 (*extreme right*). We estimate each respondent’s squared distance to the median prior to the election and after the election. In addition, we also use individual movement on the left–right scale, directly investigating voter shifts after the entrance of a radical party.

Figure 1 plots the polarization of panel respondents before (blue) and after (red) the election using local linear regressions. Polarization increased after the election to a substantial degree, and this trend is fairly stable across the time period covered by the election panel.⁸

⁸The number of respondents placing themselves at 6, the midpoint of the scale, also decreases from 929 to 805, another sign of

TABLE 1 Regression Estimates: Did Polarization Increase after the LPF Entrance? (Netherlands 2002)

	(1) Pre - and Post -Election	(2) Pre - and Post -Election	(3) Pre - and Post -Election	(4) Placebo: Fortuyn	(5) Placebo: Fortuyn
Before/after	0.121 (0.031)	0.121 (0.031)	0.121 (0.031)	-0.112 (0.076)	-0.109 (0.099)
Constant	1.629 (0.085)	2.059 (0.214)	1.620 (0.016)	1.644 (0.036)	
Controls		✓			
Interview timing	✓	✓			
Individual fixed effects			✓		
R ²	0.002	0.017	0.011	0.001	
Observations	2,808	2,808	2,808	1,551	1,548
N	1,404	1,404	1,404		

Note: Regression coefficients are shown with standard errors in parentheses; Models 1–3 are clustered standard errors by panel ID; Model 5 uses propensity score matching, with one match per respondent; controls (age, gender, urban vs. rural, social class, voting preference, political knowledge, religiosity) are omitted from the table.

Consistent with Gerber and Huber (2010, 157), the most crucial difference in polarization due to the election is close to the appearance of the treatment, that is, the election. The dip in polarization toward the end of the post-election panel may simply be driven by the fact that fewer respondents were interviewed towards the end of the panel. Although it is also conceivable that short-term legitimization effects may start to decline after a month, the low number of observations should caution us from making such strong inferences.

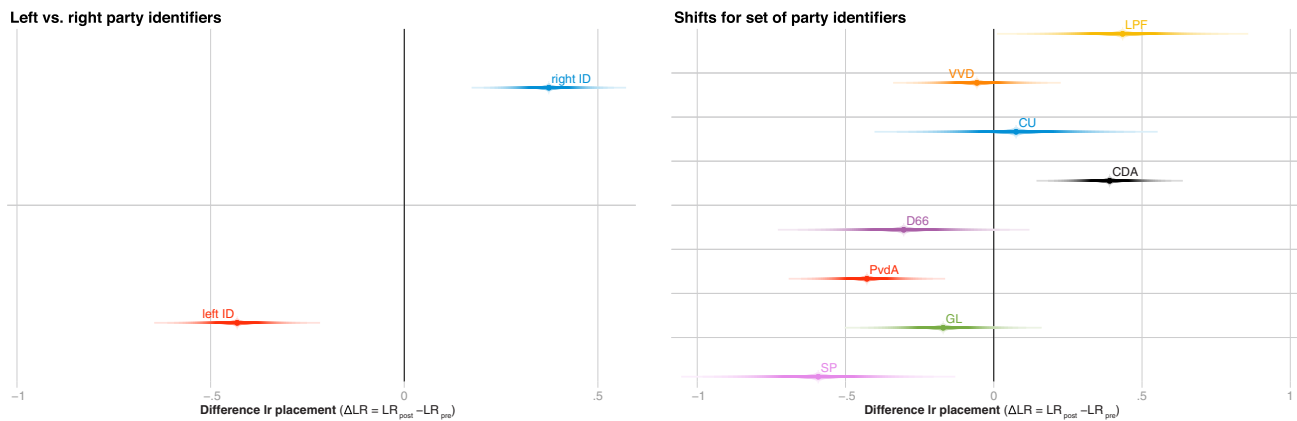
To substantiate this descriptive finding, Table 1 again uses the squared distance to the median as a dependent variable. The key independent variable is a dummy variable coded “1” for each respondent after the election and “0” before the election. Thus, we test whether respondents’ distance to the median on average significantly increased after the election. We find a statistically significant increase in ideological polarization between the two waves. This increase remains similar in size across all models we estimated, as well as when controlling only for the interview date (Model 1) or when using individual fixed effects (Model 3).

Concerns of confounded treatment may linger because the party leader was murdered 7 days before the election (Dinas, Hartman, and van Spanje 2016). Fortuyn’s killing, not the entrance of the LPF into parliament, might be the major cause of public polarization. To address this potential confounding event, we con-

polarization. Figure A.1 in the supporting information (SI) shows that most of these respondents shifted to the right.

duct a placebo test that estimates the influence of Fortuyn’s killing on ideological polarization. Using only the pre-election wave, we compare respondents interviewed prior to Pim Fortuyn’s assassination (77%) with respondents interviewed thereafter but before the election itself (22%). The latter have experienced Fortuyn’s murder but cannot plausibly be affected by an election outcome they have not yet observed. Any effect on ideological polarization stemming from his murder should be observable in this subsample of respondents. Model 4 in Table 1 draws a simple OLS comparison between the two pre-election groups. There is no statistically significant polarization effect after Fortuyn’s murder. Given that other differences in the two pre-election groups may exist, Model 5 then uses propensity score matching (Rubin 1974) to compare each respondent after the assassination to a most similar respondent before his assassination (for a similar approach, see Dinas, Hartman, and van Spanje 2016). This analysis also fails to show an increase of polarization due to Pim Fortuyn’s assassination. Moreover, the size of the coefficient is much smaller than that in the pre- and post-election comparisons. Thus, the placebo tests provide further support for our theoretical argument that the election itself (and not Fortuyn’s murder) led to ideological polarization. Although our placebo test can rule out that the murder of Pim Fortuyn was the reason for increased polarization, it cannot account for other major political developments in relation to the election. Yet, given that the election and its campaign was dominated by the electoral success, political agenda, and murder of

FIGURE 2 Effect of Party Identification on Shifts in Left–Right Positioning (Netherlands 2002)



Note: The two plots report OLS coefficient estimates with 95% confidence intervals. Coefficients estimates are for variables indicating whether a respondent identifies with a set of parties (left) or a specific party (right) in the pre-election wave. The outcome variable is the difference between the post-election and pre-election left–right position (1–11 scale). The full model specification with covariates is reported in Table A.1 in the SI. The left figure presents the coefficients for voters with left (SP, GL, PvdA, D66) and right (LPF, VVD, CU, CDA) party IDs. The right figure presents the coefficients for each party ID included in the panel study. LPF = Lijst Pim Fortuyn, VVD = Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie, CU = ChristenUnie, CDA = Christen-Democratisch Appèl, D66 = Democraten 66, PvdA = Partij van de Arbeid, GL = GroenLinks, SP = Socialistische Partij.

Pim Fortuyn, we believe that the most newsworthy and, thus, plausible event driving our findings is the entrance of the LPF into parliament.

Legitimization and Backlash Effects in the 2002 Dutch Election. Next, we investigate the legitimization and backlash mechanisms in the Dutch case. This should give us a more fine-grained and substantive understanding of the macrolevel effects reported above. Voters’ reactions to the entrance of a radical party should depend on how their general political identity relates to the party entering parliament. In this case, voters identifying with right-wing parties should be subject to a legitimization effect and left-wing party identifiers to a backlash effect.

To test this expectation, we first split the respondents into groups based on their reported party identification *prior* to the election. Note that our findings remain similar if we use respondents’ reported voting decision; we do not use this information due to posttreatment bias. Then we examine how party identifiers change their general left–right self-placement after the election. Here, we use as our dependent variable in an OLS regression the difference between voters’ left–right self-placement after and before the election.

Figure 2 reports the findings of analyses of ideological shifts conditional on party support. In the left panel, we create indicators for respondents identifying with left-

and right-leaning parties, respectively.⁹ The legitimization and backlash effects are clearly visible: Voters identifying with a right-leaning party *ceteris paribus* moved further to the right, whereas those identifying with a left-leaning party moved to the left.

The right panel of Figure 2 reports more fine-grained results for each group of party supporters. The parties in the figure are sorted based on their left–right placement in the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, starting with the most right-leaning party (LPF; Bakker et al. 2015). The models again use an OLS estimation with the difference between respondents’ pre- and post-election left–right self-placements as the outcome variable. We expect right-wing party identifiers (LPF, VVD, CU, and CDA) to move to the right and left-wing party identifiers (D66, PvdA, GL, and SP) to move to the left.¹⁰

In general, the estimates are in line with our theoretical expectations. All but one group (VVD identifiers) changed their ideological positioning as expected. Furthermore, these shifts are statistically significant for

⁹We omitted very small parties with few identifiers from this analysis (Leefbaar Nederland, Duurzaam Nederland, Partij voor de Dieren, Partij van de Toekomst, and Alliantie Vernieuwing).

¹⁰Since the left–right scale comes with a defined maximum and minimum, some voters cannot move further to the left or right (truncation). Using tobit models, which control for such “ceiling effects,” results in the same conclusions as reported here (see Table A.2 in the SI).

LPF, CDA, PvdA, and SP identifiers. Thus, we find strong movements of left–right placement particularly on the extremes of the ideological scales. These movements are evidence that our mechanisms work as expected, as our argument implies that the strongest effect should be found at the extremes of the ideological scale. Yet, the strong and positive effect for the relatively centrist CDA and D66 voters indicates that the entrance of the LPF also led to an abandonment of the center. This test of our mechanisms further strengthens the conclusion that the ideological movement of voters after the entrance of the LPF is structured and occurred in similar ways on both sides of the ideological spectrum.

Study 2: Time-Series Cross-Sectional Findings

Our first study showed that the Dutch public polarized ideologically after an election dominated by the dramatic and unprecedented entrance of a radical-right party. But do these findings hold in the longer term and generalize across contexts?

In our second study, the unit of analysis is country-years. We use Eurobarometer data, which contain surveys conducted since 1973 in member states of the European Union. Combining all Eurobarometer studies that asked respondents to place themselves on a general left–right scale running from 1 (*extreme left*) to 10 (*extreme right*) gives us information about 1,717,808 respondents across 17 European countries. On average, 1,083 respondents are asked to place themselves in each study and country. To measure public polarization, we use the standard deviation of left–right self-placements in each country-year ($\mu = 2.09$; $\sigma = 0.22$).

Table 2 reports the countries and party entries we analyze. We identified radical-right parties based on standard party family accounts.¹¹ There are three types of possible country cases for the period studied: no entrance of a radical-right party into parliament, either at all or only after the period we study (e.g., Germany); entrance of a radical right-party during the period we study (e.g., Sweden); and entrance of a radical-right party before the period we study (e.g., Austria). We exclude the third type of country.¹² We only examine the effects of the first en-

¹¹We base our selection on party families rather than ideological measures for two reasons: First, expert survey and party manifesto left–right scores are often not available for small and new parties; second, radical-right parties are almost by definition outside the mainstream in the systems in which they first emerge, so using party family provides clear face validity.

¹²These countries are Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia.

TABLE 2 Study 2: Countries and Party Entries Included in the Study

Country	Years	Radical-Right Party Entry
<i>Belgium</i>	1973–2016	Vlaams Blok (1978)
<i>Bulgaria</i>	2004–2016	ATAKA (2005)
<i>Denmark</i>	1973–2016	Dansk Folkeparti (1998)
Finland	1992–2016	
<i>France*</i>	1973–2016	Front National (1986)
Germany	1973–2016	
<i>Greece</i>	1980–2016	Laikós Orthódoxos Synagermós (2007)
<i>Italy</i>	1973–2016	Lega Nord (1992)
Luxembourg	1973–2016	
<i>Netherlands</i>	1973–2016	Lijst Pim Fortuyn (2002)
<i>Poland</i>	2004–2016	Kukiz (2015)
Portugal	1985–2016	
Romania	2004–2016	
Slovenia	2004–2016	
Spain	1985–2016	
<i>Sweden</i>	1994–2016	Sverigedemokraterna (2010)
United Kingdom	1973–2016	

Note: *France employed an electoral threshold in the 1986 election, which helped the FN to enter parliament in this election. Italics indicate countries with radical-right party entry.

try of a radical-right party into parliament.¹³ Countries are coded as not having experienced radical-right party entry even if such a party has long existed but has not yet entered parliament. Countries are coded as having experienced radical-right party entry for all periods after radical-right party entry.¹⁴ Finally, only in France did the radical-right party, after entering, leave parliament without another competitor taking its place.¹⁵

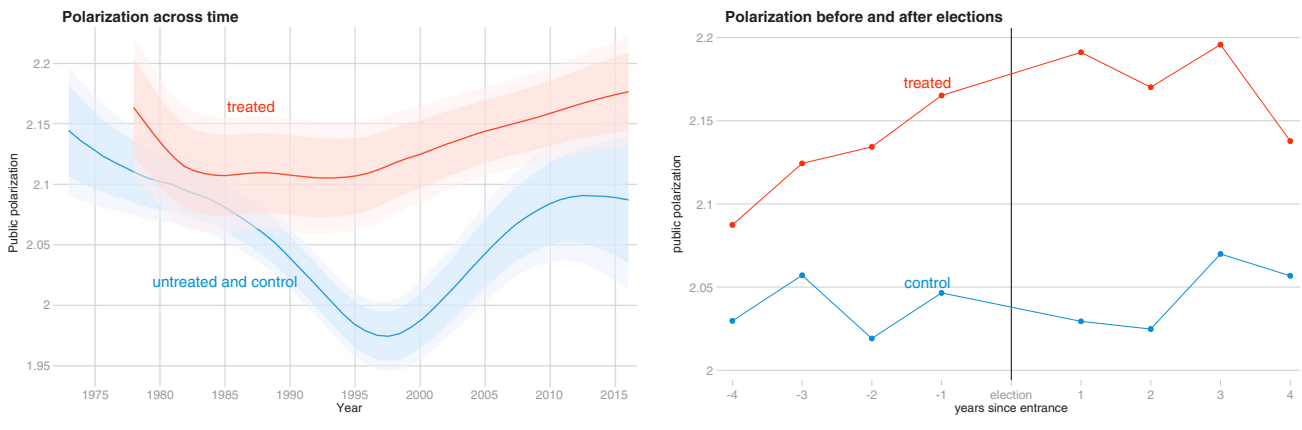
Our theoretical discussion highlighted that parties may shape what voters think. Yet, parties should also

¹³We include Italy, the Netherlands, and Sweden even though they had witnessed earlier entrances of radical-right parties over a decade earlier. Results are robust if we exclude these countries from Studies 2 and 3 (see Tables B.5 and C.2 in the SI).

¹⁴This is even the case if another, more radical party enters. This is only the case once in our period, when Golden Dawn enters the Greek parliament in 2012. In the Netherlands, the PVV entered after the LPF left parliament.

¹⁵The Front National (FN) experienced three time periods (after elections in 1993, 2002, and 2007) without parliamentary representation. As these are short periods and the party remained important in presidential elections, we believe it is warranted to include the FN throughout our analyses.

FIGURE 3 Descriptives of Polarization Measure Based on Eurobarometer across Time, 1973–2016



Note: The panel on the left reports local polynomials (kernel: epanechnikov; degree: 0) surrounded by 95% and 83.7% confidence intervals. The panel on the right plots the mean of respective samples by year.

follow voters in the positions they take, making elite polarization the consequence of voter polarization (Adams et al. 2006; Ezrow 2007; Ezrow et al. 2010). Untangling the causal association between elite and mass polarization is thus crucial to avoid problems of endogeneity (Down and Wilson 2010; Gabel and Scheve 2007a). Our research design helps us to assess the causal impact of elite polarization on voters.

Figure 3 shows key descriptives based on the Eurobarometer data. The panel on the left compares polarization in countries that have experienced the entrance of a radical party (*treated*) with the countries that either never experienced (*control*) or had not yet experienced the entry of a radical party at the respective year drawn on the x-axis (*untreated*). It becomes strikingly evident that the trajectories are substantially distinct for treated and control countries: It seems that countries with radical-right parties in parliament experience a substantively larger voter-level ideological polarization. The panel on the right then compares the average public polarization in treated and control countries in the legislative periods before and after the entrance of an radical-right party. The panel shows that, on average, the entrance of a radical-right party leads to more ideological polarization among voters in the year after the election, whereas after an election, voters *depolarize* in the control countries. The figure provides suggestive evidence that radical-right party entry leads to increased ideological polarization.

To better understand polarization patterns across countries and time, we estimate two-way fixed effects models. Causal claims are difficult to achieve with time-series cross-sectional (TSCS) data. In the best-case scenario, we would compare the entrance of a radical party in a country with the absence of such a party entrance in

the *same* country at the *same* point in time. Obviously, we can never observe both of these outcomes.¹⁶ The best we can do is to “impute” a credible counterfactual for each country.

We rely on a fixed effects regression model to approximate such a credible counterfactual (e.g., Folke, Hirano, and Snyder 2011). Thus, we control for country effects and time-varying effects by introducing fixed effects. Such a model effectively compares countries having experienced the first-time entrance of a radical-right party with countries that had not experienced the same event in the same decade.¹⁷ In essence, such a modeling strategy generalizes the well-known difference-in-differences approach (e.g., Fowler and Hall 2015, 45). Thus, we estimate the following model:

$$\text{polarization}_{c,t} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{radical-right party entry}_{c,t} + \Gamma Z_{c,t-1} + \zeta_c + \delta_t + \epsilon_{c,t}, \quad (1)$$

where c and t index countries and years, respectively; β_1 reports the effect of radical party entrance; $Z_{c,t-1}$ is a set of controls lagged by 1 year outlined below; ζ_c is the country fixed effects; δ_t is the decade fixed effects; and $\epsilon_{c,t}$ is the error term. Due to contemporaneous correlation, we cluster the standard errors by the treatment appearance (country/election cycle). Alternatively, we also

¹⁶Using a regression discontinuity design that compares situations in which radical parties barely entered parliament with situations they barely did not enter is not possible in our case due to the small number of suitable observations.

¹⁷Due to sample size, we cannot introduce both country and year fixed effects and controls. Yet, we also estimated models using year fixed effects only. The findings remain substantially the same (see Table B.5 in the SI).

cluster the standard errors on the country level using panel-corrected standard errors (see Table B.6 in the SI). The variable radical-right entry is coded as “1” for the time periods after which a radical party has entered parliament and “0” otherwise. In our models, we control for the effective number of parliamentary parties, party system polarization, GDP growth, and unemployment. These are all factors that should affect voter-level ideological polarization.

Table 3 reports the OLS estimates from these model specifications.

Radical-right parties’ entrance into parliament (radical-right enter) has clear consequences for voter polarization. These effects remain remarkably stable across models: without (Model 1) and with fixed effects (remaining models), and for the entire sample (Models 1–3) or only for countries that use electoral thresholds (Models 4–6).

Radical-right party entrance has a positive and significant effect in all models. The effect of radical-right party entrance is also substantively large, resulting in an increase in polarization ($\mu = 2.11$; $\sigma = 0.23$) of about half a standard deviation ($\beta = 0.09$ in Model 1). Electoral thresholds make entrances of new parties more difficult, and as such these events should have even more shock-like effects. We indeed find larger effects for the sample

of countries relying on electoral thresholds. Although these effects (Models 4–6) are not statistically different from the effects for countries without an electoral threshold (Models 1–3), we interpret the larger effects as suggestive evidence that lends more plausibility to our findings.

These findings are robust across a set of different model specifications (see Table B.5 in the SI). First, we excluded the three countries that experienced significant success of “old” radical-right parties (Italy: Alleanza Nazionale; Netherlands: Centre Party; Sweden: New Democracy). Second, to estimate more flexible time trends, we reestimated our models using a quadric term for decades (decades²). We also tested whether there is a general trend toward ideological polarization around elections. However, controlling for election years and years immediately before an election with dummy variables does not change the substantive results discussed here (see Table B.7 in the SI). Third, we report an LDV model as well as a model using panel-corrected standard errors and bootstrapped standard errors (see SI Table B.5). These modeling decisions do not affect our key findings. Fourth, using van der Eijk’s (2001) agreement measure instead of our polarization measure results in equivalent findings (see SI Figure B.1 and Table B.4). Finally, we conducted randomization tests to check whether our findings

TABLE 3 OLS Estimates: Does Polarization Increase after Entrance of Extreme Right Party?

	Entire Sample			Countries with Threshold		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Radical-right enter	0.090 (0.034)	0.116 (0.032)	0.131 (0.033)	0.126 (0.053)	0.161 (0.045)	0.174 (0.048)
GDP growth			−0.006 (0.003)			−0.005 (0.005)
Unemployment _{<i>t</i>−1}			0.003 (0.003)			−0.003 (0.005)
Party system polarization _{<i>t</i>−1}			−0.001 (0.002)			−0.001 (0.004)
Party system fragmentation _{<i>t</i>−1}			−0.018 (0.013)			−0.022 (0.017)
Constant	2.055 (0.021)	2.103 (0.051)	2.203 (0.111)	2.088 (0.036)	2.505 (0.096)	2.610 (0.140)
<i>R</i> ²	0.035	0.674	0.690	0.061	0.646	0.670
<i>N</i> _{elections}	164	164	145	82	82	74
<i>N</i>	534	534	503	253	253	243
Country fixed effects		✓	✓		✓	✓
Decade fixed effects		✓	✓		✓	✓

Note: Regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses; Standard errors clustered by country/election; country fixed effects & decade fixed effects omitted from table.

are model-dependent (Hsiang and Jina 2014, 23–26). We replaced the entry of radical-right parties 10,000 times and then reestimated Equation (1) each time. We resampled our data in three ways, reported in detail in Section B.4 in the SI. The coefficient estimates confirm our findings.

Study 3: Synthetic Control Estimates

Using a two-way fixed effects model as reported above provides the most conservative test for such data. Yet, this identification strategy rests particularly on one crucial assumption: namely, that we can observe parallel trends between the countries that have experienced the entrance of a radical-right party and countries without such an entrance prior to the entrance of the radical party. However, given the small number of countries and entrances in our data set, this parallel trends assumption might be violated. Even though this assumption cannot be tested, the right panel in Figure 3 suggests that the trends between treated and control countries appear to be fairly similar before the entrance of a radical party, despite a stark outlier 2 years before the election.

To address this issue, we use generalized synthetic control models (GSCM; Abadie, Diamond, and Hainmueller 2010, 2015; Xu 2017). Synthetic control models rest on a similar idea as the better-known difference-in-differences estimator (Keele 2015, 322–23); for a recent application of SCM to polarization, see Silva (2018). GSCM allows researchers to estimate the effect of a non-random intervention (here, the first entrance of a radical-right party) on an outcome of interest (here, ideological polarization) in the treated unit (*Average Treatment Effect on the Treated*). First, researchers systematically choose the comparative units (also known as the *donor pool*) for the unit that experienced the intervention (Abadie, Diamond, and Hainmueller 2015). Second, based on a set of predictor variables chosen by the researcher, the SCM algorithm approximates the temporal trend of the outcome of interest prior to the intervention. Thus, the algorithm assigns different weights to each donor within the pool to minimize the distance between the trend of the treated unit and the control units. The major advantage of GSCM lies in the approximation of the pretreatment trends. Hence, the method is well suited to approximating pretreatment trends even if the analysis rests on a small set of countries (Abadie, Diamond, and Hainmueller 2015, 496–97). Below, we estimate the GSCM (Xu 2017), which generates a counterfactual for each treated unit based on the untreated units by estimating a linear, interactive two-way fixed effect model.

Figure 4 reports our findings for radical-right party entries. We can only include countries from the analysis above for which we observe enough pretreatment time periods for the GSCM to converge.¹⁸ We use the same covariates used for the GSCM estimation as in the TSCS models (Table 3).

Figure 4 reports the average treatment effect across time based on our GSCM estimates, that is, the difference between the factual and the estimated counterfactual development of polarization across our sample (surrounded by parametric bootstrapped standard errors). We find further support for our previous findings. We observe a clear and strong treatment effect of first-time radical-right entry on voter polarization. Directly after the election of a radical-right party, the factual and counterfactual scenarios diverge dramatically. It is especially noteworthy that in contrast to a simple TSCS model, the estimated model fits the pretreatment trends of the treated units well. Immediately after the first radical-right party enters parliament (Lega Nord 1992), the trajectories of the control and treated countries begin to diverge.¹⁹

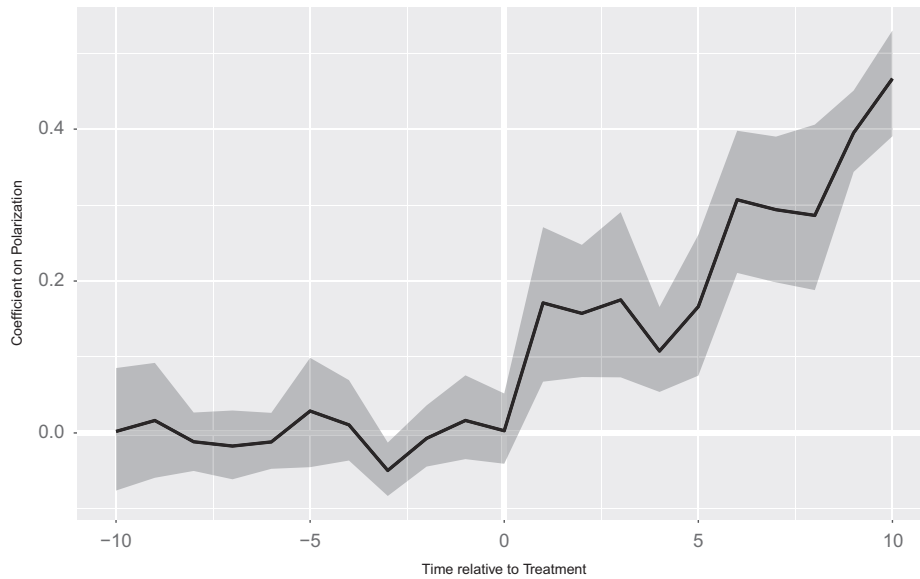
We conducted several robustness tests. First, a key concern in relation to our GSCM models is that in some countries, radical parties might have entered regional or local parliamentary chambers prior to entering the national parliament. As a result, voters might have polarized prior to radical parties' entering the national parliament. To address this concern, we moved the treatment in each country to one electoral cycle ahead of the actual occurrence (Figure C.1 in the SI). For this placebo test, we do not find a significant effect of radical-right party entry. Second, we removed Italy and the Netherlands from our analysis (Figure C.2 in the SI); the findings remain similar in significance and substance.²⁰

¹⁸Countries included are Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. The GSCM needs panels to be balanced across units to estimate the counterfactuals. Thus, we can only rely on countries that experienced the treatment a minimum of 10 years before our panel data start. To maximize the countries included before the treatments, we use countries for which the Eurobarometer provides data since 1980, giving us enough pretreatment periods before the first entrance of a radical right occurs in our data set (Italy, 1992, Lega Nord).

¹⁹Here, we only report the first 10 years after the entrance of a radical-right party. Public opinion appears to depolarize again approximately 15 years after the treatment takes place; this particular finding should be treated with caution, since effects after 10 years are driven by a single case (Italy) and several other factors might drive polarization then.

²⁰For comparability and robustness, we conducted another synthetic control method on the entrance of a radical-right party into parliament (see the SI, p. 15).

FIGURE 4 Generalized synthetic control estimates: Effects of the entrance of the radical right into parliament on polarization



Note: Countries included: Denmark (Y_{treat} : 1998), Germany (no treat), Greece (Y_{treat} : 2007), Italy (Y_{treat} : 1992), Luxembourg (no treat), Netherlands (Y_{treat} : 2002) & United Kingdom (no treat). Years included: 1980–2012. Average treatment effect on the treated = 0.304; confidence interval_{lower} = 0.2477; confidence interval_{upper} = 0.3657 using Expectation Maximization algorithm.

Radical Party Entry on the Left

So far, we have only examined radical party entry on the right. However, party entry on the left may also lead to ideological polarization among voters. Communist, radical-left and Green parties may legitimize left-wing views previously thought socially unacceptable, whereas opponents may react to these parties' success by moving further right.

To test this, we repeat our two studies above for entry on the left of the party system. First, we analyze a multiwave election panel in Germany (1983). The German Green Party entered the parliament after the 1983 elections for the first time and was perceived as an ideologically extreme challenger party. Focusing on environmental concerns along with a strong anti-nuclear stance, the party challenged not only mainstream-right parties, but also the Social Democratic Party (SPD). We use data from the second wave of a three-wave panel (February 11–23, 1983) and the third wave (March 16–28, 1983); the election itself was on March 6, 1983. Using similar covariates as in the Dutch case, we again run models estimating whether the public polarized after the election (Table A.3 in the SI). However, we do not find an increase

of polarization after the entrance of the Green Party in Germany. Second, we rerun our two-way fixed effects model controlling for Green Party entries.²¹ Yet, we do not find a polarizing effect of Green Party entries on public opinion (SI Table B.6). Third, we estimate a synthetic control model for the entrance of the German Greens. We cannot find any effect of this entrance (see SI Figure C.4). Overall, our expectation that voters polarize after radical party entry finds support for the radical right, but not for parties that enter on the left of the party system.

Discussion and Conclusion

Voters polarize ideologically when parties that are more right-wing than their competitors enter parliament for the first time. A panel study in the Netherlands in 2002 provides within-individual evidence of increased immediate polarization on both sides of the political spectrum when a radical-right party won its first seats. Voters

²¹Testing for radical-left (Communist) party entry is not possible given that Communist and post-Communist parties entered parliaments mostly long before the Eurobarometer study period, yet Green parties are arguably radical in many contexts, especially on cultural issues.

supporting right-wing parties moved further to the right, and voters supporting left-wing parties moved further left. We termed these short-term changes *legitimization* and *backlash*. Next, evidence from TSCS and GSCM models using Eurobarometer data showed that there are also long-term effects of first-time radical-right party entry. This finding is consistent with a recent single-country SCM study on the Netherlands (Silva 2018).

Using the same empirical approaches, no equivalent effect was found when Green parties enter parliament, even though these parties often proposed policies at odds with the societal mainstream. Why might voters adjust to radical-right party entry in particular? First, the positions of radical-right parties may suffer from a significant societal “taboo,” more so than the positions of Green parties. Radical-right positions are likely to break social norms and hence experience legitimization by entering parliament. This explains why short-term effects may be greater on the right. Second, long-term polarization effects may be greatest after radical-right party entry because these parties have arguably done more to shift issue concerns. Specifically, the rise of the radical right may have shifted the left–right dimension toward cultural concerns centered on immigration. When strong radical-right populist parties place these issues on the policy agenda, this may change how voters place themselves in more general terms as well. Evidence from the Netherlands indeed shows that cultural issues are used more for left–right self-placement today than 30 years ago (De Vries, Hakhverdian, and Lancee 2013). This could be a way in which party strength, and especially party entry, on the radical right influences self-placement in the longer term.

Our study certainly has limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, researchers often need to rely on respondents’ abstract left–right self-placement instead of actual policy positions when testing long-term trends. More specific issue scales may provide better insight into how polarization develops. Second, while allowing a fine-grained look into our mechanisms, the design of the Dutch election study does not allow us to perfectly rule out confound treatments; future research could address this, for example, by using survey experiments. In terms of the long-term consequences, we relied on two-way fixed effect models estimated across countries. This constitutes the most conservative test given the data we rely on, but future work could leverage other settings for stricter tests of causality.

Overall, our findings are important for research into the impact of radical parties and candidates on politics. Party systems in Europe have recently been marked by the rise of new competitors, frequently on the fringes of

the party system. Often, these competitors have experienced significant electoral success, as in the case of the Sweden Democrats and the Alternative for Germany. In the United States, the election of Donald Trump signified a radical change in presidential discourse and positions. It is important that these events have an impact not just on how voters experience politics, but on how they place *themselves* on ideological scales. Although some observers, such as Mudde (2013, 7), argue that radical-right parties “have rarely changed [voters’] more long-term attitudes”, our results show that radical right party entry has a radicalising and polarizing effect that goes beyond elite discourse and media debates.

More generally, our findings provide strong evidence that elite polarization affects voter polarization when signaled via distinctive, newsworthy, and legitimizing events. Radical party entry is arguably a relatively clear-cut form of elite polarization, and the simple entrance of such a new party affects the range of party positions represented in parliament. This binary change on its own appears to have an effect on voters. Other shock-like events, such as referendum outcomes (e.g., Brexit) or large-scale protests, unrest, or riots may have similar effects. Our finding is an important step toward identifying the key mechanisms of voter polarization more precisely. Since voter polarization is both a key characteristic of democratic societies and one for which causal relationships are most complex, it is important to study its antecedents and to use careful methodological approaches when doing so.

References

- Abadie, Alberto, Alexis Diamond, and Jens Hainmueller. 2010. “Synthetic Control Methods for Comparative Case Studies: Estimating the Effect of California’s Tobacco Control Program.” *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 105(490): 493–505.
- Abadie, Alberto, Alexis Diamond, and Jens Hainmueller. 2015. “Comparative Politics and the Synthetic Control Method.” *American Journal of Political Science* 59(2): 495–510.
- Abramowitz, Alan I., and Kyle L. Saunders. 2008. “Is Polarization a Myth?” *Journal of Politics* 70(2): 542–55.
- Adams, James, Michael Clark, Lawrence Ezrow, and Garrett Glasgow. 2006. “Are Niche Parties Fundamentally Different from Mainstream Parties? The Causes and the Electoral Consequences of Western European Parties’ Policy Shifts, 1976–98.” *American Journal of Political Science* 50(3): 513–529.
- Adams, James, Catherine E. De Vries, and Debra Leiter. 2012. “Subconstituency Reactions to Elite Depolarization in the Netherlands: An Analysis of the Dutch Public’s Policy Beliefs and Partisan Loyalties, 1986–98.” *British Journal of Political Science* 42(1): 81–105.

- Adams, James, Lawrence Ezrow, and Zeynep Somer-Topcu. 2011. "Is Anybody Listening? Evidence That Voters Do Not Respond to European Parties' Policy Statements during Elections." *American Journal of Political Science* 55(2): 370–82.
- Adams, James, Lawrence Ezrow, and Zeynep Somer-Topcu. 2014. "Do Voters Respond to Party Manifestos or to a Wider Information Environment? An Analysis of Mass-Elite Linkages on European Integration." *American Journal of Political Science* 58(4): 967–78.
- Adams, James, Jane Green, and Caitlin Milazzo. 2012. "Has the British Public Depolarized Along With Political Elites? An American Perspective on British Public Opinion." *Comparative Political Studies* 45(4): 507–30.
- Akkerman, Tjitske. 2005. "Anti-Immigration Parties and the Defence of Liberal Values: The Exceptional Case of the List Pim Fortuyn." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 10(3): 337–54.
- Arndt, Christoph. 2016. "Issue Evolution and Partisan Polarization in a European Multiparty System: Elite and Mass Repositioning in Denmark 1968–2011." *European Union Politics* 17(4): 660–82.
- Bakker, Ryan, Catherine de Vries, Erica Edwards, Liesbet Hooghe, Seth Jolly, Gary Marks, Jonathan Polk, Jan Rovny, Marco R. Steenbergen, and Milada A. Vachudova. 2015. "Measuring Party Positions in Europe: The Chapel Hill Expert Survey Trend File, 1999–2010." *Party Politics* 21(1): 143–52.
- Bartels, Larry M. 2002. "Beyond the Running Tally: Partisan Bias in Political Perceptions." *Political Behavior* 24(2): 117–50.
- Bartels, Brandon L., and Diana C. Mutz. 2009. "Explaining Processes of Institutional Opinion Leadership." *Journal of Politics* 71(1): 249–61.
- Bischof, Daniel. 2017. "G538SCHEMES: Stata Module to Provide Graphics Schemes for <http://fivethirtyeight.com>." Statistical Software Components, Boston College Department of Economics. <https://ideas.repec.org/c/boc/bocode/s458404.html>.
- Bishin, Benjamin G., Thomas J. Hayes, Matthew B. Incantalupo, and Charles A. Smith. 2016. "Opinion Backlash and Public Attitudes: Are Political Advances in Gay Rights Counterproductive?" *American Journal of Political Science* 60(3): 625–48.
- Bolleyer, Nicole. 2014. *New Parties in Old Party Systems: Persistence and Decline in Seventeen Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brader, Ted, Joshua A. Tucker, and Dominik Duell. 2012. "Which Parties Can Lead Opinion? Experimental Evidence on Partisan Cue Taking in Multiparty Democracies." *Comparative Political Studies* 46(11): 1485–1517.
- Bursztyn, Leonardo, Georgy Egorov, and Stefano Fiorin. 2017. "From Extreme to Mainstream: How Social Norms Unravel." National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 23415.
- Bustikova, Lenka. 2014. "Revenge of the Radical Right." *Comparative Political Studies* 47(12): 1738–65.
- Carmines, Edward G., and James A. Stimson. 1986. "On the Structure and Sequence of Issue Evolution." *American Political Science Review* 80(3): 901–20.
- Carmines, Edward G., and James A. Stimson. 1989. *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Chappell, Bill. 2016. Swastikas Are Painted at Adam Yauch Park in NYC—But Kids Win the Day. NPR, November 19. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/11/19/502710608/swastikas-are-painted-at-adam-yauch-park-in-nyc-but-kids-win-the-day>
- Dalton, Russell J. 2008. "The Quantity and the Quality of Party Systems: Party System Polarization, Its Measurement, and Its Consequences." *Comparative Political Studies* 41(7): 899–920.
- De Lange, Sarah L., and David Art. 2011. "Fortuyn versus Wilders: An Agency-Based Approach to Radical Right Party Building." *West European Politics* 34(6): 1229–49.
- De Vries, Catherine E., Armen Hakhverdian, and Bram Lancee. 2013. "Dynamics of Voters' Left/Right Identification: The Role of Economic and Cultural Attitudes." *Political Science Research and Methods* 1(2): 223–38.
- Dinas, Elias, Erin Hartman, and Joost van Spanje. 2016. "Dead Man Walking: The Affective Roots of Issue Proximity between Voters and Parties." *Political Behavior* 38(3): 659–87.
- Dinas, Elias, Pedro Riera, and Nasos Roussias. 2015. "Staying in the First League: Parliamentary Representation and the Electoral Success of Small Parties." *Political Science Research and Methods* 3(2): 187–204.
- Down, Ian, and Carole J. Wilson. 2010. "Opinion Polarization and Inter-Party Competition on Europe." *European Union Politics* 11(1): 61–87.
- Druckman, James N., Erik Peterson, and Rune Slothuus. 2013. "How Elite Partisan Polarization Affects Public Opinion Formation." *American Political Science Review* 107(1): 57–79.
- Dunn, Kris P., and Shane P. Singh. 2011. "The Surprising Non-Impact of Radical Right-Wing Populist Party Representation on Public Tolerance of Minorities." *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion & Parties* 21(3): 313–31.
- Ecker, Alejandro. 2011. "AGRM: Stata Module to Calculate van der Eijk's Measure of Agreement." Statistical Software Components, Boston College Department of Economics. <https://ideas.repec.org/c/boc/bocode/s457287.html>.
- Enns, Laurenz. 2010. "The Homogeneity of West European Party Families: The Radical Right in Comparative Perspective." *Party Politics* 18(2): 151–71.
- Ezrow, Lawrence. 2007. "The Variance Matters: How Party Systems Represent the Preferences of Voters." *Journal of Politics* 69(1): 182–92.
- Ezrow, Lawrence, Catherine E. De Vries, Marco R. Steenbergen, and Erica E. Edwards. 2010. "Mean Voter Representation and Partisan Constituency Representation: Do Parties Respond to the Mean Voter Position or to Their Supporters?" *Party Politics* 17(3): 275–301.
- Fernández-Vázquez, Pablo. 2014. "And Yet It Moves: The Effect of Election Platforms on Party Policy Images." *Comparative Political Studies* 47(14): 1919–44.
- Fernández-Vázquez, Pablo, and Zeynep Somer-Topcu. 2019. "The Informational Role of Party Leader Changes on Voter Perceptions of Party Positions." *British Journal of Political Science* 49(3): 977–96.

- Fiorina, Morris P., and Samuel J. Abrams. 2007. "Political Polarization in the American Public." *Annual Review of Political Science* 11: 563–88.
- Flores, Andrew R., and Scott Barclay. 2016. "Backlash, Consensus, Legitimacy, or Polarization: The Effect of Same-Sex Marriage Policy on Mass Attitudes." *Political Research Quarterly* 69(1): 43–56.
- Folke, Olle, Shigeo Hirano, and James M. Snyder. 2011. "Patronage and Elections in U.S. States." *American Political Science Review* 105(3): 567–85.
- Fowler, Anthony, and Andrew B. Hall. 2015. "Congressional Seniority and Pork: A Pig Fat Myth?" *European Journal of Political Economy* 40: 42–56.
- Gabel, Matthew, and Kenneth Scheve. 2007a. "Estimating the Effect of Elite Communications on Public Opinion Using Instrumental Variables." *American Journal of Political Science* 51(4): 1013–28.
- Gabel, Matthew, and Kenneth Scheve. 2007b. "Mixed Messages: Party Dissent and Mass Opinion on European Integration." *European Union Politics* 8(1): 37–59.
- Gerber, Alan S., and Gregory A. Huber. 2010. "Partisanship, Political Control, and Economic Assessments." *American Journal of Political Science* 54(1): 153–73.
- Goren, Paul, Christopher M. Federico, and Miki Caul Kittilson. 2009. "Source Cues, Partisan Identities, and Political Value Expression." *American Journal of Political Science* 53(4): 805–20.
- Hetherington, Marc J. 2001. "Resurgent Mass Partisanship: The Role of Elite Polarization." *American Political Science Review* 95(3): 619–31.
- Hetherington, Marc J. 2009. "Review Article: Putting Polarization in Perspective." *British Journal of Political Science* 39(2): 413–48.
- Hobolt, Sara B., and Catherine E. de Vries. 2015. "Issue Entrepreneurship and Multiparty Competition." *Comparative Political Studies* 48(9): 1159–85.
- Hoekstra, Valerie J., and Jeffrey A. Segal. 1996. "The Shepherding of Local Public Opinion: The Supreme Court and Lamb's Chapel." *Journal of Politics* 58(4): 1079–1102.
- Hogg, Michael A. 2010. "Influence and Leadership." In *Handbook of Social Psychology*, Vol. 2, ed. Susan T. Fiske, Daniel T. Gilbert, and Gardner Lindzey. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1166–1207.
- Hsiang, Solomon M., and Amir S. Jina. 2014. "The Causal Effect of Environmental Catastrophe on Long-Run Economic Growth: Evidence from 6,700 Cyclones." National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 20352.
- Iyengar, Shanto, Gaurav Sood, and Yphtach Lelkes. 2012. "Affect, Not Ideology a Social Identity Perspective on Polarization." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76(3): 405–31.
- Keele, Luke. 2015. "The Statistics of Causal Inference: A View from Political Methodology." *Political Analysis* 23(3): 313–35.
- Koopmans, Ruud, and Jasper Muis. 2009. "The Rise of Right-Wing Populist Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands: A Discursive Opportunity Approach." *European Journal of Political Research* 48(5): 642–64.
- Lachat, Romain. 2018. "Which Way from Left to Right? On the Relation between Voters' Issue Preferences and left–Right Orientation in West European Democracies." *International Political Science Review* 39(4): 419–435.
- Layman, Geoffrey C., and Thomas M. Carsey. 2002. "Party Polarization and 'Conflict Extension' in the American Electorate." *American Journal of Political Science* 46(4): 786–802.
- Layman, Geoffrey C., Thomas M. Carsey, and Juliana Menasce Horowitz. 2006. "Party Polarization in American Politics: Characteristics, Causes, and Consequences." *Annual Review of Political Science* 9(1): 83–110.
- Lenz, Gabriel S. 2009. "Learning and Opinion Change, Not Priming: Reconsidering the Priming Hypothesis." *American Journal of Political Science* 53(4): 821–37.
- Longest, Kyle C. 2007. "REVR: Stata Module to Reverse Variable Value Order." Statistical Software Components, Boston College Department of Economics. <https://ideas.repec.org/c/boc/bocode/s456836.html>.
- Lupia, Arthur, and Mathew D. McCubbins. 1998. *The Democratic Dilemma: Can Citizens Learn What They Need To Know?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mudde, Cas. 1996. "The Paradox of the Anti-Party Party: Insights from the Extreme Right." *Party Politics* 2(2): 265–76.
- Mudde, Cas. 2007. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mudde, Cas. 2013. "Three Decades of Populist Radical Right Parties in Western Europe: So What?" *European Journal of Political Research* 52(1): 1–19.
- Nicholson, Stephen P. 2012. "Polarizing Cues." *American Journal of Political Science* 56(1): 52–66.
- Paluck, Elizabeth Levy, Hana Shepherd, and Peter M. Aronow. 2016. "Changing Climates of Conflict: A Social Network Experiment in 56 Schools." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113(3): 566–71.
- Queally, James, Paige St. John, Benjamin Oreskes, and David Zahniser. 2017. "Violence by Far-Left Protesters in Berkeley Sparks Alarm." *LA Times*, August 28. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-berkeley-protests-20170827-story.html>.
- Rabinowitz, George, and Stuart E. Macdonald. 1989. "A Directional Theory of Issue Voting." *American Political Science Review* 83(1): 93–121.
- Rubin, Donald B. 1974. "Estimating Causal Effects of Treatments in Randomized and Nonrandomized Studies." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 66(5): 688–701.
- Schleifer, Theodore. 2016. "Mitt Romney Says Donald Trump Will Change America with 'Trickle-Down Racism.'" Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2016/06/10/politics/mitt-romney-donald-trump-racism/index.html>.
- Seeberg, Henrik Bech, Rune Slothuus, and Rune Stubager. 2017. "Do Voters Learn? Evidence That Voters Respond Accurately to Changes in Political Parties' Policy Positions." *West European Politics* 40(2): 336–56.
- Silva, Bruno Castanho. 2018. "Populist Radical Right Parties and Mass Polarization in the Netherlands." *European Political Science Review* 10(2): 219–44.
- Slothuus, Rune, and Claes H. de Vreese. 2010. "Political Parties, Motivated Reasoning, and Issue Framing Effects." *Journal of Politics* 72(3): 630–45.

- Somer-Topcu, Zeynep. 2017. "Agree or Disagree: How Do Party Leader Changes Affect the Distribution of Voters' Perceptions?" *Party Politics* 23(1): 66–75.
- Sørensen, Rune J. 2014. "Political Competition, Party Polarization, and Government Performance." *Public Choice* 161(3–4): 427–50.
- Sprague-Jones, Jessica. 2011. "Extreme Right-Wing Vote and Support for Multiculturalism in Europe." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34(4): 535–55.
- Steenbergen, Marco R., Erica E. Edwards, and Catherine E. de Vries. 2007. "Who's Cueing Whom?" *European Union Politics* 8(1): 13–35.
- Stevens, Daniel. 2013. "Issue Evolution in Britain: The Debate on European Union Integration, 1964–2010." *European Journal of Political Research* 52(4): 536–57.
- Taber, Charles S., and Milton Lodge. 2006. "Motivated Skepticism in the Evaluation of Political Beliefs." *American Journal of Political Science* 50(3): 755–69.
- Tankard, Margaret E., and Elizabeth Levy Paluck. 2016. "Norm Perception as a Vehicle for Social Change." *Social Issues and Policy Review* 10(1): 181–211.
- Tankard, Margaret E., and Elizabeth Levy Paluck. 2017. "The Effect of a Supreme Court Decision Regarding Gay Marriage on Social Norms and Personal Attitudes." *Psychological Science* 28(9): 1334–44.
- Tavits, Margit. 2008. "Party Systems in the Making: The Emergence and Success of New Parties in New Democracies." *British Journal of Political Science* 38(1): 113–33.
- Van Der Eijk, Cees. 2001. "Measuring Agreement in Ordered Rating Scales." *Quality and Quantity* 35(3): 325–41.
- van Holsteyn, Joop J. M., Galen A. Irwin, and Josje M. Den Ridder. 2003. "In the Eye of the Beholder: The Perception of the List Pim Fortuyn and the Parliamentary Elections of May 2002." *Acta Politica* 38(1): 69–87.
- van Spanje, Joost, and Wouter Van Der Brug. 2007. "The Party as Pariah: The Exclusion of Anti-Immigration Parties and Its Effect on Their Ideological Positions." *West European Politics* 30(5): 1022–40.
- van Spanje, Joost, and Till Weber. 2017. "Does Ostracism Affect Party Support? Comparative Lessons and Experimental Evidence." *Party Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068817730722>
- Xu, Yiqing. 2017. "Generalized Synthetic Control Method: Causal Inference with Interactive Fixed Effects Models." *Political Analysis* 25(1): 57–76.
- Zaller, John R. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Appendix A: study 1

Appendix B: study 2

Appendix C: study 3