

Bachelor thesis

Is the Government to Blame for Immigration, or otherwise Said is the Government to Blame for Far-Right Succes: A European Study.

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Abstract

Far-right parties have been a steady factor in many European countries over the past years. Their anti-system and anti-immigrant sentiments formed their trademark. And now with the people becoming ever more distrustful of immigrants and subsequently blaming the government for the immigration problem, far-right parties take the win. Using data from the 10th wave of the European Social Survey to do a logistic regression analysis, this study aims to discover the relationship between Government Dissatisfaction and Far-Right Support and how this relationship is moderated by Anti-Immigrant Attitudes for 11 European countries. Results showed no clear evidence of this relationship, however suggestions of some form of interplay are not ruled out.

Introduction

In the past 2 years, far-right parties throughout Europe have yet again been booming in the elections (POLITICO, 2024) and now many are foreseeing big wins of far-right parties in the European elections, set to take place between the 6th-9th of June (Wax, 2024). Far-right parties have been steadily increasing in support and political participation for a couple decades now, which is perceived to be at odds with the changes in society that are seen as more progressive, whereas the far-right parties are seen as more conservative parties (Sandel, 2018).

Governments had to deal with multiple crises, like shortage in the labour market, the housing problem, the inflation, the energy crisis, and most likely the trigger, the Ukrainian war (Faiola et al., 2023). In these crises, governments face even more pressure from the people to solve their issues. Their perceived incapability to do so, however, lead to a sense of distrust and dissatisfaction (Aassve et al., 2024). On the one hand, the people believed that their government had failed them by not taking enough action and, on the other hand, they perceived the aid given to immigrants to be privileges, which left them with a feeling of abandonment and anger (Keskinen, 2016).

It is under these circumstances that powershifts can occur, which could in turn have been the reason for the current far-right success (Aassve et al., 2024). Their political agenda, which has always been focused on immigration and nationalism, now formed a ground for

the population to build their protest on (Vasilopoulou & Halikiopoulou, 2023). Furthermore, with many struggling under the stress of insecurity, people find themselves more attracted to parties and political leaders that tell them that there is an 'easy fix' to their issues (Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2021). Moreover, far-right parties actively try to pit the people against the sitting government, by intensifying the population's growing dissatisfaction. Their campaigns portray the immigrants as scapegoats with the aim of winning votes (Mondon, 2022). For people who already hold a negative attitude towards immigrants, or even for the ones who are hesitant towards immigrants, this may sound appealing, especially considering their growing distrust towards the government. As a result, their inclination to vote for the far-right may increase (Vasilopoulou & Halikiopoulou, 2023). Therefore, in this study the aim is to discover to what extent the relationship between government dissatisfaction and voting for far-right parties is affected by a person's attitude towards immigrants.

Past research has mainly focused on the relationship between someone's attitude towards immigration and the likeliness that they will vote for a far-right party (Davis & Deole, 2015; Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2019; Nijs et al., 2019; Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2020; Eger & Olzak, 2023). And while some research showed that people who are dissatisfied with the government tend to vote more for right-wing parties (Alvarez et al., 2018; Hernández, 2018; Cohen, 2019; Donovan, 2021), until now research has not focused much on how negative attitudes towards immigrants and dissatisfaction with the government may interplay with each other into support for the far-right (Vasilopoulou & Halikiopoulou, 2023). This can, however, be argued to be important to understand the background to the current events that have played into the success of the far right. In the following sections, this research will therefore dive into this possible relationship. In the next section, the theory and past research will be reviewed, and the foundation of this study will be established. Following the third section the research design will then be explained. Subsequently, the findings of this research will be elaborated in section four and at last, in the fifth section the findings will be discussed and a proposal for future research will be made.

Theory

Far right parties

Parties on the external ends of the political spectrum, especially on the right-wing side have been a popular option for protest votes against the mainstream parties (Hernández, 2018). On the right side of these edges, we have the far-right parties, which are well known for their anti-immigration and nationalistic attitudes (Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2020). In Europe, where many countries have been popular places for immigrants to migrate to, many citizens are concerned about what this means for them (Edo et al., 2019). As such, the exclusionism, or more specifically the nativism, have contributed to the increase in popularity of the far right (Muis & Immerzeel, 2017).

According to the idea of nativism, which is shaped by an ethno-nationalist notion of citizenship, only the natives count as true citizens (Muis & Immerzeel, 2017). Campaigns of the far-right will therefore often revolve around slogans like: 'our people first'. They seek to create exaggerated distinctions between us and them with the purpose of causing polarization between right and left (Muis & Immerzeel, 2017). On their side, they appeal to people's xenophobia and (economic) insecurities, while on the left-centre side of the political spectrum, the supporters are more open to their parties' ideas of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism (Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2019). Xenophobic attitudes, however, are not the only elements of the nativist ideology, it also includes an anti-European stance. The euroscepticism of the far-right signals their doubts and distrust about the posed benefits of European integration or they reject the entire institution of the European Union in general (Szöcsik & Polyakova, 2018).

The term far-right is often used interchangeably with populism, such that far-right parties become populist parties. However, populism is a far more widely used term in politics. It refers to any party, whether on the left, right, or even in the centre side of the political spectrum, that uses a communication style that is anti-establishment, othering and directed to the 'common folk'. They also change their focus based on the people's current issues to make them more appealing (De Bruycker & Rooduijn, 2021). The last part of the puzzle that is the far-right party is its specific ideas about leadership, which can be defined as authoritarian. Authoritarianism can be described as an ideal of leadership where the citizens are expected to obey the law, and the government is expected to rule decisively and in an orderly manner.

It's a call for a more conventional way of ruling (Tillman, 2021). As most far-right parties exhibit traditional and conservative values, authoritarianism, and authoritarian leadership, fits well within their agenda structure (Donovan, 2019).

Government dissatisfaction and Far-Right Support

Much of the research done on the relationship between government dissatisfaction and far-right support stems from the theory of protest voting. This theory suggests that voting for the far-right is rooted in a general dissatisfaction towards the established powers, the so-called elite (Cohen, 2019). These are the mainstream parties that typically get the most votes and are ideologically speaking more centralized than their far-right counterparts (Alvarez et al., 2018). Researchers find that far-right voters generally have higher levels of political disillusionment compared to most voters, similarly they express a strong feeling that they are not heard and even ignored by the mainstream and ruling political parties (Alvarez et al., 2018).

There are various reasons and mechanisms that play a role in the level of satisfaction among citizens with the government. These factors can both be problems with the government themselves, from now on called internal factors, or problems that are projected onto the government as to assign blame to them, which will be named external factors. These factors can influence someone's decision to switch their votes from a mainstream or ruling party, referring to the parties with the executive power of government to enforce rules and laws and implement public policies, to a far-right party, who opposes the government and opts for change in the political system (Hernández, 2018).

Internal Factors

In a democracy, the government and the citizens are in a social contract where both sides have duties to sustain this relationship (Giurlando, 2020). As such, citizens have daily contact with all sorts of democratic institutions, state-funded and public amenities, and welfare-state benefits. Their perceptions of how these systems function greatly determine their satisfaction with the state and democracy (Dahlberg et al., 2014). Negative evaluations of democratic functioning are therefore related with disengagement from the ruling and mainstream parties as these parties often are associated with the poor policy choices that led up to these negative perceptions. While mainstream parties thus suffer from negative evaluations, far right parties, which are characteristically anti-establishment, take the win

(Vasilopoulou & Halikiopoulou, 2023). In one study they tested this effect, though in the opposite direction. They tried to discover whether people with high trust in democracy and people with positive evaluations of democratic functions were less likely to vote for the far-right. What they found was that indeed those people who are more positive about democracy choose less often for far-right parties. It was also found that this was contingent on the extent to which people held negative attitudes towards immigrants (Vasilopoulou & Halikiopoulou, 2023). Though this study doesn't show the relationship between a negative evaluation and likeliness to support the far-right, a reasonable assumption can be made that such an association exists.

Authoritarian attitudes have often been linked to far-right support, people with such attitudes prefer a strong leader to rule the country. Their dissatisfaction with the government could therefore be explained by the fact that democratic processes and systems hinder the power of one strong leader who can bring them security and stability (Donovan, 2019). A study shows that, when comparing centre-right and radical right parties, preferences for strong leaders was associated with support for the latter but not for the first. The same finding was found for when people expressed low ratings of democracy (Donovan, 2021). On top of this, other research suggests that this preference for an authoritarian regime increases during times of societal and economic turmoil. Under these circumstances, the people feel a need for security and want a leader who can take action right now without needing to go through all the democratic processes (Miller, 2016).

Citizens that are dissatisfied with the government often mention that they have the feeling that the people in government don't seem to care about the problems of the ordinary citizens (Chanley et al., 2000). They feel politically alienated by the ruling parties. In addition, they perceive their political power to be limited and minimal, sensing that it will make no difference, for the parties will just do what they want. These feelings of alienation and lessened efficacy can make people more cynical and doubtful about the political system (Pattyn et al., 2012). According to Chanley et al. (2000) political cynicism can be exacerbated by economic concerns, political scandals, and public distress about crimes. In a study done by Pattyn et al. (2012), they tried to discern between political (dis)trust, social cynicism, and political cynicism. What they found was that political cynicism is closely related to political attitudes like estrangement and powerlessness. They concluded that political cynics were

most likely to vote as a way to protest against party policies and the incumbent and so choose for an anti-establishment party, which is often also a far-right party (Pattyn et al., 2012).

External factors

Research found that cultural threat is a reliable predictor of far-right support (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Studies suggest that people with conservative attitudes and traditional values push back against the progressive movement. The progressive movement refers to the onset of social emancipation of women, the LGBTQ-community, and minorities as well as the fight against climate change and processes of multiculturalism and globalization (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). These people have the internal longing to go back to the 'good old days', a feeling of national nostalgia to return to a time before the progressive movement, because everything was better then (Smeekes et al., 2021). Far-right parties agree to these sentiments and are thus believed to be more popular than mainstream and ruling parties, who are supposedly blamed for the downfall of their country's culture by fostering the progressive movement (Ausserladscheider, 2019).

Another external factor that can lead to dissatisfaction with the government are economic insecurities. Factors like unemployment, poverty, crises & inflation, rising prices and (housing) shortages can have big impacts on the stress levels of the citizens. This can lead to outsourcing of the blame to external sources like the government, which fosters dissatisfaction towards them (Giugni & Grasso, 2017). These sentiments can be exacerbated by far-right parties which appeal strongest to general feelings of economic threat and increase the likelihood someone will vote for a far-right party (Ferrari, 2021). One of the most poignant cases in this, is found in Greece where in times of economic failure, national debt weighted heavily on society, causing groups of people to move away from mainstream parties and gather behind the Golden Dawn, the extreme right party who promised to bring prosperity again (Ellinas, 2013).

Finally, it can be shown that those who are Eurosceptic are also more likely to be discontent with the mainstream and ruling parties of their country (De Vries et al., 2010). Eurosceptics don't believe in the European Union or have a strong disagreement with the functioning of the European parliament. As many European countries have governments that are pro-EU, Euroscepticism can lead to dissatisfaction with one's own country's government.

As these sentiments are often shared by far-right parties they choose to vote for these parties rather than the mainstream ones (De Vries et al., 2010). This effect is shown in a study done by Treib (2014), where it was found that among UKIP-voters, British far-right party, there was a far larger portion of Eurosceptical voters as well as voters who portrayed dissatisfaction with mainstream British parties than among the supporters of other parties. This finding was replicated in several other European countries (Treib, 2014). The results, however, are inconclusive about the direction of the relationship. Yet, because Eurosceptics tend to blame mainstream parties for being pro-Europe, it is plausible that these two sentiments are sequentially related (Treib, 2014).

All these factors combined show evidence for a positive relationship between government dissatisfaction and far-right support. Therefore, the second hypothesis of this research is:

H1: Dissatisfaction with the government increases the likelihood to support the far-right.

Though research suggests that factors contributing to government dissatisfaction can be related to far-right support, they aren't necessarily exclusively associated with an increase in the voter base of the far right. There are studies that show that government dissatisfaction has a general positive effect on both left and right extremist parties (Bles et al. 2018, Kriesi & Schulte-Cloos, 2020; McManus, 2023), and other studies suggest that rather than voting for the far-right people may abstain as a consequence to their political cynicism (Kselman & Niou, 2011; Dassonneville et al., 2015; Allen, 2017). One study showed that dissatisfaction alone is not an indicator of far-right support. Instead, it is suggested that dissatisfaction in combination with policy alignment determines the party one will vote for (Hernández, 2018). This idea argues that someone will vote for the far right, because they are dissatisfied with certain policies in place and choose for a far-right party, because they claim to either abandon or change that policy for the better. If that person aligns with this, then their likelihood to vote for that far-right party increases (Hernández, 2018).

Anti-Immigrant Attitudes and Far-Right Support

In recent years, the effect of immigration on people's decision to vote for a far-right party has been extensively researched. Various studies that have been done on this topic found a positive association between increases in immigration rates and the vote share of the

far right. For example, in Germany they found that in 2015 and 2016, when immigration increased, people voted more for the far right AFD, while in 2017, when the number of immigrants applied for asylum dropped again, the support for the AFD also dropped (Otto & Steinhardt, 2017). Some other research also found that in Greece, not only the far-right parties gained voters when immigration rose, but also support for the far-left decreased in this situation (Roupakias & Chletsos, 2020). Another study in Austria discovered that in so-called high-immigration communities, regions that host more immigrants, people are more attracted to vote for the FPÖ, the Austrian far-right party (Halla et al., 2017). On the other side, research also suggests that homogenous societies are more negative towards immigrants, because they feel threatened, and that leads to more support for the far-right (Esses, 2021).

Furthermore, it is also seen in other studies that being exposed to immigrants or ethnic minorities does not increase far-right support. One study, for example, showed that the proportion of the Muslim population in a European country did not amount to an increase in voting for a radical right party (Lucassen & Lubbers, 2012). There are also studies that show that being exposed to immigrants reduces the perceived threat of those immigrants (McLaren, 2003; Schlueter & Scheepers, 2010; Green et al., 2016; Berg, 2020). Immigrant exposure alone, thus, is inconsistently associated with far-right support. A better explanation of far-right support would be the threat perception and related negative attitude towards immigrants. One study done on this effect showed that a negative interaction with immigrants increased one's perception of threat towards immigrants which increased the likelihood of that person voting for a far-right party (Nijs et al., 2019). In addition, a study in Germany showed that being exposed to violence against immigrants only led to more radical right support among people who hold a more negative attitude towards immigrants (Eger & Olzak, 2023).

Now roughly, there are two competing theories that give an explanation as to why people may be hostile towards immigrants. On one side of the debate, researchers believe that far-right support is rooted in cultural concerns for immigration (Oesch, 2008; Davis & Deole, 2015; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). On the other side, studies suggest that economic threat perception of immigrants is what drives these parties' support (Halla et al., 2017; Kevins & Lightman, 2019; Edo et al., 2019; Jay et al., 2019).

Cultural Concerns

The theory of cultural protectionism argues that natives grow hostile attitudes towards immigrants because of their difference in norms and values. People are afraid that these immigrants will erode their culture and hinder their traditional way of life. In addition, it is thought that this group of people shares the notion that citizenship ought to be homogenous. In this frame, immigrants are the intruders that need to be warded off (Oesch, 2008).

This idea of the immigrants trying to replace the dominant culture is deeply ingrained in the ideology of far-right parties, at least in Western and Southern Europe. Therefore, it is suspected that the people that resonate most with these beliefs and, thus, see the immigrants as a cultural threat are most likely to vote for the far-right. For example, Davis and Deole (2015) found that cultural concerns towards immigrants was associated with an increase in an individual's rightward ideology whereas economic concerns had a much smaller effect on increasing rightward ideology. Cultural concerns are argued to be most relevant to the loyal group of followers, the group that always votes for the far right because they agree with their ideology. However, when talking about far-right success, the parties are dependent on a new additional set of voters. Therefore, these supporters, though important for their consistency, are probably not the game changers that set about the recent victories of the far-right (Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2019).

Economic concerns

The bigger portion of the group that votes for far-right parties are suspected to be those that have struggles with economic concerns. The labour market competition hypothesis predicts that hostility towards immigrants is mainly a consequence of economic insecurities (Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2020). This hypothesis stems from the economic theory that when the supply side is larger than the demand side, competition will be higher. When immigrants increase this supply side, it can cause feelings of insecurity among natives (Halla et al., 2017). They might be afraid that with more competition their chances of getting a job decline and this fear then turns into negative sentiments towards immigrants (Kevins & Lightman, 2019). More research also suggests that there is a difference between high-skilled and low-skilled workers. Among the workforce, it is the low-skilled workers that are most likely to be the

main sufferers of this problem and therefore also the most likely to be dissatisfied with immigration. Their labour can relatively easily be replaced by foreigners, and this has that group worried for the low-educated migrants (Edo et al., 2019). Moreover, even more than economic insecurities and grievances, economic inequality seems to be a driver of anti-immigrant attitudes. One study showed that inequality increased threat perception and allegiance to a national identity which form the ground of anti-immigrant attitudes (Jay et al., 2019).

A mix of both

Because both economic concerns and cultural concerns towards immigrants affect far-right support, they are mostly studied together. Halikiopoulou & Vlandas (2019), for example, studied economic grievances in combination with the cultural grievance thesis, and found that indeed cultural concern is the most important predictor for far-right support. However, far-right parties gain an extensive amount of their votes from people with economic concerns (Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2019). In subsequent research done by these two researchers, they did an even more extensive study and found that the effect of economic concerns on far-right support is stronger when a person scores low on cultural concerns. Economic concerns are thus a crucial predictor for far-right voting (Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2020). Similar findings were also discovered in Great Britain, where both economic and cultural grievances, regarding immigration, played a part in Brexit, for which its main advocate was UKIP. This shows an indirect effect between immigration related economic and cultural grievances and far-right support (Carreras et al., 2019). A final study shows far-right support from the perspective of the followers themselves and it showed that cultural and economic concerns are, besides from a passive motivation, also an active belief that they use to justify their anti-immigrant attitudes. As such, these concerns are found to be relevant and important reasons for people to vote for the far right (Fernandes-Jesus et al., 2022).

What seems to be the main consensus, though, that all studies have in common is that far-right support is mainly driven by the perception of immigrants as a threat. This threat can be for cultural reasons as well as economic or social reasons. The fact however remains and that is that when natives feel threatened by the existence of immigrants, this will most likely

significantly increase their willingness to vote for a far-right party (Fernandes-Jesus et al., 2022). As such the first hypothesis will be:

H2: A threat perception of immigrants and subsequent anti-immigrant sentiments increase the likeliness to support the far-right.

Government Dissatisfaction, Anti-Immigrant Attitudes & Far- Right Support: The Scapegoating Effect

So far, the theory established two propositions. First, the threat perception of natives towards immigrants is an important driver for far-right success. Second, perceived government failure, resulting in distrust, is another booster for far-right parties. In this study, the idea proposed by Hernández (2018) is explored, where government dissatisfaction relates to far-right support only insofar the voter also aligns with the policies of the far right. Therefore, immigration policies are suggested to be what links government dissatisfaction with far-right support, and thus, anti-immigration attitudes, driven by perceived threats of immigrants, is what solidifies or strengthens the relationship. This is done through the mechanism of scapegoating. In the rest of this section, this idea will be explored.

The financial crisis of 2008 didn't just change the political climate in Greece, though, it was the most noticeable one. Many countries in Europe saw far right parties entering the core of the political sphere. Where before, the average vote share of these parties in Europe was about 5%, after the crisis countries saw an average increase to 10% and sometimes even 20% in far-right participation (Funke & Trebesch, 2017).

Far-right parties seem to capitalize on mainstream failure and try to exploit their shortcomings to pull supporters away from them and towards their own parties. Like many politicians, the far-right try to shape public opinion and frame situations to fit their agenda (Mondon, 2022). These frames, however, only work so far as the conditions allow it. Cochrane and Nevitte (2012) showed this in their research on the scapegoating effect. Their study focused on the extent to which people were influenced by the frame of the far-right that argued that immigrants were the cause for their unemployment. They found that the people were only influenced when they actually were unemployed (Cochrane & Nevitte, 2012).

In many European countries, immigration is a priority topic in elections. It has become increasingly more politicized due to the growing groups of foreigners residing in various

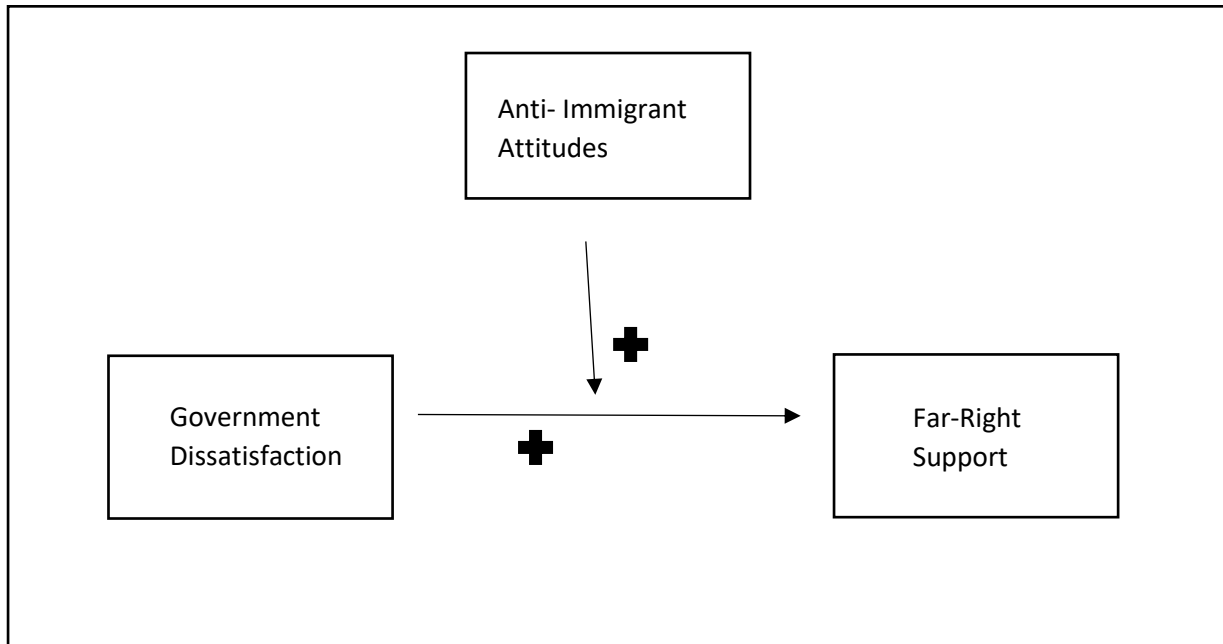
European countries. Research has generally given two factors as the most likely explanation (Grande et al., 2019). First, for the past decades the government has struggled to get a grip on immigration, and it has only ever increased as a force of globalization. With these large immigration flows it has become more difficult to control borders and integrate migrants. Second, far-right parties are trying to exploit these challenges (Grande et al., 2019).

The Far-right parties, thus, claim that they want to guard the 'pure people', the natives, from the 'dangerous ones', the immigrants. The immigrants, they are the cause for all the problems the country must deal with (Smeeke et al., 2021). This frame of the 'pure people' is a theme that far-right parties use in other contexts as well. Conversely, they will frame the 'pure people' against the 'corrupt elite' to gain even more attraction (Rydgren, 2017). The 'corrupt elite' symbolizes the government here, a government that doesn't protect its citizens and invites the 'dangerous ones' over. If people believe this frame and see both the immigrants and the government as their enemy, the expectation is that they will see the far-right parties as their 'saviour' or at least the only reasonable option to vote for (Smeeke et al., 2021).

Two sentiments are played into when far-right parties try to scapegoat the immigrants. First, they can fuel people's feelings of resentment towards both the immigrants and the government. Then, they also tap into people's nationalistic sentiments giving the suggestion that there is a need 'to take back our country and fight against immigration' (Muller, 2021). Thus, by sharing or pointing out their concerns about immigrants and immigration, far-right parties essentially fill in a gap. Especially for those who portray a negative attitude towards immigrants and are unhappy with how the government is dealing with immigration, the far-right parties can offer them an opportunity to still participate in democracy (Allen, 2017). Because far-right parties tend to play so heavily on immigration issues and have that as one of their agenda points, it is almost impossible to separate this issue from politics (Muis & Immerzeel, 2017). Furthermore, linking the ruling and mainstream parties in government with the immigration issues could strengthen already existing dissatisfaction with that government. From this follows the third hypothesis:

H3: A threat perception of immigrants increases distrust towards the government which further increases the likelihood to support the far-right.

Conceptual model



Data, Operationalization, and Method

Data

This study used data from the European Social Survey of 2020, wave 10. This survey was done over the course of 2 years, from 2020-2022, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which made it more difficult for countries to collect data (European Social Survey, 2023). For similar reasons, this wave included less countries than other rounds did. In this survey only the countries, where there were recognized far-right parties within the data, were involved. These were: Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, France, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal & Slovenia. All countries were analyzed together, and this was done on the individual level. The study involved 21.464 participants and is representative of the population.

Operationalization

The dependent variable, which is Far-Right Support, was explained using the following question: 'Did the participant vote for a party that is considered a Far-Right Party in their country's national elections?'. This question was measured using the following item of the survey: 'Which party did you vote for in that election?'. For each country separately, it was turned into a binary variable where 0 indicated No and 1 indicated Yes on the question of whether the participant voted for a Far-Right party. Based on the PopuList 3.0 (Rooduijn et al., 2023), the parties that were labeled as Far-Right in this analysis were: Vlaams Belang (Belgium), Vazrazhdane (Bulgaria), Svoboda a přímá demokracie (Czechia), Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond (Estonia), Debout La France (France), Front National (France), Ελληνική Λύση (Greece), Χρυσή Αυγή (Greece), Lega (Italy), Fratelli d'Italia con Giorgia Meloni (Italy), PVV (the Netherlands), Forum voor Democratie (the Netherlands), Fremskrittspartiet (Norway), CHEGA (Portugal) and SDS - Slovenska demokratska stranka (Slovenia). The descriptives showed that of the total number of voters in the sample, about 10% voted for one of these far-right parties.

For the independent variable, Government Dissatisfaction, the question that was asked was: 'How dissatisfied is the participant with the functioning of the government?'. For this reason, the following item best matched the scope of the variable: 'Now thinking about the [country] government, how satisfied are you with the way it is doing its job?' The item

was reverse coded so that 0 indicated 'Very Satisfied with the government' and 10 indicated 'Very Dissatisfied with the government'. The descriptives of this variable showed that the average was leaning slightly more towards dissatisfaction than satisfaction with the national government ($M= 5.53$, $SD= 2.45$).

For the moderator variable, which is Anti-Immigrant Attitudes, the question was: 'To what extent does the participant portray a more negative attitude towards immigrants?', and this was determined by these 3 items: 'Would you say it is generally bad or good for [country]'s economy that people come to live here from other countries?', 'Would you say that [country]'s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?', 'Is [country] made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?'. This scale was internally consistent and reliable, and the cronbach alpha was .884 (See in Appendix A). The scale was also reverse coded, to be in line with the aim of this study. This means that 0 indicated a 'very positive attitude towards immigrants' and 10 indicated a 'very negative attitude towards immigrants.' Descriptives for this variable showed that the sample had on average a slightly more positive attitude than a negative attitude towards immigrants ($M= 4.85$, $SD= 2.21$). Further in the analysis, an interaction term between the moderator variable Anti-Immigrant Attitudes and the independent variable Government Dissatisfaction was created to measure the combined effect of the independent variable and the moderator variable on the dependent variable Far-Right Support.

At last, the effect of age, gender, education, and income were also accounted for as control variables. For the variable Gender the response category was female, so that female was 0 and male was 1. Research showed that men are more likely to vote for the far right than do women (Stockemer et al., 2018). The reason why is not very clear, but the most viable suggestion is that men portray a more nativist and authoritarian attitude (Immerzeel et al., 2013). For the second control variable Age, a continuous variable that indicated 'years of age' was used. Research has been inconclusive about whether younger or older people are more likely to vote for the far-right, however it does agree that there is a significant effect of age (Stockemer et al., 2018). Continuing with Education, which was transcribed into 7 categories and was reverse coded, so that 0 indicated 'highly educated' and 7 indicated 'lowly educated'. Lower education has been associated with a greater likelihood of voting for a far-right party (Stockemer et al., 2018). Research showed that the most relevant explanations are again

authoritarian attitudes, however also a higher ethnic threat perception by those that are lower educated (Savelkoul & Scheepers, 2016). Lastly, Income, which was measured in deciles, where the 1st decile is the 10% highest earning people of the population & the 10th decile is the 10% lowest earning of the population. This item was also reverse coded and 1 indicated a high income and 10 a low income. Research has been somewhat inconclusive on the effect of income on far-right support; however, most studies do point at economic insecurities & poor economic conditions among lower income groups as relevant explanations of far-right support (Halla et al., 2017; Kevins & Lightman, 2019; Edo et al., 2019; Jay et al., 2019).

Methods

For the procedure, a descriptive analysis on all variables was performed first. In addition, because the dependent variable Far-Right Support is a binary variable an independent T-Test was performed on the independent variable Government Dissatisfaction and the control variables Gender, Age, Education, and Income. The analysis was done using a logistic regression analysis where Far Right Support was regressed on Government Dissatisfaction and Anti-Immigrant Attitudes. This was done in 3 models. The first model contained the independent variable Government Dissatisfaction and the control variables Age, Gender, Education, and Income, the second model included the potential moderator variable Anti-Immigrant Attitudes. The final model added the interaction effect between Anti-Immigrant Attitudes and Government Dissatisfaction. In the next section the results will be reported.

Table 1- Descriptive Statistics for All Variables

	<i>N</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Variance</i>
<i>Far Right Support</i>	12116	0	1	.096	.295	.087
<i>Government Dissatisfaction</i>	21036	0	10	5.528	2.454	6.022
<i>Anti-Immigrant Attitudes</i>	20309	0	10	4.851	2.21	4.886
<i>Gender (Female=0, Male=1)</i>	21464	0	1	.472	.499	.249
<i>Age</i>	21334	15	90	50.44	18.38	337.8
<i>Education (High-Low)</i>	21362	0	26	2.85	1.825	59.65
<i>Income (High-Low)</i>	16552	1	10	5.507	2.643	6.988

Results

Table 2- Independent T-Test for Independent & Control variables

	<i>Vote Far Right</i>		<i>Vote other</i>		T-Test	df
	M	SD	M	SD		
<i>Government Dissatisfaction</i>	5.78	2.69	5.29	2.45	-6.43**	12.022
<i>Gender (Female=0, Male=1)</i>	.56	.50	.48	.50	-5.11**	12.114
<i>Age</i>	52.92	16.45	53.44	16.85	.991*	12.069
<i>Education (high-low)</i>	3.12	1.57	2.52	1.83	-8.56**	12.099
<i>Income (high-low)</i>	5.51	2.53	5.26	2.63	-2.91	10.065

**p>.01 *p>.05

As the dependent variable Far-Right Support has a binary variable, a T-Test was conducted first. These results are presented in table 2. It shows that there was a significant difference between participants that voted on far-right parties and those who voted on other parties for the independent variable Government Dissatisfaction ($t(12.022) = -6.43, p=.00$), which is that the mean score of far-right supporters on this item is higher and thus on average are more likely to be dissatisfied with the national government.

In table 3, the logistic regression analysis was performed, in which Far Right Support was regressed on Government Dissatisfaction. The first model included the independent variable Government Dissatisfaction and the control variables (Age, Gender, Education, and Income). From these results can be concluded that being dissatisfied with the government is associated with a higher level of support for the far right. The overall model is significant at the .01 level according to the model chi-square statistic. The independent and control variables explain about 13.9% of the variance of the dependent variable Far-Right Support according to the Nagelkerke R-square. Furthermore, the odds-ratio for the independent variable Government Dissatisfaction, is 1.09 ($p=.00$), indicating that with each increase of one unit in dissatisfaction, there's an increase in the likelihood of voting for a far-right party with about 9% when accounted for the variables Age, Gender, Education, and Income. This confirms the first hypothesis of the study. As for the control variables, the analysis found that most of them were significant and had a positive effect on Far-Right Support, except for Income which was

insignificant.

Moving on to the second model where the potential moderator variable was included. This model shows that someone's attitude towards immigrants is a reliable predictor for whether someone is going to vote for a far-right party. The results showed that a negative attitude towards immigrants increases the likelihood of supporting the far right. The effect of this potential moderator variable Anti-Immigrant Attitudes on the dependent variable Far-Right Support is positive with an odds-ratio of 1.382 ($p=.00$), which is significant when accounted for all other variables. This indicates that with each increase of one unit in anti-immigrant sentiments, there's an increase in the likelihood of voting for a far-right party of about 38.2%. As such, this model confirms the second hypothesis of the study.

The overall model is significant at the .01 level according to the model chi-square statistic. The Nagelkerke R^2 shows that this second model explains 20%, which is a change of 6.1%, of the variance in Far-Right Support and, thus, has increased in comparison to the first model. At the same time, the effect of the independent variable has decreased. Now with each increase of one unit in Government Dissatisfaction, there's an increase in the likelihood of voting for a far-right party of only about 2.6% ($p=.094$), which now renders it insignificant. For the control variables, not much has changed.

Lastly in the third model, the interaction effect was added. As it turns out there is no associational effect of Anti-Immigrant Attitudes and Government Dissatisfaction that affects the dependent variable Far-Right Support. The effect of the potential moderator variable Anti-Immigrant Attitudes on the dependent variable Far-Right Support is even larger than the second model, for the odds-ratio is now 1.398. This indicates that with each increase of one unit in anti-immigrant sentiments, there's an increase in the likelihood of voting for a far-right party of about 39.8%, considering that the independent variable Government Dissatisfaction has an effect of 0 and when accounted for all other variables in the model. Lastly, the interaction effect ($p=.76$) of the independent variable Government Dissatisfaction and the potential moderator variable Anti-Immigrant Attitudes was found to be insignificant in affecting the relationship between the independent variable Government Dissatisfaction and the dependent variable Far-Right Support. As such, the last hypothesis of this research is rejected.

Nevertheless, the overall model is significant at the .01 level according to the model

chi-square statistic. The Nagelkerke R² shows that this third model still explains 20 % of the variance in Far-Right support, which is a negligible difference from the second model. On the other hand, the effect of the independent variable Government Dissatisfaction (p=.35) on the dependent variable Far-Right Support has slightly increased in effect, if considered that the effect of the potential moderator variable Anti-Immigrant Attitudes is 0, however it is still insignificant when accounted for all variables in the model. For the control variables still not much has changed in the third model.

Table 3 - Summary of Logistic Regression on Far-Right Support (Country Dummy Variables in Appendix B)

	<i>Model 1</i>		<i>Model 2</i>		<i>Model 3</i>	
<i>Independent variable</i>	Odds-ratio	Wald	Odds-ratio	Wald	Odds-ratio	Wald
<i>Government Dissatisfaction</i>	1.090**	34.04	1.026	2.811	1.038	.859
<i>Anti-Immigrant Attitudes</i>			1.382**	286.5	1.398**	63.79
<i>Government Dissatisfaction X Anti-Immigrant Attitudes</i>					.998	.097
<i>Gender (Female=0/Male=1)</i>	1.452**	26.61	1.423**	22.65	1.423**	22.66
<i>Age (young-old)</i>	.991**	17.8	.987**	30.52	.987**	30.53
<i>Education (high-low)</i>	1.265**	99.77	1.168**	40.54	1.168**	40.51
<i>Income (high-low)</i>	1.025	2.66	1.022	1.875	1.022	1.877
<i>Constant (Netherlands=0)</i>	.040**	302.9	.022**	403.2	.020**	189.8
Model χ^2	656.1**		960.3**		960.4**	
Pseudo R²	.139		.200		.200	
n	8651		8651		8651	

** p>.01 *p>.05

Discussion

The aim of this research was to discover if people who are dissatisfied with the government are more likely to vote for a far-right party if they also have a negative attitude towards immigrants. For this, the study focused on 11 European countries with the expectation to give a potential and partial explanation as to what could have caused the rise of the far-right in recent years. Despite the unavailability of contemporary data, the prediction was that a possible association between these three variables in older data could also be applied to the current situation. Needless to say, the predicted outcome was not found. Thus, threat perception of immigrants did not strengthen the positive relationship between government dissatisfaction and far-right support.

The results do show that dissatisfaction with the government and a negative attitude towards immigrants, separately, each increase support for a far-right party. These outcomes prove that both the first and the second hypotheses were correct. Therefore, this research fits within the theoretical framework suggesting that politically disaffected citizens support far-right parties (Alvarez et al., 2018; Donovan, 2021; Vasilopoulou & Halikiopoulou, 2023), as well as in the framework that argues that negative sentiments towards immigrants is a predictor of voting for a far-right party (Davis & Deole, 2015; Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2019; Nijs et al., 2019; Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2020; Eger & Olzak, 2023). From the analysis it can also be concluded that the effect of a negative attitude towards immigrants plays a far more significant role than does government dissatisfaction. As shown in the results, government dissatisfaction did not increase far-right support in the second model of the logistic regression.

Furthermore, the third model showed that perceiving immigrants as a threat, and thus having a negative attitude towards them, does not strengthen the association between being dissatisfied with the government and supporting a far-right party. Instead, the effect of someone's attitude on their willingness to vote for the far-right overrules the effect government dissatisfaction had on far-right support. This negates the idea of protest voting where the prediction was that people vote for a far-right party because they are disenchanting with the political system (Alvarez et al., 2018). In this line of thought, the effects should have shown that citizens, who perceive immigrants as a threat are more likely to believe the frame of far-right parties that portrays immigrants as the 'dangerous ones' (Smeeke et al., 2021).

This in turn would lead them to be more dissatisfied with the government because the problems with the immigrants happened under their watch, and for that reason they would be more likely to vote for the anti-immigration far-right parties. This, however, was not shown and so the third hypothesis is rejected. This could either mean two things, people don't direct their blame towards the government for the immigration crisis. This could then be explained by the fact that the parties in government are also advertising for stricter immigration policies (Alonso & Da Fonseca, 2012). Or two, the far-right is already becoming part of the mainstream and so there is no distinction between the two groups anymore, as some research suggested already (Muis et al., 2021).

Another factor that might have played into the non-finding is the choice to look at all European countries combined instead of analysing them separately next to each other. The goal of this research was to see if it was possible to speak of a far-right trend throughout Europe. It could, however, be that there are different mechanisms per country that have led to a similar outcome, which is the increase in political participation of the Far-Right. As such, it might be that for some countries, the model proposed in this research is relevant where for others it is not. However, because there were more European countries in the sample with no finding, it's not a functional model to explain the European wide success of the far-right.

An aspect that was not yet considered in this study is the different dimensions of ethnic threat. In the theory it was found that there are two different groups of far-right voters, the loyalists who support their far-right party regardless of the situation, and the more strategic voters who vote on a far-right party when times for them are economically difficult (Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2019; Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2020). It could be that this effect is also translated into the attitudes towards immigrants, where perhaps the interaction between government dissatisfaction and a negative economic threat perception has a more outspoken effect than the combination of cultural threat, economic threat and general dislike that have made up the variable Anti-Immigrant Attitudes in this analysis.

Another limitation of this research is the unavailability of some of the data due to it being released in covid times, so some countries didn't have the information necessary for the study and had to be excluded. Furthermore, in this analysis the aim was to try and recreate the conditions of the contemporary trend to see if it could partially explain the trend of the far-right gaining more support throughout Europe. And though this effect was not found, the

study was only a partial fit as the right data of 2022-2024 is not yet available. In future research, this analysis could be redone using the adequate data to see if there is a connection after all. Another interesting path to take would be to look at the far-right rise from the perspective of left-wing parties as the progressive movements that have enveloped over the last decades didn't result in the expected rise of the left. Some possible explanations, like the cultural backlash (Norris & Inglehart, 2019), have already been suggested, however more elements potentially affected this outcome that would be interesting to study.

One last thing to note is that although the predicted outcome was not found, there was evidence that anti-immigrant sentiments, rather than strengthen discontent with the government, may instead mediate the relationship between government dissatisfaction and far-right support. This may altogether ask for a different kind of model and theoretical framework to approach the data with, that might give a better understanding of the processes and mechanisms behind this relationship.

Finally, it can be concluded that perceiving immigrants as a threat and having negative sentiments towards them does not strengthen feelings of discontent with the government further increasing the likeliness of voting for a far-right party. Nevertheless, this study does show that there seems to be some form of interplay between negative attitudes towards immigrants and government dissatisfaction, which could be fertile ground for future research to expand on.

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Appendix A

Table 0- Factor Analysis for Anti-Immigrant Attitudes

	Factor Loading	Communiality
	1	
<i>Would you say it is generally bad or good for [country]'s economy that people come to live here from other countries?</i>	.862	.67
<i>would you say that [country]'s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?</i>	.862	.744
<i>Is [country] made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?</i>	.818	.743
KMO		.745
Eigenvalue		2.437
Cronbach's alpha		.884

Appendix B

Table 3b- Extended Summary of Logistic Regression on Far-Right Support

<i>Independent variable</i>	<i>Model 1</i>		<i>Model 2</i>		<i>Model 3</i>	
	Odds-ratio	Wald	Odds-ratio	Wald	Odds-ratio	Wald
<i>Government</i>	1.090**	34.04	1.026	2.811	1.038	.859
<i>Dissatisfaction</i>						
<i>Anti-Immigrant</i>			1.382**	286.5	1.398**	63.79
<i>Attitudes</i>						
<i>Government</i>					.998	.097
<i>Dissatisfaction X Anti-Immigrant Attitudes</i>						
<i>Gender</i>	1.452**	26.61	1.423**	22.65	1.423**	22.66
<i>(Female=0/Male=1)</i>						
<i>Age (Young-Old)</i>	.991**	17.8	.987**	30.52	.987**	30.53
<i>Education (High-Low)</i>	1.265**	99.77	1.168**	40.54	1.168**	40.51
<i>Income (High-Low)</i>	1.025	2.66	1.022	1.875	1.022	1.877
<i>Belgium</i>	.176**	53.94	.110**	82.74	.110**	82.33
<i>Bulgaria</i>	1.032	.035	.883	.536	.883	.535
<i>Czechia</i>	.675*	5.223	.333**	36.66	.331**	36.74
<i>Estonia</i>	1.791**	15.22	1.260	2.247	1.259	2.23
<i>France</i>	1.706**	12.61	1.318	3.139	1.319	3.156
<i>Greece</i>	.453**	18.92	.251**	53.52	.251**	53.56
<i>Italy</i>	2.334**	36.33	1.681**	12.75	1.68**	12.72
<i>Norway</i>	1.067	.16	1.006	.001	1.009	.003
<i>Portugal</i>	.157**	32.06	.162**	30.49	.162**	30.51
<i>Slovenia</i>	3.145**	58.06	2.36**	30.77	2.347**	30.05
<i>Constant</i>	.040**	302.9	.022**	403.2	.020**	189.8
<i>(Netherlands=0)</i>						
Model χ^2	656.1**		960.3**		960.4**	
Pseudo R²	.139		.200		.200	
n	8651		8651		8651	

** p= .01 *p=.05