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What drives right-wing populism in Europe? An empirical analysis

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Jens Horbach



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Jens Horbach¹

What Drives Right-Wing Populism in Europe? An Empirical Analysis

Abstract

The rising success of right-wing populist parties and governments affects the cooperation of states in many areas such as the mitigation of climate change or common solutions to the refugee problem. Therefore, a better understanding of the reasons behind the growing importance of right-wing attitudes and voter behaviour is crucial. The paper summarises the potential determinants of right-wing voting behaviour and attitudes including personal characteristics, the economic situation, peer and regional path dependencies, the role of social contacts and the political and institutional framework. The empirical analysis is based on the European Social Survey (wave 11 for 2023). The results of econometric estimations show that a low qualification level is positively correlated with right-wing attitudes and voter behaviour. European right-wing voters disproportionately use the internet and social media to obtain political information. Interestingly, the current economic situation is not correlated with right-wing attitudes and behaviour. In Germany, poor people are even less likely to vote for the right-wing party AfD.

JEL-Classification: O52, C25, P10, Y80

Key words: Right-wing populism, European analysis, probit regressions

September 2025

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1. Introduction

The rise of populist parties and extremely right-wing national governments is a worldwide phenomenon that negatively affects the international cooperation of states. The US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement reducing the chances of the fight against climate change or the obstruction to free trade by high tariffs might be taken as examples. The European integration process is also distorted by the influence of right-wing governments, e. g. the refusal of a common European refugee policy by the Hungarian government. Therefore, it is crucial to learn more about the determinants of right-wing attitudes and the resulting voter behaviour. Do personal factors such as gender, education, age or the family situation support right-wing attitudes and behaviour? Which role do online information sources and social media play in that context? Furthermore, the economic situation, peer and regional path dependencies, the role of social contacts or the political and institutional framework should be considered.

The present paper summarizes the recent literature on right-wing populism and develops its own framework for an econometric analysis of self-perceived right-wing attitudes and voter behaviour for European and some neighbouring countries. Such kind of analyses analysing many countries in a comparative manner are still rare. The econometric analyses are based on the newest wave 11 of the European Social Survey (ESS) finished in 2025 for 2023.

The paper is organised as follows. In Section 2, the theoretical background and the relevant empirical analyses of the literature are discussed leading to our hypotheses for the econometric analysis. Section 3 presents a description of the data basis and descriptive statistics for right-wing attitudes and voter behaviour. The estimation strategy and the results of econometric analyses of right-wing behaviour for European countries are presented in Section 4. Section 5 summarizes the key findings of our analysis and develops some policy recommendations.

2. Theoretical background and literature overview

Förtner et al. (2021:577) describe populism "... as a structurally anti-pluralist, anti-elitist position that declares its positions as non-negotiable, while pretending to represent the only true voice of the people..." (see also Müller 2016). Populists "... often pursue short-time oriented, nationalist policies that hamper international cooperation" (Gold, Lehr 2024:1). With their simplistic view of the World they do not see the long-term economic and societal benefits of the international division of labour. The Brexit in 2016 or the tariff policy of the U.S. in 2025 are fitting examples for this argument.

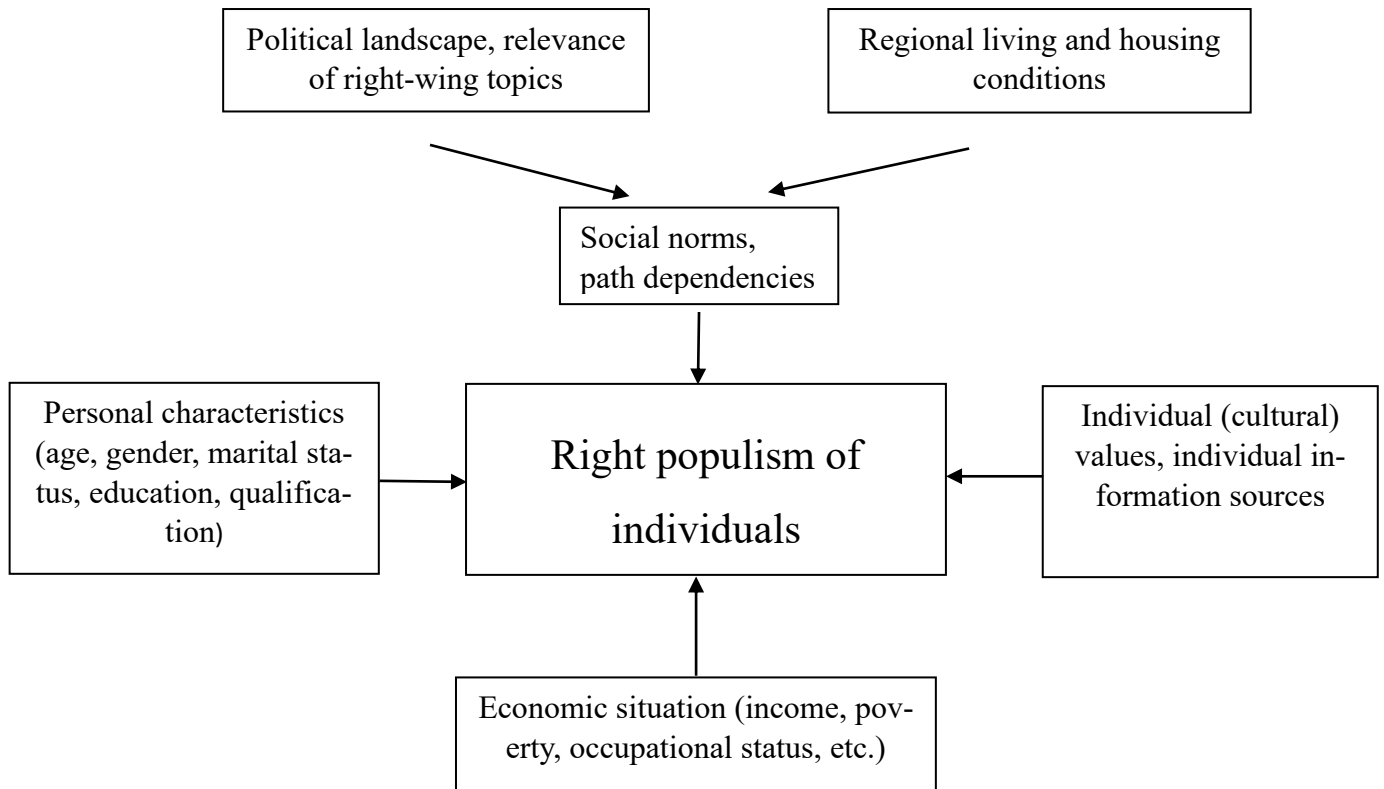
The decision to support right-wing populist parties is connected with a broad variety of factors such as living conditions, the general political landscape, the economic situation or personal characteristics (see Figure 1). Framework conditions such as an economic shock (e. g. the world economic crisis in 1929) or a drastic increase of the number of immigrants (Germany in 2015) can trigger the success of populist parties if a society is characterised by a high potential of people showing right-wing values and who tend to distrust the ruling politicians. Unfortunately, there are self-enforcing mechanisms such as the establishment of social norms. A growing number of supporters of a right-wing party may attract further voters because it becomes more and more “normal” to support such a party. Especially in a regional context, these path-dependencies might be very important.

In the following, the specific political and economic framework conditions, personal characteristics, values and attitudes leading to a growing importance of right-wing parties are discussed.

Typical right-wing attitudes show an excess importance placed on the own nation, even claiming that other people are even less valued. The immigrant topic is therefore highly relevant (see also Decker 2016 or Dinas et al. 2019). Weisskircher (2020:615) even claims that the “...anti-immigrant sentiment is the single most important driver of the radical right vote.” The highly anthropocentric orientation of right-wing voters furthermore leads to the view that nature- and environment-related problems do not play a role. Förtner et al. (2021:3) even argue that “... one of the main reasons for the success of the AfD is its antipolitical mode of politics. It brings together ideas from a wide range of ideologies such as resentment-laden nationalism, racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia; market-radical economic, social, and education policy proposals; and climate change denial and anti-elitism directed at established political parties and media outlets.”

These considerations lead to Hypothesis 1:

H1: Nationalistic, anti-immigrant, Euro skeptic or climate change denial are typical attitudes of right-wing voters and perceptions.

Figure 1: Determinants of right-wing populism

Source: Own representation.

Such an unreflective view of the World can be enforced by fitting personal characteristics. A low education level might make people more vulnerable for fake news in social media, whereas a high qualification level is often connected with a broader use of information sources. Women might be less likely to vote for right-wing parties because they are more the winners of modernism, on the other side, a right-wing culture pronounces the “traditional” role of women (see Berthold et al. 2017 for this argument). Hypothesis 2 can thus be formulated:

H2: Low educated people and men are more likely to favour right-wing parties.

Dissatisfaction with democracy seems to be an important characteristic of right-wing voters. Favaretto and Mariani (2024) analyze this aspect by defining a democracy gap between expectations and perceived performance of the democracy in a country. Interestingly, the authors find many similarities between non-voters and populists pointing to a potential future with an even higher populist vote share. A bad personal economic situation might create dissatisfaction with democracy thus supporting anti-democratic parties which was one of the main reasons of the failure of the Weimar Republic in Germany in 1933. Rodríguez-Pose (2020) argues that the long-term economic decline of places is particularly important for the rise of populism. The

empirical analysis of Greve et al. (2023) for East-Germany supports this argument. The authors find out that the feeling of being long-term behind other regions such as West-Germany might be even more important for right-wing voting compared to the present economic situation. Van Hauwaert et al. (2019:303) also focus on regional-level factors explaining populism. They analyze the role of economic hardship, strong institutional autonomy, strong territorial identity, and greater distance from elites for nine countries. The authors find out that besides a lack of economic resources the regional identity and the distance to national elites is important for populism. Gold and Lehr (2024) show that regional policy may help to reduce the success of populist parties in these left-behind regions. The authors use NUTS3-level panel data on the outcomes of elections to the EU parliament for the period 1999-2019. Their results show that financial transfers within the framework of the EU regional policy reduce the vote share of right-wing parties by about 2.5%.

Manow (2018) shows that especially the present labor market insiders but not the outsiders vote for the German right-wing populist party AfD, but on the other hand he finds an effect of unemployment in 2000 of AfD strength seventeen years later supporting the view that the memories of bad economic conditions in the past may have a long-term effect on voting behavior. Hansen and Olsen (2019) also find that the AfD votes in 2017 were not driven by the own economic situation of the voters but by the immigrant topic and a general dissatisfaction with democracy in Germany. On the other hand, Guriev (2018) and Noury, Roland (2020) point to an important role of economic factors such as unemployment during the Great Recession and resulting inequality problems for the rise of populism.

Based on these results from the literature, Hypothesis 3 can be formulated:

H3: The role of the present personal economic situation for right-wing voting decisions remains undetermined.

Di Cocco et al. (2024) analyse the role of interpersonal trust affecting populism. Besides other channels, they postulate that interpersonal trust "... can fuel populism by fostering suspicion towards outgroup members, such as immigrants, resulting in increased voting for parties that endorse nativist narratives". Using ESS data from 2004 to 2019, the authors find a clear negative causal relationship between interpersonal trust and populist voting.

From a dynamic perspective, regional path dependencies may play an important role. An already existing right-wing social milieu might shape social norms so that it is "normal" to support right-wing parties. These social norms lead to further support of right-wing positions thus

creating path dependencies, the voting decision is then based on the opinions of neighbors and peers but not on actual problems. Gerling and Kellermann (2022) denote this mechanism as social contagion in populist party support. An already existing presence of a populist party then leads to more support because of bandwagon and reputation effects. The authors (Gerling and Kellermann 2022:1) also show “... Our results suggest that exposure to higher-than expected AfD support significantly increases the probability of reporting an AfD vote intention by up to 2.7 percentage points.” This argument can be complemented by the historical perspective of Cantoni et al. (2019). These authors analyze the role of a long-run cultural persistence for right-wing populism in Germany. Their empirical results show that municipalities with high voting shares for the Nazi party in 1933 showed disproportionately high votes for the AfD in 2017.

Path dependencies and bandwagon effects may be enforced using social media. Activities of right-wing parties using new media as information sources may lead to a high mobilization of potential voters (Zhuravskaya et al. 2020:5). The analysis of Guriev et al. (2020, see also Guriev et al. 2022) supports this argument. They use global data on 3G mobile wireless network between 2007 and 2018 to show that populist parties in Europe profited from the expansion of mobile internet infrastructure. The vote shares of both right-wing and left-wing populist opposition were higher in regions characterized by a high expansion of mobile internet networks. Bakshy et al. (2015) state that people get more online contents that are close to their already existing political views than to opposing political opinions. These arguments lead to Hypothesis 4:

H4: Social contagion in populist party support is promoted by a disproportional use of the internet and social media

3. Data and descriptive statistics

The econometric analysis of right-wing populism uses the European Social Survey (ESS, ESS ERIC 2024). The ESS is a Europe-wide comparative general social survey in place since 2002. This analysis uses ESS round 11 (2023), containing 46,162 observations. Looking at indicators for right-wing populism, ESS 2023 allows an analysis of self-perception of the political position on a left-right scale and voting for right-wing parties as a revealed preference indicator. One major advantage of this data source is the broad country coverage. ESS 2023 includes the EU (excluding Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Malta, Luxembourg, Romania) and Great Britain, Iceland, Israel, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia and Switzerland. Data are collected by computer-assisted personal interviewing. The samples for the different countries must be representative

of all people aged 15+, irrespective of nationality, citizenship, or language. Individuals are selected by random probability methods.

The dependent variables are *polright* and *popvotes*. *Polright* describes the self-perceived position of the questioned person on a political left-right scale. As a revealed preference indicator, the voting decisions for right-wing parties (*popvotes*) are used.

Table 1: Results for the right-wing orientation and voter behaviour in the sample (in %)

| Country | Polright | Popvotes |
|---------------|----------|----------|
| Austria | 0.12 | 0.15 |
| Belgium | 0.24 | 0.21 |
| Bulgaria | 0.25 | 0.08 |
| Croatia | 0.22 | 0.05 |
| Cyprus | 0.26 | 0.06 |
| Finland | 0.37 | 0.15 |
| France | 0.24 | 0.15 |
| Germany | 0.11 | 0.05 |
| Great Britain | 0.14 | - |
| Greece | 0.26 | 0.07 |
| Hungary | 0.33 | 0.67 |
| Iceland | 0.23 | 0.04 |
| Ireland | 0.15 | - |
| Israel | 0.40 | 0.46 |
| Italy | 0.22 | 0.36 |
| Latvia | 0.24 | 0.17 |
| Lithuania | 0.20 | 0.01 |
| Montenegro | 0.15 | 0.13 |
| Netherlands | 0.24 | 0.22 |
| Norway | 0.31 | 0.07 |
| Poland | 0.31 | 0.42 |
| Portugal | 0.18 | 0.06 |
| Serbia | 0.13 | 0.62 |
| Slovakia | 0.20 | 0.10 |
| Slovenia | 0.17 | 0.004 |
| Spain | 0.19 | 0.07 |
| Sweden | 0.26 | 0.08 |
| Switzerland | 0.24 | 0.22 |
| Total | 0.22 | 0.18 |

Source: European Social Survey (2023). Own calculations.

In all European and the other countries in the sample, there is a high voter potential for right-wing parties, for all countries the variable *polright* denoting the positions 7-10 on a left-right political scale gets a mean value of 22% (Table 1) but there are much higher values (37% for Finland, 33% for Hungary or even 40% for Israel). The real voting decisions (*popvotes*) are correlated to the self-perceived right-wing positions (a significant tetrachoric correlation coefficient of 0.47) but there are considerable differences in the different countries. E. g. in Hungary

(0.67) or in Serbia (0.62) the results for right-wing parties surmount the right-wing self-perceptions. In these countries, the right-wing politicians are so popular that they are even voted by people with moderate political positions.

4. Description of variables and estimation strategy

Estimation strategy

Both dependent variables *polright* and *popvotes* capturing the self-perceived political position and the right-wing voting behaviour of households are binary, thus probit models can be used for estimation. For example, a household has to decide whether to vote for a populist party ($Y=1$) or not ($Y=0$). Following the theoretical considerations, different factors such as gender, income, education level or information sources, summarised by a vector \mathbf{x} , may influence this decision. Therefore, an estimation of the probability $Prob(Y = 1 | \mathbf{x}) = F(\mathbf{x}, \beta)$ is needed. The β parameters reflect the impact of changes in \mathbf{x} on this probability (Greene, 2008:772). Average marginal effects for all covariates are calculated, allowing comparisons of the different determinants of right-wing voter behaviour.

Besides a general model for all included countries, different separate country models are estimated (Table 3). The special case of Germany seems to be interesting because of a quite unequal distribution of the right-wing votes in East- and West-Germany. Furthermore, the case of already right-wing governed countries such as Hungary, Italy, Poland or Serbia is analysed (Table 4). Table 2 summarises the indicators for the determinants of right-wing voter behaviour and the control variables (see also a detailed description of the variables in Table A1 in the Appendix).

Table 2: Description of the variables

| Determinants of right-wing-populism | ESS indicators |
|--|---|
| <i>Individual variables</i> | |
| Personal characteristics | <i>Age</i> (in years), <i>female</i> (gender), <i>married</i> (married or partner), <i>eduys</i> (education in years), <i>relig</i> (highly religious), <i>conflictchildhood</i> (serious conflicts in households when growing up), <i>creative</i> (highly important to think new ideas), <i>funpleasure</i> (important to have fun), <i>polinterest</i> (very interested in politics), <i>respectdiffpeople</i> (important to understand different people) |
| Personal economic situation | <i>highincome</i> (8 th to 10 th decile of the income distribution), <i>poverty</i> (first decile of household's total net income), <i>retired</i> , <i>unempdisabled</i> (unemployed or permanently sick or disabled), <i>selfemployed</i> (self-employment), <i>responsibility</i> (responsible for supervising other employees), employed in the <i>construction</i> sector, <i>construction</i> (working in the construction sector), <i>healthsocial</i> (working in health or social oriented professions) |
| Social networking, information sources | <i>Socialcontact</i> (how often meet with friends), <i>friends</i> (number of people with whom personal matters are discussed), <i>netustm</i> (intensity of internet use), <i>polsharedonline</i> (online posting of politics) |
| Assessment of the political situation and preferred political topics | <i>dissatisfygov</i> (low satisfaction with the national government), <i>dissatiseconomy</i> (dissatisfied with the state of the economy), <i>notrustpeople</i> (no trust in people), <i>notrustlegal</i> (no trust in the legal system), <i>notrustpoliticians</i> , <i>toomucheu</i> (European unification already gone too far), <i>immiworse</i> (immigrants make country worse place to live), <i>againstgays</i> (against gays and lesbians free to live as they wish), <i>antivax</i> (against own corona vaccination), <i>noworryclimate</i> (not worried about climate change) |
| Regional living conditions, social milieu | <i>country</i> (living at the countryside), <i>badhealth</i> (bad state of health services in country), <i>east</i> (dummy for Eastern Germany) |

Source: European Social Survey 2022, own representation.

5. Results of the econometric analysis

Regarding personal characteristics of the politically right-wing voters, a clearcut result for gender can be observed: Women (*female*) are significantly less likely to vote for right-wing parties in Germany and Europe (Table 3), this result also holds for right-wing opinions (supporting H2). This result confirms the theoretical argument in Section 2 that a right-wing culture

pronounces more the “traditional” role of women. The variable *age* of the questioned persons shows a quite mixed picture. There are no significant results for Germany, but at the European level, younger people are more likely to vote for right-wing parties. On the other side, self-perceived right-wing opinions are positively correlated to the age of people. This might be due to the success of right-wing parties using social media to attain young voters whereas the right wing-perception of elder people is more based on their conservative right positions. The qualification level measured by the number of education years (*eduyrs*) shows a highly significant negative influence for the right-wing voter behaviour and for right opinions except Germany (H2). In Germany, a problematic childhood (*conflictschildhood*) is positively correlated to AfD (Alternative for Germany) votes but even negatively correlated to right wing opinions, for Europe, this variable is not significant. The German AfD seems to profit from long-term social conflicts in families. This corresponds with the result that AfD voters seem to be in general more pessimistic, indicated by the negative sign of *funpleasure* (the importance to seek fun and things that give pleasure). Being religious is not significantly relevant for right-wing voter behaviour in Germany. At the European level right-wing votes and opinions are even positively correlated with religiousness.

Concerning the important question of information sources, the results show that European right-wing voters disproportionately use the internet to get information. In Germany, the AfD voters are significantly more likely to post or share anything about politics (*polsharedonline*) via the internet or social media supporting H4. On the other side, these voters seem to have less direct social contacts (*socialcontact*), but this variable is only weakly significant.

The analysis of the economic factors of right-wing voter behaviour and right opinions shows an interesting and clear picture. A low income does not seem to trigger right-wing behaviour. For European and German right-wing voter behaviour, the income variable is not significant (*highincome*), for self-perceived right-wing attitudes a high income is even positively correlated to this behaviour supporting H3. In Germany, the voter behaviour of poor people (*poverty*) is negatively correlated to the AfD votes. Interestingly, a dissatisfaction (*dissatiseseconomy*) with the current economic development is not a significant factor for right-wing votes and opinions in Germany. For right opinions at the European level, even the opposite is true. People living at the *countryside* are more likely to vote for right parties in Europe, for Germany, the results are not significant.

Table 3: Determinants of right-wing voter behaviour and perception

| Correlates | Germany AfD | Germany Polright | Europe Popvotes | Europe Polright |
|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| age | -0.004 (0.004) | 0.008 (0.006) | -0.005* (0.002) | 0.009** (0.002) |
| female | -0.027* (0.011) | -0.069** (0.015) | -0.011+ (0.006) | -0.061** (0.005) |
| eduyrs | -0.007** (0.002) | -0.003 (0.002) | -0.006** (0.001) | -0.002* (0.001) |
| conflictschildhood | 0.028* (0.014) | -0.034+ (0.017) | -0.013 (0.008) | -0.009 (0.008) |
| married | 0.015 (0.010) | -0.012 (0.016) | -0.001 (0.006) | 0.010+ (0.006) |
| relig | -0.017+ (0.010) | -0.000 (0.018) | 0.020** (0.006) | 0.090** (0.006) |
| netustm | 0.000 (0.000) | -0.000 (0.000) | 0.000** (0.000) | 0.000+ (0.000) |
| polsharedonline | 0.027* (0.013) | 0.020 (0.019) | 0.000 (0.007) | 0.005 (0.007) |
| socialcontact | -0.016+ (0.009) | 0.010 (0.015) | -0.002 (0.006) | 0.005 (0.005) |
| friends | -0.006 (0.004) | -0.003 (0.006) | -0.004+ (0.002) | -0.002 (0.002) |
| creative | 0.016 (0.012) | -0.006 (0.017) | -0.009 (0.006) | -0.001 (0.006) |
| funpleasure | -0.023* (0.011) | -0.025 (0.016) | -0.012+ (0.006) | 0.014* (0.006) |
| retired | -0.001 (0.013) | -0.011 (0.019) | 0.006 (0.008) | -0.005 (0.008) |
| selfemployed | -0.017 (0.013) | -0.019 (0.021) | 0.003 (0.008) | 0.035** (0.008) |
| construction | 0.026 (0.022) | 0.003 (0.030) | 0.022+ (0.012) | -0.006 (0.011) |
| healthsocial | -0.006 (0.015) | 0.014 (0.025) | -0.007 (0.009) | -0.014+ (0.008) |
| unempdisabled | 0.011 (0.033) | -0.004 (0.036) | -0.019 (0.013) | -0.033** (0.011) |
| highincome | -0.003 (0.010) | 0.031+ (0.016) | -0.003 (0.006) | 0.065** (0.006) |
| poverty | -0.036** (0.009) | -0.001 (0.041) | 0.003 (0.014) | -0.009 (0.014) |
| country | 0.002 (0.010) | 0.024 (0.015) | 0.024** (0.006) | 0.023** (0.006) |
| polinterest | -0.004 (0.009) | -0.009 (0.016) | -0.022** (0.007) | 0.025** (0.008) |
| dissatisfygov | 0.026* (0.012) | 0.076** (0.022) | 0.003 (0.008) | -0.037** (0.007) |
| badhealth | -0.015 (0.011) | -0.038* (0.018) | -0.031** (0.008) | -0.055** (0.008) |
| dissatiseseconomy | -0.007 (0.011) | 0.005 (0.021) | -0.016+ (0.009) | -0.025** (0.008) |
| notrustpeople | -0.001 (0.013) | 0.006 (0.022) | 0.019* (0.009) | 0.020* (0.008) |
| notrustlegal | -0.007 (0.013) | 0.008 (0.027) | -0.002 (0.009) | 0.006 (0.009) |
| notrustpoliticians | 0.040** | -0.002 | 0.002 | -0.028** |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|---------|---------|----------|----------|
| | (0.015) | (0.020) | (0.008) | (0.007) |
| toomucheu | 0.028+ | 0.096** | 0.098** | 0.114** |
| | (0.015) | (0.029) | (0.009) | (0.009) |
| immiworse | 0.074** | 0.078** | 0.105** | 0.113** |
| | (0.022) | (0.029) | (0.011) | (0.010) |
| againstgays | 0.007 | 0.098+ | 0.034** | 0.010 |
| | (0.024) | (0.055) | (0.011) | (0.010) |
| antivax | 0.046+ | 0.024 | 0.018* | -0.013 |
| | (0.024) | (0.029) | (0.009) | (0.008) |
| noworryclimate | 0.017 | 0.049+ | 0.066** | 0.081** |
| | (0.014) | (0.026) | (0.008) | (0.007) |
| respectdiffpeople | -0.015 | -0.046* | -0.017** | -0.022** |
| | (0.011) | (0.019) | (0.006) | (0.006) |
| east | 0.034** | -0.000 | | |
| | (0.013) | (0.019) | | |
| Observations | 1,464 | 1,744 | 15,723 | 24,953 |
| Wald Chi | 231 | 190 | 2495 | 2158 |
| Pseudo R ² | 0.42 | 0.15 | 0.22 | 0.09 |

Source: European Social Survey 2023, own estimations.

A high dissatisfaction with the government (*dissatisfygov*) and no trust in politicians (*notrustpoliticians*) is characteristic for the German AfD voters, German people with right wing opinions are also significantly dissatisfied with the government. At the European level, the results are different, self-perceived right-wing attitudes are significantly satisfied by their government. For all involved countries, the results also support the analysis of di Cocco et al. (2024) that low interpersonal trust is positively correlated to populist voting and self-perceived right-wing attitudes (*notrustpeople*). For Germany, this variable does not play a significant role.

Concerning the main political topics of right-wing oriented people, the results also show a clear-cut picture. Right-wing people in Germany and Europe show significant negative attitudes regarding the political and economic activities of the European Union (*toomucheu*), furthermore they think that immigrants make a country a worse place to live (*immiworse*). This result is confirmed by the variable *respectdiffpeople*, for right voters it is less important to understand different people. At the European level the right-wing voters and people with such opinions are significantly oriented against gays (*againstgays*), for Germany, this variable is not significant, a similar result holds for the attitudes towards climate change (*noworryclimate*). In Eastern Germany (*east*), the results for the AfD are significantly higher compared with Western Germany. Interestingly, for self-perceived right-wing opinions, this variable is not significant. These results strongly support H1.

Table 4: Determinants of right-wing voter behaviour in countries with right-wing governments

| Correlates | Hungary | Italy | Poland | Serbia |
|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| age | 0.004 (0.013) | 0.009 (0.017) | 0.005 (0.016) | -0.024 (0.017) |
| female | -0.012 (0.033) | 0.007 (0.035) | -0.028 (0.041) | 0.073* (0.036) |
| eduysrs | -0.009+ (0.005) | -0.006 (0.005) | -0.009 (0.006) | -0.020** (0.008) |
| conflictschildhood | -0.053 (0.058) | 0.111 (0.091) | -0.054 (0.068) | 0.026 (0.074) |
| married | 0.003 (0.034) | 0.011 (0.036) | 0.032 (0.041) | 0.010 (0.036) |
| relig | 0.061+ (0.035) | 0.087* (0.039) | 0.215** (0.040) | 0.012 (0.038) |
| netustm | 0.000 (0.000) | 0.000 (0.000) | -0.000 (0.000) | 0.000+ (0.000) |
| polsharedonline | -0.051 (0.052) | -0.075+ (0.039) | -0.102+ (0.060) | -0.122* (0.053) |
| socialcontact | 0.122* (0.051) | 0.048 (0.036) | 0.008 (0.056) | 0.023 (0.040) |
| friends | -0.047** (0.014) | -0.006 (0.015) | -0.012 (0.013) | 0.025 (0.017) |
| creative | 0.058 (0.040) | 0.022 (0.042) | 0.042 (0.057) | 0.006 (0.047) |
| funpleasure | -0.032 (0.042) | -0.003 (0.039) | -0.091* (0.036) | -0.040 (0.041) |
| retired | 0.004 (0.047) | -0.098* (0.049) | 0.060 (0.053) | 0.082 (0.056) |
| selfemployed | 0.046 (0.066) | 0.049 (0.040) | -0.088+ (0.053) | -0.020 (0.055) |
| construction | 0.041 (0.069) | -0.077 (0.061) | 0.044 (0.076) | 0.205** (0.063) |
| healthsocial | -0.025 (0.064) | -0.099 (0.070) | 0.064 (0.071) | 0.122+ (0.066) |
| unempdisabled | 0.069 (0.105) | -0.069 (0.090) | 0.082 (0.125) | 0.031 (0.107) |
| highincome | 0.040 (0.033) | -0.004 (0.037) | 0.001 (0.042) | -0.071+ (0.039) |
| poverty | 0.088 (0.068) | -0.068 (0.107) | 0.112 (0.127) | |
| country | 0.111** (0.033) | 0.099** (0.034) | 0.104** (0.040) | 0.134** (0.043) |
| polinterest | -0.074 (0.059) | -0.011 (0.062) | -0.063 (0.056) | 0.071 (0.046) |
| dissatisfygov | -0.348** (0.063) | -0.176** (0.045) | -0.093* (0.042) | -0.384** (0.085) |
| badhealth | -0.114* (0.050) | 0.003 (0.061) | -0.108* (0.045) | -0.070 (0.045) |
| dissatiseconomy | -0.043 (0.054) | -0.112* (0.049) | -0.155* (0.062) | -0.119 (0.073) |
| notrustpeople | 0.034 (0.039) | 0.060 (0.051) | 0.083 (0.057) | 0.074+ (0.041) |
| notrustlegal | -0.148* (0.062) | 0.230** (0.079) | -0.000 (0.045) | 0.091* (0.041) |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| notrustpoliticians | 0.073 (0.045) | -0.076+ (0.042) | 0.091* (0.040) | -0.234** (0.052) |
| toomucheu | 0.111** (0.041) | 0.327** (0.057) | 0.214** (0.058) | -0.001 (0.042) |
| immiworse | 0.132** (0.036) | 0.105+ (0.062) | 0.116 (0.074) | 0.042 (0.050) |
| againstgays | 0.070+ (0.036) | 0.084 (0.112) | 0.120+ (0.067) | -0.001 (0.042) |
| antivax | -0.081* (0.037) | -0.022 (0.076) | 0.095* (0.046) | -0.033 (0.041) |
| noworryclimate | 0.011 (0.048) | 0.133* (0.053) | 0.123* (0.052) | 0.049 (0.044) |
| respectdiffpeople | 0.024 (0.032) | -0.030 (0.036) | -0.023 (0.040) | 0.050 (0.045) |
| Observations | 692 | 603 | 502 | 270 |
| Wald Chi | 191 | 157 | 128 | 158 |
| Pseudo R ² | 0.28 | 0.25 | 0.26 | 0.58 |

Source: European Social Survey 2023, own estimations.

Are results different when countries are considered that are governed by right-wing populist parties? To answer this question, separate estimations for Hungary, Italy, Poland and Serbia were carried out (Table 4). In these countries, also women (*female*) seem to support right-wing parties, as there are no significant differences between men and women. In Serbia, women are even more likely to vote for right-wing parties compared to men. Contrary to the whole sample, the qualification (*edu yrs*) of the voters is weakly or not significant for the voting decision in Hungary, Italy and Poland. Only in Serbia, the governing right-wing party is disproportionately supported by people showing a low qualification. A disproportionately high use of the internet (*netustm*) cannot be observed for Hungary, Italy and Poland. In these countries, the right-wing parties do no longer need to promote new information channels because they are already well-established. The variable *polsharedonline* denoting the use of social media or the internet to post or share anything about politics is in most of these countries even negatively significant. Concerning the role of income (*highincome*), Hungary, Italy and Poland do not show significant results, whereas in Serbia poorer people seem to support right-wing parties. Not surprisingly, the voters of the right-wing parties are satisfied with the government (*dissatisfygov*) in these right-wing governed countries.

5. Summary and policy recommendations

The paper analyses the determinants of right-wing attitudes and voter behaviour for 28 European countries including Israel. The decision to support right-wing populist parties is

connected with a broad variety of factors such as personal characteristics, living conditions, the general political landscape or the economic situation. Framework conditions such as an economic shock or a drastic increase of the number of immigrants (e. g. Germany in 2015) can trigger the success of populist parties if a society is characterised by a high potential of people showing right-wing values and who tend to distrust the ruling politicians. An active use of social media channels by right-wing parties can enforce the mobilization of this potential.

The results of an econometric analysis based on the European Social Survey for 2023 confirms this argument. European right-wing voters disproportionately use the internet to get information. In Germany, the AfD voters are significantly more likely to post or share anything about politics online. Concerning personal characteristics, women are significantly less likely to vote for right parties in Germany and Europe. The qualification level measured by the number of education years shows a highly significant negative influence for the right-wing voter behaviour and for right opinions. Interestingly, the present economic situation of the right-wing voters is not decisive for their behaviour. For European and German right-wing voters, the income variable is not significant, for self-perceived right-wing attitudes a high income is even positively correlated to this behaviour. In Germany, the voter behaviour of poor people is even negatively correlated to the AfD votes. Concerning the preferred topics, not surprisingly, the right-wing people in Germany and Europe show significant negative attitudes regarding the political and economic activities of the European Union, furthermore they think that immigrants make a country a worse place to live.

The results of the econometric analysis suggest some policy recommendations. In general, democratic parties should give more priority to information policy towards voters and especially on an adequate and more efficient use of social media. In that respect, they can even “learn” from radical parties. From a long-term perspective, more political education not only in high schools but especially in secondary schools seems to be crucial. The econometric results always show a negative correlation of the qualification level and right-wing voting results. Even the firm-level might be included in these “education” activities. E.g., discussion forums of different groups of employees (e. g. foreign and home) might be useful. Furthermore, more visible support for long-term disadvantaged regions (e. g. more East-German managers in East Germany) seems to be necessary.

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Appendix

Table A1: Descriptive statistics of the variables

| Variable | Description | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|--------------------|--|--------|-----------|
| popvotes | Voting for a right-wing party (1: Yes, 0: No) | 0.18 | 0.386 |
| polright | Politically right on a left-right scale (1: Yes, 0: No) | .22 | .414 |
| age | Age in years/10 | 5.164 | 1.872 |
| female | Gender: 1: Female, 0: Male | .533 | .499 |
| eduysr | Years of education | 13.246 | 4.094 |
| conflictschildhood | Serious conflicts between people in household when growing up (1: Always or often, 0: Other) | .11 | .312 |
| married | Family status married (1 Yes, 0: No) | .494 | .5 |
| relig | Highly religious (1: Yes, 0: No) | .337 | .473 |
| netustm | Internet use, how much time on typical day, in minutes | 236.45 | 187.08 |
| polsharedonline | Posted or shared anything about politics online last 12 months (1: Yes, 0: No) | .145 | .352 |
| socialcontact | How often socially meet with friends, relatives or colleagues (1: Several times a week or every day, 0: Other) | .411 | .492 |
| friends | Number of people with whom personal matters are discussed | 2.717 | 1.427 |
| creative | Highly important to think new ideas (1: Yes, 0: No) | .207 | .405 |
| funpleasure | Important to seek fun and things that give pleasure (1: Yes, 0: No) | .689 | .463 |
| retired | Retired, community or military service, housework, looking after children (1: Yes, 0: No) | .334 | .472 |
| selfemployed | Self-employed (1: Yes, 0: No) | .141 | .348 |
| construction | Working in the construction sector (1: Yes, 0: No) | .056 | .231 |
| healthsocial | Working in the health sector/social institutions (1: Yes, 0: No) | .091 | .288 |
| unempdisabled | Unemployed, looking (or not) for job, permanently sick or disabled (1: Yes, 0: No) | .068 | .252 |
| highincome | 8 th to 10 th decile of household's total net income (1: Yes, 0: No) | .279 | .449 |
| poverty | First decile of household's total net income | .067 | .25 |
| country | Living at the countryside (1: Yes, 0: No) | .387 | .487 |
| polinterest | Very interested in politics (1: Yes, 0: No) | .116 | .321 |
| dissatisfygov | Low satisfaction with the national government (1: Yes, 0: No) | .287 | .452 |
| badhealth | Bad state of health services in country nowadays (1: Yes, 0: No) | .179 | .383 |
| dissatiseseconomy | Highly dissatisfied with present state of economy in country (1: Yes, 0: No) | .212 | .409 |
| notrustpeople | No trust in most people (1: Yes, 0: No) | .167 | .373 |
| notrustlegal | No trust in the legal system (1: Yes, 0: No) | .165 | .371 |
| notrustpoliticians | No trust in politicians (1: Yes, 0: No) | .353 | .478 |
| toomucheu | European unification already gone too far (1: Yes, 0: No) | .147 | .354 |
| immiworse | Immigrants make country worse place to live (1: Yes, 0: No) | .156 | .363 |
| againstgays | Gays and lesbians free to live life as they wish (1: Against, 0: Other) | .137 | .344 |
| antivax | Against own Corona Vaccination (1: Yes, 0: No) | .186 | .389 |
| noworryclimate | Not worried about climate change (1: Yes, 0: No) | .2 | .4 |
| respectdiffpeople | Important to understand different people (1: Yes, 0: No) | .621 | .485 |
| east | 1: Eastern Germany, 0: West-Germany | .177 | .382 |

Source: European Social Survey 2023, own calculations.