

**Socioeconomic Deprivation and the
Support for Populism:
A Study on Individual and Contextual
Determinants**

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ISBN: 9789403657738

DOI: 10.26116/krx7-v627

Layout Design: Claudia Tofan, Open Press TiU

Cover Photo: Tom Barrett, UnSplash

Print: Open Press TiU

Naam drukkerij

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Socioeconomic Deprivation and the Support for Populism: A Study on Individual and Contextual Determinants

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor aan
Tilburg University
op gezag van de
rector magnificus,

prof. dr. W.B.H.J. van de Donk,
en University of Trento

op gezag van de
rector magnificus,

prof. dr. F. Deflorian,

in het openbaar te verdedigen ten overstaan van een door het college voor
promoties aangewezen commissie in de Aula van de Universiteit

op vrijdag 22 april 2022 om 13.30 uur

door

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geboren te Ochsenfurt, Duitsland

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Summary

Economic explanations vs. cultural concerns. These two branches of research have been established as the two major approaches in understanding the electoral success of radical populist parties. As for economic hardship, the feeling of neglect by established parties and political discontent are considered as mechanisms translating into the preference of anti-establishment parties with a people-centrist rhetoric. From a cultural perspective, radical populist voting has been linked to people holding on to more conservative viewpoints and rejecting the perceived predominance of trends such as multiculturalism and postmaterialism they assume established parties to focus on. While there is evidence suggesting that an unfavorable socioeconomic status does foster voting in favor of populist parties, multiple previous studies agree that cultural or political concerns surpass the explanatory power of economic insecurity in that regard (e.g. Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018; Oesch, 2008, Ramiro & Gomez, 2017). Nonetheless, economic approaches of populist voting should not be discarded. Instead, the inconsistency across previous studies in terms of evidence hints at the possibly crucial impact of the research design on the results to be obtained. In this respect, the predominant use of aggregate data in the field does not allow for conclusions on individual voting behavior whereas even the analysis of individual-level data often comes along with a static perspective on single-election years which makes the results context-dependent and limits their generalizability. Next to the substantial investigation on which aspects of socioeconomic hardship increase support for populism, it is another objective of this thesis to contribute to the state of research by illustrating the methodological impact on the evidence yielded. In order to achieve that, this thesis consists of four sub-studies, each approaching the research question from another perspective to provide a comprehensive overview on socioeconomic drivers of populist voting.

Relying on survey data from the Belgian Election Study 2014, for a start it is analyzed if socioeconomic deprivation shapes populist attitudes. For that, both the individual and the contextual situation are considered. Another deepening of knowledge pursued in the first empirical chapter is the disentanglement of three attitude dimensions which are part of the rhetoric used by populist parties

but have been cumulated in previous studies (i.e. anti-immigration views, people-centrism, and anti-elitism). The evidence suggests that populist views are stronger among persons with a lower level of education and a stronger sense of relative deprivation. The effect of relative deprivation on people-centrist views is furthermore stronger when the local surroundings are characterized by higher financial wealth.

In the second empirical study, the outcome to be explained is the actual voting behavior in favor of a populist party, using the example of Flemish Interest (Vlaams Belang). Again, the analysis is taking place on a small-scale contextual level. The longitudinal perspective on Flemish municipalities covering the period from 2006 to 2018 is an additional contribution. Through the estimation of fixed effects panel regression models, possible sources of biased findings may be partially eliminated. This advantageous statistical method is not only exploited for substantial purposes but also to point out its benefits when contrasting it to other longitudinal strategies, such as separate year-specific and pooled models. Unexpectedly, the local unemployment rate is negatively related to the aggregate success of Vlaams Belang. Nonetheless, the comparison across analytical approaches underlines the relevance of advantageous statistical methods that reduce the risk of an omitted variable bias and allow to consider time trends. The third chapter also relies on a longitudinal design and illustrates the analytical benefits of panel data but gives attention to the individual level, using information from the Dutch LISS panel survey. Like in the previous sub-study, there is evidence illustrating the analytical potential of panel data. In substantial terms, however, multiple characteristics of individual deprivation do not significantly influence the support for radical populist parties.

The fourth and final empirical chapter broadens the perspective in several regards as it gives up the previous focus on single countries in favor of a cross-country analysis on the election for the European Parliament 2019. What is more, another form of voting behavior is considered that is theoretically similar to populist voting, namely abstaining. With that alternative outcome being part of the study, additional analyses are conducted to identify attitudinal mechanisms which explain the preference for either

populist voting or abstaining. Both prove to be more likely than mainstream party voting among person with a low educational level and frequent educational difficulties. An unfavorable position on the labor market, however, comes along only with an increased tendency of abstention. If socioeconomic vulnerability translates into anti-immigration views, however, radical populist voting is more likely than mainstream party voting or abstaining whereas an emerging political disinterest and feeling of powerlessness explain why socioeconomically vulnerable persons rather choose not to vote at all. The tendency of mainstream party voting is reduced if unemployment or financial troubles translate into the disapproval of politics but neither radical populist party voting nor abstaining are boosted more than the other.

1

Introduction

1.1 Research Objective

The electoral success of populist parties in recent decades evoked scientific interest that aimed at explaining the support of these parties among certain groups of voters. While in some countries these parties have been trying for several decades to attract voters who are disappointed by the political establishment, their more recent emergence and immediate success in other political contexts seems to suggest a link to major societal changes that the countries underwent and that may have left parts of the electorate unsatisfied with governing political parties. In that regard, the populist appeal has been attributed to insecurities coming along with trends due to globalization or modernization (e.g. Betz, 1993a; Essletzbichler, Disslbacher, & Moser, 2018; Santana & Rama, 2018) but also more specifically to developments such as economic crises (e.g. Funke, Schularick, & Trebesch, 2016; Hernández & Kriesi, 2016; Magni, 2017) or the increasing inflow of migrants in the European Union since 2015 (e.g. Dustmann, Vasiljeva, & Damm, 2019; Vasilakis, 2017). These findings may also explain why by now countries that for a long time lacked this party type have an influential populist party focusing on migration and protectionism (e.g. Germany, Spain).

Similar to the mentioned contextual circumstances, predictors of populist voting on the individual level have commonly been distinguished between a cultural and an economic dimension. Especially with regard to populist parties from the right wing, cultural concerns and the opposition against predominant social developments such as multiculturalism and postmaterialism are considered driving forces of populist support among those voters holding on to more conservative positions on these issues (e.g. Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018; Oesch, 2008). Another branch of research links economic vulnerability due to trends of globalization, for instance an increased job insecurity among voters lacking the required formal skill-set, to populist voting in general (e.g. Im, Mayer, Palier, & Rovny, 2019; Rooduijn, 2018; Rovny & Rovny, 2017; Santana & Rama, 2018). However, there is some agreement in the literature that cultural or political concerns surpass the explanatory power of economic insecurity

when it comes to predicting populist voting (e.g. Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018; Oesch, 2008, Ramiro & Gomez, 2017).

Still, the focus of future research should not be exclusively on cultural predictors of populist voting, despite the scarce evidence of economic hardship fostering populist voting. Instead, economic and cultural developments are often interdependent. For instance, an insufficient social integration as expressed by the feeling of being “left behind” can be induced by both a decline in personal wealth as well as by the impression that one’s opinions and concerns are not deemed important by elites (Gidron & Hall, 2020). The interrelation of cultural and economic issues can be illustrated by preoccupations about the cultural or ethnic homogeneity in persons’ surroundings translating into the additional belief that globalization and immigration have adverse effects on the economic situation (see Margalit, 2019). Jointly, economic and cultural worries may shape status anxiety among voters which may furthermore explain why populist parties from the right wing gain support from economically disadvantaged voters although these parties emphasize cultural (i.e. nativist) stances rather than economic (e.g. labor market or redistributive) policies (Gidron & Hall, 2017). Hence, both the educational level and the occupational status can be attributed to the cultural or the economic sphere and they both will be central characteristics in the following analyses on economically motivated populist voting as they are crucial predictors of economic security and wealth. Nonetheless, it is aimed at distinguishing this economic explanation from other possibly underlying mechanisms. This is done, for instance, by analyzing how the support for populism is influenced by the educational or occupational status, depending on actually experienced deprivation. In line with this and instead of discarding economic explanations of populist voting, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2018) recommend to pursue research approaches providing deeper insights, for instance through the use of refined measurements of economic hardship, by the consideration of a subjective economic dimension or by considering potential mediators.

Besides, considering economic predictors of populist voting is advisable as it applies the widely spread concept of economic voting to the rather new – or less established – political approach

of populism. Economic voting theory assumes that – mainly non-populist – governing parties are “punished” by voters who perceive an economic downturn to have occurred. Although this perspective suggests a worsening of the macro economic situation (*sociotropic voting*) to be more predictive for the rejection of the incumbent than the personal economic status (*egotropic voting*), there is also evidence indicating that individual economic hardship is more influential than the assessment of the contextual economy (see Lewis-Beck & Paldam, 2000). In that regard, it is contributive to the state of research to further ascertain to what extent the anti-establishment and scapegoating rhetoric of populist parties makes them beneficiaries of economic concerns within the electorate and which explanatory role can be attributed to the individual and the contextual situation as well as to the interplay of both levels. Moreover, since populist parties from both the left and the right wing can be assumed to take advantage of economic vulnerability (through an either redistributive or scapegoating and nativist rhetoric), detailed insights should be gained into what particular aspect of socioeconomic deprivation (for instance, educational or occupational disadvantage) translates into an increased support for each type of populist parties.

In line with the presumed impetus of “punishing” the political establishment as it is theorized by the economic voting approach, the wish to express one’s discontent with politics is commonly considered an explanatory factor of populist voting (e.g. Ramiro, 2016; Rooduijn, 2018). Accordingly, another contribution of this study is disentangling the pure effect of socioeconomic vulnerability on populist voting from the influence that attitudes related to populism have on voters’ preferences. Therefore, dissatisfaction with politics in general is studied same as views reflecting the ideological divide across left-wing and right-wing populist parties. In one sub-study, these positions are used as control variables in order to obtain the pure effect of socioeconomic deprivation. In another empirical chapter, a mediation analysis is conducted that allows distinguishing the direct effect of socioeconomic vulnerability on voting behavior from the indirect effect via various attitudinal aspects that are possibly enhanced by socioeconomic hardship.

Aside from a scientifically motivated deepening of research on the economic branch of explaining populist voting, the findings obtained in this study entail societal relevance. As the electoral success of anti-establishment parties has been increasing recently in numerous countries, their political influence and their possibilities of blocking political decision-making has been growing likewise. The *cordon sanitaire*, a self-imposed restriction to cooperate with radical populist parties in many Western European democracies, reduces the options for parties that received the highest share of votes but are in need of one or more coalition partners. In some cases, this may lead to the formation of a minority coalition as the only option left which, however, requires the approval of the parties not involved in the government – including populist parties in the opposition. If these parties decide not to condone a minority coalition any more this may lead to the dissolution of the government, as happened in the Netherlands in 2012. Still, even if a majority can be obtained without being dependent on populist parties, their relative amount of seats in parliament reflects the share of voters who supposedly reject the political establishment and, along with the deliberate abstainers, may question the legitimacy and representative nature of political decisions.

In order to get a comprehensive picture of the socioeconomic profile of this population group, studies focusing on economic deprivation from various perspectives are necessary for politics and society if they want to “win back” those voters that give in to the appeal of populism. Empirical evidence supporting the claim that struggling to keep up with transformations on a globalized labor market or suggesting that the impression of being neglected compared to others may be the foundation of adjusting policies to the needs of these voter groups. Alternatively, if the findings show that political discontent and an ideological agreement with populist parties are the main drivers of support for these parties instead of socioeconomic hardship, conclusions may be drawn on the informative and rhetorical efforts for established parties if they want to disenchant populist parties and convince voters feeling “left behind”. Obviously, it is unrealistic to assume that the further evolvement of globalization can be stopped or that every person distrusting politics is receptive for endeavors to improve

the exchange between politicians and voters. Nonetheless, an evidence-based adaption of policy-making may decrease the use of populist parties as a gathering place of dissatisfied persons and foster the approval of actions taken by governing parties.

In the following, four sub-studies address this need for further research. The main research question of this study is:

How does socioeconomic deprivation affect the appeal of populism?

Building on this, there are several subgoals pursued:

- 1. Which attitudinal aspects addressed by populism benefit from individual and contextual socioeconomic hardship?*
- 2. Does populist voting flourish under unfavorable economic conditions on the local level?*
- 3. Does the use of advantageous panel data possibly explain the inconsistent findings on economically motivated populist voting in the literature that mainly relied on (pooled) cross-sectional data?*
- 4. To what extent do socioeconomic difficulties foster populist voting and abstaining in a "second-order" election? Moreover, how can the preference for either outcome be explained?*

Accordingly, each of the four empirical chapters pursues certain research objectives and adds another perspective in order to provide a comprehensive overview on socioeconomic drivers of supporting populism. For that, various research designs are used that all aim at introducing analytic gains compared to other studies: the individual and the contextual level are considered both separately and jointly, single-country studies as well as cross-country analyses are applied, and statistical models that allow to take into account the context dependency of individual political preferences are estimated same as regression analyses eliminating the distorting impact of unobserved heterogeneity. Like that, a partial advancement for each sub-study can be achieved that goes beyond the previous state of knowledge. Before the particular advantages and contributions of each sub-study are outlined in detail, the main concepts used in

them are defined same as an overview on the different theoretic approaches is given.

1.2 Populism

In the literature, there is no generally accepted definition of populism (Pappas, 2016). Besides, previous conceptualizations of populism vary widely and range from identifying it for instance as a communication style (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), a political style (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014) or a mode of political mobilization (Jansen, 2011). However, a conceptualization by Mudde (2004) has been established as a common definition of the term. Accordingly, populism views society as divided in two main antagonistic groups, namely “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite” and furthermore suggests that politics should reflect the “*volonté générale*”. More precisely, populism has been defined to consist of four crucial elements which are (1) the presence of two homogenous societal units, namely “the people” and “the elite”, (2) an appreciation of “the people” while “the elite” is devaluated, (3) an antagonist relationship between these two societal units, and (4) the vision of popular sovereignty (Stanley, 2008).

Being a thin-centered ideology, populism can adopt various other ideologies, such as nationalism or socialism, and consequently different party types may utilize it (Mudde, 2004; Stanley, 2008). Beyond the anti-establishment and people-centrist stance, populist parties from the (radical) left are furthermore characterized by a democratic socialist ideology and by their self-portrayal as speaking not just on behalf of the proletariat but being the voice of the people (Mudde, 2004). The left-wing populist rhetoric of “the people” versus “the elite” is mainly of a socioeconomic nature and advocates for those who are economically disadvantaged by requesting a decrease in social inequality. By that, left-wing populism is inclusionary as it also considers social out-groups as its clientele and calls for material support through state resources for all those facing unfavorable economic conditions, regardless if they are a part of the majority population or not. Also politically and symbolically, left-wing populism is rather inclusionary. Right-wing populism, on the contrary, not only disparages “elites” but also excludes cultural out-groups (e.g. immigrants) from the “common

people”, although its representatives likewise claim to be the voice of the people. Hence, right-wing populism is more exclusionary and puts more emphasis on cultural than on socioeconomic concerns when defining its constituency (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). This distinction is in line with Bobbio’s (1996) comparison of left and right politics with the former being egalitarian and opposing inequality whereas the latter is nonegalitarian and accepts inequality – which in the case of populism are ethnicity-based.

In this context, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2018) additionally emphasize that populism and right-wing related nativism are to be considered as distinct phenomena “[...] whereas the former alludes to the moral clash between ‘the pure people’ (the good ones) and ‘the corrupt elite’ (the bad ones), the latter refers to the ethnic division between insiders (natives) and outsiders (aliens)” (p. 1677). Thereby, right-wing populist parties create a frame regarding the natives as “the pure people” while the (also native) establishment is described as “the corrupt elite” that is accused of siding with the “aliens”. This is commonly underlined by describing immigration as beneficial for the business community and economic elites since it allows them to keep on paying low wages and by claiming that the political elites aim at gaining new voters by providing immigrants with welfare benefits (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2018).

In Western Europe, a radical right approach has prevailed among populist parties in recent decades and nonetheless, there has not been established a unique label for that party group in the literature. Apart from right-wing populist, these parties have been labelled as extreme or extremist right, radical right, far right, and due to their issue-ownership with regard to immigration issues also as anti-immigration parties (e.g. Arzheimer & Carter, 2006; Berning & Schlueter, 2016; Boomgarden & Vliegthart, 2007; Coffé, Heyndels, & Vermeir, 2007; Golder, 2003; Han, 2016; Jackman & Volpert, 1996; Jesuit, Paradowski, & Mahler, 2009; Muis & Immerzeel, 2017; Rydgren & Ruth, 2013; Swank & Betz, 2003). However, despite this inconsistency in labelling these parties, the mentioned studies largely agree which parties in particular to assign to this group.

On the contrary, radical populist parties from the left wing are less common in Western Europe and even more rarely represented in

national parliaments (Rooduijn et al., 2019). This may be possibly explained with their political contents beyond populism, such as redistribution and social equality, already being addressed by other parties while the strong nativist claim of their right-wing counterparts supposedly is more distinctive. Still, when contrasting the political activities of radical populist parties from both ends of the political spectrum in the Dutch parliament the left vs. right dichotomy appears to be more influential than the populist approach (Otjes & Louwerse, 2015). Additionally, the fact that the Netherlands are – as stated by Otjes and Louwerse – one of the rare political contexts for which both left-wing and right-wing populist parties can be jointly considered for a longer period hints at national particularities possibly facilitating or impeding the electoral success of certain party types.

This relates to another important distinction when aiming at explaining the appeal of populism within the electorate, namely the focus on supply-side and demand-side aspects. The supply-side comprises political opportunity structures in an electoral context, for instance the electoral system, programmatic conformity among parties from the center or the media but also the structure of populist parties themselves. The demand-side, on the contrary, consists of political views and preferences among the electorate (see e.g. Rydgren, 2007). Economic hardship and the possibly related dissatisfaction are assignable to the demand-side as both on the contextual and on the individual level inequality is likely to shape voters' political orientations and accordingly, this thesis puts emphasis on the demand-side. Still, the supply-side is not entirely neglected as possibly influential institutional factors are either kept constant (for single-country analyses) or considered as control variable (for cross-country analyses).

In the following sub-studies, support for populism is conceptualized in different ways which entails advantages when considering the study in its entirety. The initial focus on people-centrist, anti-elitist, and anti-immigration views allows to investigate a precondition of actual populist voting while at the same time individual intensities of these views can be considered same as persons who hold populist views but do not vote at all. Comparing the share of votes obtained for a radical populist party in local elections as it is done in another

chapter may limit the informative value about voting behavior but provides insights on how certain municipal conditions shape the success of populism. By that a potential distortion stemming from social desirability is avoided as each resident contributes equally to the indicators on the economic performance and each voter is captured by the overall electoral outcome (Elinder, 2010; Schwander & Manow 2017). When focusing on the individual level in the subsequent analyses, voting is considered first through a measure that combines actual behavior at the ballot box in election years and the intended vote choice in the years between elections. This is done to fully exploit the analytic potential of panel data and to test if and how experienced economic downturns affect political preferences in the short run. This perspective on populist voting moreover goes beyond the mere anti-establishment character by considering and contrasting voting in favor of populist parties from both the left and the right wing. Another point of comparison is introduced in the final analysis which adds abstention as another theoretically relevant outcome of economic deprivation.

1.3 Economic Deprivation

According to the Cambridge Dictionary¹, the term deprivation refers to “a situation in which you do not have things or conditions that are usually considered necessary for a pleasant life” and “an absence or too little of something important” while the adjective deprived is explained as “lacking something that is needed to live the way most people live” which is closely related to being disadvantaged by “not having the standard of living conditions, education, etc. that most people have”. Accordingly, economic deprivation is defined as a shortage of economic resources and assets that are common and attainable for large parts of the population and yet distributed unequally in society. However, it is the aspect of lacking goods “that are usually considered necessary for a pleasant life” which distinguishes deprivation from the lack of resources needed to meet at least one’s basic needs as expressed by the term poverty. Hence, poverty does represent an intense form of deprivation but conversely, being economically deprived is not to be equated

1. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/deprivation> (as of 12th August 2021)

with being poor. Moreover, not having what is “usually considered necessary for a pleasant life” underlines the subjective component of deprivation as – unlike for poverty – there is no unique income-based threshold indicating if someone is to be regarded as deprived or not. On the contrary, a person may consider herself or himself economically deprived if she or he lacks an economic resource that is considered personally as particularly important. For instance, even if one has a personal income which is above average one still may feel to be economically deprived if one’s social reference group is perceived to be better off than oneself (see Foster & Matheson 1995, Guimond & Dubé-Simard 1983, Runciman 1966). Consequently, apart from being “visibly” deprived in some regards also the mere impression that the own situation is unsatisfactory or that the economic conditions of others are more favorable than the personal ones can reflect a form of economic deprivation. In order to take this into account, not only objective aspects of economic deprivation (such as unemployment, receiving welfare benefits, or a low income) will be studied as predictors of populist voting but also the subjective (i.e. perceived) and the relative dimension of economic deprivation will be tested with regard to their influence on this kind of electoral behavior.

Hence, economic deprivation is conceptualized through several dimensions instead of combining them into an index or relying on one distinct aspect. This approach is pursued to get a broad insight on the economic drivers of the support for populism that at the same time provides detailed evidence on each considered aspect. The theoretical reasoning to be outlined in the following suggests that the employability on the labor market is a decisive economic factor that may explain differences in the perceived appeal of populism. Lacking the formal skill set demanded in nowadays’ globalized and service-sector dominated economy may evoke the impression of feeling left behind, an impression that is fueled and used by populist rhetoric. Consequently, it is advisable to take into account the educational attainment as well as the occupational situation to test whether unfavorable prospects on the labor market actually foster the support for populism. Both concepts may also induce the opposition against the political establishment through other mechanisms, such as the perception of being unseen in

a “diploma democracy” (Bovens & Wille, 2017) or lacking certain economic assets that match the scapegoating approach of populism. This particularly applies to these economic resources over which a conflict with out-groups may be portrayed, such as jobs among the unemployed and welfare benefits among those in financial difficulties. The related feeling of having to cope with less than others underlines the importance of including subjective concepts of economic deprivation.

Hence, the embeddedness in the economic-centered literature on populist voting not only explains the selection of indicators in this study but it also points out why no additional concepts on the economic situation have been analyzed. Especially the longitudinal perspective in two sub-studies might suggest the chance to detect further transitions over the life-course that make voters more susceptible for the populist appeal. However, without a theoretical reasoning the underlying mechanisms are hardly identifiable and hardly generalizable across individuals. Nonetheless, the consideration of the – objective or subjective – financial situation at least partially captures economic hardship that is experienced beyond the labor market.

Although the following sub-studies share an overarching theoretical framework, their methodological contributions ensure that each of them also comes along with advancements of how economic deprivation is operationalized. The concept is measured both for individuals as well as for small-scale contextual units and the longitudinal design allows to consider the partial concept of a reduced employability more adequately than through a static perspective. However, it needs to be mentioned that such a multidimensional conceptualization implies that the explanatory variables are theoretically interrelated which most plausibly holds true for the educational attainment and the occupational status. In line with the theoretical assumption initiated above, high education is supposedly associated with more occupational security and prestige. Robustness checks yield no considerable differences of findings between the full models that include both concepts and reduced models that leave one of them aside. Two sub-studies account for this supposed interconnectedness even further by

conducting separate analyses on the influence of education and of occupation, also since both were used for an interaction term with unemployment.

1.4 Theories on Economic Deprivation and the Populist Appeal

The *losers of globalization thesis* (sometimes referred to as the *losers of modernization thesis*) is a common explanatory approach on unfavorable economic circumstances increasing the demand for populism among voters. Its basic premise is that trends related to globalization or, more generally, modernization came along with higher competition in the economic, social, and political sphere (e.g. Betz, 1993a; Decker, 2018; Kriesi et al., 2006; Lengfeld, 2017). While these transformations took place on a contextual level and by that affected society as a whole, their perceptibility and implications supposedly vary on the personal level as some individual characteristics make persons more likely to become “winners” whereas others rather are “losers” of globalization. Since major economic concomitants of globalization are a growing deindustrialization and the rise of the service-sector, voters’ educational and professional adaption to these developments are crucial predictors of being able to benefit from globalization (Betz, 1993a; Lengfeld, 2017). Those with higher levels of formal education are more likely to meet the requirements for attaining a remunerative occupation in the upper service-sector or a skilled manual profession but the workforce without the demanded skill set face less promising prospects on the labor market. Consequently, a low employability and a lack of individual exit options suggest a feeling of being left behind that populist rhetoric might exploit (Kriesi et al., 2006; Oesch, 2008).

In social terms, immigration and multiculturalism are central phenomena of globalization that on their own rather address cultural than economic concerns. However, in connection with socioeconomic vulnerability, immigration may pose a particular threat to the “losers” of globalization who may consider immigrants as competitors on the labor market. Particularly radical populist parties from the right wing are expectable profiteers from the opposition towards immigration although also their left-wing counterparts have proven to benefit from anti-immigration sentiments (O’Malley,

2008; Santana & Rama, 2018). Moreover, globalization boosted political competition that becomes noticeable through an increasing transfer of competences to supranational institutions such as the European Union. The “losers” of globalization may blame European integration for their economic struggle and therefore respond to the Eurosceptic rhetoric that is shared by both left-wing and right-wing populist parties (e.g. Otjes & Louwerse, 2015).

Although the *losers of globalization thesis* is commonly attributed to the demand-side (e.g. Rydgren, 2007), globalization and modernization also indirectly paved the way for populist party success on the supply-side. The growing need for higher education and larger parts of society meeting these requirements came along with shifted political preferences (e.g. post-materialism) by the electorate to which centrist parties had to adapt to maintain their political influence. Hence, in order to address a broader range of interests held by voters, parties from the center were pressured to become “catch-all parties” which came at the price of no longer being considered as representatives of those struggling to cope with the changes inflicted on them by globalization (Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Kirchheimer, 1966; Williams, 2009). Accordingly, the convergence of center parties that was fueled by trends over the course of modernization also created advantageous conditions for populist parties claiming to act on behalf of the “common people”.

Linking two of the above mentioned side effects of globalization, namely the emergence of a socioeconomic divide among “winners” and “losers” and an increase of migration flows, is the foundation of another theoretical mechanism possibly explaining support for populism. According to *group conflict theory* (or the *ethnic competition thesis*), immigrants are perceived a particular threat among individuals who have difficulties in attaining scarce economic resources (e.g. employment or welfare benefits) themselves (e.g. Berning & Schlueter, 2016; Bobo & Hutchings, 1996). The natives affected by economic hardship therefore are assumed to be more receptive to the protectionist rhetoric of populist parties that is emphasized even further by radical right parties and their nativist stances.

The profound social changes in the wake of globalization and modernization may additionally evoke a feeling of nostalgia for a supposedly better past. *Relative deprivation theory* suggests that the perception among voters to be worse off than before or than their social reference group translates into discontent (Gest, Reny, & Mayer, 2018; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018; Runciman, 1966). This may match the political offer made by populist parties as they portray themselves as advocates of “the common people” standing up for the weal of the natives (right-wing) or for redistribution (left-wing, see Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). Thus, the approach of relative deprivation highlights the relevance that subjective deprivation may have for populist voting that goes beyond objective traits such as lacking a formal skill set or being in need for a job. This distinction between objective and subjective aspects of deprivation is consistent with the dichotomy of social status either being an unevenly distributed resource marking the personal rank in the social hierarchy or referring to the respect a person feels to receive and which may be more equally distributed across society but is largely characterized by comparisons with others. While enhancing one’s social status is considered a unifying objective among individuals, the preference for one of these two sources of gaining it has proven to be individually determined (Anderson et al., 2012). Economically challenging conditions, such as high social inequality, may emphasize the personal importance of the subjectively received respect as voters who have rather unfavorable economic prospects are aware of the widening gap between the rich and the poor. On this matter, it has been shown that in contexts characterized by high economic inequality the wish to improve one’s relative social position is stronger, although this effect is curvilinear. This means that after reaching a certain threshold value, a further increase in inequality comes along with a lower preference for status enhancement. Besides, this effect of macro-economic inequality on status-seeking is stronger among persons with a low objective position on the social ladder (Paskov, Gërkhani, & van de Werfhorst, 2015).

That points out the importance of the contextual situation for individuals when they assess their own situation, even if perceptions of the conditions in one’s surroundings obviously do not have to match

the objective circumstances. The thesis of persistent republicanism links perceptions of societal developments to political preferences and states that concerns about the evolvement of society may also emerge among those who are not affected themselves by economic deprivation. Hence, this approach is related to the populist concept of a lost “heartland”, a glorified image of society in the past. Voters approving this rhetorical nostalgia are likely to blame the political establishment for the downturns which is beneficial for populist parties (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016; Taggart, 2004). Among those actually facing individual hardship, unfavorable macro-economic developments have been theorized to deepen their discontent or, if there is a more promising economic environment, their feeling of relative deprivation may be enhanced as they are unable to benefit economically themselves (Rooduijn & Burgoon, 2018).

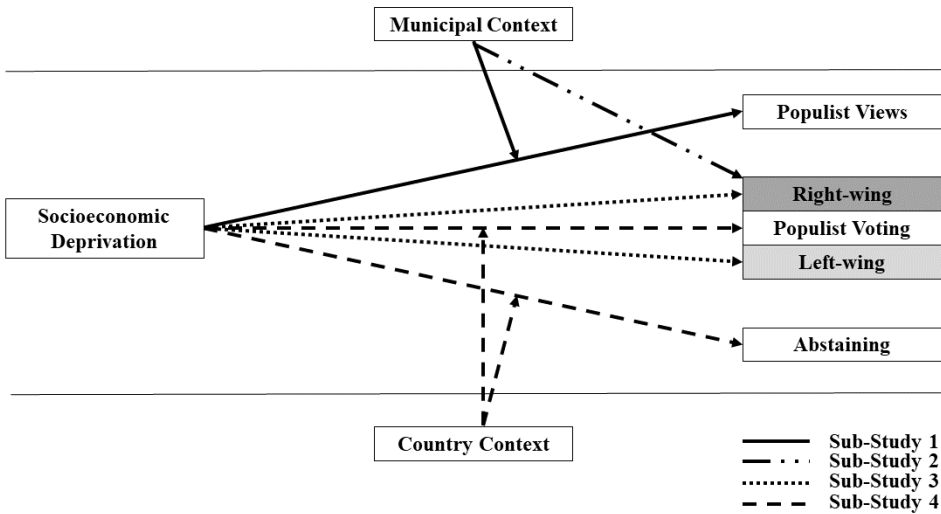
However, the underlying mechanisms of the outlined theoretical approaches to a large extent rely on an approval of the anti-establishment, politically cynic, and nativist positions held by populist parties in order to explain their appeal among those persons with unfavorable economic prospects (e.g. Marx & Schumacher, 2018; Rooduijn, van der Brug, & de Lange, 2016). Nonetheless, particularly the emergence of political cynicism makes support for populism only one of the imaginable reactions among voters. Instead of “voicing” their discontent by voting for a political challenger of centrist and incumbent parties that they may hold responsible for their economic hardship, the impression of not being represented by politics may lead them to “exit” from political participation, manifesting itself through abstention (Hirschman, 1970; Hooghe, Marien, & Pauwels, 2011). Another objective of this study is to disentangle the mediating factors that make socioeconomically disadvantaged voters either vote for a populist party or abstain from voting at all.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis and Contributions to the State of Research

The four sub-studies aim at explaining the appeal of populism among socioeconomically deprived persons from different angles and by that, they vary in terms of their research designs and measurements of the relevant theoretical concepts. As can be seen from figure 1,

populist voting is taken into account as a general concept but also separately across the ideological left-right divide. Besides, populist attitudes are another outcome that is sought to be explained as it allows to distinguish the intensity of these views same as the inclusion of abstainers in the analysis. Although being an electoral phenomenon by itself, abstention is analyzed as another possible consequence of socioeconomic deprivation. The peculiarities and intended contributions of the four sub-studies are outlined more detailed below in order to clarify the gradual approach on the research objective.

Figure 1: Framework of the research objective (by sub-studies)



1.5.1 Does the Socioeconomic Context Create a Breeding Ground for Populist Attitudes? Multilevel Evidence from Belgium

The first empirical approach on socioeconomic hardship affecting the approval of populism is limited to the mere agreement with statements related to populism. These are people-centrism, anti-elitism, and anti-immigration opinions. These separate analyses allow considering differences in terms of intensity of these views as well as populist views among abstainers, both of which would not be possible when studying voting behavior. Besides, populist voting

may also be driven by the election manifesto of these parties and not necessarily by sharing their populist views. Although previously there have been conducted similar studies (e.g. Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016; Rico & Anduiza, 2019; Spruyt, Keppens, & Van Droogenbroeck, 2016), there is still need for further insights on the economically motivated formation of populist attitudes.

Relying on the above mentioned theories, the additional contribution of this study is a joint consideration of the individual and the contextual situation. Survey data collected after the Belgian national elections 2014 is linked with information on the economic situation in the respondents' residential surroundings which allows analyzing the context dependency of effects stemming from individual conditions. Besides, as the macro-level data refers to municipalities the findings on the contextual impact are plausibly less distorted by heterogeneity than when basing such an analysis on official statistics on a regional or even national level. Another deepening of knowledge pursued in this first chapter is the disentanglement of three attitude dimensions which are part of the rhetoric of populist parties but have been cumulated in previous studies (Akkerman, Mudde, Zaslove, 2014; Spruyt, Keppens, & Van Droogenbroeck, 2016; Tsatsanis, Andreadis, & Teperoglou, 2018). Like that, conclusions can be drawn on which aspect of individual or contextual economic deprivation is particularly intensifying people-centrism, anti-elitism and anti-immigration views and furthermore, which of these three viewpoints is likely to trigger actual voting for populist parties.

To sum up, the first empirical sub-study aims at answering the research questions: *How do objective and subjective aspects of socioeconomic deprivation affect the three attitudinal aspects of people-centrism, anti-elitism, and opposition towards immigration? Are economic predictors relevant on both the individual and the contextual level as well as for the interplay of predictors across the two explanatory levels?* The contributions to the state of research comprise the separate consideration of attitudes related to populism and the merging of individual-level data with the most detailed level of information possible (i.e. municipalities).

1.5.2 Social and Economic Predictors Favoring the Local Success of Right-Wing Populism: A Longitudinal Analysis on Municipal Elections in Flanders

In the second empirical study of this thesis, the outcome to be explained is the actual voting behavior in favor of a populist party, using the example of Flemish Interest (*Vlaams Belang*). Again, the analysis is taking place on the municipal level while the situation of individual voters, however, remains unconsidered. Although this means that no inference on individual behavior can be made based on the findings, such a pure macro analysis entails advantages that the use of individual survey data cannot provide, such as the even representation of all societal groups in the economic indicators and the electoral outcomes and an eliminated impact of social desirability. Municipalities being the units of analysis furthermore ensures the highest amount of homogeneity of analyses based on aggregate data and the predictors being adapted to their theorized perceptibility among the residents.

Although a mere macro perspective has been a standard approach among previous studies (e.g. Bowyer, 2008; Coffé, Heyndels, & Vermeir, 2007; Jackman & Volpert, 1996; Kestilä & Söderlund, 2007; Rydgren & Ruth, 2013; Schwander & Manow, 2017; Swank & Betz, 2003), this sub-study addresses issues that have still been rarely considered in the research field. One contribution is the longitudinal perspective on the municipalities in Flanders covering the period from 2006 to 2018. Through the estimation of fixed effects panel regression models, possible sources of biased findings may be partially eliminated which adds to the analytical precision of using small-scale contextual units. This advantageous statistical method is not only to be exploited for substantial purposes but also to point out its benefits when contrasting it to other longitudinal strategies, namely separate year-specific and pooled models. Beyond that, the focus on local election outcomes instead of the common consideration of national election results involves the possibility of giving a deeper understanding whether unfavorable municipal conditions are also detrimental for the local incumbent and not just for centrist parties on the national level.

Hence, the research questions of the second empirical chapter are: *How did economic and social characteristics on the municipal level influence the electoral success of the radical right-wing populist Vlaams Belang in local elections between 2006 and 2018? Which analytical benefit comes along with the use of fixed effects panel regression models?* The novelties compared to previous studies consist in both the explanatory variables and the outcome referring to the municipal level and in outlining the possible distortion stemming from static research perspectives that to some extent may explain the inconsistent findings in the literature.

1.5.3 The Effect of Individual Economic Deprivation on Populist Voting: Longitudinal Evidence from Dutch Panel Data

The longitudinal research design making use of panel data is maintained for the third empirical chapter. In this case, however, the attention is shifted towards individuals and their experience of economic deprivation over time altering the tendency of populist voting. For that, information from the Dutch LISS panel survey is considered. The Netherlands are a suited case for the longitudinal analysis on economic drivers of populist voting as it is one of the few Western European countries where both left-wing and right-wing populist parties witnessed considerable success and have been represented in parliament (see Otjes & Louwerse, 2015). Accordingly, both kinds of populist voting cannot only be studied separately but also compared to one another. In theoretical terms, this sub-study is particularly tailored for a test of the losers of globalization thesis, the group conflict theory, and the relative deprivation thesis as the estimation of fixed effects panel regression facilitates conclusions that are as close as possible to causal claims when relying on observational data. For that, measures exploiting the longitudinal data structure are introduced, for instance by analyzing the transition to unemployment dependent on a person's educational level or previous occupational status. Moreover, new measures on relative deprivation and the receipt of welfare benefits are considered with regard to their explanatory power. Similar to the preceding empirical chapter, the findings from the fixed effects panel regression models are contrasted to results obtained when leaving the hierarchical data structure aside.

The research objectives of the third sub-study are to find answers to the following questions: *To what extent do objective and subjective economic deprivation among voters change their tendency to support a populist party from the right and the left wing? Which explanatory factors are more predictive for left-wing than right-wing populist voting and vice versa? Do the findings obtained from year-specific analyses differ from the longitudinal evidence making use of the panel structure of the data?* The major contributions of the chapter are the testing of the theories on economically motivated support for left-wing and right-wing populist parties in a way that is less prone to distortions and the illustration of the benefits of such a research design that may help to overcome the possible sources of inconsistent findings in the literature.

1.5.4 The Effect of Socioeconomic Vulnerability on Radical Populist Voting and Abstaining in the European Elections 2019

Given that the empirical analyses so far have been limited to single-country contexts (i.e. Belgium, Flanders, and the Netherlands), it is advisable to expand the research scope to a cross-country perspective. The fourth and final empirical chapter therefore studies if economic deprivation increased populist party voting compared to mainstream party voting in the elections for the European Parliament 2019. With these supranational election taking place simultaneously across all EU member states it is an adequate context to study populist voting comparatively and even more so since it is a “second-order election” in which populist voting is likely to be enhanced by the elimination of deliberations on the consequences of one’s vote that apply in national elections. However, the subordinate role of European elections suggests abstaining to be another common outcome that can be explained theoretically in a similar way than populist voting. Thus, abstaining is analyzed as another phenomenon. Apart from merely contrasting populist voting and abstaining to mainstream party support, the analysis is deepened towards further studying under which circumstances populist voting is more likely than abstaining and the other way round. For that, various political attitudes are tested with regard to their mediating role between educational, occupational, and financial vulnerability and the three possible outcomes.

Thus, the research interests of the fourth sub-study are: *How does socioeconomic vulnerability affect the tendency of populist voting and abstaining, both compared to mainstream voting? Which attitudinal mediators can explain why certain aspects of socioeconomic vulnerability rather lead to populist voting or abstaining than other voting choices?* The contributions consist of the joint examination of populist voting and abstaining in a “second-order” election and in the additional identification of political views that are fostered by socioeconomic vulnerability and that lead increase the likelihood of a distinct outcome.

2

Does the Socioeconomic Context Create
a Breeding Ground for Populist Attitudes?
Multilevel Evidence from Belgium

Operationalizing support for populism through voting in favor of populist parties constrains the analysis in multiple ways. The dichotomization conceals varying intensities of populist views, abstainers cannot be considered although their indifference or disapproval towards politics may comprise populist stances and it is impossible to disentangle whether the vote was cast due to agreement with the populist character or with the political contents of a party. The need for further research on populist views is approached by separately analyzing the impact of socioeconomic hardship on three attitudinal domains commonly addressed by populist parties (people-centrism, anti-elitism, and anti-immigration stances). Besides, the possible influence of the economic situation in individuals' municipalities of residence is taken into account since the perceptibility of contextual hardship may reinforce the effect of individually unfavorable conditions. Linear multilevel models based on official statistics and survey data from the Belgian National Election Study 2014 indicate that a lower level of education and a stronger feeling of relative deprivation come along with more intense populist views. Besides, the positive effect of relative deprivation on people-centrist views is enhanced by witnessing higher financial wealth in the local surroundings. The municipal unemployment rate, however, does not strengthen the effect of personal labor market insecurity.

2.1 Introduction

When referring to the increasing success of populism in Western Europe, the electoral success in terms of vote shares and parliament seats won by parties making use of this political style is a commonly considered indicator. Populism has been characterized as a “thin-centered” ideology that portrays the “elite” as the antagonist of the “common people” and that is usually combined with nativism (Mudde, 2004; Stanley, 2008). However, the anti-establishment and people-centrist rhetoric of populist parties is not necessarily the root of the support they receive by the electorate. Instead, voters may favor them due to their substantive policy objectives. What is more, focusing on the binary concept of having or having not voted for a populist party inhibits studying the intensity of populist views and additionally excludes non-voters from the analysis who supposedly are driven by a disapproval of (established) politics (Rico & Anduiza, 2019; Spruyt, Keppens, & Van Droogenbroeck, 2016; Tsatsanis, Andreadis, & Teperoglou, 2018). Hence, the rejection of established parties at the ballot box may be only “the tip of the iceberg”.

Although holding populist views has been identified as a decisive precondition of populist party preference (Akkerman, Mudde, & Zaslove, 2014), populist attitudes have been widely neglected in the literature mainly focusing on actual voting behavior (see Tsatsanis, Andreadis, & Teperoglou, 2018). Previous studies of populist views attributed both theoretically and empirically a crucial role to socioeconomic characteristics and the associated capacities of coping with societal transformations over the course of globalization (e.g. Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016; Spruyt, Keppens, & Van Droogenbroeck, 2016; Tsatsanis, Andreadis, & Teperoglou, 2018). Empirical evidence also indicates that populist views are more likely among persons with a low income and a low educational level (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016; Spruyt, Keppens, & Van Droogenbroeck, 2016; Tsatsanis, Andreadis, & Teperoglou, 2018). On the contrary, unemployment does not enhance populist opinions (Rico & Anduiza, 2019; Tsatsanis, Andreadis, & Teperoglou, 2018). Being a manual worker as an additional indicator of economic vulnerability due to globalization appeared to be irrelevant for the intensification of populist attitudes in Greece whereas a cross-country analysis for nine European states hints at a stronger support for populist position

among blue-collar employees (Rico & Anduiza, 2019; Tsatsanis, Andreadis, & Teperoglou, 2018). Additionally, subjective deprivation has been highlighted as a major predictor of populism, for instance among those considering themselves relatively disadvantaged – both individually and collectively (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016; Spruyt, Keppens, & Van Droogenbroeck, 2016).

Although there is widespread agreement in the literature on the core elements of populism, preceding studies varied with regard to its measurement and did not aim at disentangling people-centrism and anti-elitism (Akkerman, Mudde, Zaslove, 2014; Spruyt, Keppens, & Van Droogenbroeck, 2016; Tsatsanis, Andreadis, & Teperoglou, 2018) or concentrated the measurement of populism to people-centrism (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016). Accordingly, this study addresses three distinct attitudes that populist parties commonly address, i.e. people-centrism, anti-elitism, and anti-immigration views. People-centrism refers to the demand of giving political power to the “ordinary people” and not to politicians (*popular sovereignty* (Mudde, 2004; Stanley, 2008)). Anti-elitism reflects the “common people” rejecting the political “elite” for not representing them adequately. Since populist radical right parties (e.g. *Vlaams Belang*) are furthermore characterized by their nativist stances, anti-immigration views are additionally considered as an ideological position that goes beyond the “thin-centered” ideology of populism. Through the distinction across these three viewpoints, conclusions are facilitated on which particular aspects of populism are appealing for persons with a disadvantageous socioeconomic profile (see Schulz et al., 2018).

However, not only the individual economic situation is likely to shape political stances. In accordance with the differentiation between egotropic and sociotropic voting (e.g. Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2000), the latter suggests that political preferences are additionally driven by concerns about the contextual economic situation. A lacking direct effect of individuals’ life satisfaction on populist views furthermore illustrates the contextual relevance since at the same time populist opinions are stronger if the current state of society is perceived as negative (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016). Even if their social network is supposedly more influential, the local context inevitably confronts individuals with difficulties that their

neighbors are facing and which may pose a threat on them if they have a personal profile that makes them vulnerable for economic hardship (Books & Prysby, 1991; Sevä, 2010). If they are already experiencing economic deprivation, for instance having lost their job, a high level of local unemployment possibly reinforces negative sentiments triggered by their individual economic distress (Rooduijn & Burgoon, 2018).

Hence, this study investigates how the local context affects the formation of populist attitudes. Given that the economic situation on the national level comes along with high heterogeneity, it is advisable to use contextual units that are as small-scale as possible but still allow the linkage with survey data. The Belgian National Election Study 2014 is a suitable data source for that as the recruiting of respondents was guided by a previous sampling across municipalities to provide a hierarchical data structure. Like that, not only the impact of the municipal context on populist views is quantifiable but also its effect dependent on individual characteristics of local residents. Moreover, Belgian municipalities are applicable units of analysis as they not only had not changed in terms of composition since 1983¹ but also hold competencies in domains such as social welfare, housing, education, and public order². This leads to expect variation in the social and economic performance across municipalities that in many respects can be ascribed to local administrations.

Similar multilevel approaches have been pursued for actual voting behavior in favor of populist parties (e.g. Han, 2016; Koeppen, Ballas, Edzes, & Koster, 2020; Rooduijn & Burgoon, 2018) but these mainly refer to contextual units more large-scale than municipalities. With regard to visible electoral behavior, voting for *Vlaams Belang* being determined by the economic situation on the individual and the municipal level has been studied already (Lubbers, Scheepers, & Billiet, 2000). However, as for the societal phenomenon investigated in this study, i.e. the attitudes related to populism, there is only

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1. <https://www.vvsg.be/bestuur/samenwerking-verzelfstandiging/fusies> (as of 14th August 2021)
 2. https://www.belgium.be/en/about_belgium/government/Communes/competence (as of 14th August 2021)

scarce evidence linking the individual and the municipal economic situation. These studies also are limited to partial attitudinal domains (e.g. anti-immigration views, see Green, Fasel, & Sarrasin, 2010) and do not predominantly focus on economic predictors. Further research on the interplay between the personal situation and the local surroundings entails societal and political relevance as it provides a more detailed understanding of how resentment towards the political establishment and immigration arises. By that, it may give suggestions how traditional parties and politics may “win back” persons whose unfavorable economic status translates into people-centrist, anti-elitist or anti-immigration views.

Next to the wide range of responsibilities held by its municipalities, Belgium is a suited context in order to study the appeal of populism among socioeconomically disadvantaged persons. With Flemish Interest (*Vlaams Belang*) in Flanders and the People’s Party (*Parti Populaire*) in Wallonia, populist parties have been present in the two largest language areas. Especially *Vlaams Belang* received considerable electoral support on various political levels since its foundation in 2004 as a successor party of the *Vlaams Blok* whereas the *Parti Populaire* failed to gain major political influence. Still, the mere presence of populist parties in the political arena may fuel the emergence and intensification of attitudes matching their rhetoric as anti-establishment parties have proven to be both beneficiaries and catalysts of political discontent (Rooduijn, van der Brug, & de Lange, 2016). Consequently, the exposure to populist party rhetoric suggests an underlying predisposition towards people-centrism and anti-elitism. Due to the right-wing characterization of both parties, anti-immigration views may be brought forward as well. Besides, Belgium is characterized by contextual variation in terms of economic performance. In the election year of 2014, Flanders had an unemployment rate of 4.5% whereas in Wallonia 12.6% and in the Brussels capital region even 16.6% of the working-age population were unemployed³. As for the population structure, 5.5% of the Flemish residents in 2014 were non-Belgian citizens born

3. See Statistics Belgium: <https://bestat.statbel.fgov.be/bestat/crosstable.xhtml?view=f0fae533-cd23-40ee-94ff-37334303d057> (as of 19 July 2021, percentages for the second quarter of 2014 when the federal election took place)

from outside the European Union which is about the same share as in Wallonia (5.3%). In that regard, the relevance of considering the municipal level is emphasized by local figures with the percentage of foreign-born residents from outside the EU ranging from 0% to 36.3%⁴. These indicators illustrate contextual differences in exposure to economic and social conditions and by that, they emphasize the added benefit to the state of research through an analysis on how they shape political views, both separately and jointly with residents' individual situation.

2.2 Theory and Hypotheses

Since holding populist views and actually voting for a populist party are related to one another (Akkerman, Mudde, & Zaslove, 2014), the occurrence of both phenomena can be explained similarly. Nonetheless, support for a populist party is not necessarily based on opposition towards the political "elite" as the political program of these parties may be particularly convincing for some voters. Besides, the anti-elitist and people-centrist dimension of populism suggests abstaining ("exiting") as another form of protest against the establishment instead of "voicing" one's discontent (see Hirschman, 1970). Still, the theoretical mechanisms on populist voting attribute a decisive impact to populist attitudes and hence, they can be drawn upon to outline how certain aspects of socioeconomic hardship may lead to the formation of people-centrist, anti-elitist, and anti-immigration views.

Common attempts at explaining the rising approval of populism over recent decades have focused on simultaneously evolving societal trends, mainly globalization and modernization, and the differences across social groups in keeping pace with these trends on the economic, social, and political level (e.g. Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Kriesi et al. 2006). In that regard, two sources of discontent have been identified that link the intensification of populist views to socioeconomic resources. On the one hand, globalization initiated cultural transformations and the approval of cosmopolitanism

4. See Statistics Belgium (Herkomst naar nationaliteitsgroep van herkomst per gemeente): <https://statbel.fgov.be/en/themes/population/origin#figures> (as of 19 July 2021, percentages for 2014)

which supposedly caused a backlash within the working-class as its members may have other preferences which they do not see adequately addressed by their traditional political representatives any more. On the other hand, the increasing requirement of formal education on a globalized labor market suggest fewer chances to attain a remunerative occupation among low educated persons (Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Spruyt, Keppens, & Van Droogenbroeck, 2016, Kirchheimer, 1966; Williams, 2009). Accordingly, education is not only a potential predictor of populist views given its decisive impact on labor market prospects and – in case of a lack thereof – the impression of being “left behind”. It furthermore represents a parameter of political socialization, political efficacy, and status identity with all of which suggesting that low education fosters the emergence of populist views (see Spruyt, Keppens, & Van Droogenbroeck, 2016).

Through various mechanisms, a low level of education is possibly related to all three dimensions of populist views that are considered in the following. People-centrism questioning the legitimacy of representative democracy as well as anti-elitism considering established parties as mainly pursuing their own interests can be traced back to a less pronounced adaption of civic and democratic knowledge and a reduced promotion of political skills and participation among persons who underwent less formal schooling (Wiseman et al., 2011). Besides, the political domination of high-educated persons (“diploma democracy”) may induce a feeling of neglect among low educated social strata and provoke a backlash among “the common people” against “the elite” same as the impression of being individually irrelevant for political decisions (Bovens & Wille, 2010, 2017). A more extensive exposure to schooling also proved to decrease anti-immigration attitudes, possibly due to fostered tolerance and interaction with different cultures or due to immigration posing less of a threat for one’s individual economic prospects (Cavaille & Marshall, 2019). Accordingly, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1: Persons with a low educational level have more intense (a) people-centrist, (b) anti-elitist, and (c) anti-immigration views.

Besides, an insecure labor market status is likely to foster populist views as the feeling to be “left behind” is supposedly enhanced by established center parties neglecting the concerns of their working-class clientele in order to attract additional voter groups that have different economic and attitudinal preferences (Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Kirchheimer, 1966; Williams, 2009). Accordingly, populist views supposedly are more pronounced among workers with unfavorable personal prospects on the labor market due to their lack of formal skills in a service-sector society, i.e. low-skilled manual workers, but also among the unemployed who are concerned about re-entering the labor market. This hardship may increase the openness towards *popular sovereignty* and the populist claim of leaving political decision-making to the ordinary people instead of professional politicians as it is expressed by people-centrism. Hence, those feeling insufficiently protected on the labor market may put their hopes in the “common people” and their common sense to change their situation that established parties failed to improve (see Spruyt, Keppens, & Van Droogenbroeck, 2016). Besides, the “us versus them” dichotomy emphasized by populism provides a coping strategy as it portrays individual hardship as a shared experience for which responsibility can be shifted onto others, for instance the “elite” abandoning the “common people” and their struggles (Hogg, 2000, 2005). Thus, anti-elitism may be more prevalent among low-skilled manual workers and unemployed persons because of the impression of one’s hardship being unnoticed by established parties.

Vulnerability due to a disadvantageous labor market status may furthermore evoke opposition towards immigration. In that respect, considering immigrants as possible competitors for economic resources is a mechanism explaining why those who need these economic resources themselves (i.e. persons with little formal education or without a job) supposedly are less in favor of immigration (e.g. Berning & Schlueter, 2016; Bobo & Hutchings, 1996; Lucassen & Lubbers, 2012; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, & Prior, 2004; Stephan, Diaz-Loving, & Duran, 2000). Thus, it is hypothesized that labor market vulnerability comes along with intensified populist attitudes.

H2: Unskilled manual workers or unemployed persons have more intense (a) people-centrist, (b) anti-elitist, and (c) anti-immigration views.

Still, being disadvantaged can be expected to particularly translate into these populist views if an individual is aware of it or at least believes to be worse off, regardless of an actually underlying objective hardship. The concept of relative deprivation puts emphasis on the perception that someone is unfairly disadvantaged compared to oneself in the past or to other persons. If a certain desired asset, such as individual economic wealth, cannot be attained although one sees or assumes that for others it is within reach, discontent is likely to emerge (Runciman, 1966; Smith, Pettigrew, Pippin, & Bialosiewicz, 2012). Especially the thin-centered “us versus them” rhetoric of populism is in line with relative deprivation as it highlights the separation of societal groups, namely the “common people” to which the presumably deprived persons may count themselves and the political establishment fostering inequality through its focus on the benefit of the “elite” (see Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016). Similarly, the dissatisfaction of subjectively losing out when comparing oneself to others possibly evokes disbelief of politicians approaching one’s hardship. Consequently, doubts to be adequately represented in politics may grow which is a key element of anti-elitism. Relative deprivation may furthermore increase the perceived threat stemming from immigration, by catalyzing the consideration of out-groups as economic competitors for one’s own social group and by suggesting that privileges are lost to minorities (Meuleman, Abts, Schmidt, Pettigrew, & Davidov (2020). Accordingly, perceiving oneself to be worse off than others in society is assumed to foster populist attitudes.

H3: The more relatively deprived a person feels the more intense are her or his (a) people-centrist, (b) anti-elitist, and (c) anti-immigration views.

The concept of relative deprivation is a first hint at the importance of the contextual situation for the formation of opinions. The local level may be particularly decisive in that regard as social comparisons are likely to refer to one’s immediate surroundings. Although the personal social network supposedly plays a more crucial role in that

regard, the inevitable regular exposure to their local surroundings lead residents to observe and to assess the status quo of their environment (Books & Prysby, 1991; Sevä, 2010).

The thesis of persistent republicanism is a possible explanation on how unfavorable contextual circumstances possibly increase the intensity of populist attitudes as it suggests that political views and preferences within the electorate are only to a limited extent determined by the degree of satisfaction with one's personal conditions but more so by an evaluation on the status of society. Accordingly, a perceived negative development of society and the economy enhances the appeal of populism with its scapegoating rhetoric against the "elite" who they portray as unable to improve the situation, in contrast to the practically-minded, clear-headed "common people" (Elchardus, 2011; Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016). The link between unfavorable conditions in one's environment and populism is furthermore reinforced by the concept of a lost "heartland", a glorified vision of a better past that populist parties use to attract voters through a feeling of nostalgia (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018; Taggart, 2002). Since populist parties – and by that the main users of populist rhetoric in the political arena – are not part of the government in Belgium, such a mechanism is in line with the approach of economic voting which assumes a "punishment" for the incumbent at the ballot box as a consequence of an economic downturn (Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2000). Hence, the mere impression of the local economy declining may boost people-centrist views (due to only little or no problem-solving competence attributed to established parties) and anti-elitist sentiments (due to populists' finger-pointing at the "elite" neglecting the "people"). Considering a high unemployment rate as an indicator of an unfavorable labor market status and a high per capita income in a municipality as a measure of aggregate economic wealth, the following is hypothesized:

H4: The higher the municipal unemployment rate the more intense are (a) the people-centrist, (b) the anti-elitist, and (c) the anti-immigration views of a person living there.

H5: The higher the average income in a municipality the less intense are (a) the people-centrist, (b) the anti-elitist, and (c) the anti-immigration views of a person living there.

The assumption of anti-immigration stances being more prevalent among residents in municipalities characterized by high unemployment and little financial prosperity is again based on the mechanism of considering immigrants as competitors for employment or for financial means (e.g. welfare benefits) which supposedly are more demanded in less affluent contexts.

However, personally facing unfavorable economic prospects may reinforce the perceived threat stemming from the contextual level. According to the deepening hypothesis by Rooduijn & Burgoon (2018), the insecurity of persons who struggle with individual deprivation is increased if they are surrounded by economic conditions that do not give them reason to hope that their situation may change. In this case, populist parties may gain in terms of electoral appeal as they point out these grievances and rhetorically set themselves apart from the established parties in the government by presenting themselves as advocates of the neglected people. Populist attitudes then are likely to intensify as a preliminary step of voting in favor of these parties.

Thus, high unemployment within a municipality is particularly alarming for those residents who already have reduced prospects on the labor market as an individual. This may be due to a higher vulnerability on the labor market (i.e. a low level of education or working in an unskilled manual position) or due to experiencing unemployment. In that case, resentment against the “elite” possibly arises even more as one may get the impression that the governing parties are not doing enough to address the general decline on the labor market. This emphasizes the risk of the low educated and the low skilled to be affected by the loss of their job themselves and suggests to the unemployed that re-entering the labor market may be additionally hampered. Besides, populism provides a way to consider these individual (“my”) problems as “our” difficulties by portraying hardship as a shared experience among the “common people”. Upon realizing that more people in one’s environment struggle similarly, one can disclaim responsibility for one’s own

hardship (Hogg, 2000). Since professional politicians may be blamed of not only neglecting one's own issues but also to have failed in addressing labor market issues on an aggregate level, disapproval of being represented by them may increase even more with the claim arising of more direct political influence for the "common people". Such an approval of people-centrism may be particularly fueled by the rhetoric of populist parties aiming at utilizing popular discontent (see Rooduijn, van der Brug, & de Lange, 2016).

Apart from the anti-elitist and people-centrist positions, also anti-immigration stances may be more prevalent among the socioeconomically disadvantaged if there is a high extent of unemployment in the municipal environment. In this case, also the potential perception of immigrants as economic competitors is even stronger as the contextual labor market situation suggests a low supply of a highly demanded economic resource, namely jobs while oneself is in need of these resources or at least more worried about losing it due to unfavorable circumstances (e.g. Berning & Schlueter, 2016; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, & Prior, 2004).

H6: The negative effect of the educational level on (a) people-centrist, (b) anti-elitist, and (c) anti-immigration views is enhanced by a high municipal unemployment rate.

H7: The positive effect of being an unskilled manual worker or being unemployed on (a) people-centrist, (b) anti-elitist, and (c) anti-immigration views is enhanced by a high municipal unemployment rate.

Although the reference group of relative deprivation is not clearly defined, the situation in the municipality of residence is likely to account at least partially for the assessment of how someone or their social group is doing by comparison. If someone feels to be part of a group that is neglected in society, living in a rather prosperous context may dampen this impression as in this case the external circumstances do not confirm this impression. On the contrary, witnessing the wealth of others in one's environment may deepen the perception of neglect (Rooduijn & Burgoon, 2018). Given that relative deprivation is a subjective concept, this deepening mechanism supposedly applies regardless of someone benefitting

as an individual from contextual wealth since the ingrained belief of unfair deprivation will probably outshine a person's actual economic situation (see D'Ambrosio & Frick, 2007). As the feeling of neglect by society and politics grows due to the visibility of contextual prosperity, people-centrism may be accentuated even stronger as it matches the rhetoric of society being divided in "us" (the people) versus "them" (the elite). Similarly, anti-elitism may grow further through the greater perceptibility of one's disadvantage in more affluent municipalities which supposedly boosts the impression that the political establishment does not care about the needs of "people like me". Apart from anti-establishment stances, relative deprivation being reinforced by witnessing economic prosperity in one's surroundings is also a possible driving force of anti-immigration positions. Thinking to have less than others while at the same time seeing that other residents in one's home municipality – including immigrants – are better off defies the collectively internalized notion of the status order between the in-group and out-groups. Next to an inner demarcation from minorities and the existence of a group identity, there is a sense of entitlement to certain privileges within the majority population that is challenged when these privileges are visibly accessible to outsiders (Blumer, 1958; Bobo & Hutchings, 1996). Possibly fueled by the rhetoric of populist parties from the right wing, the presumption of immigrants living in prosperity while one believes to be neglected is likely to increase anti-immigration sentiments. This mechanism furthermore highlights the need to take into account the local perceptibility of immigration as it presumably holds true even more for contexts with a high share of immigrants and by that a bigger threat of competition. Hence, the following deepening effects are hypothesized for the interplay of individual relative deprivation and local economic wealth (considering the municipal net income per person as an indicator for the latter).

H8: The positive effect of relative deprivation on (a) people-centrist, (b) anti-elitist, and (c) anti-immigration views is enhanced by a higher net income per person in a municipality.

2.3 Data and Methods

2.3.1 Data

For a joint analysis of individual and contextual factors possibly explaining populist attitudes, data for both of these levels is used. Information on the individual situation is drawn from the Belgian National Election Study (BNES) 2014 for which 1,901 respondents were randomly selected in a two-stage procedure and interviewed personally (CAPI) in the aftermath of the federal elections on 25 May 2014, for instance on their political opinions and their economic situation. The population of the survey consists of all Belgians that were eligible to vote in the federal elections (Abts et al., 2015).

Additionally, the BNES 2014 includes information on the home municipalities of the respondents. This allows linking it with indicators from official statistics on a considerably small-scale level. From the 589 Belgian municipalities a sample of 110 of these local administrative units (43 Walloon municipalities and 67 from Flanders/Brussels) was drawn and each is represented by between one and 63 respondents. The Belgian Statistical Office (StatBel) provides data on the share of foreign-born residents with a non-EU origin⁵ and on the net income per resident within the municipalities⁶. Information on the unemployment rate in the Belgian municipalities is published by the Walloon statistical office (IWEPS)⁷.

2.3.2 Method

Linear multilevel regression models are estimated to adequately exploit the hierarchical data structure. Such an approach allows to distinguish which share of the variance in populist attitudes can be attributed to individual characteristics or the municipal

5. <https://statbel.fgov.be/nl/themas/bevolking/herkomst#figures> (as of 14th August 2021)

6. <https://statbel.fgov.be/nl/themas/huishoudens/fiscale-inkomens#figures> (as of 14th August 2021)

7. Share of working-age (15 to 64 years) residents who are not employed but looking for employment, see <https://www.iweps.be/indicateur-statistique/taux-dactivite-taux-demploi-taux-de-chomage-commune-calibres-lenquete-forces-de-travail/> (as of 14th August 2021)

economic situation. Beyond that, interaction effects of individual and contextual predictors across levels can be estimated (Langer, 2010). Assessing whether the hypotheses hold true or not will be based on a random slope model which builds on the assumption that the effect of a particular individual level variable on populist attitudes is varying across municipalities. While this seems plausible when for example considering the heterogeneity in size and economic performance across municipalities, a random slope model is furthermore advisable from a statistical perspective: If one does not estimate such a model despite an underlying variation in the effects across municipalities the standard errors of the other predictors might be biased (Snijders & Bosker, 2012: 87). Regarding the array of economic explanatory variables outlined in the theory section, the decision for which of them the impact on populist attitudes will be allowed to differ across municipalities is based on theoretical deliberations: As relative deprivation is determined by social comparisons with one's surroundings, the municipal context is assumed to be particularly decisive for its extent and its impact on the three attitude domains. Thus, in order to account for the feeling of unfair neglect probably being stronger pronounced in certain municipal settings, random slopes are estimated for relative deprivation.

2.3.3 Measurement

The respondents' educational level is operationalized through four categories which are none or lower education, lower secondary education, higher secondary education, and higher and university education (reference category). For the occupational class, five categories are considered: higher-grade service class (reference category), lower-grade service class, small business owners, skilled workers, and unskilled workers. For those persons with a missing value on that variable (i.e. economically inactive persons), two additional categories are created that refer to their reported activity status. These are being unemployed and looking for a job and all other forms of economic inactivity (e.g. retirement, housework, ongoing education). The degree to which a person feels relatively deprived is measured on a sum score consisting of three items with a five-point Likert scale: "If we need something from the government, people like me have to wait longer than others." "People like me

are being systematically neglected, whereas other groups receive more than they deserve.” and “In times of economic crisis people like me are always the first victims.” (Cronbach’s Alpha: 0.84)⁸. Accordingly, the operationalization of relative deprivation is more in line with its subsumable concept of collective relative deprivation which puts emphasis on the impression of belonging to an unfairly disadvantaged group instead of being neglected as an individual (Runciman, 1966). This group-centered conceptualization has been identified as a relevant predictor of expressing protest despite the expected major influence stemming from individual relative deprivation (Guimond & Dubé-Simard, 1983). Hence, previous empirical research and the “us versus them” (“the common people” versus “the elite”) rhetoric of populism leads one to expect that above formulated hypotheses on relative deprivation also apply when narrowing it down on its collective manifestation.

Additionally, sociodemographic control variables are included that are possible predictors of a person’s socioeconomic performance and of her or his political views. These are gender and age to capture for instance different gender ratios in the occupational groups and possibly varying risks of (long-term) unemployment across age groups. Age will additionally be considered as a transformed (squared) variable to account for its possibly curvilinear effect. Moreover, the area (Flanders, Wallonia, or Brussels) is taken into account to address regional differences in terms of economy and politics such as economic wealth and the intensity of populist rhetoric in the regional political arenas.

The municipal unemployment rate (in percent) is one of the two theoretically emphasized contextual indicators and refers to that share of the local working-age population (15 to 64 years) that is not employed although they are looking for a job. In order to extend the relative deprivation approach to the municipal level, the local net income per resident (in 1,000 Euro) is included in the analysis. As the major populist parties in Belgium next to their anti-establishment rhetoric stand out through their nativist stances, the percentage of foreign-born residents with a non-EU origin in each municipality is another predictor on the macro-level. Commonly having been

8. A principal component factor analysis indicated one underlying factor.

identified as a predictor of approving populism (e.g. Schwander & Manow, 2017; Swank & Betz, 2003), an aggregate measure on the presence of foreigners allows to disentangle economic causes of populist views from cultural concerns.

These populist views comprise three attitudinal domains that are analyzed separately. For each, an item battery was included in the BNES 2014 questionnaire. All of the subsequently listed items were to be answered using a five-point Likert-scale (see table 1).

Table 1: Items Composing the Dependent Variables

People-Centrism ⁹	Anti-Elitism ¹⁰	Anti-Immigration Attitude ¹¹
<i>Cronbach's Alpha: 0.87</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha: 0.86</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha: 0.90</i>
The people and not the politicians should take our most important political decisions.	Voting is pointless; the parties do what they want to do anyway.	In general, migrants cannot be trusted.
The people would be better represented by ordinary citizens than by specialized politicians.	Parties are only interested in my vote, not in my opinion.	Migrants come here to take advantage of our social security system.
The power should be returned entirely to the common people.	Most politicians promise a lot, but don't do anything.	Migrants are a threat to our culture and customs.
Political debates in parliament are nonsense, it would be better if politicians just followed the will of the people.	As soon as they are elected, politicians think they are better than people like me.	Migrants abuse our system of unemployment benefits too much.
Ordinary people know better than politicians how the country should be governed.		Migrants' way of life is irreconcilable with the Western European way of life.

9. A principal component factor analysis indicated one underlying factor. One item from the original item battery ("There is a need for a strong leader who executes directly what the people think.") was not included in the sum score as it would decrease the internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha).
10. A principal component factor analysis indicated one underlying factor. One item from the original item battery ("Most of our politicians are competent people who know what they are doing.") was reversely coded before the analyses but was not included in the sum score as it would decrease the internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha).
11. A principal component factor of the eight statements in the item battery indicated two underlying factors. Two items capture the enriching aspects of immigration ("The presence of different cultures enriches our society." and "Migrants who work here contribute to affordable pensions.") whereas the remaining items that are used as a dependent variable in the following refer to the threats that are perceived to stem from immigration. One of them ("Migrants can never become real Flemings/Walloons.") was not included in the sum score as it would decrease the internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha).

2.4 Results

2.4.1 Descriptive Statistics

After listwise deletion the analysis sample consists of 1,186 respondents from 101 municipalities¹². Among them, 33.6% work in the service-sector whereas 18.5% of the respondents are unskilled workers. Only 14 persons (1.2%) in the analysis sample are unemployed and looking for a job. The most frequent educational category is having a higher (i.e. tertiary) education (41.3%). No or only little education (below the secondary level) applies to 8.4% of the respondents. The sum score of relative deprivation, ranging from three to 15 has a mean value of 8.7 scale points which by that slightly leans towards a weak sense of unfair disadvantage.

Anti-elitism is rather prevalent with a mean score of 13.1 on a scale ranging from four to 20 points. People-centrism (14.2) and anti-immigrations views (15), both varying between five and 25 points, are on average closer to the middle category. Pearson's correlation indicates a stronger positive interrelation between people-centrism and anti-elitism (0.4833) as well as between anti-elitism and anti-immigration views (0.4710) than between people-centrism and anti-immigration views which amounts to 0.2698. Differences in contextual circumstances are noteworthy as for instance the share of foreign-born residents with a non-EU background ranges from 0.8% to 36.3%. The annual per capita net income across the 101 considered municipalities covers a range from 8,877 Euro to 25,043 Euro. The lowest level of observed unemployment is 2.3% which is more than 25 percentage points below the observed maximum in the analysis sample (27.6%). Around two thirds of the respondents reside in a Flemish municipality with 29.1% living in Wallonia and 4.1% being from the Brussels area.

12. The considerable decrease compared to the initial sample size of 1,901 respondents is mainly to be explained by the items on people-centrism being enquired through a follow-up questionnaire. Only 1,403 persons completed this additional survey. In order to compare across the three dependent variables, the analysis is limited to respondents who participated in both the main survey and the follow-up interview.

2.4.2 Linear Multilevel Regression Models

For the multilevel analyses, the continuous predictors on the individual level are centered around the grand mean and the contextual indicators are centered around the average across municipalities which allows for a meaningful interpretation of main effects in models including cross-level interactions (Hox, 2010). Besides, direct effects are estimated while controlling for multiple other variables. Hence, the effect interpretation of a certain parameter comes with the condition that the other predictors are held constant (“*ceteris paribus*”). Given the high number of variables considered in the models, additional analyses have been conducted to test the impact on the findings¹³.

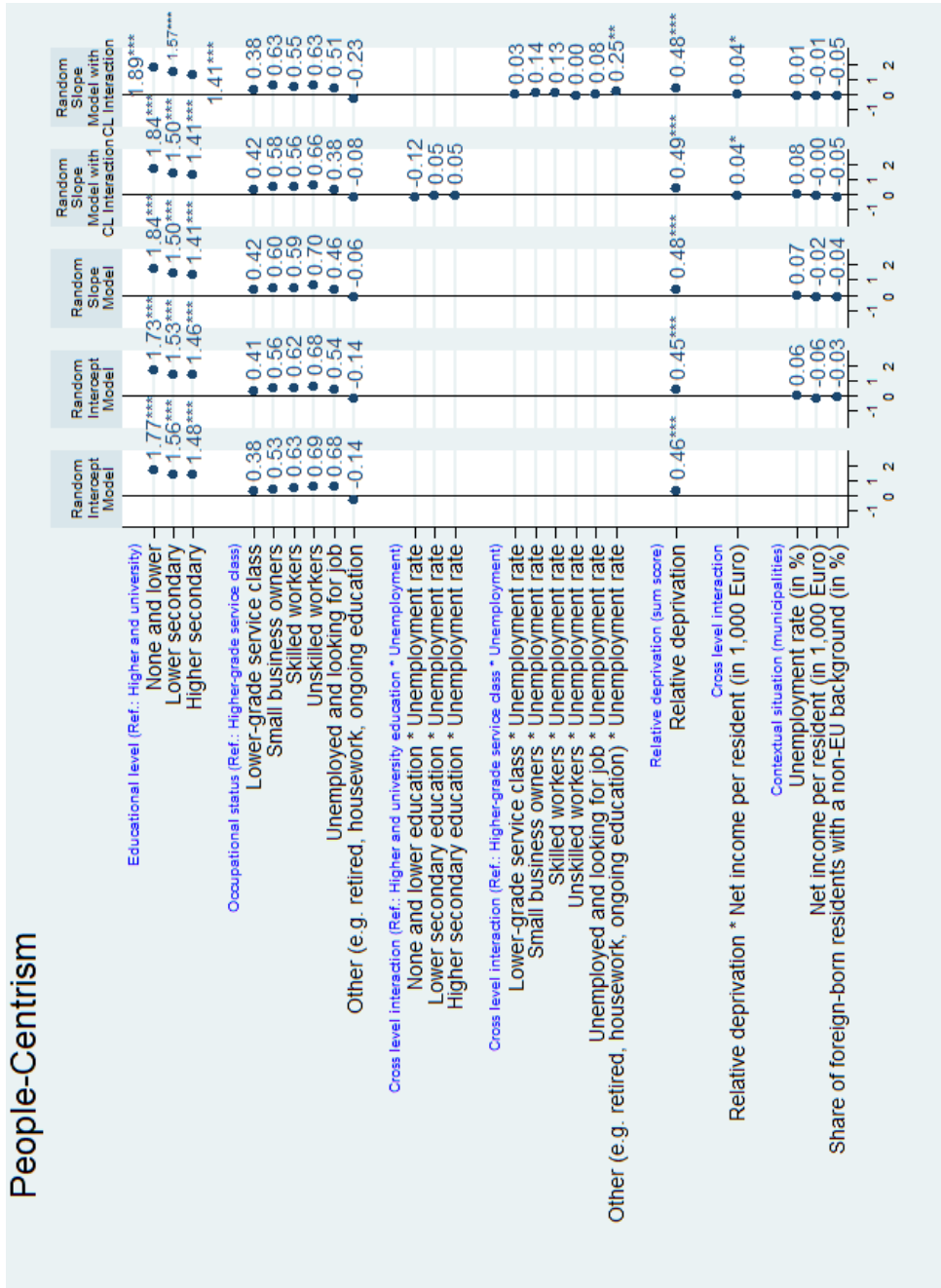
For a start, random intercept only models are estimated for all the dependent variables. These do not yet include explanatory variables and only indicate the average value of people-centrism, anti-elitism, and anti-immigration views. A higher informative value comes from the intraclass correlation that is calculated based on these models as it refers to the percentage of variance on the three attitudinal domains that can be attributed to differences across municipalities. For people-centrism, this share is 1.2% whereas municipal differences account for 4.7% of the variance on anti-elitism. The intraclass correlation of anti-immigration views is 4%. Hence, particularly the intensity of people-centrism is slightly related to variation among municipalities. Still, multilevel models may yield conclusive results since the intraclass correlation only tells about the share of variance on a dependent variable that is attributed to specifics of contextual units but not about the actual relationship of these dependent variables with explanatory characteristics (Nezlek 2008: 857).

13. Separate random slope models have been estimated for the three economic key variables on the individual level (each still including the control variables and municipal indicators). Unlike the full models, these findings hint at a significant effect of certain occupational categories on each of the three dependent variables. However, since both the educational attainment and the occupational status are used for a cross-level interaction with the local unemployment rate these two related concepts are considered separately in the final models which are used to test the hypotheses (see figures 2, 3, and 4). Besides, the variance inflation factors in the full models do not hint at multicollinearity, except for age and the transformed (squared) age variable.

2.4.2.1 People-Centrism

Extending the random intercept model explaining people-centrism by individual-level variables indicates that both a low level of education and the feeling to be relatively deprived increase the extent of “giving the power back to the people” (see figure 2). Compared to persons with a (higher) tertiary educational level, all persons with a lower attainment score significantly higher on the people-centrism score, including those with no education or no degree from secondary education whose approval of people-centrism is 1.77 points higher than among high-educated persons. Besides, each additional scale point on the scale of relative deprivation heightens people-centrism by 0.46 units which is a remarkably strong effect considering the 12-point range of the relative deprivation score. Hence, hypotheses H1a and H3a are initially supported.

Figure 2: Linear Multilevel Models Explaining People-Centrism (* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$)



The occupational situation, however, proved to be irrelevant for people-centrism when only considering the personal level. Neither the unemployed nor the unskilled workers have a level of people-centrism that varies significantly from those working in a higher-grade service class profession. This also applies to the other occupational categories. In addition, the individual-level control variables do not have a significant impact on people-centrism.

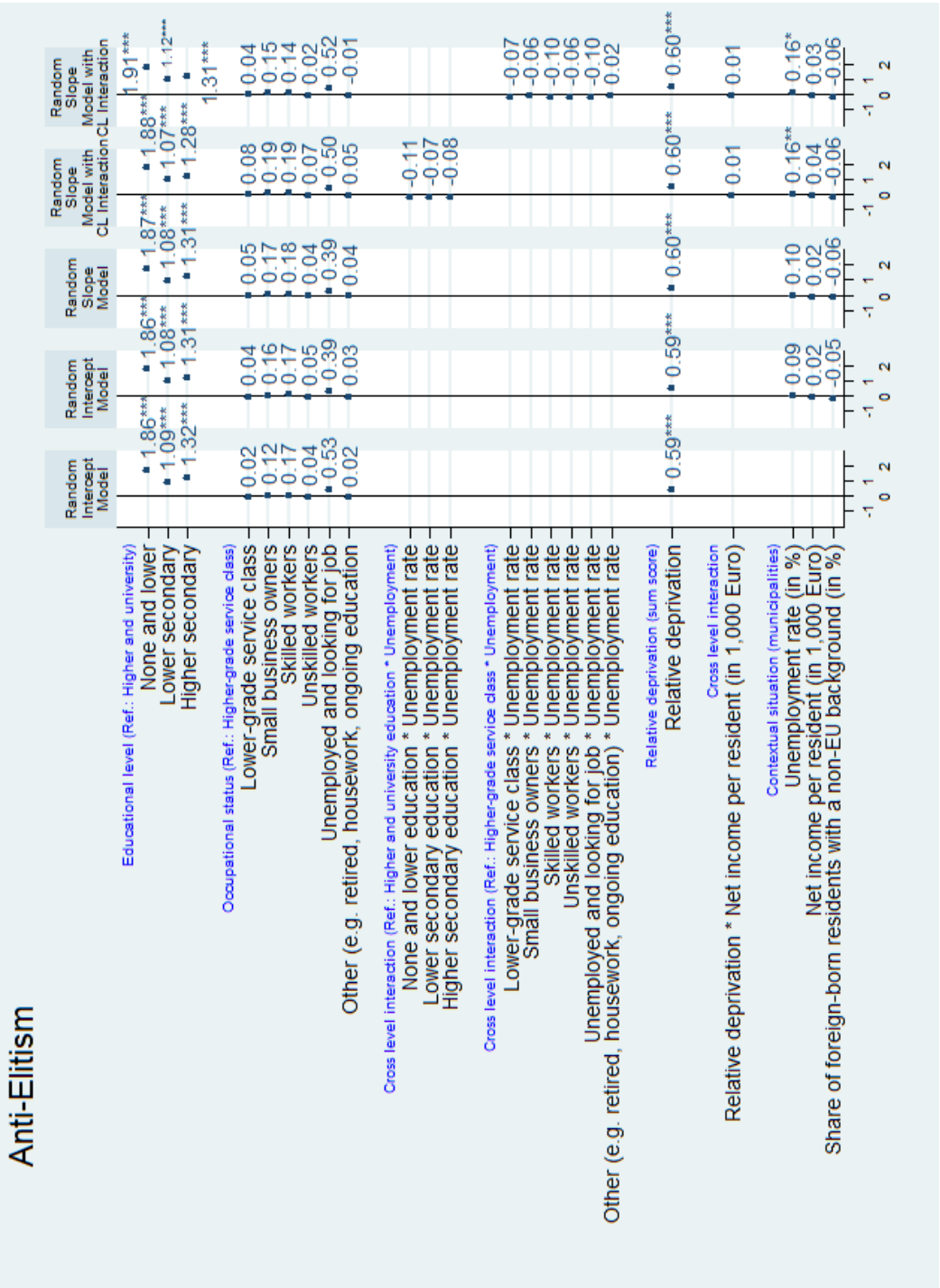
The significance level of the coefficients does not change when adding the three contextual-level variables. While the positive effect of having the lowest educational level is slightly reduced (to 1.73), the municipal unemployment rate, the net income per resident, and the share of foreign-born citizens from outside the EU does not alter the level of people-centrism of local residents. As relative deprivation is supposedly related more to the contextual level than the other economic variables are (due to the social comparisons determining this concept and the points of reference therefore being likely to vary across local units), its coefficient is allowed to vary across municipalities in the subsequently estimated random slopes model.

This leads to a small increase in effect size of relative deprivation (0.48). When subsequently also considering its interplay with the extent of local prosperity, it becomes apparent that relative deprivation boosts a person's degree of people-centrism even stronger the more prosperous the residents in her or his home municipality are on average. Accordingly, living in a wealthy environment enhances the disapproval of representative democracy among those who feel to be unfairly disadvantaged in society. Thus, next to hypotheses 1a and 3a also the assumption formulated in hypothesis 8a is confirmed. The other hypotheses related to people-centrism (2a, 3a, 4a, 5a, and 6a) are not confirmed as the cross-level interaction of a low educational level and an unfavorable occupational status with the local unemployment rate did not yield generalizable results. Nonetheless, the context dependence of the effect of relative deprivation emphasized the use of a multilevel explanatory approach of people-centrism, despite the low initial intraclass correlation of 1.2% which decreased to 0.3% in the final random slope model.

2.4.2.2 Anti-Elitism

Similarly, a random intercept model focusing only on the individual-level indicates the significant impact of a lower educational attainment and relative deprivation on anti-elitism (see figure 3). Disbelief in the political “elite” caring for the needs of the “common people” is by 1.86 scale points higher among the lowest educational group (compared to graduates of tertiary education) and increases by 0.59 points with every additional unit on the relative deprivation scale. The occupational and sociodemographic status is unrelated to anti-elitism with the exception of men having a significantly lower degree of anti-elitism than women. Adding contextual predictors does not noteworthy alter the findings from the random intercept model and the municipal predictors themselves only have insignificant effects.

Figure 3: Linear Multilevel Models Explaining Anti-Elitism (* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$)



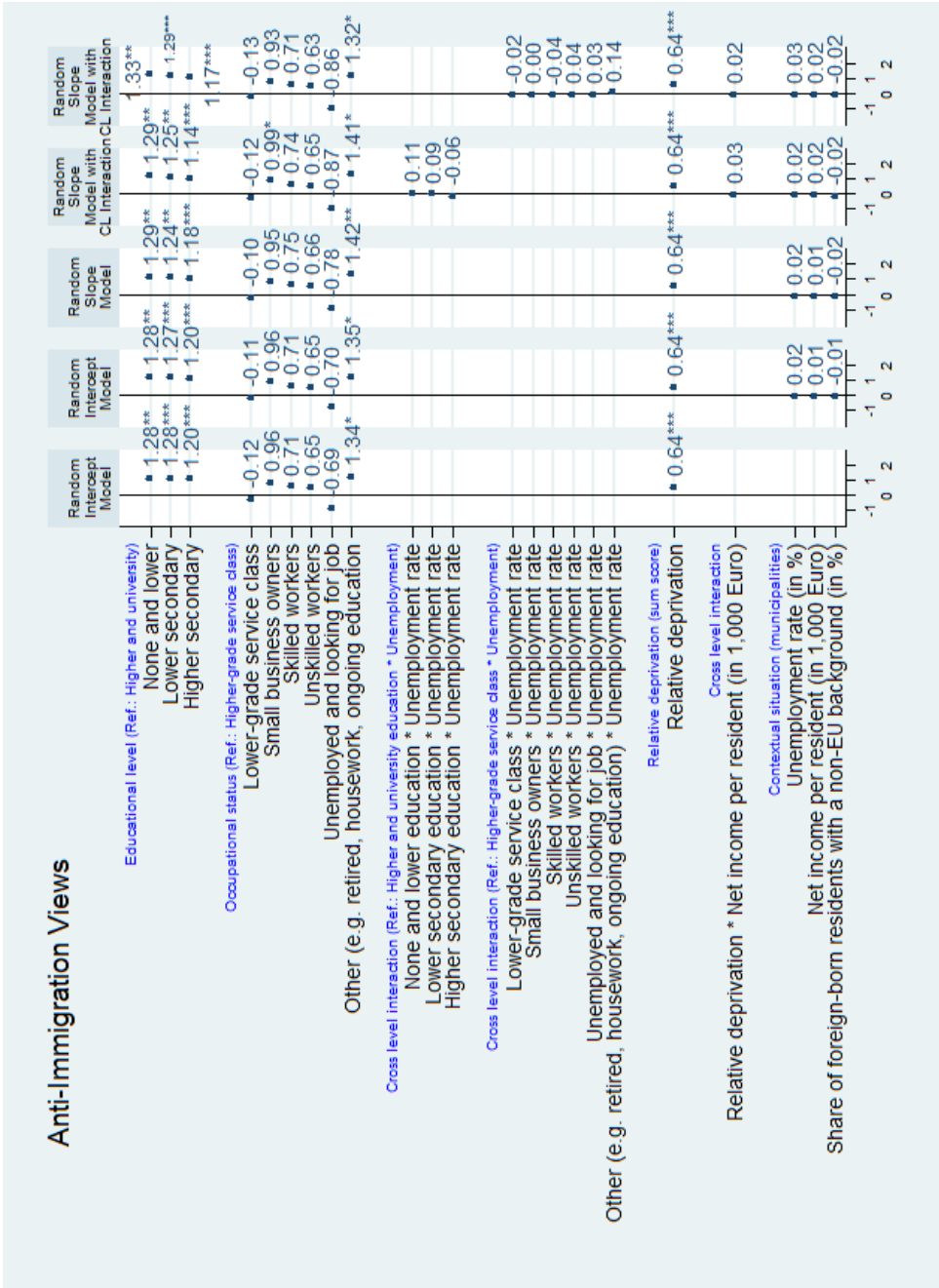
Again, in the random slope models the effect of relative deprivation is considered as variant across municipalities given its relation to comparing oneself to others and by that accounting for the differences in local reference points. This does not change the parameters considerably. However, when additionally considering the cross-level interactions of the municipal unemployment rate with the educational and occupational situation, the contextual impact becomes apparent for anti-elitism. While the interaction effects are not significant, the positive main effect of the municipal unemployment rate is. This finding is theoretically surprising as it only applies for the persons in the reference categories of the two variables with which it interacts, namely high-educated persons and residents working in the higher-grade service sector. Only for these groups, a higher municipal unemployment rate comes along with more anti-elitism and not for those who are more vulnerable due to their socioeconomic profile. Besides and contrary to the findings for people-centrism, there is no explanatory interdependence found of perceiving to be relatively deprived and of living in a wealthy municipality. Considering the negative effect of education on anti-elitism and the latter being also higher among persons feeling to be relatively deprived, hypotheses 1b and 3b are confirmed. Since unskilled workers and unemployed persons did not prove to be significantly more anti-elitist and since the municipal context (both separately and jointly with the individual situation) did not affect anti-elitism as expected, the remaining hypotheses referring to anti-elitism need to be refuted. The intraclass correlation decreased from 4.7% in the random intercept only model to 0.8% in the final random slope model.

2.4.2.3 Anti-immigration views

The general pattern obtained for the previously considered “thin-centered” aspects of populist views is confirmed for anti-immigration stances which are a rather ideological view commonly held by populist parties (see figure 4). A low level of education and a subjective disadvantage compared to others increase anti-immigration views in a random intercept model. The theorized labor market risks for unskilled manual workers and the unemployed, however, do not translate into a more intense disapproval of immigration. Gender and age do not explain differences in anti-

immigration views either. The region of residence, on the contrary, hints at the contextual impact: Persons from Wallonia and from the greater Brussels area both score significantly lower on the anti-immigration scale than Flemish residents.

Figure 4: Linear Multilevel Models Explaining Anti-Immigration Views (* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$)



The municipal unemployment rate, the net income per resident, and the share of foreign-born non-EU residents have no impact on anti-immigration views as an extended random intercept model shows although the consideration of these local indicators leads to the region of residence becoming an insignificant predictor. Moreover, the interplay of the individual socioeconomic profile and the contextual unemployment rate as well as the interdependence of perceived relative deprivation and local economic wealth is no relevant predictor of anti-immigration views in the subsequent random slope models (with the effect of relative deprivation possibly varying across municipal contexts same as for the previously studied populist views). Hence, hypotheses 1c and 3c are empirically supported whereas the occupational status and municipal context do not explain differences in opposition towards immigration – contrary to the expectations specified in the remaining hypotheses on anti-immigration positions. The share of variance on anti-immigration views that can be attributed to differences across municipalities decreased from 4% in the random intercept only model to 3.5% in the final random slope model. This small reduction is another hint at the considered predictors on the municipal level only being marginally related to anti-immigration views.

2.5 Conclusion

On the individual level, the findings of this study pointed out a higher prevalence of people-centrist, anti-elitist, and anti-immigration views among low-educated persons. On the contrary, the occupational status did not prove to shape political views that agree with populist rhetoric. The strong effect on all three attitudinal domains stemming from the feeling to be disadvantaged unfairly in society and by politics is noteworthy as well, also since relative deprivation was assumed to be particularly context-dependent. At least for people-centrism this was confirmed with the approval of popular sovereignty being stronger among persons who consider themselves relatively deprived and live in a municipality that is characterized by high aggregate wealth. However, such an effect was not found for the remaining two attitudinal domains. Thus, resentments against the political elite and opposition towards immigration are not stronger pronounced if persons thinking to be worse off than others are surrounded by greater financial wellbeing.

Besides, the impact of socioeconomic vulnerability on people-centrism, anti-elitism or anti-immigration views is not enhanced by a higher exposure to contextual economic risks, i.e. high local unemployment.

The lack of evidence on the interplay of personal and contextual conditions is remarkable as the consideration of the municipal level entails less contextual heterogeneity to be expected than when relying on regional or even national conditions. It is even more surprising considering the evidence yielded by previous multilevel studies linking local conditions to similar attitudinal domains such as exclusionary stances towards immigrants (e.g. Green, Fasel, & Sarrasin, 2010; Kawalerowicz, 2021), the suspicion of welfare abuse (Sevä, 2010) or discontent with politics (McKay, 2019), although these studies refer to different countries. Nonetheless, the higher extent of political discontent among persons believing that the local economy is doing worse than on the national level as identified by McKay (2019) underlines the impact of relative deprivation on attitudes related to populism that was also found in this study. However, it remains unclear why the approval of populist stances is seemingly independent from more objective aspects of economic vulnerability. In that regard, it should be pointed out that certain local characteristics do not necessarily affect perceptions corresponding to their actual level. Instead, their interpretation within the population is possibly biased by the appraisal of political actors who pursue own interests in trying to influence the public opinion (Sevä, 2010). Relatedly, a dynamic perspective on sudden and rapid changes of contextual characteristics over time may fit the outlined explanations on the formation of political views more accurately than relying on the absolute levels of economic or societal circumstances (Meuleman, Davidov, & Billiet, 2009).

The higher scores of people-centrism and anti-elitism among low-educated residents may be explained by them not feeling adequately represented in a “diploma democracy” and a reduced exposure to civic norms taught in the educational system (Bovens & Wille, 2010, 2017; Wiseman et al., 2011). The latter may additionally explain why anti-immigration views are stronger pronounced among persons with a low educational level since the alternatively proposed mechanism of possibly considering immigrants as competitors for

economic resources is refuted by the lack of effects stemming from the local unemployment rate and the relative presence of foreign-born inhabitants coming from a non-EU background. This raises the question if the considered attitudinal domains are shaped by contextual factors other than the economic or sociodemographic situation on the municipal level. For instance, even the municipal level might entail a too high extent of heterogeneity regarding living conditions. A within-municipality analysis has shown that the general sentiment towards immigration in a neighborhood is a major predictor of the individual opinion on immigrants (Himmelroos & Leino, 2015). Besides, economic deprivation in neighborhoods has been linked to a lower degree of perceived social cohesion among the residents (Sturgis, Brunton-Smith, Kuha, & Jackson, 2014; Taylor, Twigg, & Mohan, 2010). In light of these findings, social issues that are visible when looking over one's garden fence may be more influential for the formation of political opinions than the aggregate conditions in the entire municipality. However, since suitable survey data that sufficiently captures the general political mood of the residents in neighborhoods is often limited to single cities (Himmelroos & Leino, 2015; Sturgis, Brunton-Smith, Kuha, & Jackson, 2014), the findings are hardly generalizable to less urban contexts. Hence, future research should aim at combining the benefits of considering neighborhood effects with the analytic gain of this study that captured social and economic diversity across municipalities.

In nowadays information-society, a crucial role in forming opinions can be attributed to the media as well. In fact, a multilevel analysis on Flanders has shown that the actual degree of crime and ethnic diversity within municipalities hardly affects the view towards immigrants. However, a high television consumption proved to increase the subjective fear of crime and the perceived presence of ethnic minorities, both of which giving rise to anti-immigration stances (Jacobs, Hooghe, & de Vroome, 2017). Moreover, following the news is positively linked to agreement with the "thin-centered" aspects of populism and voters with more intense people-centrist and anti-elitist stances additionally stand out with regard to their preferred type of news media, namely commercial TV news, tabloid newspapers, and social media (Schulz, 2019). The use of social

media also has proven to consolidate populist positions among individuals (Schumann et al., 2021). What is more, frequently consuming alternative news with populist content not only increases the approval of populism but also the feeling of being relatively deprived as an individual (Müller & Schulz, 2021). This consistency of results across studies highlights the influential role of the media and hints at the exposure to political information from various sources enhancing populist views. Hence, the large-scale portrayal of society, politics, and the economy in the news might surpass the explanatory impact that small-scale conditions in one's surroundings have on political views.

Accordingly, further research on the local context possibly shaping attitudes should not be discarded. Instead, if suitable data is available, the scope may be extended to the even more immediate surroundings and to the news consumption preferences among residents. After all, since scoring high on the considered attitudinal domains is likely to be a preliminary step of actually voting in favor of a party addressing anti-establishment and anti-immigration issues, the individual-level findings of this study accentuate the scientific importance of taking socioeconomic hardship into account.

3

Social and Economic Predictors Favoring
the Local Success of Right-Wing Populism:
A Longitudinal Analysis on Municipal
Elections in Flanders

This study primarily analyzes if and to what extent changes in the economic performance and in the sociodemographic structure of Flemish municipalities affect the electoral success of right-wing populist Vlaams Belang (VB) in local elections. For this purpose, panel data from official statistics was gathered that covers the municipal elections from 2006 to 2018. Although a purely contextual perspective only allows conclusions on the influence of economic and social characteristics on aggregate voting behavior, there are some analytic advantages (e.g. complete data, no social desirability bias, no underrepresentation of specific population groups) over individual-level studies. In methodological terms, the benefits of panel data are illustrated by estimating fixed effects models. Contrary to theoretical expectations, the local unemployment rate is negatively related to VB's electoral success. Comparing these findings to year-specific analyses shows that a static perspective yields results that partly contradict those obtained from a longitudinal approach. Hence, reducing the risk of an omitted variable bias and accounting for time dynamics of the social, economic, and political situation proves advantageous for insights on the electoral success of populism.

3.1 Introduction

In the recent past, many Western European countries have witnessed the emergence and increasing electoral success of radical right parties that are furthermore characterized by their populist stance. Unlike other right-wing parties that also represent authoritarian, nativist, and ethno-pluralist positions, it is their rhetoric of society consisting of two antagonist groups, namely “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite”, and their claim to represent “the people’s” interest against the political establishment that makes them being labelled as populist (Mudde 2004, Stanley 2008). However, their populist distinction of society is narrowed down to only considering the majority population as “the common people” whereas other groups (especially immigrants and ethnic minorities) are excluded from their people-centrist approach. What is more, these populist parties frame established parties as a homogeneous political class that leaves the actually urgent problems faced by “the people” aside (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018; Rydgren, 2007).

Particularly those feeling disadvantaged in society and neglected by established parties are the target audience these parties aim for. So far, this has been addressed by a considerable amount of research with different socioeconomic characteristics being studied regarding their influence on the electoral success of right-wing populist parties (e.g. Arzheimer & Carter, 2006; Gest, Reny, & Mayer, 2018; Kessler & Freeman, 2005; Lubbers, Gijsberts, & Scheepers, 2002; Lubbers, Scheepers, & Billiet, 2000). Many previous studies are limited to the macro level and try to explain the local share of votes obtained by right-wing populist parties by using aggregate data from official statistics on various macro levels, ranging from municipalities to entire countries (e.g. Bowyer, 2008; Coffé, Heyndels, & Vermeir, 2007; Jackman & Volpert, 1996; Kestilä & Söderlund, 2007, Rydgren & Ruth, 2013; Schwander & Manow, 2017). While relying only on aggregate data certainly comes with the downside of a reduced informative value, it is also associated with advantages that individual-level data cannot offer. For instance, limitations of generalizability due to missing data and the unequal representation of certain social groups when relying on survey data can be overcome as each resident of a macro unit contributes equally to the calculation of a given aggregate measure.

Beyond that, information on electoral behavior is unaffected by social desirability that occurs in interview situations (Elinder, 2010; Schwander & Manow 2017). Aggregate data is additionally advantageous for the analysis of contextual effects as it refers to explicitly defined geographical areas whereas voters' perceptions on their surroundings in survey data may be based on variously sized units of reference (Elinder, 2010).

Previous research on contextual circumstances shaping electoral outcomes yielded mixed evidence. Unemployment as a common indicator of economic difficulties has proven to be negatively associated with the success for radical right parties (e.g. Knigge, 1998) but there is also evidence indicating that there is no such effect at all (e.g. Bowyer, 2008; Jesuit & Mahler, 2004). Further aggregate-level studies obtained a positive effect of unemployment on the electoral success of radical right parties (e.g. Giebler & Regel, 2017; Jackman & Volpert, 1996; Rydgren & Ruth, 2013). Other findings hint at the positive effect of unemployment being dependent on further contextual characteristics, such as unemployment regulations (Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2016) or a high immigration rate (Golder, 2003). Relatedly, and in line with radical right parties' anti-immigration rhetoric, this party type proved to be more successful in contextual units with a higher presence of immigrants (e.g. Knigge, 1998) although there are findings questioning the existence of such an effect (e.g. Jesuit & Mahler, 2004) or emphasizing its interplay with characteristics such as the immigrants' origin or skill-level (Bolet, 2020; Coffé, Heyndels, & Vermeir, 2007). In addition, alternative measures of contextual wealth, for instance the average income or the receipt of welfare benefits, have been empirically linked with the electoral success of radical right parties (e.g. Coffé, Heyndels, & Vermeir, 2007; Rydgren & Ruth, 2013).

As pointed out by Poznyak, Abts, and Swyngedouw (2011), this variation in terms of findings is keeping up the use of contradictory theoretical approaches. A positive relation between an economic downturn and the share of votes for radical right parties agrees with the basic assumption of economic voting according to which unfavorable economic circumstances induce voters to "punish" the incumbent by voting for their contenders (e.g. Lewis-Beck & Nadeau, 2011). Conversely, research on the regional level showed

that economic growth and an upward trend on the labor market come with rewarding the government at the ballot box (Elinder, 2010). However, voters supporting parties that are associated with labor market policies instead of an anti-establishment character can explain why an economic downturn does not necessarily come along with a higher support for populist parties. Similarly, while a positive effect of immigration on the electoral success of radical right parties can be traced back to the majority population perceiving immigrants as an economic or cultural threat, having had more opportunities to meet with immigrants and to overcome prejudice may explain a negative effect of the contextual immigration rate on populist radical right voting (Poznyak, Abts, & Swyngedouw, 2011).

Aside from their findings, above-cited studies vary widely in several aspects of research design, such as considered countries or size of contextual units, and in terms of methodology, for instance by measurement or investigation period. Not only does this limit the generalizability of the results obtained but it also may explain the inconsistency of findings. Two potential sources of these conflicting findings have been identified which is the risk of an ecological fallacy when relying on aggregate data and the predominant consideration of single elections. The latter may distort the findings as the influence of election-specific peculiarities cannot be controlled and dynamic processes remain unconsidered (Poznyak, Abts, & Swyngedouw, 2011). The need to disentangle structural from cyclical effects is furthermore emphasized by populist radical right parties not being particularly successful in areas with a generally high percentage of immigrants and unemployment but rather in those municipalities that witnessed a strong and rapid increase of immigration and unemployment over time (Patana, 2020).

This study pursues the objective to overcome the shortcomings of previous research even further. Although its macro-level design does not allow for conclusions on individual voting behavior as well, the consideration of municipalities suggests a higher homogeneity among residents than relying on more large-scale units which in some previous studies are even entire countries (e.g. Jackman & Volpert, 1996). Besides, a fixed effects panel analysis meets the need to consider dynamic processes and eliminates the distorting influence of omitting relevant factors that may be hard to operationalize

on a contextual level. For instance, the geographical situation of a municipality or the local political tradition could explain certain electoral outcomes that are contrary to socioeconomic conditions. Illustrating the analytic advantage of fixed effects panel regressions compared to a longitudinal perspective that just contrasts multiple year-specific analyses is another contribution of this study.

A further advancement of this study is its focus on municipal elections in Flanders from 2006 to 2018, a period covering the decline and the reinvigoration of the region's major radical right party, *Vlaams Belang* (VB). Although analyzing aggregate data on local instead of regional or national elections comes at the price of limiting the analysis on those municipalities where VB ran for mayoral office, it provides more inclusive aggregate information on voting behavior. Unlike in regional or national elections, foreign citizens are eligible to vote in local elections¹ and by that, they can shape the electoral outcome, presumably to the disadvantage of nativist VB. However, a high presence of foreigners can also be expected to foster the success of VB among the majority population. Hence, there might be an underlying composition effect when estimating the impact of the proportion of foreigners on radical populist voting. Nonetheless, this makes the outcome variable of this study as representative as the predictor variables as all residents aged 18 and older had the same chance to contribute to the aggregate data considered in the following. It also allows drawing less distorted conclusions on how the relative frequency of foreigners is reflected in aggregate voting behavior. Belgian municipalities being responsible for multiple aspects of societal life (e.g. social welfare, education, housing, and public order)² underlines the power of municipal administrations and suggests that their populist challengers may benefit in the local political arena from economic downturns.

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1. <https://www.vlaanderen.be/stemrecht-en-stemplicht-bij-verkiezingen> (as of 30th March 2021)
 2. https://www.belgium.be/en/about_belgium/government/Communes/competence (as of 30th March 2021)

3.2 Flanders as a Research Context

Founded in 2004 as a successor party of the *Vlaams Blok*, *Vlaams Belang* (“Flemish Interest”) has become one of the most successful political parties in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. In that very year, the party even turned out to be the most successful party in the Flemish regional elections, reaching 24.2% of the all votes. After having experienced a decline in electoral support (15.28% in 2009, 5.98% in 2014) in between, VB became in 2019 the second strongest party again with 18.5% of the votes. Also on a higher level, i.e. the elections to the national parliament as well as to the European Parliament, VB witnessed similar variations in terms of vote shares obtained.

Regarding its economic policy, VB stands out through its nativist stances calling for independence from Wallonia and by its attempts to gain votes among dissatisfied parts of the electorate (Coffé, 2008). Unlike radical right parties from other countries, the nationalism of VB is not only directed against immigrants as an out-group but also at Belgians from French-speaking Wallonia with Walloon policy-makers being blamed for an unfavorable economic development (Coffé, 2008; De Cleen, 2016). Beyond that, VB engages in a comprehensive populist rhetoric by labelling several societal groups as “the corrupt elite” while portraying themselves as advocates of “the common people”. Apart from opposing multiculturalism, rigid action against crime is another self-demarkation of VB from other parties. An explicit focus on socioeconomically struggling areas furthermore suggests higher support for VB in municipalities that undergo economic hardship, even more so as its leaders provide scapegoats and emphasize the disciplined work attitude of the Flemish in contrast to the one shown by out-groups (De Cleen, 2016).

Given that voting is compulsory in Belgium, the anti-establishment profile of VB supposedly earns it additional votes among dissatisfied voters who otherwise would abstain from voting and who do not cast an invalid vote. Although there is individual-level evidence that VB still would benefit from political distrust even if compulsory voting was abolished (Hooghe, Marien, & Pauwels, 2011), one can expect that the institutional mobilization of voters does not harm the

populist success on an aggregate level. Nonetheless, this limits the generalizability of results to contexts without that legal regulation.

As mentioned above, this study refers to local elections and not to regional or national elections. This leads one to assume that campaigning was tailored to the socioeconomic conditions in the single municipalities and it obviously limits the analysis to those municipalities in which VB ran for office in 2006, 2012, or 2018. A historically rooted strong sense of belonging towards the own municipality, distrust towards the national government and many aspects of economic performance (e.g. economic growth, education, security or social assistance) falling under the municipal scope of responsibility point out the expectable populist appeal in local elections which is backed up by VB's municipal success matching the national support in recent election years (Delwit, 2019). Research comparing voting outcomes in local and in national elections showed that high unemployment and immigration rates are beneficial for radical right parties on both levels (Kestilä & Söderlund, 2007).

3.3 Theoretical Approach

3.3.1 Economic Approaches Explaining Right-Wing Populist Success

The basic approach of economic voting assumes governing parties to benefit from voters approving the general economic performance. In the case of an economic downturn, however, voters blame and “punish” the incumbent by turning towards political contenders (e.g. Lewis-Beck & Nadeau, 2011). While this perspective mainly explains gains or losses for previously governing parties and not for any other specific party type, radical populist parties such as VB can be considered a likely profiteer of economic grievances as their anti-establishment rhetoric directed against the political “elite” makes them appear a good option to at least express one's dissatisfaction at the ballot box. For the Flemish context, this protest vote perspective not only applies to regional elections but also to the local level since VB was never represented in a mayor's office and thus, it can portray itself as a non-establishment party.

Frequent interactions with people from one's own municipality and the consumption of local news furthermore suggest that voters are aware of the state of economy in their home surroundings and that their political preferences are shaped by these impressions (Elinder, 2010). Although it is possible that local conditions also affect voting behavior in national elections, the mayor is supposedly held responsible for economic downturns as well since local prosperity is mainly related to political choices made on the municipal level. In this regard, the longitudinal setting of this study becomes relevant as VB may benefit from disappointment with the incumbent even more if the population witnessed a rapid decline in contrast to municipalities that had been facing hardship for a longer period (see Patana, 2020). Accordingly, VB is hypothesized to be less successful in municipalities with a high local added value (as an indicator for economic well-being), or put conversely:

H1: The higher the gross added value of a municipality, the lower the share of votes obtained by VB.

However, not every population group is equally affected or threatened by economic hardship. The *losers of globalization thesis* highlights the appeal of populist parties among voters who struggle to meet the requirements on a globalized labor market and who do not feel represented adequately by established political parties. A growing service-sector and an increasing technological automation came along with the creation of new employment possibilities but also with a higher requirement of formal education and skill-sets. By contrast, employment in industrial and manufacturing jobs has shrunk which reduced the job opportunities of those lacking specialized skills (e.g. Decker, 2018; Kriesi et al., 2006; Lengfeld, 2017; Mudde, 2016; Oesch, 2008). Thus, being a "loser" of globalization is mostly associated with a person's employability and with not meeting the demand for specific skill sets on the labor market but also with already having experienced these unfavorable concomitants of globalization, for instance by being unemployed for a longer period (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). In order to improve their situation, these "left behinds" may tend to participate in collective mobilization as it is addressed by populist radical parties portraying themselves as challengers of the political "elite" and promoting an idealized view on the past (Kriesi et al., 2006; Mudde & Rovira

Kaltwasser, 2018). Although it generally affects all occupational groups, a high level of local unemployment may have a signaling effect on the “losers of globalization” in particular. Those who already have experienced unemployment may perceive this as an indication that more residents have similar difficulties but also a hint that re-entering the labor market may be particularly difficult (see Rooduijn & Burgoon, 2018). Besides, those not affected themselves by a job loss but having a weak labor market position may regard a high unemployment in their immediate environment as a warning sign for their own security of employment. By claiming to address the needs of the “common people” and to overcome the societal neglect they have to endure, populist parties such as VB may benefit from an unfavorable local situation on the labor market. Thus, one can hypothesize the following:

H2: The higher the unemployment rate in a municipality, the higher the share of votes obtained by VB.

The *relative deprivation thesis* furthermore suggests an increase in populist voting among those feeling to be “left behind”. In this case, however, their perceived disadvantage is related to the impression of having less than they did in the past or than their social reference group (Runciman, 1966). As a concept, relative deprivation has been defined to comprise three distinct aspects, namely (1) persons comparing themselves to others (2) with these comparisons making them feel to be disadvantaged and (3) regarding this perceived disadvantage as unfair which causes discontent among these persons (Smith, Pettigrew, Pippin, & Bialosiewicz, 2012). Although relative deprivation is a subjective concept that is less obviously linked to societal trends such as globalization, the discontent coming along with it may also serve the success of populist parties. Aside from their people-centrist approach, their nostalgic rhetoric of bringing back “the good old days” may match the feeling of disadvantage among voters (Gest, Reny, & Mayer, 2018; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018). Besides, VB’s focus on Flemish prosperity and the narrative of Wallonia as a threat for Flemish wealth may additionally explain its electoral success among those voters who consider themselves worse off than others or than before. On the individual level, relative deprivation has proven to increase the

tendency of populist radical right support (Burgoon, van Noort, Rooduijn, & Underhill, 2019; Gest, Reny, & Mayer, 2018).

Likewise, relative deprivation may be reflected in the electoral results on an aggregate level. Put simply, more residents perceiving to be disadvantaged as an individual supposedly are reflected by more votes for anti-establishment and non-incumbent parties. Studying relative deprivation on the municipal level requires a measure that captures the percentage of residents who may be assumed to feel such a disadvantage compared to others due to the economic struggle they face. Considering the average income in a municipality would rather address economic inequality across municipalities instead of within them. The share of indebted inhabitants on the other hand is a suitable macro measure as it includes the share of the population that did or did not experience severe financial hardship. Hence, the following is hypothesized:

H3: The higher the percentage of indebted inhabitants, the higher the share of votes obtained by VB.

3.3.2 Social-Structural Approaches Explaining Right-Wing Populist Success

Given the nativist and anti-immigration policy of populist radical right parties such as VB, the exposure to immigration is assumed to be closely linked to the success of these parties. Moreover, assuming that immigration is not equally visible across the entire country, the local level is decisive in shaping individuals' perceptions of the extent of immigration (Patana, 2020). A high percentage of immigrants in a municipality may be perceived as a threat both in cultural and in economic terms. Culturally, the presence of immigrants may have two implications on the electoral success of VB. When being perceived as a threat towards the ethnic and cultural predominance of the majority population, a higher percentage of foreign residents is more likely to come along with an increased aggregate support for radical right parties such as VB (see Ben-Nun Bloom, Arikan, & Lahav, 2015; de Blok & van der Meer, 2018; Patana, 2020). On the contrary, according to the intergroup contact hypothesis prejudices and hostility towards an out-group are reduced if there are regular interactions with the in-group (Allport, 1954). These interactions are

more likely if a rather high proportion of the municipal population consists of out-group members (such as immigrants) and the presumed reduction of prejudices may manifest itself in a lower share of votes for nativist parties such as VB. Previous studies have confirmed the cultural threat approach (e.g. Bowyer, 2008; Coffé, Heyndels, & Vermeir, 2007) but also evidence supporting the intergroup contact hypothesis on the municipality level has been obtained (Della Posta, 2013).

From an economic perspective, a high perceptibility of foreigners in a municipality may induce sentiments of a material threat among the majority population. Group conflict theory considers persons to be primarily concerned with their personal economic wealth but also with the well-being of their group in general. When perceiving these interests to be under threat by an out-group, a feeling of collective deprivation may emerge that explains why the presence of foreigners is perceived as an economic threat which probably fosters the support for a political party opposing immigration (Bobo, 1988). Hence, foreigners are possibly considered competitors among the in-group when it comes to attaining scarce economic resources, for instance jobs (see Ben-Nun Bloom, Arikan, & Lahav, 2015).

As outlined above, from a cultural perspective a high proportion of foreigners living in a municipality can be associated either positively or negatively with the share of votes for VB. However, when additionally considering the perspective of economic self-interest, the relative size of an out-group may pose a threat for the in-group in attaining economic resources. Accordingly, the electoral success of VB is expected to be even stronger if the municipality is characterized by a high percentage of immigration and a high unemployment rate as the latter indicates a high need for jobs by a large part of the local population.

H4: The positive effect of the unemployment rate on the share of votes obtained by VB is even stronger the higher the percentage of foreigners is.

As outlined in the introduction, using aggregate data may affect the findings insofar as a high percentage of foreigners is likely to dampen the electoral success of VB as under these circumstances the votes of foreigners – who are eligible to vote in municipal elections – are more influential for the overall electoral outcome. Considering the nativist stance of VB, foreigners supposedly are more inclined to support other parties. Thus, the focus of this study on local elections can also illustrate if the hypothesized positive effect of the proportion of foreign residents on radical right voting withstands a potential composition effect since in elections on higher levels (i.e. provincial, regional, and federal elections) foreigners have no right to vote and consequently cannot shape the aggregate election results.

The crime rate is another local characteristic that can explain why populist radical right voting flourishes more in some municipalities than it does in others. VB claims to pursue stricter law and order policies than established parties do and connects delinquency with immigration by even accusing the government of providing forged data concerning this matter (Mudde, 2000). On the individual level, support for VB has been traced back to a fear of crime that also comprises the residential environment as residents of rural or suburban areas hope for VB to prevent them from high crime rates that are commonly attributed to urban regions (Schuermans & De Maesschalck, 2010). Assuming that voters are aware about the prevalence of local crime (e.g. through the newspaper), a high delinquency is expected to benefit VB as a self-proclaimed law and order party. What is more, VB's representatives could use the local prevalence of crime by explicitly highlighting this issue as a failure of the incumbent and as a threat for the population they will tackle on behalf of the electorate.

H5: The higher the crime rate, the higher the share of votes obtained by VB.

3.4 Data and Methods

Information on the economic, social, and political situation within the Flemish municipalities at the three municipal elections in 2006, 2012, and 2018 is taken from the Municipality Monitor (*Gemeente-en Stadsmonitor*) provided by the Flemish regional government³. The indicators that are considered, their range of values in the analysis sample as well as the exact year they refer to are listed in table 2⁴. The unemployment rate as well as the percentage of foreigners are centered around their mean values which is done to allow for a more meaningful interpretation of their main effects in models including their interaction.

Table 2: Municipality Characteristics

Municipality Indicator	Value Range (Across All Waves)	Years
Percentage of votes received by the Vlaams Belang in the municipal election	2.04% to 34.71%	2006, 2012, 2018
Unemployment rate (in %)	2.97% to 15.31%	2006, 2012, 2017
Gross value added per person (in 1,000 Euro)	9.59 to 157.81	2006, 2012, 2017
Percentage of residents in debt	0.71% to 5.28%	2007, 2012, 2018
Crime rate (per 1,000 persons)	10.69 to 115.05	2006, 2012, 2017
Percentage of foreign residents	0.38% to 30.58%	2006, 2012, 2018
Percentage of male residents	47.66% to 51.60%	2006, 2012, 2018
Percentage of persons aged 60 years and older	17.26% to 49.08%	2006, 2012, 2018
Percentage of persons being younger than 30 years	20.00% to 40.23%	2006, 2012, 2018
Population size (in 1,000 persons)	2.776 to 523.248	2006, 2012, 2018
Overall number of parties participating in the municipal election	3 to 17	2006, 2012, 2018

3. See <https://gemeente-en-stadsmonitor.vlaanderen.be/naar-de-cijfers/stel-zelf-je-rapport-samen-en-vergelijk>

4. Due to lacking information for the first and last election year of the investigation period, some indicators used for the first wave (2006) actually refer to the year 2007 and some indicators used for the third wave (2018) actually refer to 2017 (see table 2).

Apart from the economic indicators specified in the hypotheses, the number of inhabitants is included as a control variable to account for the variance in terms of population size across municipalities that ranges from 2,776 to 523,248 inhabitants in the analysis sample. Needless to say that this comes along with a varying extent of heterogeneity within the Flemish municipalities which can be accounted for by adding this indicator as well as other information on the population structure (percentage of male residents as well as of persons aged under 30 years and above 59 years). Furthermore, the overall number of parties competing in the municipal elections captures the political supply-side in the municipalities. In a highly fragmented local party system, a populist radical right party may have more difficulties in standing out compared to their political competitors and thus, their electoral success may decrease as the number of parties that are up for vote grows (see Kestilä & Söderlund 2007).

Given that VB did not participate in all local elections in the three election years considered, the statistical analyses are limited to those municipalities where it ran for office. While this certainly is associated with a reduction of the analysis sample it is less of a problem when applying a statistical method that is merely based on within-comparisons for the same municipalities over time and not, as in cross-sectional studies, on the comparison between municipalities. This is made possible by a longitudinal linear fixed effects regression with the municipalities considered as units of analysis. The basic approach of this method is to transform the longitudinal data in a way that individual information on the relevant variables are not analyzed by their actual value but by their difference from the municipality-specific mean value across all observations for one municipality. Transforming panel data like that allows to eliminate the possibly distorting influence of unobserved time-constant heterogeneity which in turn means that there is no need to include explanatory variables that do not change over time in the model (Giesselmann & Windzio 2012). Such invariant factors that are possibly linked to the local economic situation or the municipal election results are for example the geographical situation as it is associated with the proximity of infrastructural facilities and the related appeal for companies and immigrants.

Through the consideration of within-variation on the municipal level, the known temporal order of changes on the explanatory variables and the outcome, and the above mentioned control of time-constant unobserved heterogeneity, effects are obtained that are closer to causality than those being based on cross-sectional data as in most previous studies. However, the estimation of linear fixed effects only considers those municipalities that have experienced at least one transition over time on a predictor. Nonetheless, regarding the detailed measurement of the municipality indicators with several decimal places it is to be assumed that there are at least minor changes on the macro indicators over time. Still, even the potential omission of single municipalities due to a lack of variation over time would not affect the informative value of the results by a selection bias since the effects can be considered as an *average treatment effect on the treated* (Brüderl 2010). Still, the population on which conclusions are drawn in the following is limited to those municipalities with VB participating in at least two municipal elections over the observation period.

Since the analysis covers the period from 2006 to 2018 and in order to obtain more precise estimations, indicators on the three election years are added as control variables as well. Controlling for time trends reduces the potential bias caused by omitting time-variant characteristics in the model specification or by missing information on the relevant characteristics in the data (Andreß, Golsch, & Schmidt, 2013). Apart from the fixed effects panel regression models, separate linear regression models are estimated for each election year. In doing so, it is shown if and to what extent the restriction on between-comparisons across municipalities yields results that vary from the within-comparisons over time.

3.5 Results

3.5.1 Longitudinal Analysis

As described above, the first research objective of this study is addressed by a fixed effects panel regression model that is extended stepwise (see table 3)⁵. For a start, the main effects of all explanatory variables are estimated while in a second model an interaction effect between the unemployment rate and the percentage of foreigners is added. The third and final model specification furthermore controls for the election year which provides more precise effects for the other predictors as simultaneously occurring time trends are captured. While the explanatory variables of each hypothesis are considered jointly in the models presented in table 3, the effect directions and their significance are supported by robustness checks from additionally estimated separate models that only include the independent variables from every hypothesis and the control variables.

Table 3: Results from Fixed Effects Panel Regression (Linear Models)

	Dependent Variable: Share of Votes for Vlaams Belang in Municipal Elections (in %)					
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Coefficient	p-Value	Coefficient	p-Value	Coefficient	p-Value
Unemployment (in %)	0.882*	0.013	0.885*	0.013	-1.463***	0.000
Gross Value Added per Resident (in 1,000 EUR)	-0.238**	0.001	-0.239**	0.001	-0.082	0.091
Indebted Residents (in %)	-5.635***	0.000	-5.664***	0.000	-0.254	0.727
Crime Rate (per 1,000 residents)	-0.226***	0.000	-0.226***	0.000	-0.012	0.675
Foreigners (in %)	-0.175	0.477	-0.147	0.570	0.416*	0.048
Male residents (in %)	0.777	0.434	0.839	0.406	0.909	0.189
Residents aged 60 years and older (in %)	-0.942***	0.000	-0.944***	0.000	-0.206	0.361
Residents aged under 30 years (in %)	-1.243*	0.010	-1.232*	0.011	-0.675	0.051
Number of residents (in 1,000)	-0.464***	0.000	-0.448***	0.000	-0.384***	0.000
Total number of parties	-0.911***	0.000	-0.915***	0.000	-0.485**	0.001
Unemployment * Foreigners			-0.018	0.716	0.041	0.234
Municipal Election Year						
	2006				Ref.	
	2012				-8.879***	0.000
	2018				-6.122***	0.000
Constant	81.034	0.142	77.433	0.168	14.806	0.702
N (Election years in municipalities)		564		564		564
N (Municipalities)		241		241		241
Within-R2		0.5700		0.5702		0.8005
Between-R2		0.0511		0.0508		0.0565
Overall-R2		0.0067		0.0064		0.0010

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

- Given the wide range of explanatory variables, the following interpretation of effects comes along with the “ceteris paribus” condition, i.e. all other predictors being held constant simultaneously.

The first model suggests a significant impact of municipal economic deprivation on VB's success, two of them with an effect direction that is in line with hypothesis 1 and 2: A growth of the unemployment rate by one percentage point comes along with electoral gains for VB by 0.882 percentage points. An increase in economic prosperity, measured through the gross value added per resident rising by 1,000 Euro, reduces the local vote share of VB by 0.238 percentage points. Even stronger is the effect of the relative frequency of indebted persons as an increase of that population group by one percentage point leads to a lowered electoral success of VB by 5.635 percentage points. Relative deprivation theory, however, led to expect an opposite effect in the third hypothesis. The negative effect of the local crime rate on VB voting also contradicts the theorized assumptions that led to the formulation of hypothesis 5. As for the sociodemographic structure of the population, neither the percentage of foreigners nor the share of male residents significantly affect VB's support at the ballot boxes whereas both a rather high share of people aged 60 years and older as well as of residents being younger than 30 years decreases the vote share of VB. Besides, an increase in population size reduces the electoral support for the VB same as a higher fragmentation of the municipal party competition does.

Adding an interaction between the unemployment rate and the share of foreigners does not change the results described above considerably and the interaction itself does not suggest that a potential intergroup conflict affects VB's success significantly. This lack of impact is further illustrated by the hardly increased share of explained within-variance of 57.02% compared to 57.00% in the previous model. Still, altogether the explanatory factors have quite a high explanatory potential for the variance of aggregate VB support on the municipality level.

By contrast, controlling for the specific election year considerably increases the explained within-variance of VB support to 80.05%. This finding emphasizes the relevance of temporal developments and particularities, same as the strong effects of the year indicators themselves. The consideration of time trends has also implications for the effects of the other predictors. Most notable is that the effect of the local unemployment rate increases in size and

significance but changes its direction. Accordingly, with all other predictors – including the election year – being equal, an increase of the unemployment rate by one percentage point reduces the VB's vote share in municipal elections by 1.463 percentage points. Due to its interaction with the share of foreign residents, the effect of the unemployment rate comes along with the condition that the share of foreigners is on an average level at the same time. Hence, not only hypothesis 2 is refuted but it also becomes apparent that the omission of time trends in the previous models would have caused an opposite conclusion on the impact of the unemployment rate on VB's municipal success. At least on an aggregate level the theorized impulse of "punishing" the incumbent or generally the political establishment for unfavorable labor market prospects by supporting a populist challenger does not become manifest.

Likewise, the gross value added per capita, the share of indebted residents, and the crime rate are no significant predictors of VB support in the full model anymore. Nonetheless, the previously negative and insignificant effect of the share of foreigners is positive and significant in model 3. An increase of foreign citizens by one percentage point comes along with the VB gaining 0.416 percentage points in terms of local success – if the unemployment rate is on a mean level. Hence, a higher visibility of foreign residents and, by that, of immigration is advantageous for radical right populism in municipal elections. The related assumption of a group conflict between the majority population and minorities (foreigners) over employment possibilities, however, does not affect populist radical populist voting in municipal elections. After all, none of the five hypotheses is supported.

Considering the sociodemographic composition of the municipalities suggests that the VB is less successful in more populous municipalities. The age structure of the population has no significant impact on the VB's support. In addition, the negative effect of the number of competing parties on aggregate voting for the VB remains significant but is weaker in size.

3.5.2 Method Comparison

In order to illustrate the benefits of exploiting the analytic potential of panel data, cross-sectional OLS models for each election year as well as a pooled linear regression analysis combining the three election years have been estimated (see table 4). As for the election year of 2006, none of the considered economic indicators significantly affects VB's support in municipal elections. Accordingly, the positive effect of aggregate unemployment obtained from a statistical analysis accounting for temporal dynamics as well as controlling for time-constant aspects would not have been obtained when only analyzing the year 2006. Furthermore, only having considered the election year of 2006 would have led to the conclusion that high crime rates are beneficial for VB's local success. With regard to the sociodemographic structure in 2006, the percentage of foreign residents did not increase the share of votes of VB whereas they gained support if the local population was characterized by a high share of male residents and of persons aged 60 years and older. Besides, the number of inhabitants did not have an impact on VB's municipal electoral outcome. Furthermore, the positive effect of the number of locally competing parties stands out with each additional party that was up for vote in 2006 increasing VB's support by 0.58 percentage points.

Table 4: Results from Year-Specific OLS Regressions and a Pooled OLS Regression (Linear Models)

	Dependent Variable: Share of Votes for Vlaams Belang in Municipal Elections (in %)				
	Model 1: Fixed Effects (All Years)	Model 2: OLS for 2006	Model 3: OLS for 2012	Model 4: OLS for 2018	Model 5: Pooled OLS (All Years)
	Coefficient	Coefficient	Coefficient	Coefficient	Coefficient
	p-Value	p-Value	p-Value	p-Value	p-Value
Unemployment (in %)	-1.463***	0.531	1.402***	1.089**	0.653***
Gross Value Added per Resident (in 1,000 EUR)	-0.082	-0.030	-0.145	0.296	-0.017
Indebted Residents (in %)	-0.254	-0.828	-1.263**	0.309	-0.602
Crime Rate (per 1,000 residents)	-0.012	0.109**	-0.003	0.001	0.055**
Foreigners (in %)	0.416*	-0.129	-0.130**	0.137	-0.098*
Male residents (in %)	0.909	-2.380***	-0.396	0.000	-0.919**
Residents aged 60 years and older (in %)	-0.206	-0.877***	-0.211	0.000	-0.517***
Residents aged under 30 years (in %)	-0.675	-0.020	0.131	0.368	-0.180
Number of residents (in 1,000)	-0.384***	0.009	0.004	0.077	0.006
Total number of parties	-0.485**	0.380*	-0.366*	0.020	0.098
Unemployment * Foreigners	0.041	-0.045	-0.063**	0.001	-0.049**
Municipal Election Year					
2006	Ref.				Ref.
2012	-8.879***				-6.079***
2018	-6.122***				-1.158
Constant	14806	147.787	32.639	77.603*	76.241***
N	564	225	186	153	564
Adjusted R ²	0.8005 (Within-R ²)	0.2594	0.3009	0.1376	0.4834

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

In 2012, a high unemployment rate in Flemish municipalities came along with a significantly increased share of votes for VB if at the same time the proportion of foreign residents is on an average level. Moreover, the interaction between unemployment and the share of foreigners is a significant predictor of populist radical right voting, although it is not in line with the expected direction according to group conflict theory. Instead, the interplay of high local unemployment and a high share of foreigners reduces VB's success in municipal elections. Another unexpected effect stems from the share of indebted persons with its growth by one percentage point being associated with a loss of electoral support for VB by 1.265 percentage points. Unlike in the previous municipal election year, a high local prevalence of crime did not turn out to be advantageous for VB in 2012. The sociodemographic composition of the municipalities furthermore does not have a significant impact, with the exception of the proportion of foreign residents that decreased the vote share of VB (provided that the unemployment rate amounts to the cross-municipal average). The negative effect of the total number of parties running for the mayor's office is in contrast to the evidence for the previous election year. Thus, the inconsistency of the findings across two year-specific analyses already hints at the distorting impact of temporal particularities that the fixed effects panel regression models could account for.

The separate analysis for the municipal elections in 2018 confirms the strong positive effect of the unemployment rate on VB voting from the previous election year. However, neither the gross value added per person nor the percentage of indebted persons are significantly related to VB's electoral success which also applies to the crime rate. As for the remaining predictors concerning the sociodemographic composition of the population, only the age structure appears to have a significant influence. VB is less successful in municipal election if there is a rather larger part of persons being younger than 30 years as well if there a relatively much residents aged 60 years and older. Besides, in 2018 the extent of political competition did not affect VB's electoral success at all.

Apart from the variation in terms of effect directions and significance across the three local election years, the range of explained variance underlines the impact of the temporal context. While in 2006 all

predictors explained 25.94% of the variance in VB success, this share increased to 30.09% in 2012. In 2018, however, the adjusted R-squared decreased to 13.76%. Obviously, these values cannot be compared unconditionally across models due to varying numbers of observations, but they additionally suggest that choosing a particular election year affects the conclusions to be drawn from a cross-sectional research design.

Aside from year-specific characteristics, another distortion may stem from the possible omission of relevant explanatory factors as a pooled OLS regression covering all three election years shows (see table 4). Despite being a longitudinal analysis capturing time trends, this approach does not allow to keep unchangeable municipality characteristics constant since the hierarchical data structure remains unconsidered. In line with the cross-sectional models for 2012 and 2018, it suggests a positive effect of the unemployment rate on VB voting. This result, however, is contradicting the negative effect obtained in the fixed effects model exploiting the panel data structure. Same as the fixed effects regression, the gross value added per capita as well as the percentage of indebted residents prove to be insignificant predictors of VB support whereas only the pooled OLS model yields a significant and positive effect of the crime rate. There are furthermore deviating results regarding the proportion of foreign residents which according to between-comparisons in the pooled OLS model decreases VB voting whereas within-comparisons across municipalities indicate a positive effect (in both cases with a simultaneously average unemployment rate). Since both longitudinal approaches take temporal dynamics into account, this discrepancy in effect directions may be rather attributed to an underlying spurious relationship in the pooled OLS model due to an insufficient model specification. Moreover, the pooled OLS model delivers evidence refuting group conflict theory with the interaction between unemployment and the percentage of foreigners negatively affecting radical populist voting. Fixed effect panel regression on the contrary suggest no interdependence of these two municipal characteristics at all.

With the exception of the population size, the sociodemographic composition of the municipalities proved to be unrelated to VB's success when factoring in the panel structure of the data.

Yet according to the pooled OLS model, a high share of male residents and of elderly residents (aged 60 years and older) both decrease aggregate support for VB and also the total number of parties running for office in the local elections appears to be an irrelevant predictor. However, when making within-comparisons of municipalities over time, an increase in party competition lowers VB's vote share. Thus, comparing these varying approaches not only highlights the importance of taking particularities across election years into consideration but also illustrates the potential bias caused by unobserved heterogeneity that at least partially can be controlled by estimating fixed effects panel regressions.

3.6 Conclusion

This study pursued two main objectives: First, identifying which economic and social characteristics of Flemish municipalities affect the electoral support of populist radical right *Vlaams Belang* by applying an advantageous statistical method for longitudinal analyses. Second, pointing out how such a research design may contribute to the research field that previously was characterized by (pooled) cross-sectional analyses and inconsistent findings. Local unemployment turned out to be a significant influencing factor in municipal elections. Contrary to theoretical expectations, however, this effect is negative and by this, rather in line with alternative explanations such as the clientele hypothesis according to which negative developments on the labor market are converted into support for parties associated with related policies instead of those political actors who blame the incumbent for unfavorable conditions. In order to draw more precise conclusions on this, further research may extend the analysis to additional party types.

Other contextual indicators such as the percentage of indebted residents being an aggregate measure of relative deprivation as well as the local crime rate which is linked to the populist radical right rhetoric of law and order did not prove to be significant predictors of VB's success. A high presence of foreigners in a municipality fosters the electoral support for VB suggesting that the perception of foreigners as a – cultural or economic – threat is advantageous for its local electoral success. An interaction between the municipal unemployment rate and the share of foreigners, however, does

not significantly affect VB's support. Thus, the assumption of a group conflict for scarce economic resources between the majority population and out-groups is not supported on a small-scale aggregate level. Besides, municipalities with a high number of inhabitants and a wide range of competing parties experience a lower electoral support for VB than their less populous and politically less contested counterparts.

It was the second objective of this study to illustrate the advantages of a research method that eliminates two potential sources of bias and inconsistency across studies at least partially, namely an omitted variable bias and the non-consideration of time dynamics. For that, wave-specific regression analyses as well as a longitudinal model based on pooled data were conducted and contrasted to the fixed effects panel regression that exploited the hierarchical data structure. This comparison of analytic advantages led to two main conclusions: First, selecting a particular election year for the analysis matters for the results to be obtained. For instance, in 2012 and 2018 local unemployment was positively related to VB support whereas no significant effect was found in 2006. Similarly, a high crime rate only came along with an increase in VB support in 2006 but not in the other election years. Second, the analytic approach that is applied has an impact on the findings as the results from the fixed effects model vary from those obtained from pooled OLS models that leave the panel structure of the data aside but still consider time dynamics. For instance, the negative effect of unemployment on VB's success from the fixed effects model would have seemed to be a positive one according to a pooled regression model although both longitudinal analyses refer to the same observations. Also with regard to the sociodemographic composition, contrasting conclusions on the impact on VB voting would have been drawn when only relying on between-comparisons across municipalities.

Apart from this methodological contribution to the research field, the scale of the aggregate units was furthermore advantageous as they are "as micro as possible" when using official statistics on the economic performance and on social and political characteristics. Accordingly, the findings are affected to a lesser extent by the heterogeneity of contextual data on a regional or even national level.

The remaining heterogeneity, regarding for instance the population size of municipalities ranging from 2,776 inhabitants to more than half a million residents, was intended to be captured by including control variables on the population. Still, the results presented and discussed above do not provide evidence on individual electoral behavior. Besides, despite the outlined contributions to the state of research, this study is limited to Flemish municipalities and consequently, an expansion to other contexts is advisable although cross-country comparisons possibly are hampered by the differences across municipal figures that are made available by official statistics from various countries. Nonetheless, this study provided insights into how economic and social conditions shape populist radical right voting in local elections and into the impact the chosen analytical approach may have for these findings.

4

The Effect of Individual Economic
Deprivation on Populist Voting:
Longitudinal Evidence from
Dutch Panel Data

Apart from ascertaining the effect of various aspects of individual economic deprivation on the tendency to support a radical populist party (from both the left wing and the right wing), this study pursues the methodological objective to address three potential sources of inconsistency in the literature. These are the common use of aggregate data, the prevalence of analyzing (pooled) cross-sectional data, and the risk of omitting a relevant predictor. For that, fixed effects panel regression models are estimated that rely on eleven waves of the Dutch LISS panel survey. The findings suggest that economic deprivation neither affects the support for populist radical left nor populist radical right parties. However, the comparison of these longitudinal analyses with findings from wave-specific models illustrates the benefits of exploiting the analytic potential of panel data and the use of longitudinal individual-level studies in the research on populist voting.

4.1 Introduction

The electoral success of populist parties in West European societies came along with a growing interest in how to explain their appeal. Their rhetoric of society being divided in “us” (the people) versus “them” (the elite or the establishment) as well as their claim to give power back to the people may suggest that their supporters are particularly overrepresented among unskilled low-income groups who do not feel represented adequately and convert their feeling of being left behind into support for an anti-establishment party (Mudde, 2004; Stanley, 2008). Although populist radical right parties (PRRPs) provide “scapegoats” through their nativist, authoritarian, and populist positions, it can, nonetheless, be expected that experiencing economic hardship may be also beneficial for populist radical left parties (PRLPs) which combine an anti-elite rhetoric with strong redistributive claims (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018).

Alongside with cultural concerns, economic hardship is often considered as one of the explanatory factors of voting for populist radical parties (especially from the right wing). While some studies suggest that they benefit from economic deprivation (e.g. Han, 2016; Jackman & Volpert, 1996; Rama & Santana, 2020; Rico & Anduiza, 2019; Rydgren & Ruth, 2013) other scholars argue that cultural concerns trump economic matters (e.g. Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Oesch, 2008; Schwander & Manow, 2017). The mentioned studies, however, not only differ in terms of substantive findings but also methodologically. First, many studies refer to single elections and lack generalizability of results as they leave aside dynamic trends (Poznyak, Abts, & Swyngedouw, 2011). Besides, the common use of aggregate data does not allow drawing conclusions on individual behavior and even if individual-level data is used, the predominant analysis of (pooled) cross-sectional data bears the risk to omit relevant predictors (Brüderl, 2010; Giesselmann & Windzio, 2012). This study aims at overcoming potentially inconsistent and possibly distorted findings by analyzing individuals over a period of eleven years by fixed effects regressions. Hence, the research objectives are twofold: First, the impact of individual economic deprivation on populist radical voting is studied. Second, the methodological advantage of using panel data in contrast to the findings obtained when not using repeated measurements of the same persons over

time is illustrated. Before that, theoretical arguments on different aspects of (changes in) individual economic deprivation that may be associated with populist radical voting are outlined same as their operationalization with the survey data used.

4.2 Theory and Hypotheses

The “losers of globalization” thesis is one of the most commonly considered approaches to explain economically motivated populist voting (e.g. Decker, 2018; Kriesi et al., 2006; Lengfeld, 2017; Mudde, 2016; Oesch, 2008; Schwander & Manow, 2017). It assumes that globalization comes along with profound economic, social, cultural, and political transformations that create both winners who benefit from these changes and losers who struggle to cope with the opening of national borders. Economically, post-industrial society is characterized by a decline of industrial manufacturing jobs and the growth of the service sector combined with technological automation creating new job opportunities requiring specialized skill sets, all of which makes rather high levels of education more important. However, not only between economic sectors but also within these sectors a segmentation of labor markets is splitting both manufacturing and service sector jobs in a core-versus-periphery division with the latter requiring little formal or technical training and not offering much chances of career development (Betz, 1993b; Lengfeld, 2017). Hence, working in a particular sector is not to be equated with being a “winner” or a “loser” of globalization per se. Instead, the presumed winners have been defined to be entrepreneurs as well as highly-skilled professionals working in sectors open to international competition. The more likely losers, however, are unqualified employees with relatively low levels of employability on the labor market, unemployed persons with poor prospects to re-enter the labor market or those who are dependent on welfare benefits (Kriesi et al., 2006; Inglehart & Norris, 2016). It is these “left behinds” whose position on the labor market has been weakened and who lack individual exit options since they often did not acquire the transferable skills necessary to adapt to the transformed economy. Thus, in order to improve their situation they may tend to participate in collective mobilization addressed by populist rhetoric (Kriesi et al., 2006; Oesch, 2008). Studies indicate that low-skilled manual workers are more likely supporting populist

radical parties (e.g. McGann & Kitschelt, 2005; Rooduijn, Burgoon, van Elsas, & van de Werfhorst, 2017; Scheuregger & Spier, 2007) or populist attitudes (Rico & Anduiza, 2019). The exposure to economic trends of globalization has proven to be particularly beneficial for right-wing anti-establishment parties (Colantone & Stanig, 2018; Swank & Betz, 2003). Besides, subjective economic deprivation (e.g. dissatisfaction with one's own economic condition) is to be taken into account as its interplay with objective conditions influences populist support as well (Hadler, 2004). Subjective deprivation appears to be particularly beneficial for PRLPs, both compared to non-populist parties as well as to PRRPs (Rama & Santana, 2020; Santana & Rama, 2018).

A weak labor market position due to one's educational and professional status supposedly is considered even more severe if a person is unemployed and becomes even more aware of lacking individual exit options. Hence, the above-theorized impact of being "left behind" on radical populist voting is likely to be enhanced by experiencing unemployment and the related concerns of re-entering the post-industrial labor market due to one's low employability. In order to test this assumption, the longitudinal design of this study is particularly suitable as it allows to contrast the electoral preferences of the "losers of globalization" before and after they are in need for a new job.

H1: Experiencing unemployment increases the positive effect of a) working in a low-skilled manual profession and of b) a low educational level on populist radical voting.

However, given that both PRRPs and PRLPs pursue policies that address hardship faced by disadvantaged groups on the labor market (i.e. through their focus on social equality or through their scapegoating rhetoric) it is not expected that one of the two populist party types under study benefits more than the other from voters' low employability.

H2: The enhancing impact of unemployment on the positive effect of a) working in a low-skilled manual profession and of b) a low educational level on populist radical voting is equally strong for PRRPs and PRLPs.

Similarly, the relative deprivation thesis puts emphasis on changing individual and group-based status positions but argues that voting for populist radical parties is not only limited to low-skilled and vulnerable social groups. Instead, the susceptibility for populist rhetoric is assumed to be more likely among those who find themselves losing out when they compare their current economic conditions to their own past or to social reference groups. Persons can be considered relatively deprived if they do not have access to aspired assets but see that others have gained it (Runciman, 1966). Relative deprivation comprises three distinct aspects, namely: (1) persons compare themselves to others; (2) these comparisons make them feel to be disadvantaged; and (3) perceiving this disadvantage as unfair causes discontent (Smith, Pettigrew, Pippin, & Bialosiewicz, 2012). Since social reference groups vary across persons, a distinction should be made between egoistic (or individual) and fraternalistic (or group) relative deprivation (Runciman, 1966). With the former referring to one's personal well-being, the focus of this study is on individual relative deprivation.

This feeling of being disadvantaged may increase a voter's tendency to express dissatisfaction by supporting a party opposing the political elite and claiming to act on behalf of the neglected "common people". Apart from political cynicism, relative deprivation may furthermore foster voters' nostalgia for a better past (Gest, Reny, & Mayer, 2018). Although selling nostalgia is part of almost all parties' rhetoric, especially PRRPs "[...] often refer to a mythical time of a shared heartland – A version of the past that celebrates an uncomplicated and nonpolitical territory of imagination from which populists draw their own vision of their unified and ordinary constituency" (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018: 1676). Thus, relative deprivation can be converted into a feeling of wanting "the good old days" back and opposing further globalization and modernization. These sentiments have proven to be beneficial for PRRPs (Gest, Reny & Mayer, 2018) while one's personal income growth being below the one for the rest of society increases the support for both PRRPs and PRLPs (Burgoon, van Noort, Rooduijn, & Underhill, 2019). Accordingly, a positive effect of relative deprivation on populist radical voting is hypothesized that is not expected to

vary across the ideological divide as both PRRPs and PRLPs put emphasis on the unfairness of current inequality.

H3: Having to cope financially with less than one deems a) sufficient or b) good increases the tendency to support a populist radical party.

H4: The positive effect of having to cope financially with less than one deems a) sufficient or b) good on populist radical voting is equally strong for PRRPs and PRLPs.

Losing out in the competition over commonly demanded economic resources is also emphasized by group conflict theory. In this case, however, the social reference group consists of an out-group (mainly immigrants) whose members are considered competitors in attaining scarce resources. Thus, conflicting interests may cause negative attitudes towards out-groups (e.g. Berning & Schlueter, 2016; Lucassen & Lubbers, 2012; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, & Prior, 2004; Stephan, Diaz-Loving, & Duran, 2000). This perspective assumes that economic vulnerability triggers interethnic hostility: "Individuals who face unemployment, who are concentrated in low-status occupations, who have low incomes, or who face racially changing neighborhoods and workplaces, are most likely to feel threatened by competition from members of other minority groups." (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996: 953). In previous studies, being in need for a job turned out to be irrelevant for populist radical voting (Anduiza & Rico 2016; Arzheimer & Berning, 2019; Rama & Santana, 2020). Nonetheless, PRRPs gain from high unemployment rates (Bolet, 2020; Giebler & Regel, 2017; Jackman & Volpert, 1996; Rydgren & Ruth, 2013; Teney, 2012) especially if the national proportion of foreigners is high (Golder, 2003). Hence, it is assumed that being in need of an economic resource over which a competition with out-groups is perceivable (e.g. employment, welfare benefits) makes populist radical party support more likely.

H5: Being unemployed and receiving welfare benefits both increase the tendency of populist radical voting.

Although seemingly tailored to anti-immigration parties, this approach can be extended to PRLPs and their claim of economic protectionism which is also related to the inflow of immigrants on

the national labor market (Santana & Rama, 2018). In that regard, PRLP supporters turned out to be more averse to immigration and furthermore were more likely to disagree with asylum seekers being eligible for welfare benefits (O'Malley, 2008; Santana & Rama, 2018). Still, considering the explicit scapegoat rhetoric of PRRPs, one may expect them to benefit more from a competition over economic resources than PRLPs.

H6: The positive effects of being unemployed and of receiving welfare benefits on populist radical voting are stronger for PRRPs than for PRLPs.

In order to disentangle the influence of economic deprivation on populist radical party voting from the anti-establishment appeal of these parties, political cynicism is considered as well. Disbelief in one's influence on politics and doubting whether politicians act on one's behalf is in line with the anti-establishment rhetoric of populist radical parties and thus, political cynicism is hypothesized to foster voting for both PRRPs and PRLPs among persons who intend to express their dissatisfaction (Marx & Schumacher, 2018; Rooduijn, van der Brug, & de Lange, 2016).

H7: Political cynicism increases the tendency of populist radical voting.

Moreover, sociocultural and socioeconomic differences largely capture the ideological divide between PRRPs and PRLPs and consequently may explain why one party type is chosen over the other. Those holding strong anti-immigration views are considered more likely to respond to the scapegoating rhetoric of PRRPs while the claim of social equality and redistribution of PRLPs probably attracts voters who have egalitarian opinions. Both has been confirmed empirically (Akkerman, Zaslove, & Spruyt, 2017; Rooduijn, 2018).

H8: Being opposed to immigration increases the tendency of PRRP voting rather than PRLP voting.

H9: Being in favor of social redistribution increases the tendency of PRLP voting rather than PRRP voting.

4.3 Methodological Impact

Before testing the hypotheses, the benefit of using individual-level panel data for the underlying research objective is outlined. Given the inconsistency of findings in the literature and the different research designs, an analytic strategy using repeated measurements for the same individuals over time is advisable.

To a large extent, previous studies are based on aggregate data (e.g. Bolet, 2020; Bowyer, 2008; Coffé, Heyndels, & Vermeir, 2007; Giebler & Regel, 2017; Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2016; Jackman & Volpert, 1996; Kestilä & Söderlund, 2007; Rydgren & Ruth, 2013; Schwander & Manow, 2017; Swank & Betz, 2003; Tenet, 2012). While a focus on macro units provides some advantages over individual-level survey information (such as a higher representation of disadvantaged groups, see Schwander & Manow, 2017), it does not allow conclusions on individual electoral behavior. Nonetheless, these findings shape the state of knowledge on economic deprivation affecting radical populist voting to a considerable extent.

In addition, the way of analyzing data may have a distorting impact on the findings – even when relying on individual-level data. The predominance of (pooled) cross-sectional analyses is associated with a potential omitted variable bias since it is likely that not all potentially relevant predictors of populist radical voting are considered, either due to an insufficient model specification or due to certain characteristics not being included in the survey questionnaire. Using panel data and analyzing it with an adequate statistical method (fixed effects regressions) allows to reduce this source of bias by implicitly controlling all those characteristics of a voter that remain constant over time and to obtain effects that get as close as possible to causal claims when relying on observational data (Brüderl, 2010; Giesselmann & Windzio, 2012). Furthermore, a longitudinal perspective ensures a higher generalizability of the results as temporal particularities of a single election year are less influential (Gidron & Mijs, 2019; Poznyak, Abts, & Swyngedouw, 2011).

In short, this study approaches three potential sources of inconsistent findings in the literature which are the focus on (1) aggregate data

and/or (2) single election years that (3) are analyzed in a way that is prone to an omitted variable bias. For this, individual-level survey data is considered that covers a longer period and that is analyzed by fixed effects panel regression models.

4.4 Data and Methods

4.4.1 Data

The hypotheses are tested by using individual level panel data from the Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS, wave 1 to 11)¹, a representative sample of people living in the Netherlands who complete online surveys every month. Started in 2007, the recruiting of the participants was based on a true probability sample of households recorded in the population register of Statistics Netherlands². As can be seen from the investigation period of the survey data two major societal impacts are included that – according to the mechanisms theorized above – may have been beneficial for anti-establishment parties. These are the global financial crisis from 2007/2008 and the European refugee crisis (peaking in 2015). In the three general election years covered by the investigation period, the annual number of non-EU asylum seekers in the Netherlands varied between 15,100 (in 2010), 13,095 (in 2012) and 18,210 (in 2017), with a considerable increase in 2015 to 44,970 asylum applicants from outside the EU³. Unlike for immigration as a key aspect addressed by PRRPs, economic inequality as a main concern of PRLPs was less subject to fluctuations over the years. The Gini coefficient of disposable income in the Netherlands across the three election years was 25.5% (in 2010), 25.4% (in 2012), and 27.1% (in 2017) and by that always below the EU average, although was slightly higher in some other years that are also part of the subsequent analyses⁴.

1. In this paper I make use of data of the LISS (Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social sciences) panel administered by CentERdata (Tilburg University, The Netherlands).

2. More information about the LISS panel can be found at: www.lissdata.nl

3. See Eurostat: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_asyappctza/default/table?lang=en (as of 11th January 2021)

4. See Eurostat: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tessi190/default/table?lang=en> (as of 11th January 2021)

For several reasons, the LISS panel is suited for the research objectives of this study: First, due to its high number of participants⁵ and the eleven-year period covered, a sufficient amount of variation on the relevant concepts is observed in order to exploit the analytic potential by focusing on individual changes over time. Second, online data collection may reduce the social desirability bias as respondents in face-to-face interviews are probably more reluctant to report a populist vote and the exposure to economic difficulties. At the same time, online (panel) surveys often lack representativeness and are affected by non-random attrition although the distribution of sociodemographic characteristics in the LISS panel is comparable to face-to-face survey data (Scherpenzeel & Bethlehem, 2010). Third, the time-span of data collection of the LISS panel covers almost the entire electoral participation period of the *Party for Freedom* (founded in 2006), one of the most successful PRRP in contemporary Western Europe. The populist radical left *Socialist Party* on the other side has been politically active for a longer period (founded in 1971) but unlike in earlier decades, it had considerable political impact during the investigation period of this study with never falling below 9% of the overall votes in the three national elections between 2010 and 2017.

4.4.2 Operationalization

The two dependent variables, namely (1) voting for a populist radical right party (PRRP) or not and (2) voting for a populist radical left party (PRLP) or not, are measured through binary indicators with a vote choice in favor of any other non-populist party representing the reference category. Observations of not having voted at all or having left the related survey item unanswered remain unconsidered for the following analyses. The selection of parties classified as PRRP comprises four parties characterized by anti-establishment, nationalist, and anti-immigration positions: the Party for Freedom (*Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)*, since 2006), Proud of the Netherlands (*Trots op Nederland*, from 2007 to 2012), For Netherlands (*VoorNederland*, from 2014 to 2017), and Forum for Democracy (*Forum voor Democratie*, since 2016). PRLP voting

5. After a listwise deletion, the analysis sample consists of 7,147 respondents and 26,130 observations.

is defined by a Socialist Party (*Socialistische Partij (SP)*) vote. For a direct comparison of the two kinds of populist parties, another dependent variable is created that (3) contrasts PRRP voting to PRLP voting as a reference category whereas all other parties are not considered. Since there is no national parliament election every year, in the in-between waves voting behavior is enquired by asking for which party a respondent *would* vote if elections were held on that day.

Starting in the ninth survey wave, a survey experiment was launched with about half of the respondents now being asked to estimate the probability to vote for each of the listed parties, with the overall probability to add up to 100 percent. In order not to lose too many observations⁶, all those having stated a 100% probability to vote for a populist radical party are added to the populist supporters in the respective categorical variable. This is considered as certainty in one's electoral preference, same as among those who indicated a populist voting probability of 0% and who will be added consequently to the reference category. The remaining observations with voting probabilities not representing any certainty about supporting populist radical parties or not, however, are considered as missing values⁷.

Possibly being a loser of globalization or not is operationalized by using the opportunities of the longitudinal research design. Since the professional and educational level mostly do not change over time, an interaction with unemployment for both these characteristics is generated to capture a person's prospects of re-employability. By that, one can test if experiencing unemployment and looking for a new job makes populist radical party support more likely if persons previously worked in a low-skilled profession or lack higher vocational education since both may impede their re-entry on the labor market. Five categories of professional status are

6. This question on voting probabilities for each party was presented to 2,765 respondents in the ninth wave which makes up for 49.45% of the participants in that wave.

7. With this procedure, 1,694 observations participating in the survey experiment in the ninth wave can be considered for the analyses (30.29% of all respondents in wave 9).

regarded that distinguish between different professional levels in the service-sector and in manual work. As for vocational education, four categories are considered ranging from secondary education or less (i.e. no vocational education) to a university degree. Besides, also a subjective assessment of the financial situation in one's household is included.

Relative deprivation is operationalized by contrasting the respondents' information on the actual monthly net income of their household to their answers on subjective income thresholds. In doing so, two binary variables are created which indicate whether a person's household income is below their subjective income threshold of (1) a sufficient income level or (2) a good income level.

Being in need for possibly contested economic resources is measured by two variables, unemployment and the number of sources of welfare benefits received. Unemployment comprises two categories which are looking for a job following the loss of one's previous employment or having another occupational status (also including being a student or being retired), whereas the measure of receiving welfare benefits is continuous. The questionnaire contains a list of potential sources of welfare benefits and the respondents were asked to indicate which of these they received in a given year. Only the 13 sources that were included consistently throughout the eleven survey waves are considered for the construction of the sum score.

As mentioned above, some political views related to populist radical voting are considered as well. Next to redistributive views with regard to income inequality, these comprise a sum score on political cynicism as an expression of dissatisfaction with the political establishment (Cronbach's Alpha: 0.76) and a sum score on economic and cultural concerns about immigration (Cronbach's Alpha: 0.78). An exploratory factor analysis for the latter suggests to leave aside item 2 and 6 (see table 5)⁸.

8. To avoid biased results due to repeated measurement for the same persons, the calculations of Cronbach's Alpha and the factor analysis are restricted to the first observation of each respondent.

Besides, sociodemographic characteristics (gender, the monthly net income of the household in 1,000 Euro, and age (both for a linear and a curvilinear effect)) are included to consider different degrees of economic vulnerability and political preferences same as survey year indicators to capture temporal trends (Andreß, Golsch, & Schmidt, 2013).

4.4.3 Method of analysis

Linear fixed effects probability models are estimated to test the hypotheses⁹. Despite the dichotomous character of the dependent variables, such an approach is more advantageous than logistic fixed effects models as these not only exclude all respondents from the analysis who do not report changes on the predictors over time but also those without transitions regarding their voting behavior between survey waves (Brüderl, 2010). This would cause the omission of a high number of respondents¹⁰. For a start, linear probability models are estimated separately for each of the eleven waves. In these models, each wave is treated as a cross-sectional data set on its own. This means that for every participating respondent her or his economic situation and political behavior is only considered at its current value in a given survey year and only compared to all the other respondents in this particular survey wave¹¹. With these wave-specific analyses one can illustrate if and to what extent the results obtained from mere between-comparisons differ from the findings received when making use of the analytic advantage of having repeated measurements for the same persons. Regarding the high number of predictors considered in the following models, the possibility of strong interrelations between them needs to be taken into account. Among the socioeconomic variables, the educational level and the professional status are particularly likely to be interdependent. However, in this case an impact on the findings

9. Given the wide array of explanatory variables, the effect interpretation comes along with the “*ceteris paribus*” condition, i.e. all other predictors being held constant simultaneously.

10. Logistic fixed effects regression models would be based on 789 (PRRP support), 800 (PRLP support), and 252 (PRRP vs. PRLP support) individuals.

11. These cross-sectional models are extended by the effect of gender (time-constant variable).

is ruled out by both concepts being analyzed separately as they both are used for an interaction variable with unemployment. Additional robustness checks do not reveal changes in terms of effect direction and significance for the other economic characteristics when leaving the educational and professional status aside while only factoring in the control variables.

4.5 Results

4.5.1 Longitudinal analyses (between-comparisons)

When looking at the cross-sectional regression models explaining PRRP support in each of the eleven waves of the LISS panel, there are mixed results on the impact of economic deprivation (see figure 5 and tables 6 and 7 for a more detailed overview on the effects).

Figure 5: Populist Radical Right Voting (wave-specific OLS models, only significant effects reported, $p < 0.05$)

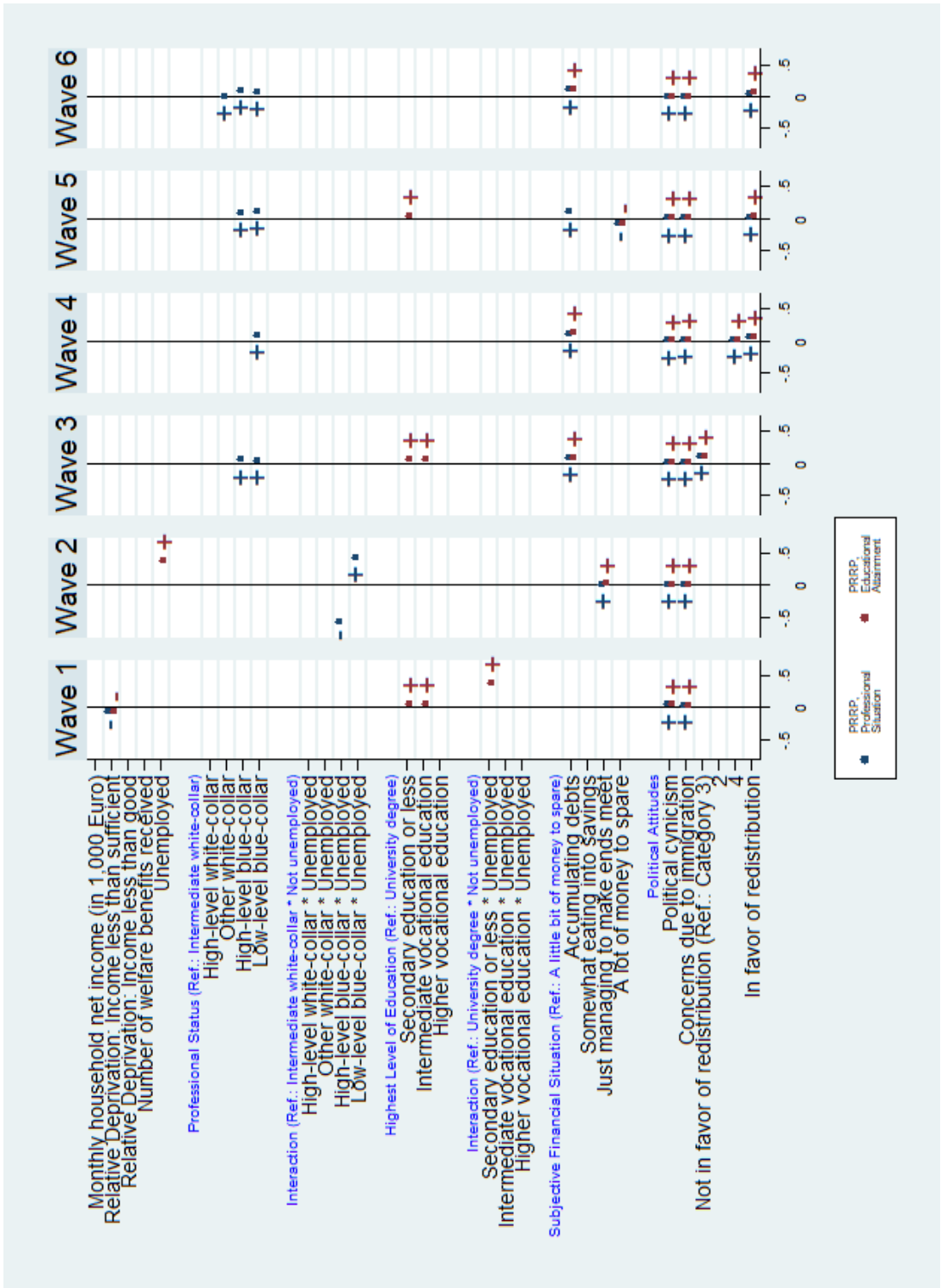
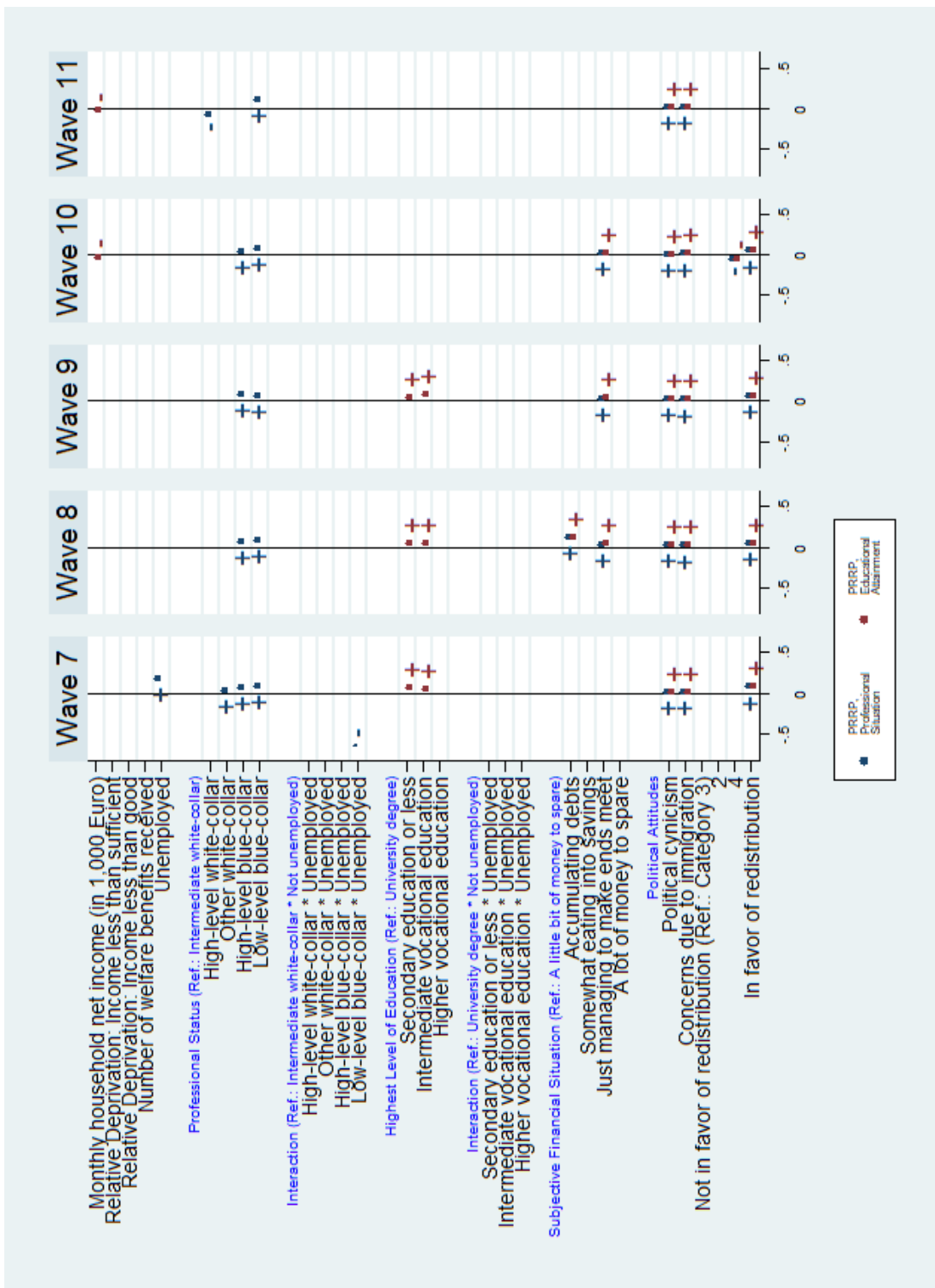


Figure 5: Second part



For instance, relying solely on the data from the second wave would have suggested that the unemployed who have worked in a lower-level blue-collar (i.e. low-skilled manual) profession do have a higher tendency to support PRRPs. While this is in line with the theorized expectations, conducting a cross-sectional analysis for the seventh wave yields a contrary effect. Moreover, those working in a lower-level blue-collar job are more likely to support a PRRP in nine of the eleven waves (compared to those working in an intermediate white-collar profession). In seven waves this positive effect also applies to higher-skilled manual workers whereas for the other professional groups there is almost no significant evidence. Regarding the educational level, in six waves a positive effect of lacking any vocational education on PRRP voting is found (with university graduates being the reference group). However, only in the first wave PRRP support is significantly higher among the unemployed without vocational education. Overall, wave-specific linear probability models suggest that only in some waves being a potential “loser of globalization” comes along with a higher tendency of PRRP preference. This inconsistency, nonetheless, underlines the temporal context dependency of cross-sectional analyses that may account for the mixed findings across previous studies. This also applies to other aspects of economic deprivation, such as perceiving to be in financial troubles for which there are also year-specific analyses with no effect. Relative deprivation is only associated to PRRP voting in the first wave through an unexpected negative relationship. In addition, a higher extent of welfare benefit dependency does not influence the support for PRRPs in most waves. A consistent pattern across all eleven waves, however, becomes only apparent for political cynicism and concerns due to immigration which both make PRRP support more likely.

The partially positive effect of being a potential “loser of globalization” is confirmed for PRRP support for those working in manual professions and having a lower educational level (see figure 6).

Figure 6: Populist Radical Left Voting (wave-specific OLS models, only significant effects reported, $p < 0.05$)

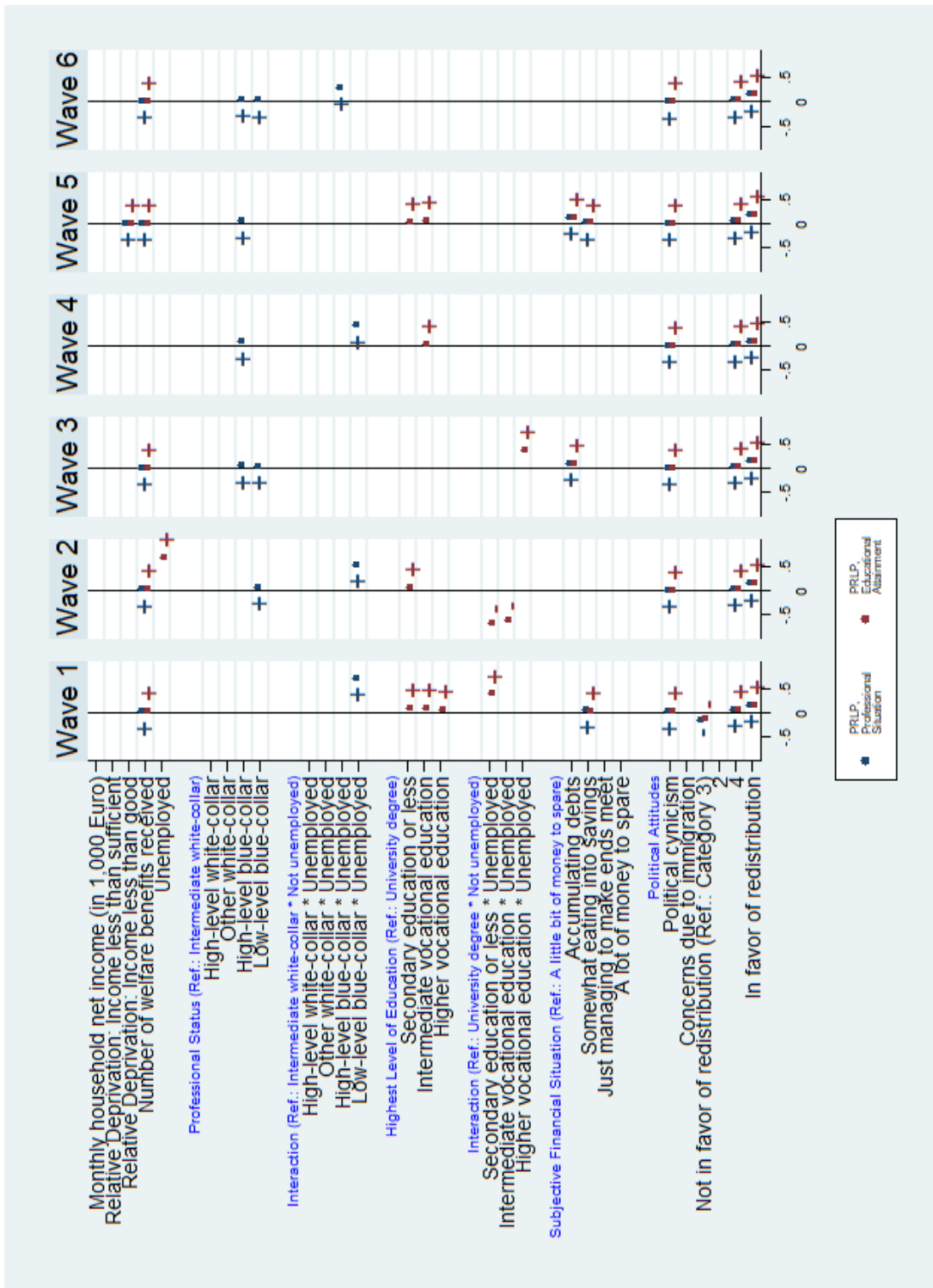
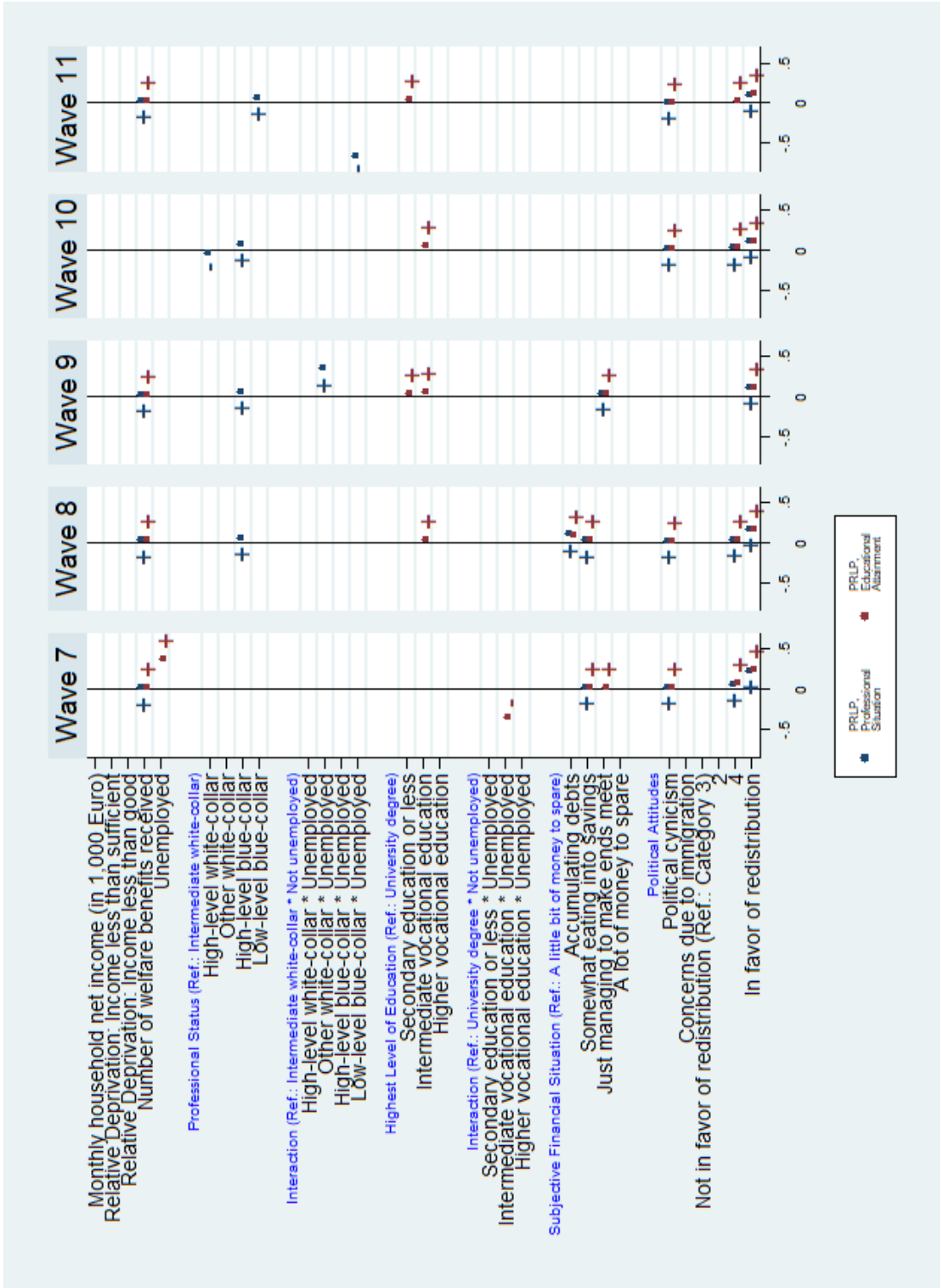


Figure 6: Second part



Besides, in some survey waves this effect is enhanced by experiencing unemployment and the concern to face difficulties in re-entering the labor market. Thus, wave-specific evidence suggests that struggles on the labor market may be beneficial for populist parties from both ends of the political spectrum. Relative deprivation, on the contrary, is hardly associated to any populist party preference. It should be noted that – unlike for PRRP support – wave-specific regression models mainly suggest a positive effect of the amount of welfare benefit sources received on PRLP voting. Although competition over economic resources is addressed by these parties as well through their protectionist policy, this finding would have been rather expected for PRRPs since their leaders explicitly portray immigrants as competitors. According to these wave-specific between-comparisons, it is rather the focus on redistributive policies of PRLPs that may be appealing for recipients of welfare benefits. Sharing the characteristic political positions of PRLPs, namely being politically cynic and in favor of redistribution, increases the probability to vote for them.

When comparing the economic driving forces for voters supporting PRLPs or PRRPs, there is even less significant evidence across the eleven cross-sectional regression models (see figure 7).

Figure 7: Populist Radical Right (1) vs. Populist Radical Left (0) Voting (wave-specific OLS models, only significant effects reported, $p < 0.05$)

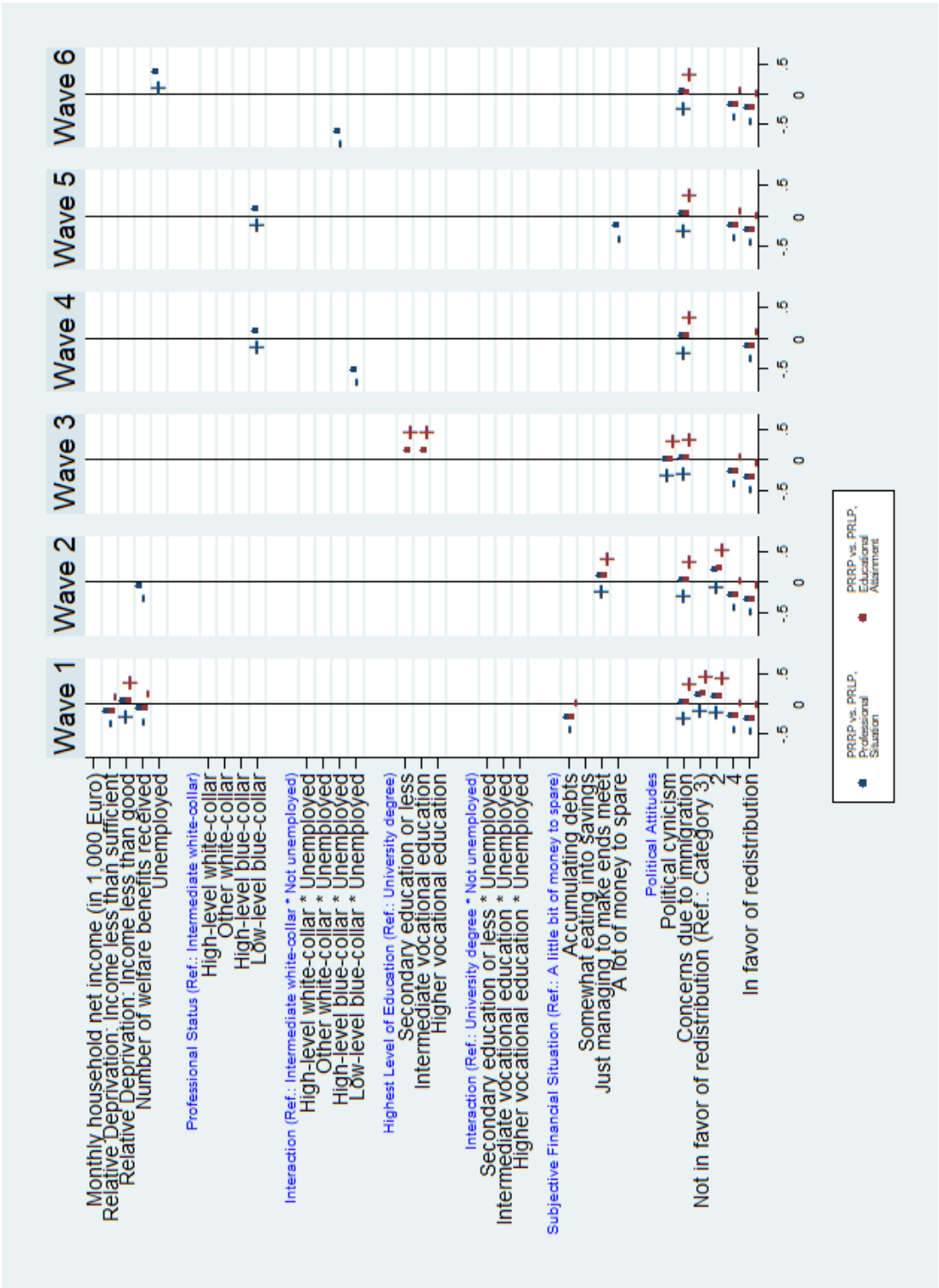
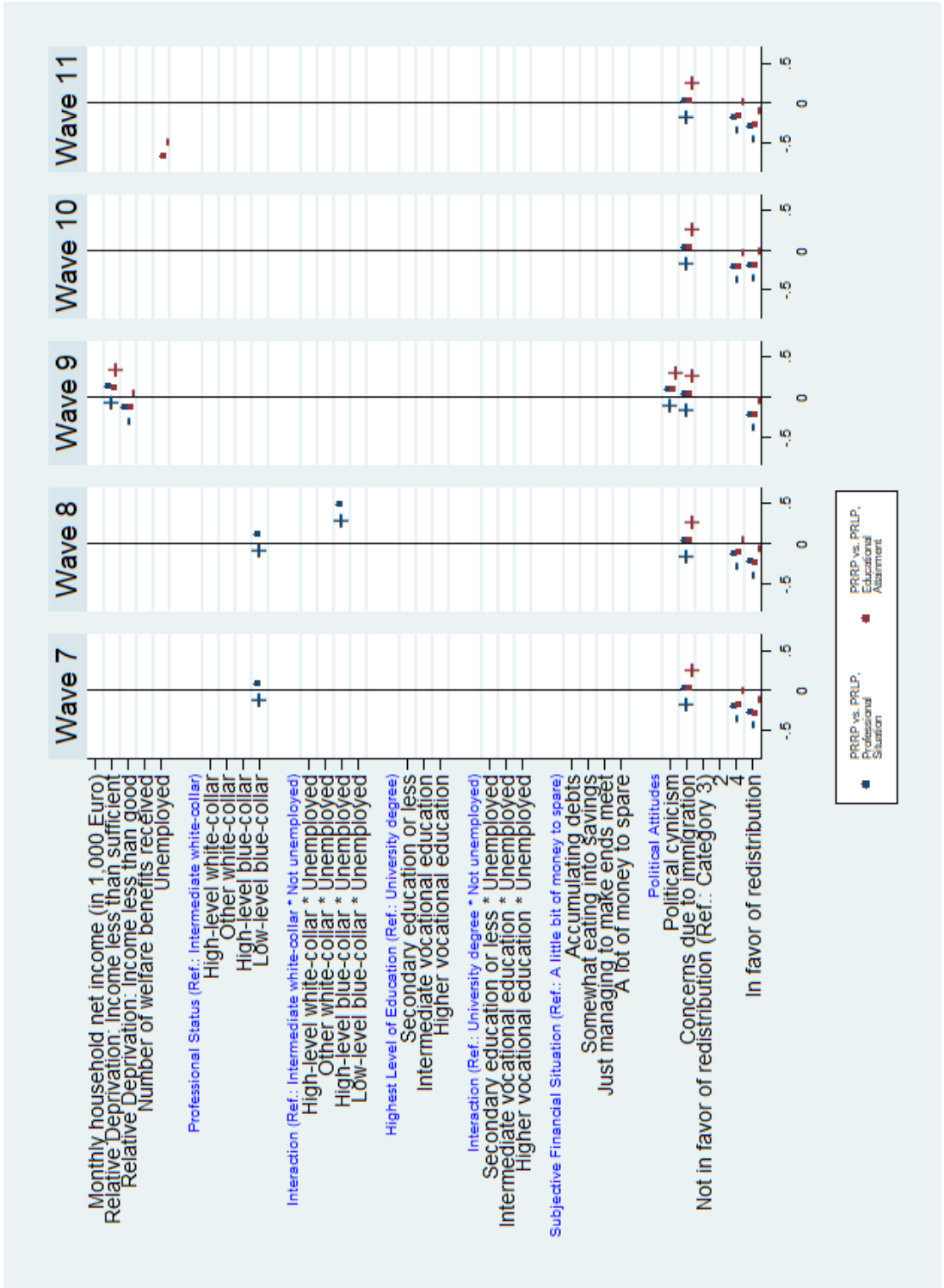


Figure 7: Second part



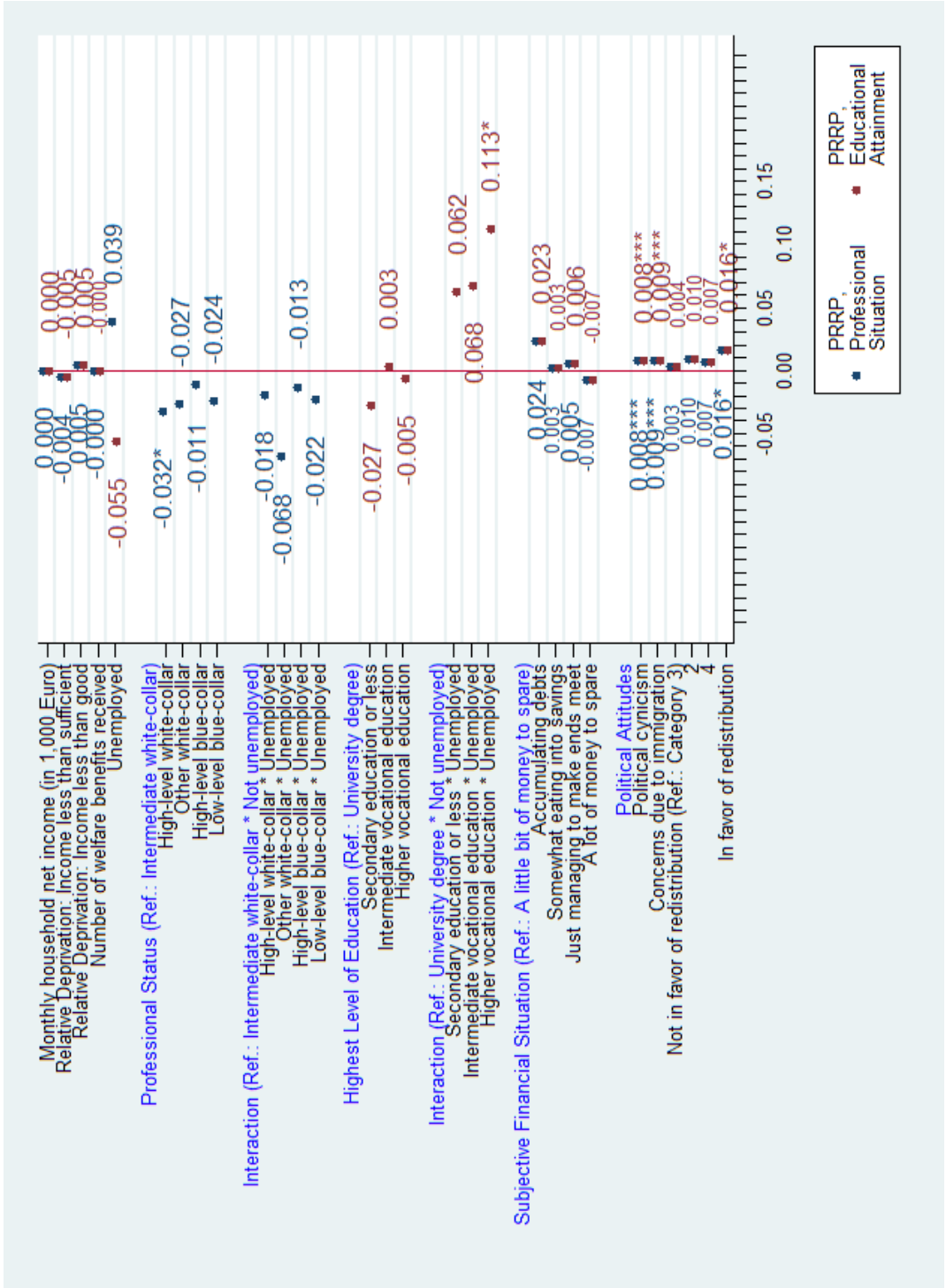
It seems that both left-wing and right-wing populist radical parties absorb the effect of economic deprivation. Again, the only consistent trend across the separate models is obtained with regard to political views as higher concerns due to immigration increase the tendency of a PRRP vote instead of a PRLP vote and vice versa for a higher approval of redistribution. The predominant lack of an effect of political cynicism can be explained by the shared anti-establishment appeal of both party types.

To some extent, the wave-specific models that are only based on between-comparisons support the assumption that certain aspects of economic deprivation are likely to increase populist voting. However, a caveat needs to be made with regard to the inconsistency of significant findings across the models hinting at their temporal context dependency.

4.5.2 Longitudinal analyses (within-comparisons)

In the fixed effects models, the impact of temporal particularities can be accounted for by making use of the panel data structure and by including survey year indicators as predictors. With regard to PRRP support, experiencing labor market vulnerability has no effect according to the fixed effect models: there are no significant effects among those who previously worked in a low-skilled manual profession or who have a low level of vocational education and additionally become unemployed (see figures 8, 11, and 12).

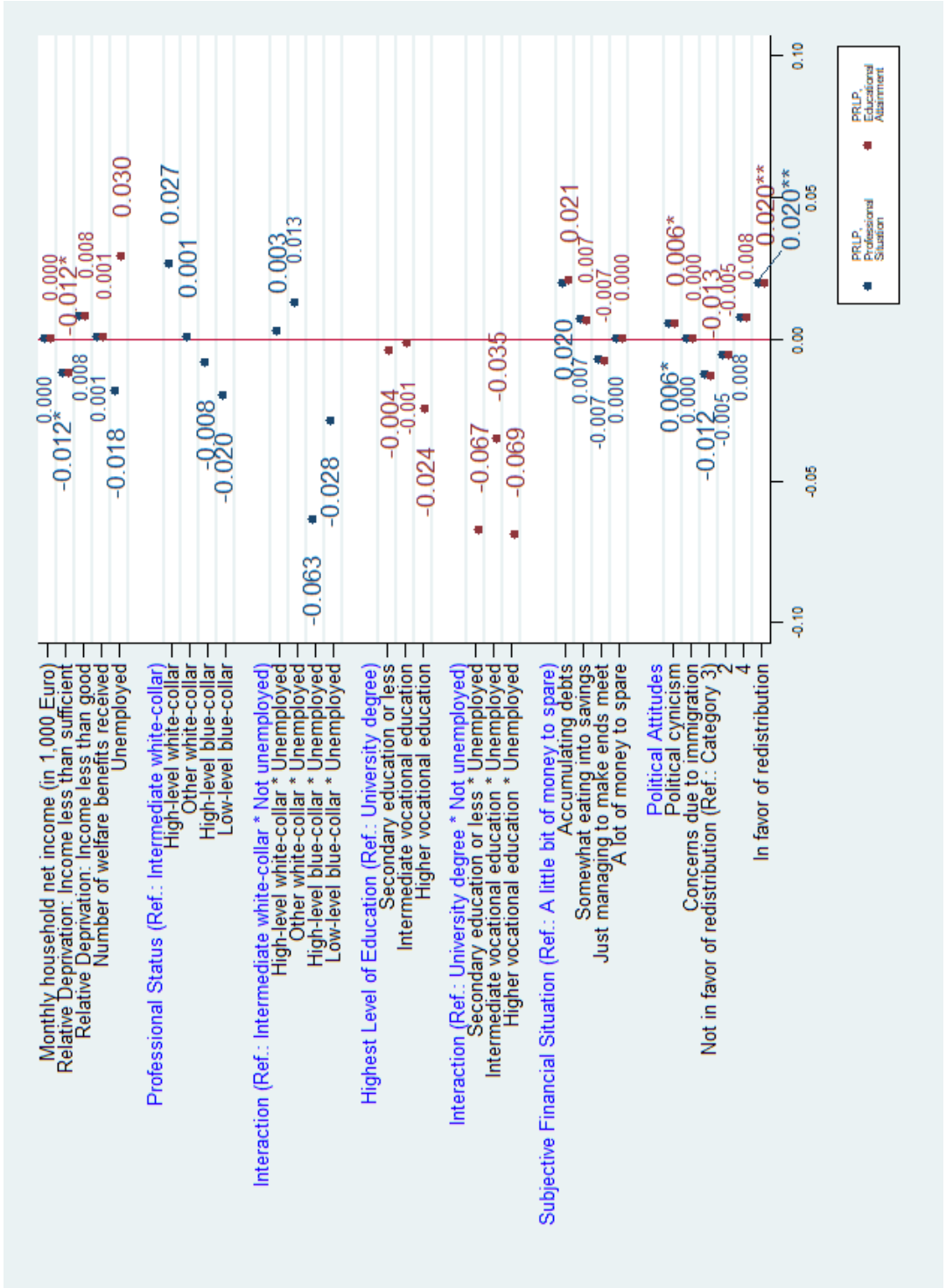
Figure 8: Populist Radical Right Voting (Fixed Effects Panel Regression, Linear Probability Models, *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$)



For the educational aspect, there is partial evidence according to which those with a higher vocational education who lose their job are more likely to vote for a PRRP than those with a university degree. For lower levels of vocational education (or none at all) – actually, persons considered to be the “losers of globalization” – no such effect is found. Apart from that, the subjective financial situation, the monthly income, relative deprivation, and receiving welfare benefits all are insignificant predictors of PRRP support, unlike political cynicism and immigration-related concerns. For these political attitudes, the fixed effects panel regression models confirm the positive effects from the wave-specific models. It is furthermore noteworthy that being in favor of more redistribution makes PRRP voting more likely despite this being an attitudinal characteristic that is assumed to be predominantly associated with PRLPs.

This holds true as well since the view that income differences should decrease comes along with a higher probability to vote for the Socialist Party same as being politically cynic does (see figures 9, 13, and 14).

Figure 9: Populist Radical Left Voting (Fixed Effects Panel Regression, Linear Probability Models, *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$)

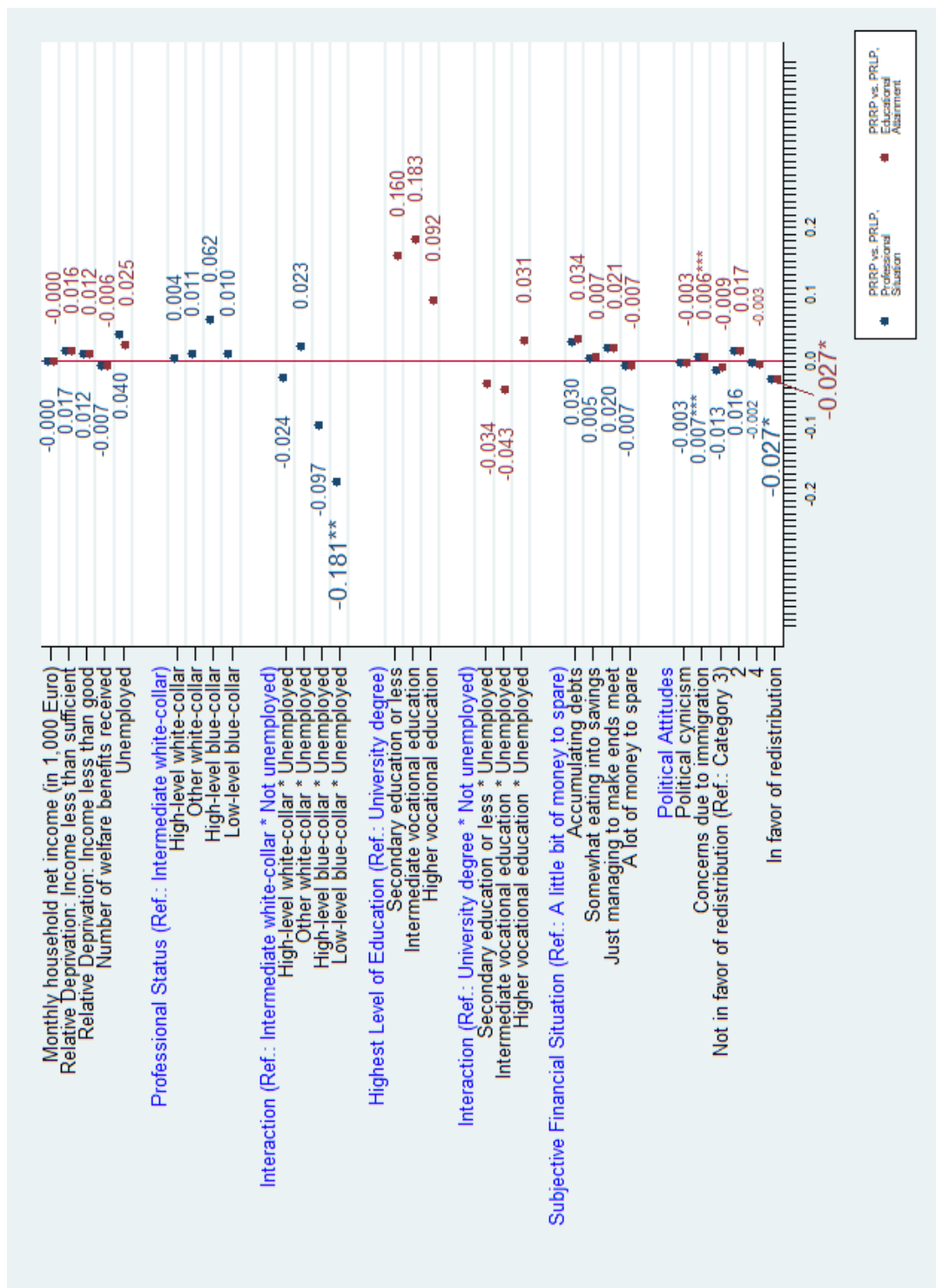


Thus, hypothesis 7 is substantiated as political cynicism fosters populist radical voting on both ends of the political spectrum. Economic or cultural concerns due to immigration, however, have no impact on PRLP voting. With regard to the personal economic situation, possibly facing difficulties in re-entering the labor market due to one's profession or educational attainment is no relevant factor. Thus, when exploiting the analytic potential of the panel data used, the significant impact of being a "loser of globalization" found in some cross-sectional analyses for single survey waves is not confirmed and also welfare benefit dependency is no significant predictor of PRLP support (unlike in the majority of wave-specific models). However, individual relative deprivation seems to have an impact on PRLP support but not according to the related hypothesis. On the contrary, if voters' income is below the threshold they consider a sufficient income level, they have a reduced probability to vote for the Socialist Party and thus, rather support any other non-populist party.

According to the fixed-effects models, neither PRRPs nor PRLPs are preferred over non-populist parties among voters who are unemployed and may face a reduced re-employability, who may feel to be individually relatively deprived or who are in need for contested economic resources. Thus, hypotheses 1a, 1b, 3a, 3b, and 5 are not confirmed.

Having difficulties to cope on the contemporary labor market appears to be more relevant when directly contrasting electorates of both types of populist radical parties (see figures 10, 15, and 16).

Figure 10: Populist Radical Right (1) vs. Populist Radical Left (0) Voting (Fixed Effects Regression, Linear Probability Models, *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$)



In this case, those with a lower-level blue-collar profession who become unemployed have a significantly reduced probability to vote for a PRRP than those from an intermediate white-collar profession. Put differently, given that the analysis sample for this model only consists of observations of populist radical voting, persons who become unemployed and due to their profession may face difficulties to return on the labor market rather support PRLPs (known for their focus on redistribution and consequently rather economic policies) than PRRPs (mainly characterized by their nativist positions which are more associated to cultural concerns). This contradicts hypothesis 2a whereas hypothesis 2b is supported since the educational aspect of a person's re-employability cannot explain the preference of one type of populist radical party over the other. The other indicators of economic deprivation, such as having to cope with a lower income than one deems sufficient or good and being in need for employment and welfare benefits are not more beneficial for one kind of populist radical party than for the other which agrees with hypothesis 4a and 4b. However, hypothesis 6 is not confirmed as unemployment and receiving welfare benefits do not come along with a preference for PRRPs over PRLPs. As for the effects of political attitudes, the ideological separation among populist parties is illustrated by high concerns due to immigration having a positive effect on PRRP voting whereas calling for more redistribution makes PRRP support less likely (and hence, increases the preference of PRLPs). Just like for the majority of the wave-specific regression models discussed above, political cynicism cannot explain why a person supports a PRRP instead of a PRLP (or vice versa). Therefore, hypotheses 8 and 9 are supported which highlights the explanatory relevance of political views.

4.6 Conclusion

Testing if and to what extent being a "loser of globalization", experiencing personal relative deprivation or lacking potentially contested economic resources affects individual support for populist parties did not yield clear findings in fixed effects regression models. Although there is evidence suggesting that the level of education is associated to an increased likelihood of PRRP support in the event of experiencing unemployment, this only holds true for those with a higher level of vocational education

compared to those with a university degree. Voters with a lower educational level, however, have no increased tendency to support populist parties after a transition into unemployment. With regard to PRLP voting, the more advantageous fixed effects models do not reveal any impact of the professional or educational aspect of potentially having to struggle on the labor market after a job loss. Individual relative deprivation turns out to be a significant predictor, albeit with an unexpected effect direction as instead of PRLPs their non-populist competitors benefit from voters' impression of having to cope with less than a sufficient income level. When leaving all other parties aside and merely contrasting populist parties from both sides of the political spectrum, unemployment among those having previously worked in a low-skilled manual profession is more beneficial for PRLPs. This indicates that voters who may be concerned about their re-entry on the labor market due to their low skill-level rather turn to those anti-establishment parties that put more emphasis on economic policies instead of focusing on an anti-immigrant rhetoric. However, this does not translate into actual electoral gains for PRLPs since such an effect is not obtained when the reference category consists of all other (non-populist) parties. Overall, with regard to the major research objective it has become apparent that individually experiencing economic deprivation over time hardly affects the tendency to support a populist radical party.

Regarding the second goal of this study, which is pointing out the analytic advantages of using individual-level panel data to examine how changing economic circumstances are converted into the tendency to support populist parties, results that are more conclusive have been obtained. This becomes apparent by the year-to-year variations in terms of significance of the cross-sectional findings on predictors that did not prove to be significant influencing factors in the panel fixed effects models. Thus, not being able to take into account the dynamic nature of individual careers and of temporal conditions may lead to contradicting conclusions on the impact of one's economic situation on political preferences across different types of research designs and data sources. The impact of the temporal context across different survey years can be considered a potential explanation for the inconsistency of results in the literature. In addition to that, the advantage of implicitly controlling

the influence of time-constant characteristics which eliminates a source of potential bias may explain as well why previous studies provided inconsistent findings and even more, why the findings obtained from both analytic approaches that were carried out in this study vary from one another that much. This is probably illustrated best by the significant and positive effect of the amount of welfare benefits received on PRLP voting in nine out of eleven survey years which, however, is not confirmed by a regression model covering the same period and relying on the same respondents but taking into account the panel structure of the data.

Apart from the contributions of this study to the state of research, there are also some limitations to be addressed. For instance, the share of explained variance on populist voting is rather low. Changes in party preference for the same persons over time are to be attributed to only 4.24% (PRRP), 2.08% (PRLP), and 3.82% (preferring one kind of populist radical party over the other) to those characteristics captured in the model specification. This is remarkable as the number of explanatory factors is rather high and is not restricted to potential sources of economic deprivation but also consists of sociodemographic control variables, opinions matching the political approach of populist radical parties, and survey year indicators. Furthermore, the lack of significance for some predictors in the fixed effects models which proved to be relevant predictors of populist voting in some cross-sectional models suggests a spurious relationship that gets detected when implicitly controlling all time-constant characteristics of a person in a fixed effects regression model. This is hardly possible in cross-sectional data as not all potentially relevant factors are adequately measurable in survey questionnaires. One of these invariable aspects which is difficult to convert into a survey item and which may explain the support for populist voting is the political socialization a person underwent. Although the distorting impact of these factors can be ruled out in the fixed effects regression models used for this study, however, even for this advantageous longitudinal design it cannot be stated with certainty which of these latent characteristics actually explains populist radical voting rather than economic deprivation does.

Appendix

Table 5: Political cynicism and attitudes towards immigration

Item	Political cynicism
1	Parliamentarians do not care about the opinions of people like me.
2	Political parties are only interested in my vote and not in my opinion.
3	People like me have no influence at all on government policy.
Item	Attitudes towards immigration
1	It is good if society consists of people from different cultures.
2	It is difficult for a foreigner to be accepted in the Netherlands while retaining his/her own culture.
3	It should be made easier to obtain asylum in the Netherlands.
4	Legally residing foreigners should be entitled to the same social security as Dutch citizens.
5	There are too many people of foreign origin or descent in the Netherlands.
6	People of foreign origin or descent are not accepted in the Netherlands.
7	Some sectors of the economy can only continue to function because people of foreign origin or descent work there.
8	It does not help a neighborhood if many people of foreign origin or descent move in.

Table 6: Detailed overview on wave-specific OLS models (Interaction of previous profession and unemployment), * $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$**

Profession	Linear Probability Models, Dependent Variables: a) Populist Radical Right Voting (0/1), b) Populist Radical Left Voting (0/1) and c) Populist Radical Right Voting (1) instead of Populist Radical Left Voting (0); OLS Regression Models for Each Survey Wave Separately											
		Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5	Wave 6	Wave 7	Wave 8	Wave 9	Wave 10	Wave 11
		Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
High level white collar profession	a) PRRP	-0.0327	-0.0254	-0.0276	-0.0162	-0.0178	0.0129	-0.0273	-0.0198	-0.0285	-0.0231	-0.0584*
	b) PRLP	-0.0294	-0.0249	-0.0148	-0.0176	-0.0453	0.0160	-0.00832	-0.00812	-0.0184	-0.0350*	-0.0236
	c) PRRP/PRLP	-0.0110	0.0226	-0.00985	-0.0185	0.0566	0.00572	-0.0657	-0.0171	-0.00850	0.0183	-0.0821
Intermediate white collar profession	a) PRRP	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
	b) PRLP	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
	c) PRRP/PRLP	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Other white collar / service sector profession	a) PRRP	-0.00794	-0.00564	-0.00885	-0.00639	0.0187	0.0296*	0.0461*	0.0336	0.0145	0.00634	0.0178
	b) PRLP	0.0171	0.000529	0.0248	0.0300	0.0262	0.0267	0.0303	0.0320	0.0169	-0.00250	0.0234
	c) PRRP/PRLP	-0.0134	0.0118	-0.0115	-0.0506	0.0442	0.0956	0.0718	0.0440	0.0292	0.0552	0.0442
High level blue collar / skilled manual profession	a) PRRP	0.0205	0.0483	0.0708*	0.0187	0.1194**	0.111**	0.0916**	0.0856**	0.104**	0.0618*	-0.0185
	b) PRLP	0.0166	0.0204	0.0783*	0.115**	0.0819**	0.0729**	0.0541	0.0768*	0.0738*	0.0854**	0.0685
	c) PRRP/PRLP	0.0240	0.0557	-0.000222	-0.119	0.0778	0.111	0.0666	0.0422	0.0144	0.00481	-0.00481
Lower level blue collar / low-skilled manual profession	a) PRRP	0.00531	0.0298	0.0533*	0.106**	0.142**	0.0866**	0.110**	0.0966**	0.0738*	0.0874**	0.131**
	b) PRLP	0.0279	0.0893**	0.0366*	0.0177	0.0363	0.0616**	0.0552	0.0200	0.0304	0.0372	0.0838**
	c) PRRP/PRLP	-0.00362	-0.0537	-0.00735	0.144**	0.130**	0.111	0.105*	0.138**	0.0481	0.0588	0.0830
Unemployment	a) PRRP	-0.000724	0.222	-0.0196	0.154	0.0433	0.0994	0.192*	-0.0144	0.0541	-0.0120	0.155
	b) PRLP	-0.108	0.111	0.0929	-0.0558	-0.107	-0.0853	0.136	0.0266	-0.0460	0.00112	0.200
	c) PRRP/PRLP	0.157	0.232	-0.222	0.256	0.0508	0.393*	0.0116	-0.120	-0.0197	-0.0750	-0.299
High level white collar profession * Unemployment	a) PRRP	-0.135	0.160	-0.0103	-0.156	-0.0851	-0.118	-0.226	-0.0331	0.139	-0.0865	-0.0507
	b) PRLP	-0.151	0.105	-0.285	-0.0315	-0.0352	-0.0321	0.0962	-0.00161	0.0975	0.198	0.107
	c) PRRP/PRLP	0	-0.0708	0.175	0	0	0	-0.270	0.0698	-0.176	-0.0431	-0.269
Intermediate white collar profession * Unemployment	a) PRRP	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
	b) PRLP	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
	c) PRRP/PRLP	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Other white collar / service sector profession * Unemployment	a) PRRP	0.249	0.0287	-0.0939	-0.00357	-0.104	-0.109	-0.216	0.00487	0.0220	0.110	-0.212
	b) PRLP	0.0741	-0.00406	-0.128	-0.0267	0.0528	0.0397	-0.0617	0.0654	0.361**	0.0722	-0.0755
	c) PRRP/PRLP	0.0690	-0.275	0.352	0.121	0.0632	-0.405	-0.00497	0.0764	-0.211	0.118	-0.0559
High level blue collar / skilled manual profession * Unemployment	a) PRRP	0.187	-0.544*	-0.308	-0.0779	-0.210	-0.146	-0.0719	0.0662	-0.395	0.125	-0.388
	b) PRLP	0.305	-0.338	0.00305	0.196	0.0618	0.311*	0.09964	-0.139	0.0750	-0.0127	0.0704
	c) PRRP/PRLP	-0.592	0	-0.0740	-0.368	-0.338	-0.604**	0.0334	0.502*	-0.459	0.327	-0.411
Lower level blue collar / low-skilled manual profession * Unemployment	a) PRRP	0.494	0.444*	0.0951	0.0519	0.0325	-0.193	-0.618**	-0.0491	-0.266	-0.156	0.0354
	b) PRLP	0.741**	0.544*	-0.245	0.455**	0.3008	-0.187	-0.0767	-0.188	0.0435	-0.158	-0.637*
	c) PRRP/PRLP	-0.331	-0.0757	0.544	-0.515*	-0.0301	0	-0.479	0.120	-0.134	0	0.470
Financial Situation in the household	a) PRRP	-0.0880	0.00145	0.108*	0.137**	0.123*	0.129**	0.0865	0.133**	0.0840	0.0656	-0.0956
	b) PRLP	0.0732	0.0237	0.124*	0.0546	0.165*	0.0439	-0.06509	0.124**	0.0673	-0.00341	-0.144
	c) PRRP/PRLP	-0.202**	0.0774	0.0591	0.0150	0.0538	0.0862	0.112	0.0342	-0.108	0.0677	0.182
we are accumulating debts	a) PRRP	0.0399	0.0115	0.0124	0.00935	0.0354	0.0298	-0.00715	-0.0102	0.0187	-0.0151	0.0175
	b) PRLP	0.0670**	0.0363	0.0373	0.0326	0.0533*	0.0174	0.0471*	0.0494*	0.0366	0.000494	0.0213
	c) PRRP/PRLP	0.00152	0.00255	0.00806	-0.00576	-0.00290	0.0259	-0.0583	-0.0527	-0.0930	0.0150	0.0108
we are somewhat eating into savings	a) PRRP	0.0257	0.0398**	0.0136	0.0144	0.0200	-0.00246	0.00355	0.0502**	0.0484*	0.0316*	0.0428
	b) PRLP	0.0280	-0.00124	-0.00195	-0.00526	0.00670	0.00688	0.0408	0.0112	0.0516*	0.0190	0.0381
	c) PRRP/PRLP	0.0310	0.125**	0.0495	0.0809	0.0598	0.0492	0.00653	0.0474	-0.0394	0.0144	0.0408
we are just managing to make ends meet	a) PRRP	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
	b) PRLP	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
	c) PRRP/PRLP	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
we have some money to save	a) PRRP	-0.0249	-0.0282	-0.0305	-0.0267	-0.0477*	-0.00842	0.0232	-0.0201	-0.00545	0.00911	0.00319
	b) PRLP	-0.0455	-0.0140	-0.0299	0.00689	-0.0290	0.00876	0.0104	-0.0127	0.0135	-0.0177	-0.0255
	c) PRRP/PRLP	0.0136	-0.0739	-0.0304	-0.149	-0.143*	-0.0783	0.00296	-0.0368	-0.0951	-0.00790	0.0200
we have a lot of money to save	a) PRRP	-0.000230	-0.000455	-0.00557	-0.000685	-0.00261	-0.000331	-0.000248	0.0000199	0.00362	-0.00776	-0.00909
	b) PRLP	0.000145	-0.000204	0.00506	-0.00176	-0.00280	-0.00188	-0.00255	-0.00207	-0.00541	-0.00811	-0.00521
	c) PRRP/PRLP	-0.00136	0.000588	0.000510	0.0344	0.0288	0.0319	0.0263	0.0130	0.00269	-0.0111	0.00589
Household net income (per month, in 1,000 Euro)	a) PRRP	-0.0455*	-0.0154	-0.00115	0.0283	-0.000559	0.00904	-0.00088	-0.0167	0.0420	0.00594	0.00791
	b) PRLP	0.0184	0.0336	0.0103	0.0104	-0.0101	0.0174	-0.0138	0.0128	0.00764	0.00629	0.0385
	c) PRRP/PRLP	-0.0932*	-0.0286	-0.0000487	0.0893	0.0248	0.0686	0.0326	-0.00928	0.141*	0.00649	0.00286
Relative Deprivation (Income lower than sufficient)	a) PRRP	0.00330	0.0107	0.00134	-0.0261	-0.0250	-0.0107	0.0280	-0.00651	-0.00875	-0.0146	0.000533
	b) PRLP	-0.0295	-0.00459	-0.00555	0.0176	0.0457*	0.0170	0.0203	-0.0151	0.000226	0.0132	-0.0252
	c) PRRP/PRLP	0.0770*	0.0430	-0.0186	-0.0954	-0.0592	0.0198	0.0499	-0.122*	-0.0688	0.0405	0.0195
Relative Deprivation (Income lower than good)	a) PRRP	-0.0179	-0.0170	0.0113	-0.0125	-0.000461	0.00709	0.0127	0.0181	0.00768	0.0157	0.0195
	b) PRLP	0.0367**	0.0389**	0.0309**	0.0120	0.0357**	0.0309**	0.0341**	0.0485**	0.0285*	0.0187	0.0468**
	c) PRRP/PRLP	-0.0601**	-0.0439*	-0.0216	-0.0197	-0.0201	-0.00788	-0.0122	-0.0350	-0.00906	-0.0105	0.00624
Number of welfare benefits received	a) PRRP	0.0655**	0.0283**	0.0422**	0.0257**	0.0287**	0.0146**	0.0289**	0.0492**	0.0364**	0.0171**	0.0383**
	b) PRLP	0.0399**	0.0320**	0.0344**	0.0261**	0.0480**	0.0286**	0.0374**	0.0416**	0.0103	0.0231**	0.0236**
	c) PRRP/PRLP	0.0256	0.0280	0.0425*	0.0190	0.00487	0.0106	0.00914	0.0242	0.103**	0.0325	0.0241
Political cynicism	a) PRRP	0.0444**	0.0339**	0.0388**	0.0326**	0.0303**	0.0218**	0.0308**	0.0380**	0.0342**	0.0285**	0.0344**
	b) PRLP	-0.000432	-0.00361	-0.00249	0.00203	-0.00193	0.000800	-0.000840	0.000679	0.000443	0.000295	-0.000357
	c) PRRP/PRLP	0.0499**	0.0523**	0.0559**	0.0487**	0.0519**	0.0540**	0.0486**	0.0562**	0.0477**	0.0559**	0.0519**
Economic and cultural concerns about immigration	a) PRRP	0.0521	0.0323	0.132*	-0.0486	-0.0645	-0.0253	0.0202	0.0500	-0.0567	-0.0239	-0.127
	b) PRLP	-0.130*	-0.0774	-0.0192	0.0167	-0.0789	-0.0356	-0.0489	0.0560	0.00968	-0.0442	0.0315
	c) PRRP/PRLP	0.175*	0.149	-0.0603	-0.0870	0.0556	0.00172	0.0219	-0.0748	-0.114	0.0289	0.0683
Attitude towards redistribution	a) PRRP	0.0338	0.00208	-0.0157	-0.0425	0.00625	-0.0221	-0.00164	0.0130	-0.0123	-0.0333	0.0683
	b) PRLP	-0.0628	-0.0516	-0.0175	-0.0145	-0.0127	-0.0313	-0.0189	-0.0271	0.0101	-0.0430	-0.00178
	c) PRRP/PRLP	0.143**	0.215**	0.0471	-0.00384	0.115	0.0205	0.0762	0.110	0.0619	0.153	0.0348
1: Differences in income should increase	a) PRRP	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
	b) PRLP	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
	c) PRRP/PRLP	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
2	a) PRRP	-0.0208	-0.0302	-0.0126	0.0385*	0.0181	0.0207	0.0179	0.0166	0.0148	-0.0348*	-0.0107
	b) PRLP	0.0724**	0.0552**	0.0580**	0.0477**	0.0835**	0.0564**	0.0858**	0.0579**	0.0262	0.0375*	0.0390
	c) PRRP/PRLP	-0.182**	-0.194**	-0.158**	-0.0515	-0.140**	-0.152**	-0.173**	-0.106*	-0.0672	-0.192**	-0.157*
3	a) PRRP	0.0220	0.0190	0.0288	0.0867**	0.0502*	0.0725**	0.0950**	0.0648**	0.0748**	0.0665**	0.0409
	b) PRLP	0.175**	0.169**	0.173**	0.127**	0.212**	0.180**	0.252**	0.184**	0.126**	0.119**	0.122**
	c) PRRP/PRLP	-0.221**	-0.263**	-0.258**	-0.112*	-0.213**	-0.215**	-0.261**	-			

**The Effect of Individual Economic Deprivation on Populist Voting:
Longitudinal Evidence from Dutch Panel Data**

*Table 7: Detailed overview on wave-specific OLS models (Interaction of vocational education and unemployment), *** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05*

Vocational Education		Linear Probability Models, Dependent Variables: a) Populist Radical Right Voting (0/1), b) Populist Radical Left Voting (0/1) and c) Populist Radical Right Voting (1) instead of Populist Radical Left Voting (0); OLS-Regression Models for Each Survey Wave Separately										
		Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5	Wave 6	Wave 7	Wave 8	Wave 9	Wave 10	Wave 11
Secondary education or less / other education	a) PRRP	0.0661*	0.0194	0.0709**	0.0452	0.0559*	0.0341	0.0894***	0.0599*	0.0654*	0.0396	0.0579
	b) FRLP	0.112**	0.0781**	0.0338	0.0423	0.0751*	0.00404	0.0324	0.0403	0.0598*	0.0434	0.0603*
	c) PRRP-PRLP	-0.0858	-0.0244	0.177*	0.0490	0.0282	0.159	0.125	0.111	-0.151	-0.00283	0.0820
Intermediate vocational education	a) PRRP	0.0820*	0.0209	0.0747**	0.0292	0.0102	0.0282	0.0650*	0.0706**	0.0952**	0.0327	0.0450
	b) FRLP	0.118***	0.0353	0.0301	0.0515*	0.0913**	0.0397	0.0535	0.0590*	0.0753**	0.0614**	0.0318
	c) PRRP-PRLP	-0.0581	0.0211	0.171*	-0.0133	-0.0457	0.122	0.0604	0.102	-0.171	-0.0545	0.0966
Higher vocational education	a) PRRP	0.0160	-0.0129	0.0288	-0.00754	-0.0242	-0.0145	-0.0104	-0.0159	0.000494	-0.0151	-0.08985
	b) FRLP	0.0681*	0.0482	-0.00835	0.0174	0.0306	-0.00901	0.0107	-0.00732	0.0287	0.0125	-0.00618
	c) PRRP-PRLP	-0.120	-0.0935	0.142	-0.0493	-0.0849	-0.000561	-0.0337	-0.0244	-0.176	-0.154	0.0510
University degree	a) PRRP	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
	b) FRLP	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
	c) PRRP-PRLP	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Unemployment	a) PRRP	-0.104	0.396*	-0.0401	0.0272	-0.0831	-0.0479	0.0372	-0.0332	0.115	-0.0743	-0.138
	b) FRLP	-0.175	0.694**	-0.145	-0.107	-0.212	0.0301	0.388**	0.129	-0.100	-0.105	-0.0960
	c) PRRP-PRLP	0.515	0.188	-0.158	0.000840	-0.0690	0.436	-0.0377	-0.241	-0.368	-0.0124	-0.639*
Secondary education or less / other education * Unemployment	a) PRRP	0.399*	-0.154	0.121	0.0904	0.0731	-0.00980	-0.0573	0.0310	-0.130	0.166	0.350
	b) FRLP	0.408*	-0.647*	0.122	0.0993	0.182	-0.0624	-0.255	-0.173	0.141	0.193	0.400
	c) PRRP-PRLP	-0.571	-0.0296	0.111	0.138	0.0717	-0.543	-0.133	0.361	0.297	0.103	0.393
Intermediate vocational education * Unemployment	a) PRRP	0.411	-0.194	-0.0668	0.184	0.157	0.108	0.0618	0.0141	-0.228	0.113	0.191
	b) FRLP	0.421	-0.590*	0.09978	0.300	0.202	-0.133	-0.330*	-0.100	0.188	0.125	0.268
	c) PRRP-PRLP	-0.447	-0.236	0.252	0	0.0915	-0.272	0.0459	0.233	0.00280	-0.0644	0.412
Higher vocational education * Unemployment	a) PRRP	0.0935	0	-0.06939	0	-0.0264	0	-0.0434	0.0648	-0.0422	0.0501	0.206
	b) FRLP	0.0747	-0.580	0.390*	0.0324	0.0694	-0.618	-0.254	-0.127	0.190	0.144	0.288
	c) PRRP-PRLP	0	-0.124	0	0	0	-0.265	-0.160	0.0571	0.217	0	0
University degree * Unemployment	a) PRRP	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
	b) FRLP	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
	c) PRRP-PRLP	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Financial Situation in the household	a) PRRP	-0.0940	0.0130	0.107*	0.143***	0.110	0.127***	0.0702	0.137***	0.0854	0.0563	-0.0878
	b) FRLP	0.0628	0.0210	0.128**	0.0541	0.167*	0.0392	-0.000946	0.139**	0.0498	-0.0120	-0.140
	c) PRRP-PRLP	-0.153	-0.0493	0.0596	-0.0226	-0.0472	-0.132	-0.0297	-0.044	-0.0905	-0.0725	0.175
we are accumulating debts	a) PRRP	0.0404	0.0141	0.00861	0.0143	0.0326	0.0307	-0.00466	-0.00577	0.0184	-0.0170	0.0139
	b) FRLP	0.0645**	0.0354	0.0351	0.0330	0.0524*	0.0188	0.0496*	0.0521*	0.0411	-0.00118	0.0224
	c) PRRP-PRLP	-0.00459	0.00605	0.00276	-0.00172	-0.00634	0.0316	-0.0442	-0.0417	-0.0669	0.00202	0.00330
we are just managing to make ends meet	a) PRRP	0.0272	0.0417*	0.0143	0.0165	0.0268	0.00171	0.00733	0.0553**	0.0572*	0.0344**	0.0452
	b) FRLP	0.0294	-0.000731	0.000490	-0.000127	0.0112	0.0116	0.04625*	0.0133	0.06628	-0.0422	0.0591
	c) PRRP-PRLP	0.0278	0.115**	0.0424	0.0674	0.0554	0.0476	0.00942	0.0570	-0.0346	0.0118	0.0460
we have some money to save	a) PRRP	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
	b) FRLP	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
	c) PRRP-PRLP	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
we have a lot of money to save	a) PRRP	-0.0142	-0.0286	-0.0275	-0.0224	-0.0457*	-0.00286	0.0245	-0.0191	-0.00110	0.00893	0.00206
	b) FRLP	-0.0319	-0.0116	-0.0321	0.00353	-0.0231	0.0106	0.0145	-0.0104	0.0186	-0.0172	-0.0274
	c) PRRP-PRLP	0.0142	-0.0568	-0.0281	-0.122	-0.134	-0.0661	-0.0163	-0.0253	-0.0982	0.00152	0.0279
Household net income (per month, in 1,000 Euro)	a) PRRP	-0.00216	-0.000588	-0.00631	-0.000990	-0.000894	-0.000536	-0.000531	-0.000213	0.00314	-0.0108*	-0.0141*
	b) FRLP	0.000156	-0.000371	0.00445	-0.00190	-0.00310	-0.00230	-0.00262	-0.00201	-0.00597	-0.00934	-0.00681
	c) PRRP-PRLP	-0.00333	0.000807	0.000339	0.0368	0.0236	0.0336	0.0251	0.0135	0.00250	-0.00995	-0.00329
Relative Deprivation (Income lower than sufficient)	a) PRRP	-0.0444**	-0.0143	-0.00417	0.0252	0.00250	0.00518	-0.00520	-0.0156	0.0385	0.00520	0.000328
	b) FRLP	0.0191	0.0368	0.00101	0.00723	-0.0111	0.0152	-0.0171	0.0106	0.00772	0.00589	0.0349
	c) PRRP-PRLP	-0.0966**	-0.0283	0.00758	0.0817	0.0293	0.0672	0.0348	-0.00860	0.130*	0.00736	0.00333
Relative Deprivation (Income lower than good)	a) PRRP	0.0403	0.0117	0.00303	-0.0234	-0.0241	-0.00554	0.0256	-0.00616	-0.00782	-0.0157	0.00408
	b) FRLP	-0.0288	-0.00172	-0.00316	0.0163	0.0477*	0.0103	0.0220	-0.0145	0.00216	0.0123	-0.0241
	c) PRRP-PRLP	0.0787*	0.0362	-0.0172	-0.0762	-0.0657	-0.0395	0.0127	0.0525	-0.117*	-0.0672	0.0426
Number of welfare benefits received	a) PRRP	-0.0186	-0.0163	0.00952	-0.00893	0.00218	0.00926	0.0137	0.0212	0.0115	0.0172	0.0121
	b) FRLP	0.0363**	0.0416**	0.0320**	0.0136	0.0369**	0.0324**	0.0358**	0.0485**	0.0321**	0.0196	0.0474**
	c) PRRP-PRLP	-0.0577**	-0.0403	-0.0313	-0.0104	-0.0172	-0.0126	-0.0171	-0.0297	-0.0127	-0.0125	-0.00252
Political cynicism	a) PRRP	0.0624***	0.0277***	0.0401***	0.0255***	0.0306***	0.0144***	0.0280***	0.0487***	0.0367***	0.0177***	0.0392***
	b) FRLP	0.0367**	0.0314**	0.0342**	0.0256**	0.0464**	0.0288**	0.0377**	0.0396**	0.00929	0.0226**	0.0230**
	c) PRRP-PRLP	0.0243	0.0186	0.0384*	0.0129	0.00426	0.00604	0.00370	0.0246	0.0990**	0.0277	0.0252
Economic and cultural concerns about immigration	a) PRRP	0.0436**	0.0342**	0.0387**	0.0330**	0.0311**	0.0223**	0.0310**	0.0377**	0.0340**	0.0286**	0.0342**
	b) FRLP	-0.00105	-0.00337	-0.00224	0.00307	-0.00219	0.00136	-0.00678	0.00034	0.00052	0.00368	0.000166
	c) PRRP-PRLP	0.0502**	0.0518**	0.0543**	0.0484**	0.0512**	0.0527**	0.0474**	0.0535**	0.0492**	0.0560**	0.0507**
Attitude towards redistribution	a) PRRP	-0.0514	0.0533	0.134*	-0.0385	-0.0658	-0.0284	-0.0730	0.0462	-0.0728	-0.0333	-0.148
	b) FRLP	-0.119*	-0.0782	-0.0295	0.00613	-0.0852	-0.0416	-0.0595	0.0524	-0.00111	-0.0415	0.0330
	c) PRRP-PRLP	0.185*	0.181	-0.0515	-0.0625	-0.0776	0.0972	0.0224	-0.0593	-0.211	0.123	0.0910
1: Differences in income should increase	a) PRRP	0.0346	0.000671	-0.0167	-0.0402	-0.0000101	-0.0231	0.000259	0.0149	-0.00849	-0.0329	0.0690
	b) FRLP	-0.0642	-0.0534	-0.0211	-0.0228	-0.0177	-0.0333	-0.0188	-0.0226	0.0122	-0.0449	0.0113
	c) PRRP-PRLP	0.140**	0.240**	0.0592	0.00553	0.118	0.0392	0.0661	0.123	0.0678	0.155	0.0504
2	a) PRRP	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
	b) FRLP	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
	c) PRRP-PRLP	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
3	a) PRRP	-0.0204	-0.0286	-0.0110	0.0426**	0.0177	0.0257	0.0195	0.0171	0.0163	-0.0323*	-0.00593
	b) FRLP	0.0738***	0.0608***	0.0583**	0.0524**	0.0824***	0.0579***	0.0896***	0.0591**	0.0272	0.0410**	0.0457*
	c) PRRP-PRLP	-0.185***	-0.196***	-0.156***	-0.0992	-0.146***	-0.145*	-0.172***	-0.102*	-0.0643	-0.189***	-0.140*
4	a) PRRP	0.0216	0.0208	0.0316	0.0925**	0.0615**	0.0615**	0.0397	0.0691**	0.0770**	0.0683**	0.0439
	b) FRLP	0.178**	0.178**	0.177**	0.132**	0.215**	0.186**	0.257**	0.184**	0.127**	0.122**	0.123**
	c) PRRP-PRLP	-0.223**	-0.272**	-0.263**	-0.119*	-0.215**	-0.210**	-0.272**	-0.215**	-0.202**	-0.184**	-0.253**
5: Differences in income should decrease	a) PRRP	-0.847***	-0.620***	-0.776***	-0.605***	-0.505***	-0.569***	-0.585***	-0.775***	-0.689***	-0.550***	-0.720***
	b) FRLP	-0.0985	-0.0575	-0.156	-0.252**	-0.400**	-0.269**	-0.311**	-0.426**	-0.307**	-0.358**	-0.215*
	c) PRRP-PRLP	-0.269	-0.414*	-0.357	-0.0281	-0.0794	-0.694*	0.237	-0.214	0.364	0.0392	-0.0843
Constant												

N (Range of the number of observations across the models)

Due to the small number of observations of persons being unemployed (592 across all waves) there are no observations of being unemployed for some professional or educational categories in some waves. This is indicated by an effect of 0.

Data: LISS Panel (Waves 1 to 11), own calculations; The results have been estimated controlling for age, age squared and gender.

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Figure 11: Average Marginal Effects of Unemployment on PRRP Voting, Dependent on the Previous Professional Situation

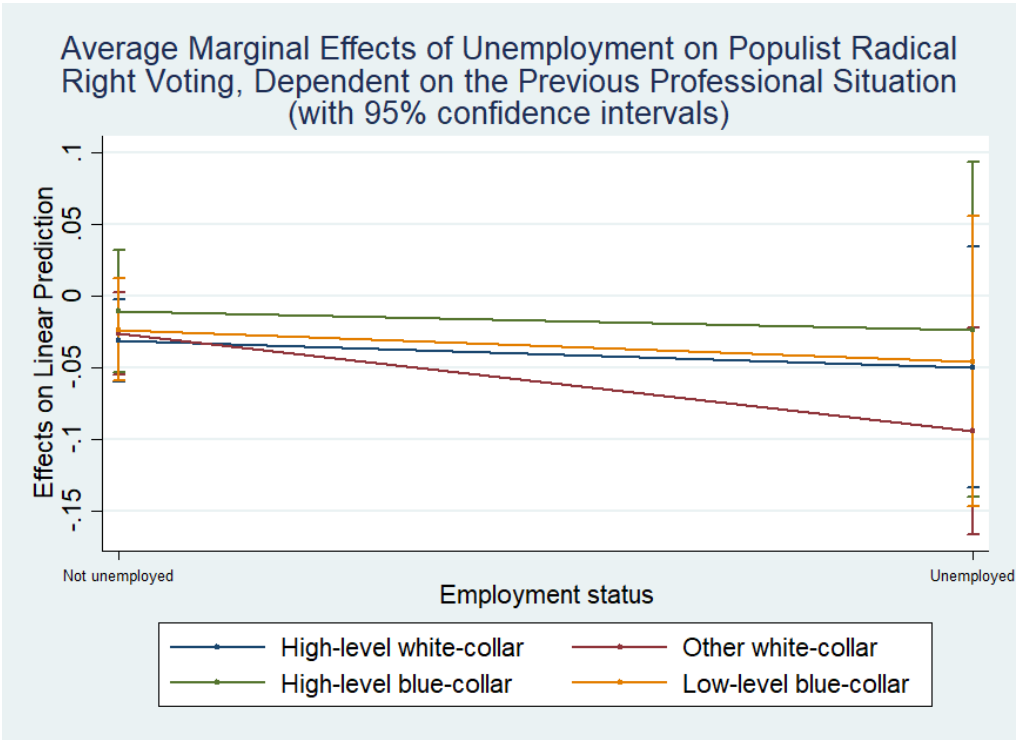


Figure 12: Average Marginal Effects of Unemployment on PRRP Voting, Dependent on Educational Attainment

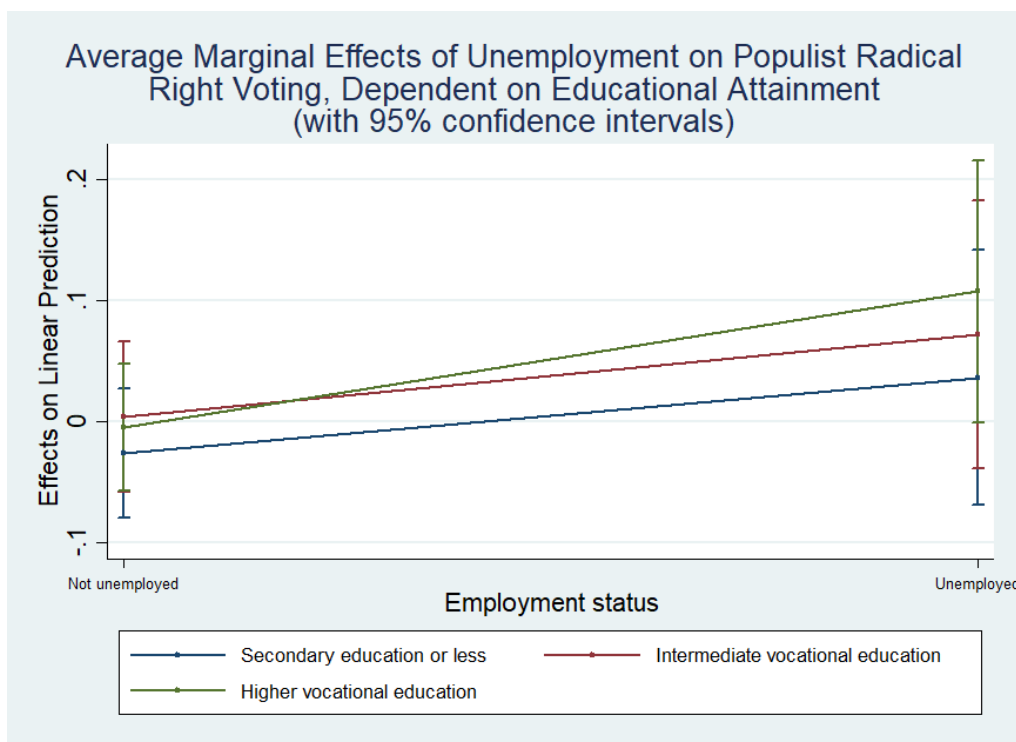


Figure 13: Average Marginal Effects of Unemployment on PRLP Voting, Dependent on the Previous Professional Situation

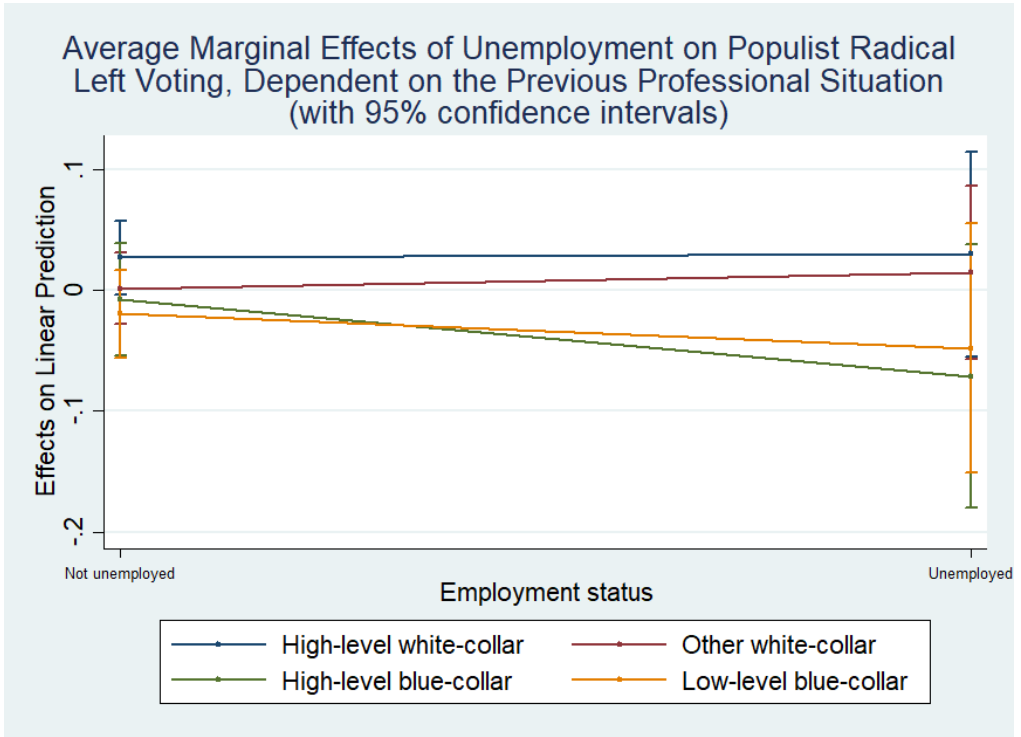


Figure 14: Average Marginal Effects of Unemployment on PRLP Voting, Dependent on Educational Attainment

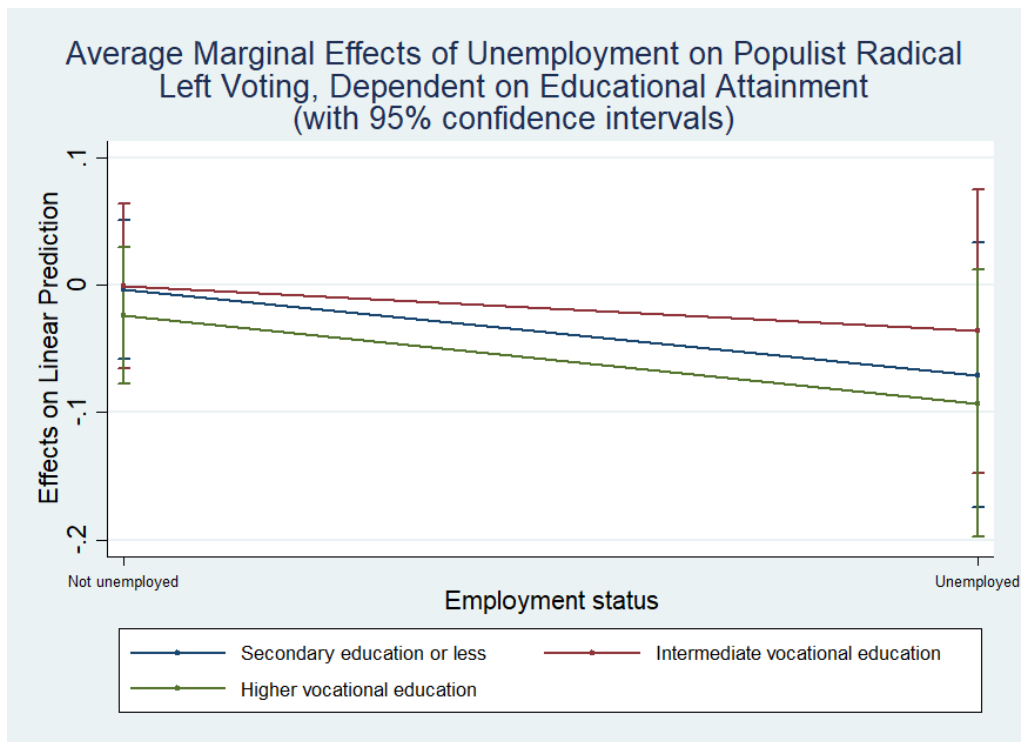


Figure 15: Average Marginal Effects of Unemployment on PRRP (1) vs. PRLP (0) Voting, Dependent on the Previous Professional Situation

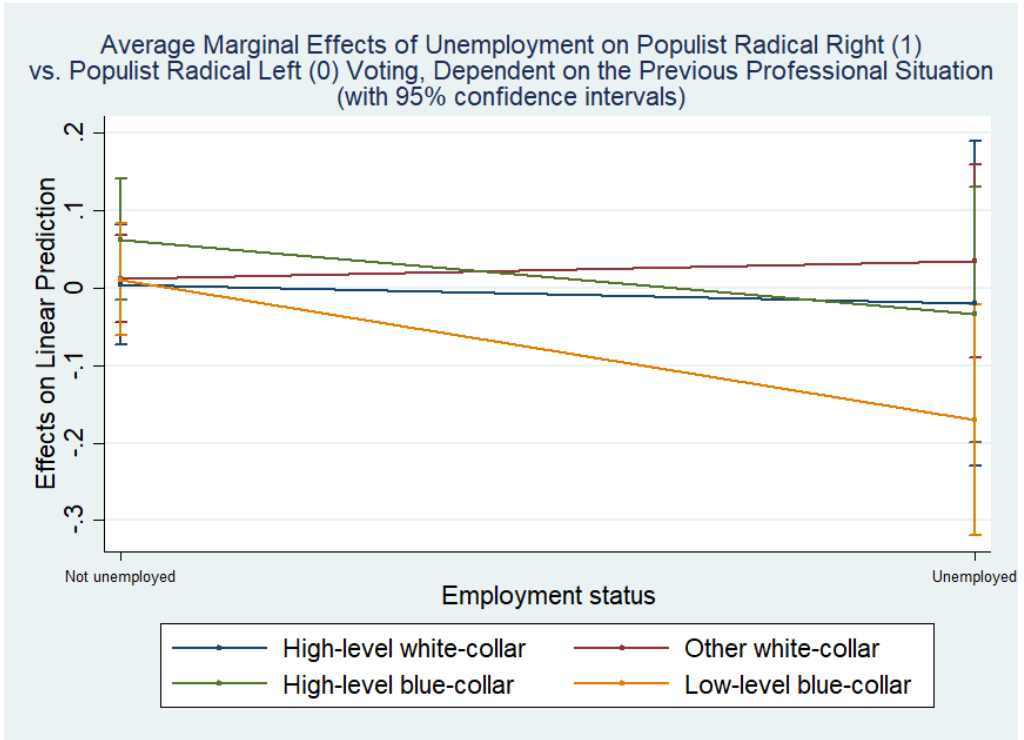
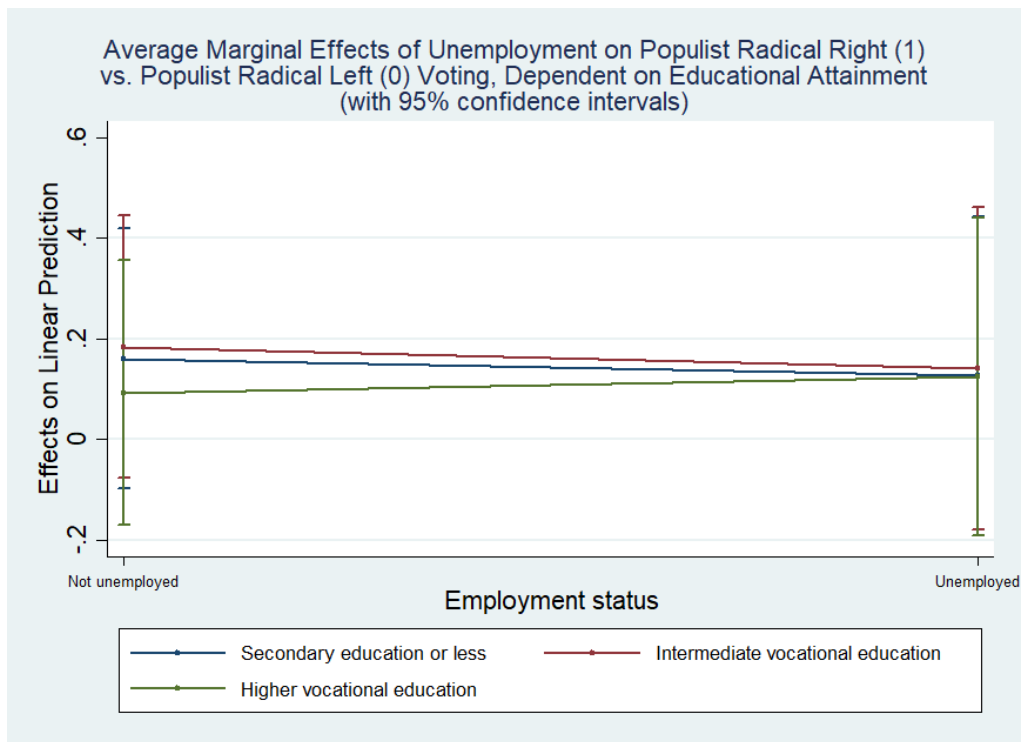


Figure 16: Average Marginal Effects of Unemployment on PRRP (1) vs. PRLP (0) Voting, Dependent on Educational Attainment



5

The Effect of Socioeconomic Vulnerability
on Radical Populist Voting and Abstaining
in the European Elections 2019

The two objectives of this study are (1) to determine if socioeconomic vulnerability increases the tendency to either support a radical populist party or to abstain from voting (both compared to mainstream party voting) and (2) which attitudinal mediators may explain the preference of one of these two outcomes over the other. This is studied for the European elections 2019 since the “second-order” character of supranational elections is supposedly linked to a higher appeal of radical populist and Eurosceptic party voting same as to a greater indifference among the electorate and a lower turnout. A multinomial logistic regression analysis using Eurobarometer 91.5 survey data suggests that educational and financial vulnerability foster both radical populist voting and abstaining whereas an unfavorable position on the labor market only increases the latter. Moreover, adopting anti-immigration views partially explains the preference of “voicing” one’s discontent in favor of a radical populist party whereas an emerging political disinterest and a perceived powerlessness due to one’s unfavorable occupational, educational or financial status rather translate into “exiting” from political participation. Disapproval of (European) politics among the socioeconomically vulnerable decreases mainstream party voting but does neither boost radical populist voting nor abstaining more than the other.

5.1 Introduction

In the run-up to the European Parliament (EP) elections of 2019, radical populist parties aiming at the mobilization of anti-establishment sentiments among the electorate were expected to almost double their share of seats (from 15.1% before the election to 29%)¹. At first sight, they have become the strongest political forces for instance in France (23.3%), Italy (34.3%), and Poland (45.4%) and the turnout of 50.62% compared to 42.54% in 2014 hints at a successful mobilization of voters. Conversely, since about half of those eligible to vote did not do so, abstention may be perceived as an alternative indicator of political resentment among voters.

Due to their “second-order” status, EP elections are a suitable context to study these two forms of electoral behavior that may indicate an underlying discontent. As there is no actual government formed based on the votes and as prospects for parties are to a lesser extent reduced by percentage hurdles, voters may be more inclined to express their dissatisfaction with the performance of incumbent parties – also on a national level – by voting for a party opposing the establishment (Ford, Goodwin, & Cutts, 2012; Heath, McLean, Taylor, & Curtice 1999, Reif & Schmitt, 1980). In “first-order” elections, this might be considered casting a “lost” vote whereas in EP elections radical populist parties can count on the additional support of strategic supporters who, unlike the core supporters, usually are kept from siding with radical populist parties by deliberations about the value of their vote (Ford, Goodwin, & Cutts, 2012). Thus, the elimination of partisan loyalties may even increase the populist success in EP elections. Similarly, the lower subjective value attached to EP elections may be met with greater indifference among the electorate and accordingly a lower turnout (Reif & Schmitt, 1980).

Experiencing unfavorable socioeconomic circumstances is one of the potential causes that both radical populist support and abstention are commonly attributed to (e.g. Margalit, 2019). For instance, those having difficulties on the labor market may be

1. See <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2019-european-parliament-populism/> (as of 12th January 2021)

susceptible for the anti-elite and scapegoating rhetoric of radical populist parties. Abstaining from voting, however, is another possible consequence as the impression of lacking adequate representation by traditional political forces may make non-voting seem rational (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018; Schwander, Gohla, & Schäfer, 2020). Both phenomena are of societal relevance as the disapproval of politics recognizable by a low turnout may be associated with little legitimacy and acceptance of political actions taken by the representatives of the people which in turn fosters the emergence and success of radical parties and impedes political cooperation (Hadjar & Beck, 2010; Hooghe, Marien, & Pauwels, 2011).

Multiple studies found evidence of socioeconomic hardship fostering both radical populist voting and abstaining (e.g. Hadjar & Beck, 2010; Martikainen, Martikainen, & Wass, 2005; Martín-Cubas et al., 2019; Santana & Rama, 2018) although they only focus on one of the two electoral options. Even if there have been studies conducted that contrast both of them to mainstream party voting (e.g. Allen, 2017; Hooghe, Marien, & Pauwels, 2011; Mayer, Rovny, Rovny, & Sauger, 2015) it is still unclear under which socioeconomic conditions radical populist voting is more likely to occur than abstaining or mainstream party voting and when one may expect persons to rather abstain than to vote for any party.

Apart from ascertaining whether socioeconomic hardship (measured through the educational, occupational, and financial situation) was a driver of radical populist support and abstaining in the EP election of 2019, this comprises the major contribution to the state of research pursued in the following. For that, attitudinal mediators are introduced that may be caused or reinforced by socioeconomic vulnerability and that may be supposed to make either radical populist voting or abstaining more likely than the other. These viewpoints comprise the agreement with issues commonly attributed to radical populist rhetoric, feelings of political indifference, and the disapproval with (European) politics. For a start, this will be approached theoretically by pointing out which and how attitudes mediate between socioeconomic hardship and the two considered forms of mainstream party rejection. These assumptions are tested by using survey data from the Eurobarometer 91.5.

5.2 Theory and Hypotheses

5.2.1 Socioeconomic Explanations of Radical Populist Party Voting and Abstaining

Both support for a radical populist party as well as abstention are two phenomena commonly traced back to the impression of being neglected by the traditional political advocates of socioeconomically disadvantaged voter groups. Societal trends such as a growing educational participation led to a shift of policy preferences demanded by wide parts of the electorate which in turn meant that centrist parties found themselves forced to adjust their policy to more heterogeneous interests. Post-industrial developments (such as post-materialism) incentivized parties to become “catch-all parties” if they intended to benefit from the growing electoral impact of formally high-educated voters working in white-collar professions. By giving up on distinct ideologies, also those parties who previously were considered the first port of call for the socioeconomically vulnerable became less representative for their former main supporters (Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Kirchheimer, 1966; Williams, 2009). Center parties adjusting their redistributive economic positions to the right and adopting progressive sociocultural stances left behind large parts of their formerly loyal working class voters feeling politically unattached (Abou-Chadi & Wagner, 2019; Gingrich & Häusermann, 2015; Karreth, Polk, & Allen, 2013; Mudde, 2016; Kitschelt, 1994), a development that was observed across several European countries (see Rennwald & Evans 2014). Hence, the traditional class-based cleavage that Lipset and Rokkan (1967) identified as a central driver of political preferences has been replaced by new cultural cleavages that fostered the emergence of and strengthening of radical populist parties (see Bornschier, 2018).

Nonetheless, the socioeconomic status still matters with regard to these new demarcation lines of voting behavior since one’s professional and educational situation may determine on what side of this cultural divide voters place themselves and since political representation is strongly marked by an insider-outsider dualism on the labor market. A weak labor market status, such as unemployment, possibly reinforces the impression of being

neglected by established parties and makes anti-establishment parties appear an electoral solution to at least express one's discontent (see Emmenegger, Marx, & Schraff, 2015). Besides, also among the employed, differences in terms of professional environment may explain why working in a hierarchical setting, for instance in an unskilled manual profession, fosters authoritarian instead of libertarian views (see Bornschier & Kriesi, 2012). Given that the former match the rhetoric of radical populist parties, voting in favor of them is supposed to be more likely than among service-sector employees working in sociocultural professions. Similarly, a high level of education is associated with more tolerance and openness towards cultural differences and by that is assumed to reduce the tendency to support anti-establishment and nativist parties (Bornschier & Kriesi, 2012; Mayer, Rovny, Rovny, & Sauger, 2015). Besides, contrasting positions in the authoritarian-libertarian values divide dependent on the educational attainment proved to be attributable to group identities among those with a low or a high level of education (Stubager, 2009). Previous research suggests that a low level of education actually increases the likelihood of radical populist voting (Allen, 2017). Experiencing unemployment has been positively associated with radical populist voting in EP elections (Martín-Cubas et al., 2019) which is enhanced by less favorable regulations (i.e. low unemployment benefits, weak dismissal regulations) on the national labor market (Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2016). Besides, radical populist parties are particularly successful among working class voters (see Bornschier & Kriesi, 2012) and a generally weak labor market status has proven to be beneficial for radical right parties in the EP election of 2014 (Mayer, Rovny, Rovny, & Sauger, 2015).

Apart from objective traits defining a voter's socioeconomic vulnerability, the subjective impression of disadvantage is relevant as well to capture economic grievance among certain groups of the electorate. Being aware of one's economic hardship, whether accurate or not, may be even more influential in predicting political discontent due to a feeling of forsakenness by established parties (e.g. Burgoon, van Noort, Rooduijn, & Underhill, 2019; Gest, Reny, & Mayer, 2018), especially if actual vulnerability applies as well (Hadler, 2004). Accordingly, a negative assessment of voters'

financial situation is supposed to increase the propensity of radical populist party support as well. In fact, self-reported difficulties paying one's bills turned out to be more prevalent among radical populist voters than among the remaining electorate in the 2014 EP election (Martín-Cubas et al., 2019) same as a low self-assessed position in society fosters radical party support over mainstream party voting (Mayer, Rovny, Rovny, & Sauger, 2015).

Nonetheless, the discontent over a perceived lack of representation by established political parties among the socioeconomically disadvantaged may also translate into withdrawal from political participation. An observed declining turnout among unskilled manual workers has been attributed to the availability of fewer social and cultural resources (e.g. time, money, civic skills) among the working class whose members furthermore are less exposed to norms suggesting that voting is a civic duty (see Martikainen, Martikainen, & Wass, 2005; Mayer, Rovny, Rovny, & Sauger, 2015). A low level of education, reflecting one of these lacking resources, may decrease turnout by itself as political awareness and the perceived responsibility to participate in political life are lower (see Hadjar & Beck, 2010; Jackson, 1995). Consequently, abstaining from voting is another form of electoral behavior that is more likely among those facing less favorable prospects due to their socioeconomic status.

This may be enhanced by a declining integration in intermediary organizations as well, and especially by the diminishing role of trade unions as advocates for the vulnerable members of the workforce (Fervers & Schwander, 2015). The reduced importance of unions came along with a decrease in electoral turnout as it may "[...] have left many voters uninterested, uninformed, and politically inactive" (Gray & Caul, 2000: 1092). Thus, failing to mobilize disadvantaged voters who instead do not vote at all can be attributed to a declining integration of individuals in intermediary social organizations. However, the declining attachment to social organizations and networks may be an additional explanation for radical populist voting as well since these parties offer some sense of belonging for increasingly individualized members of society (see Rydgren, 2009; Gidron & Hall, 2020). In that regard, social disintegration and detachment from civic norms among the unemployed supposedly increase the tendency of either abstaining from voting or supporting

an anti-establishment party claiming to act on behalf of the neglected “common people”. Similar to radical populist party voting, there is previous evidence supporting the assumption that the working class and those with an insecure position on the labor market are more likely to abstain from voting (Bornschieer & Kriesi, 2012; Hadjar & Beck, 2010; Hooghe, Marien, & Pauwels, 2011; Martikainen, Martikainen, & Wass, 2005; Mayer, Rovny, Rovny, & Sauger, 2015). Apart from the occupational and educational prospects on the labor market, the negative effect of financial deprivation on turnout can be explained by less wealthy persons lacking resources for an active political involvement and a reduced civic engagement due to their feeling of neglect (see Martikainen, Martikainen, & Wass, 2005).

Therefore, those persons eligible to vote who are in a socioeconomically unfavorable position are left with three options. First, they may nonetheless uphold their support for a mainstream party, for instance due to a shortage of alternatives. Second, if contenders of the political establishment are available, they may “voice” their discontent in favor of a radical populist party. Third, they may “exit” from political participation by abstaining (Hirschman, 1970; Hooghe, Marien, & Pauwels, 2011). Pursuant to the basic assumption of economic voting according to which voters tend to “punish” the incumbent for unfavorable conditions and to the “second-order” character of EP elections with anti-establishment parties possibly gaining additional votes from strategic supporters (Ford, Goodwin, & Cutts, 2012), it is assumed that socioeconomic vulnerability either leads to the “voice” or the “exit” option.

H1: Radical populist voting and abstaining from voting both are more likely than mainstream party voting among persons who are

- a) unskilled manual workers*
- b) unemployed*
- c) low educated*
- d) struggling financially*

So far, theorizing has been limited on why both radical populist voting and abstaining are more likely than non-populist voting when experiencing economic vulnerability or perceiving to struggle economically. Still, it is not yet clear why someone would choose the one over the other. Referring to the “voice versus exit” dichotomy, political opinions that may be shaped by one’s economic situation are possibly explaining whether someone chooses to express her or his discontent at the ballot box or to withdraw from political participation. Assuming that abstaining is the least cost-involving strategy (Hooghe, Marien, & Pauwels, 2011), taking on the greater effort of casting one’s vote at the polling station is likely to be driven by the urge to reveal one’s views that are in line with the anti-establishment, nativist, and protectionist rhetoric of radical populist parties. Abstaining on the contrary, may be particularly fostered by political indifference.

5.2.2 Mediating Impact of Agreement with Issues owned by Radical Populist Parties

Radical populist parties from the right wing are to a large extent characterized by their nativist rhetoric and by portraying immigrants as scapegoats for the hardship faced by certain groups of the majority population. Consequently, anti-immigration sentiments may arise, for instance by perceiving immigrants as competitors for economic assets such as jobs and welfare benefits (e.g. Berning & Schlueter, 2016). Since that political issue is owned by radical populist parties, a vote in favor of them is more likely than supporting a mainstream party or abstaining if someone has a very negative view on immigration. In the context of national elections, this assumption has been empirically confirmed (Allen, 2017) same as the theorized increased tendency of radical right populist support among the economically disadvantaged (Werts, Scheepers, & Lubbers, 2013). Although immigration policies are supposedly more salient in national elections and there has been some variation among the member states, generally radical populist supporters were more in favor of controlling the inflow of immigrants in the EP election 2014 (Martín-Cubas et al., 2019). Besides, stronger anti-immigration views among the EP electorate turned out to be beneficial for left-wing populist parties as well (Santana & Rama, 2018).

An economic policy issue that unites radical populist parties across the ideological divide is their advocacy of protectionism, which in economic terms particularly addresses concerns among low-skilled voters that they might suffer from international competition emerging from free trade and globalization. These economic and cultural concerns have proven to be influential for both left-wing and right-wing populist voting (van der Waal & de Koster, 2018). Thus, economically disadvantaged voters may perceive free trade as an essential threat to their personal interests, possibly enhanced by radical populist parties portraying it as such. Accordingly, being in favor of protectionism is expected to be a political matter that not only boosts radical populist voting but also reduces the tendency of abstaining as individual wealth may seem at stake. Consequently, if an unfavorable socioeconomic status leads to agreement with the issues emphasized by radical populist parties, a vote for them is hypothesized to be the most likely form of electoral behavior.

H2: Anti-immigration views and favoring protectionism explain why those experiencing or perceiving socioeconomic vulnerability are more likely to vote for a radical populist party than to vote for a mainstream party or to abstain from voting.

5.2.3 Mediating Impact of Political Disinterest and Perceived Powerlessness

Abstaining on the contrary is to be expected if a person's economic disadvantage turns into political disinterest, which can manifest itself in a low frequency of political discussions and in disregarding political news (Hadjar & Beck, 2010). This comes along with uncertainty of which parties may address the political issues a voter deems relevant and by that reduces political activity. Supposedly, this holds true even more for "second-order" elections since the related impression that EP elections are less relevant for voters' daily life and the lack of interest and knowledge about EU issues explain the occurrence of "EU-only abstention" by voters who nonetheless go to the polls on the national level (Schäfer, 2021). Likewise, abstention may be more prevalent among those voters whose unfavorable economic situation and perceived neglect by mainstream parties conveys the impression of political powerlessness. A low level of political efficacy may make abstaining appear rational if a voter

is doubtful about her or his individual political influence and as a consequence may regard voting as pointless (see Emmenegger, Marx, & Schraff, 2015; Hadjar & Beck, 2010) which leads one to assume that not even a protest vote in favor of a radical populist party is considered an option. Hence, socioeconomic vulnerability translating into these indicators of political indifference is expected to have made abstaining the most likely outcome at the EP election 2019.

H3: Political disinterest and the feeling of political powerlessness explain why those experiencing or perceiving socioeconomic vulnerability are more likely to abstain from voting than to vote for a radical populist or a mainstream party.

5.2.4 Mediating Impact of Disapproval with Politics

It is less clear, however, which electoral behavior is more likely if economic hardship translates into political dissatisfaction, given that this attitudinal dimension not only possibly reflects opposition towards the political establishment but also may lead to partisan estrangement of which not even radical populist parties may take advantage. According to a protest vote approach, support for radical populist parties is more likely among politically dissatisfied voters who do not necessarily agree with the further contents of this party type but consider them a possibility to show their discontent with the political “elite” (e.g. Schwander, Gohla, & Schäfer 2020). On the contrary, political dissatisfaction may come along with a reduced sense of having to attend one’s “civic duty” of voting (Hadjar & Beck, 2010; Goodin & Roberts, 1975). Accordingly, political dissatisfaction is assumed to equally enhance the propensity of radical populist voting and of abstaining over mainstream party voting, also because the “second-order” character of EP elections suggests a higher amount of protest votes among strategic populist supporters but also a greater degree of indifference within the electorate. This has been empirically confirmed for “first-order” elections on the national level, with political dissatisfaction being positively related to both radical populist voting and abstaining (Allen, 2017).

Similarly, political distrust may predict why economically struggling voters opt for the “voice” and for the “exit” option. It is defined as “[...] citizens’ assessments of the core institutions of the polity and entails a positive evaluation of the most relevant attributes that make each political institution trustworthy, such as credibility, fairness, competence, transparency in its policy-making, and openness to competing views” (Zmerli 2014: 1) and by that may be associated with the populist rhetoric aimed against “the corrupt elite” (Mudde, 2004). Nonetheless, a lack of trust in political institutions may be accompanied by a breach of voters’ values and norms and a consideration of voting as meaningless which is suggestive of abstaining, especially if voters are led by the intention of not complying tacitly with the expectations they perceive to be imposed by the political system (Grönlund & Setälä, 2007). Therefore, a lack of political trust is not hypothesized to be a distinct predictor of either radical populist voting or abstaining. Instead, it is assumed to foster both forms of electoral reaction equally which has been confirmed in the national context (Hooghe, Marien, & Pauwels, 2011).

A common explanatory factor of radical populist voting that gains additional importance in the context of EP elections is Euroscepticism. Particularly in the aftermath of the European debt crisis, opposition towards any further European integration among the electorate was met with the emergence of several new populist parties in Europe (Kneuer, 2018; McDonnell & Werner, 2019). Moreover, EP elections may be a suitable opportunity for voters to express their Eurosceptic views since the EP is a platform on which alliances of populist parties can hamper EU-related decision-making more efficiently (Martín-Cubas et al., 2019). With European integration having become a more salient issue in recent years, one can furthermore assume that the “second-order” character of the EP elections holds true to a lesser extent among those voters holding strong Eurosceptic views (Schäfer, 2021). In fact, although Euroscepticism was generally high among the entire electorate of the EP election 2014, supporters of populist parties score even higher on criticism towards European competency enhancement (Martín-Cubas et al., 2019). Still, there is contrary evidence suggesting that Euroscepticism boosts abstention in EP elections which can be

explained by the intention to show one's disapproval with the EU and to contribute to a low turnout that limits the legitimacy of EU policies (Schäfer, 2021). Thus, particularly in the context of an EP election, Euroscepticism can be plausibly linked to either radical populist voting ("voice") or non-voting ("exit"). In summary, socioeconomic hardship evoking the disapproval of (European) politics is supposed to equally foster radical populist voting and abstaining compared to mainstream party voting.

H4: Euroscepticism, political dissatisfaction, and political distrust explain why socioeconomic vulnerability increases the tendency of both radical populist voting and abstaining from voting compared to mainstream party voting but not why one of these two outcomes is more likely than the other.

5.3 Data and Methods

5.3.1 Data

Information on voters' socioeconomic circumstances and their electoral behavior is drawn from Eurobarometer 91.5 which was conducted through personal interviews in all 28 EU member states (plus six non-EU states) in June and July 2019. Thematically, the survey focuses on the EP election in late May 2019 and provides information on the national population aged 15 years and older. Persons not eligible to vote were excluded from the analysis sample which applies to all those below the minimum voting age² and those living in countries not belonging to the EU. Although still a member state during the EP elections 2019, the United Kingdom is left aside from the analyses due to the impending Brexit which may have lowered the perception of voting as a "civic duty" and since it remained unclear until shortly before the election whether the country would still participate in electing new members of the EP or not.

Beyond that, all respondents from Croatia, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Latvia, and Romania have to be excluded from the analysis as

2. 18 years, with the exception of Greece (17 years) and Austria and Malta (16 years each).

radical populist parties did not run for office there or were no possible response category in the country-specific questionnaires and consequently, no comparison with mainstream voting and abstaining is possible. Whether a party is considered as radical populist depends on it being categorized as such in the “PopuList” classification, version 2.0 (Rooduijn et al., 2019). In the following analyses, all those parties rated as populist, Eurosceptic and either far-left or far-right are considered radical populist (see table 9)³. The joint consideration of anti-establishment parties from both the left and the right wing is backed up by the theoretical claims mainly being applicable for both types as well as these parties and their voter bases sharing similar traits across the ideological divide (see Schwander, Gohla & Schäfer, 2020).

5.3.2 Measurement

Aside from radical populist voting, the dependent variable comprises two additional categories, namely mainstream voting (i.e. voting for a non-populist party) and abstention. In order to test the mediators supposed to differentiate radical populist support from abstaining, additional binary variables are coded contrasting each of these potential electoral outcomes to the respective other option (and mainstream party voting).

Socioeconomic vulnerability consists of three indicators capturing its key components, which are education, occupation, and income. The educational level in the Eurobarometer 91.5 is measured through the respondents’ age when finishing full-time education (up to 15 years or no full-time education at all, 16 to 19 years, more than 20 years (reference category), still studying). Since age when attaining a certain educational degree is likely to vary across respondents, it is advisable to additionally take into account their occupational status for a more in-depth indication of their socioeconomic status. For that, the following six groups are contrasted: Self-employed, service job (white-collar, reference category), skilled manual job (higher blue-collar), unskilled manual job (lower blue-collar), unemployed,

3. Malta was not part of the PopuList (version 2.0). Among the parties listed in the Maltese questionnaire of the Eurobarometer 91.5, “Moviment Patrijotti Maltin” (MPM) is coded as radical populist.

and other (i.e. housework, student, retired). The financial situation was inquired by the frequency of facing difficulties paying one's bills at the end of the month in the twelve months prior to the survey (most of the time, from time to time, or (almost) never) and by that addresses the subjective dimension of socioeconomic vulnerability.

In order to determine the intensity of anti-immigration attitudes, a sum score of two four-point items is created in which respondents were asked about how positive (1, 2) or negative (3, 4) they consider immigration of people from EU and non-EU states. Favoring protectionist policies is based on a binary indicator distinguishing between having a (very) positive or (very) negative view on protectionism. The extent of political dissatisfaction is measured on a sum score consisting of nine four-point items on the satisfaction with various aspects of democracy and civic life (free and fair elections, freedom of speech, media diversity, possibility for individual citizens to participate in political life, rule of law, respect for fundamental rights, civil society promoting and protecting democracy, fight against disinformation in the media, fight against corruption; Cronbach's Alpha: 0.92)⁴. A scale on political distrust counts in how many of the following institutions distrust was reported by the respondents: political parties, public administration, national government, and national parliament (Cronbach's Alpha: 0.80).

The degree of political disinterest refers to the frequency of discussing European, national, or local political matters with one's social environment, with high scores reflecting a lack thereof. Feeling to be politically powerless is considered to apply when disagreeing with two statements according to which one's voice counts either in one's home country or in the European Union. Having Eurosceptic views is supposed to hold true if a respondent assesses the EU membership of her or his country as a bad thing, compared to those having a neutral or positive position.

4. An exploratory (principal component) factor analysis revealed one underlying factor.

Besides, three sociodemographic controls are included. These are age (in years) to account for varying political preferences in different life stages as well as gender to grasp differences in electoral behavior between women and men other than those related to the remaining predictors (see Hadjar & Beck, 2010). The residential environment as a potential determinant of occupational and economic opportunities as well as of political concerns is furthermore considered. Besides, two contextual aspects on the country level are considered. First, the presence of compulsory voting is likely to reduce abstaining as it makes voting not only a civic duty but also a legal obligation⁵. Second, the availability from radical populist parties from both the left and the right wing in a country expands the political offer for dissatisfied voters, for instance with right-wing populist parties additionally addressing sociocultural issues (Pirro, Taggart, & van Kessel 2018). Hence, the availability of both types of radical populist parties suggests a higher chance of disadvantaged voters agreeing with one of them policy-wise which may make supporting them an even more appealing option than mainstream voting but also than abstaining. Radical populist parties, however, may not only benefit from existing discontent among parts of the electorate. Reversely, they also fuel anti-establishment resentment among people voting for them (Rooduijn, van der Brug & de Lange, 2016).

5.3.3 Method

A multinomial logistic regression model is estimated to ascertain if economic vulnerability has adverse effects on the success of mainstream parties and if both radical populist party support and abstention are more likely under such circumstances. Since a multitude of explanatory variables is considered jointly in the models, the interpretation of direct effects is linked to the “*ceteris paribus*” condition which means that the remaining predictors are held constant at the same time. Besides, there is the possibility of an underlying strong interrelation between certain predictors, especially among the three indicators of socioeconomic vulnerability. In that regard, robustness checks have been conducted that do not suggest changes in terms of effect direction and significance when analyzing either educational attainment, occupational status, and

5. Of the 22 considered countries, this applies to Belgium, Bulgaria, and Greece.

the subjective degree of financial difficulties separately while leaving the other two socioeconomic variables aside and only factoring in the sociodemographic and attitudinal variables.

The second, third, and fourth hypothesis are tested through a series of binary logistic regression in which one electoral outcome is contrasted to the other two. Given that the focus of these hypotheses is on the mediating impact of political views an analysis method allowing to determine and to quantify their intermediary role is applied. In order to get a more comprehensive picture, these mediators are examined for all three dependent variables. A suitable method for this objective is the method developed by Karlson, Holm, and Breen (KHB method) which compares the estimates from two nonlinear nested models. Unlike comparing a preliminary regression model to an extended one that includes the supposed mediator and risking a distortion due to scaling differences, this approach is based on using that part of information included in the mediator that is not captured by the predictor variable (Karlson & Holm, 2011; Kohler, Karlson, & Holm, 2011). This allows disentangling the direct effect of the occupational situation, the educational attainment, and the subjective financial situation on the three electoral phenomena from the indirect effects to be attributed to the mediating role of political views.

5.4 Results

5.4.1 Descriptive statistics

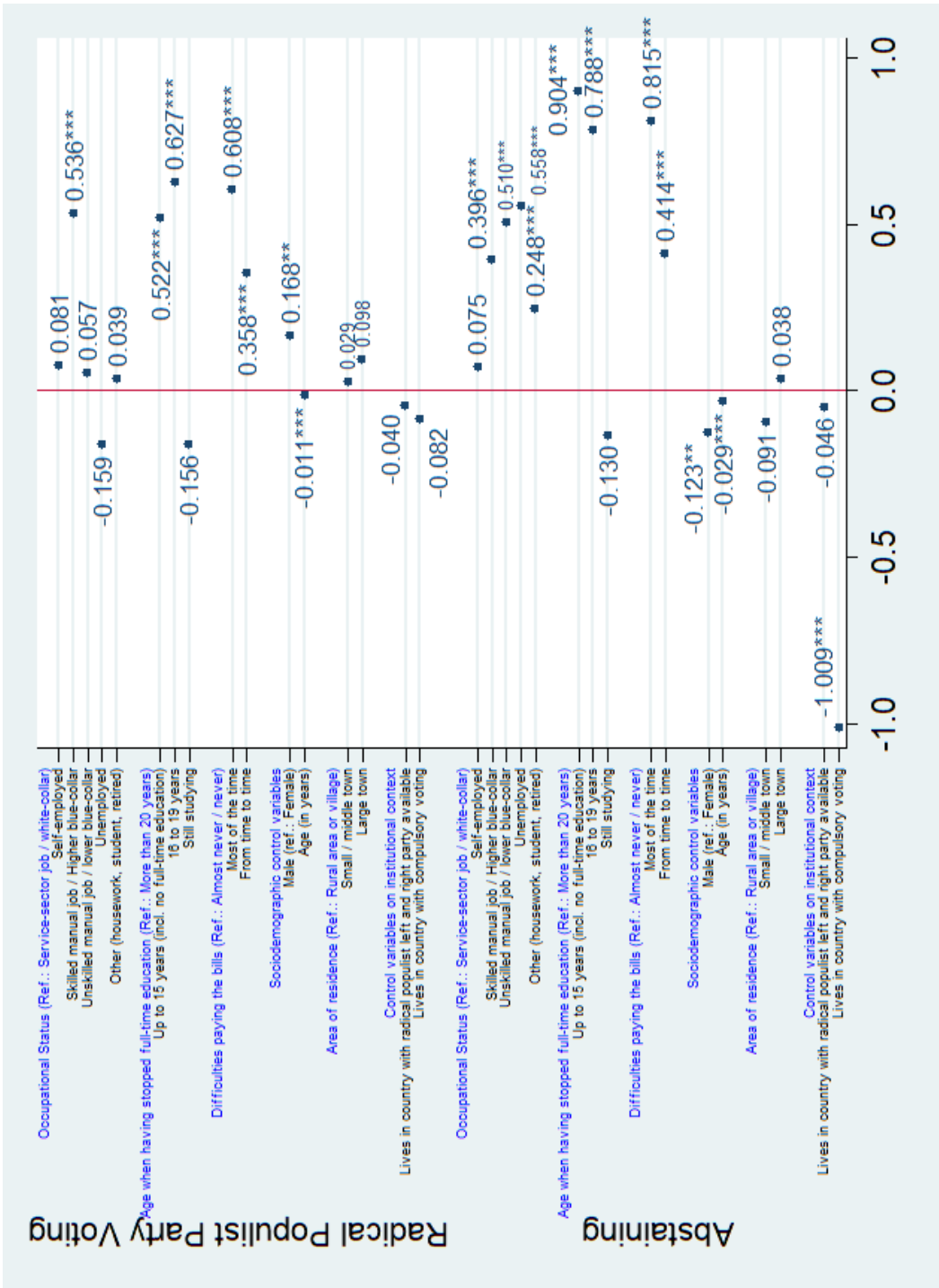
After listwise deletion, the analysis sample consists of 11,783 respondents from 22 EU member states. Mainstream party voting was reported 6,662 times (56.54%) whereas 3,511 persons abstained from voting (29.80%). Hence, the least frequently observed outcome is radical populist party voting which applies to 1,610 observations (13.66%). As for the theoretically relevant occupational categories, 708 persons are unemployed while 305 are unskilled workers in a manual profession. Low educated respondents (i.e. not older than 15 years when finishing their full-time education) form a rather small group in the sample (12.65%), with 16 to 19 years being the most frequently chosen category (43.38%). Besides, 38.8% were 20 years or older when they attained their highest level of education.

Subjective financial well-being is comparatively prevalent, as around two thirds of the respondents (almost) never encounter difficulties paying their bills. Still, 25.78% of the respondents faced financial trouble at least from time to time and 7.99% even most of the time in the year prior to the EP election.

5.4.2 Comparing radical populist voting and abstaining to mainstream party voting

A multinomial logistic regression suggests that the educational and financial dimension of economic vulnerability significantly increase the tendency of both radical populist voting and abstaining across the 22 EU member states under study (see figure 17).

Figure 17: Multinomial Logistic Regression (Hypothesis 1). Base outcome: Mainstream party voting. Results as relative log odds (** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$).



A low (max. 15 years) but also a medium level (16 to 19 years) of education is positively associated with casting one's vote in favor of an anti-establishment party as compared to a mainstream party but also with not making use at all of one's right to vote, also in contrast to non-populist parties. Similarly, difficulties paying the bills makes voting for radical populist parties as well as abstaining more likely than supporting a mainstream party. As one would expect, this positive effect is stronger for those with frequent financial problems than for those with sporadic difficulties. Accordingly, hypothesis 1c and 1d is confirmed.

As for the impact of the occupational status, there is less consistent evidence. While being unemployed or being a (skilled or unskilled) manual worker instead of working in the service sector fosters abstaining in contrast to mainstream voting, only skilled manual workers are more likely to support a radical populist instead of a non-populist party. Thus, unfavorable prospects on the labor market are rather converted into withdrawal from political participation in a "second-order" election whereas a low educational attainment and concerns about one's economic situation bring forward both forms of opposing established parties. This means that hypothesis 1a and 1b only hold true for one electoral phenomenon, namely abstaining. Besides, the other explanatory variables suggest that men rather opt for radical populist parties and that abstention is more common among women. Mainstream party voting, however, generally increases with age. The residential surroundings do not matter with regard to electoral behavior, but as expected living in a country with compulsory voting is associated with a significantly reduced tendency of abstaining.

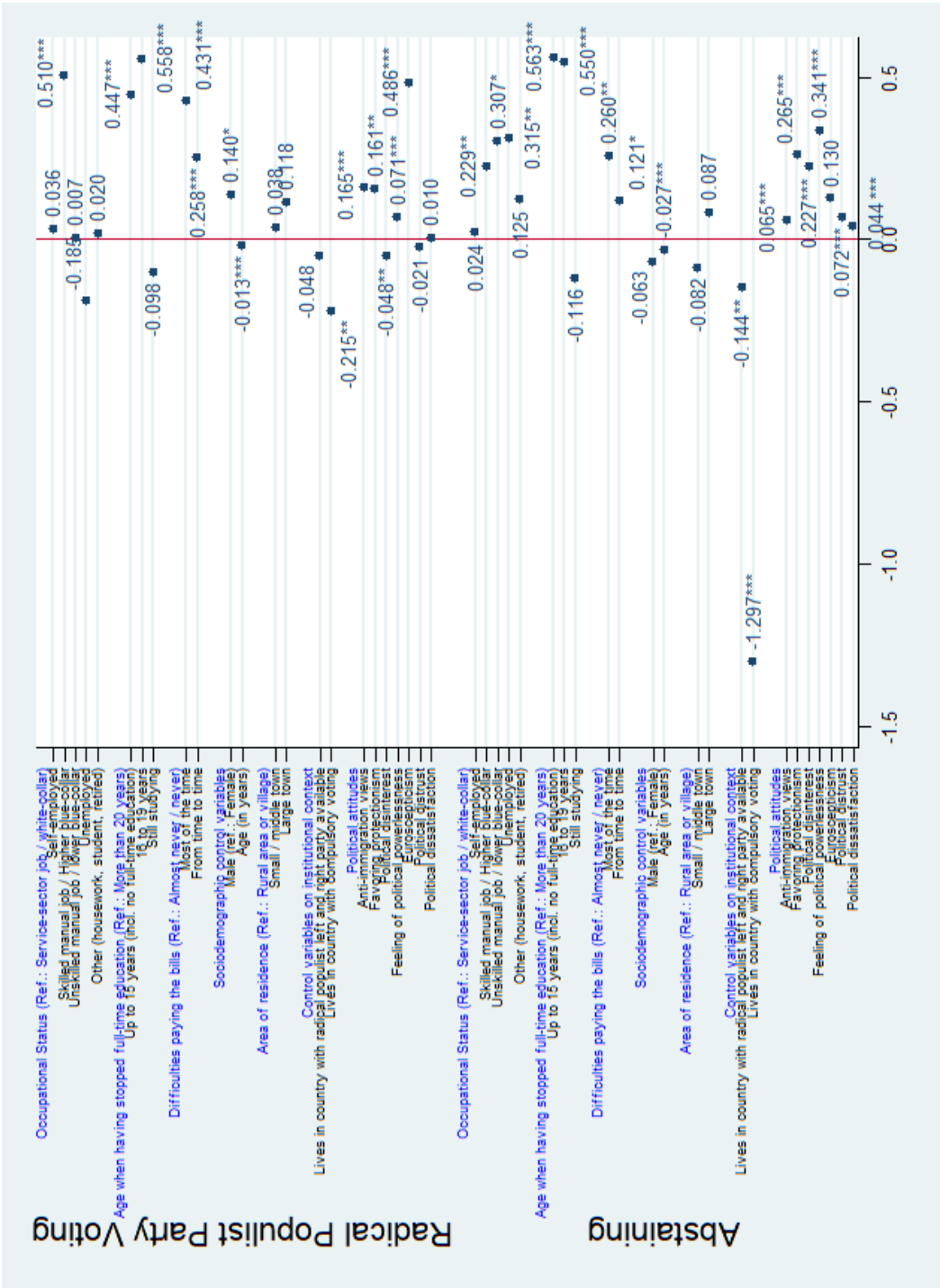
These findings are better illustrated by predictive probabilities that allow to consider the combination of multiple socioeconomic predictors while holding the other variables constant (see table 8).

Table 8: Predicted Probabilities for various combinations of socioeconomic vulnerability on the three electoral outcomes (in percent)

	Mainstream party voting	Radical populist party voting	Abstaining
Overall Frequency in Analysis Sample	56.5	13.7	29.8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unskilled manual work, • Low education, and • Mostly financial difficulties 	28.7	13.2	58.0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployed, • Low education, and • Mostly financial difficulties 	28.7	10.6	60.7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unskilled manual work, • Medium education, and • Mostly financial difficulties 	30.2	15.5	54.3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployed, • Medium education, and • Mostly financial difficulties 	30.3	12.5	57.2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unskilled manual work, • Low education, and • Sporadic financial difficulties 	36.9	13.2	49.9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployed, • Low education, and • Sporadic financial difficulties 	36.9	10.7	52.4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unskilled manual work, • Medium education, and • Sporadic financial difficulties 	38.4	15.3	46.3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployed, • Medium education, and • Sporadic financial difficulties 	38.7	12.4	48.9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White-collar job • High education, and • (Almost) never in financial difficulties 	73.6	10.4	16.0

Those persons who work in a lower blue-collar job, who were not older than 15 years when finishing full-time education, and who perceive to be in financial difficulties most of the time, had a predicted probability of 28.7% to vote for a mainstream party. However, radical populist voting was the least likely outcome among persons with that socioeconomic profile (13.2%) whereas abstaining was to be expected in 58% of these cases. Among those who were unemployed instead of working in an unskilled manual profession, the predicted probability of abstaining was even at 60.7% and of radical populist voting at 10.6%. The importance of the subjective economic dimension is additionally emphasized by the likelihood of abstaining that decreases to 49.9% among low-skilled and low-educated manual workers who report only sporadic financial troubles. For 13.2% of them, radical populist voting is predicted (mainstream party voting: 36.9%). When jointly considering the reference categories of the socioeconomic characteristics analyzed in the multinomial logistic regression, i.e. being employed in a white-collar profession, having a high level of education, and perceiving to be (almost) never in financial troubles, the predicted probability of abstaining is only at 16% while for about three quarters of persons mainstream party voting is predicted. The predicted probability of radical populist voting on the contrary is only slightly lower than under less favorable personal socioeconomic conditions. Hence, a socioeconomic profile suggesting better labor market prospects and fewer economic concerns comes along with an increased likelihood of electoral participation. The variation in terms of predicted probability, especially with regard to abstention, underline the need to disentangle why the occupational, educational, and financial situation may foster different forms of electoral behavior. The possibly mediating role of political views is reinforced by an increase in explained variation (from 5.99% to 13.30%) when extending the multinomial regression model by the seven attitudes analyzed in the following (see figure 18).

Figure 18: Multinomial Logistic Regression (including political attitudes). Base outcome: Mainstream party voting. Results as relative log odds (*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$).

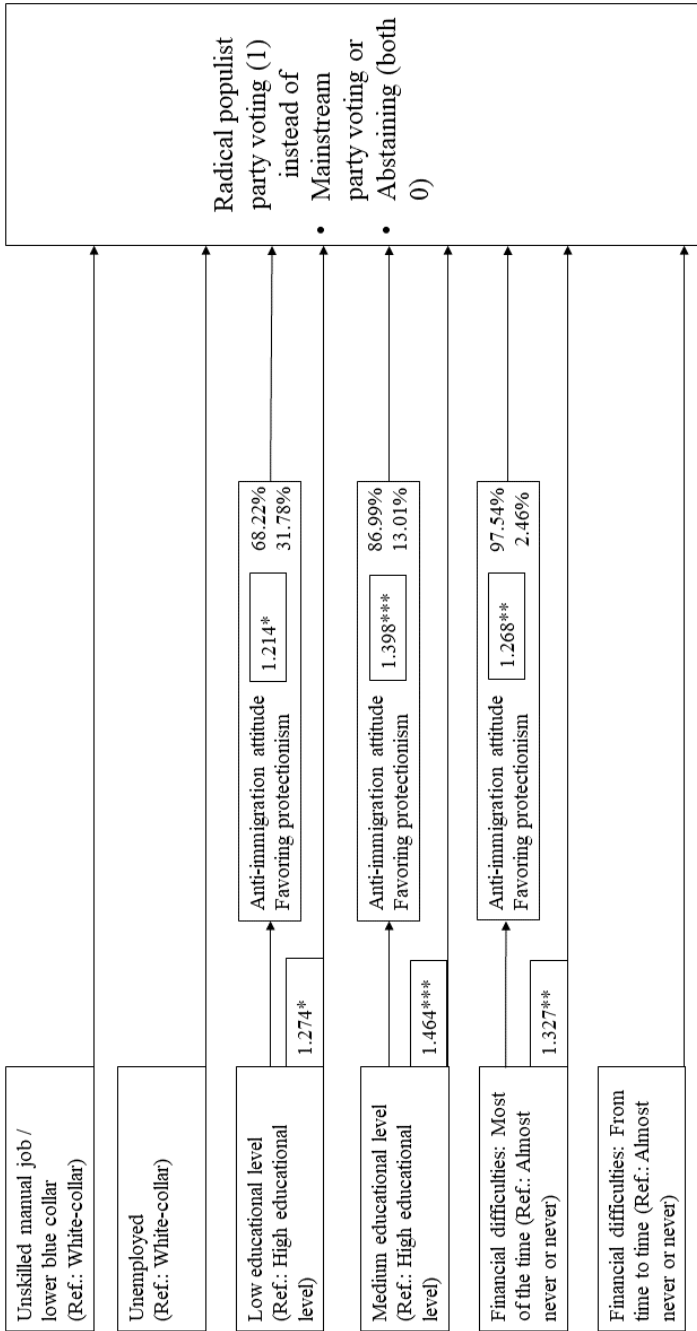


5.4.3 Explaining differences across the chosen electoral outcomes

So far it has been ascertained that socioeconomic vulnerability in educational and financial terms fosters the tendency of both radical populist voting and abstaining whereas unfavorable occupational prospects only boosts non-voting (each compared to mainstream voting). Before analyzing the hypothesized attitudinal mediators, both radical populist voters and abstainers are contrasted with regard to their sociodemographic profile (see figure 22). This binary logistic regression model likewise suggests that unskilled manual workers as well as the unemployed rather abstain than support a radical populist party. Besides, “exiting” from electoral participation instead of “voicing” one’s discontent at the ballot box by supporting an anti-establishment party is significantly more prevalent among lower educated voters whereas subjective financial distress does not make any of these two outcomes more likely than the other. Next to a considerable increase in explained variation (from 4.08% to 12.59%), the significant effects of the seven political attitudes hint at their relevance in explaining why some persons choose not to vote at all while other support radical populist parties (see figure 23). If these attitudes have a moderating effect between socioeconomic vulnerability and voting behavior is tested in the following through KHB models.

For that, the three categorical variables on occupational, economic, and financial status are the main independent variables. Gender, age, and residential environment are added as control variables same as the two indicators on the electoral context in the countries. The mediators are analyzed group-wise as they are specified in the hypotheses in order to provide a more meaningful interpretation of the indirect effects and to avoid suppressor effects if two mediators differ in their effect directions.

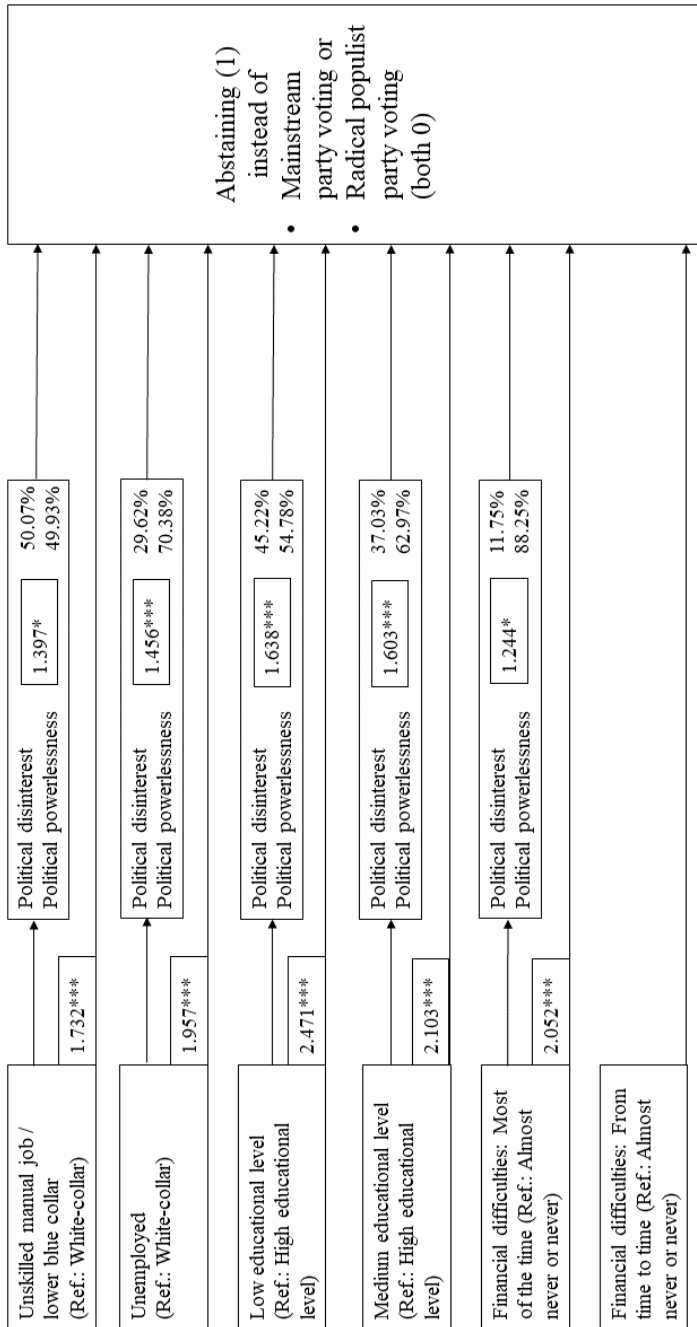
Figure 19: Mediation analysis of anti-immigration attitude and favoring protectionism (Hypothesis 2). Only significant indirect effects included. Effects are Odds Ratio (** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$). Percentages report the contribution of each mediator to an indirect effect.



Being opposed towards immigration and in favor of protectionism explain why the educational and financial dimension of socioeconomic vulnerability translate into radical populist voting instead of the other two outcomes (see figure 19). While the odds of radical populist voting instead of mainstream party voting and abstaining are 1.274 times higher among low educated persons (compared to highly educated voters), this odds ratio sinks to 1.214 when considering the mediating impact of the two political views. Likewise, taking these views into account reduces the positive effect of a medium educational level on radical populist voting (from 1.464 to 1.398). Another significant indirect effect is found among persons reporting frequent difficulties paying their bills whose odds of radical populist voting are 1.268 times higher than among those without financial troubles (total effect: 1.327). Thus, with regard to education and the financial situation, hypothesis 2 is supported. However, these indirect effects can be mainly attributed to anti-immigration views, particularly for the effect of financial difficulties (97.54%).

Political disinterest and the impression of political powerlessness are mediators explaining why socioeconomic vulnerability leads persons to abstain from voting (see figure 20).

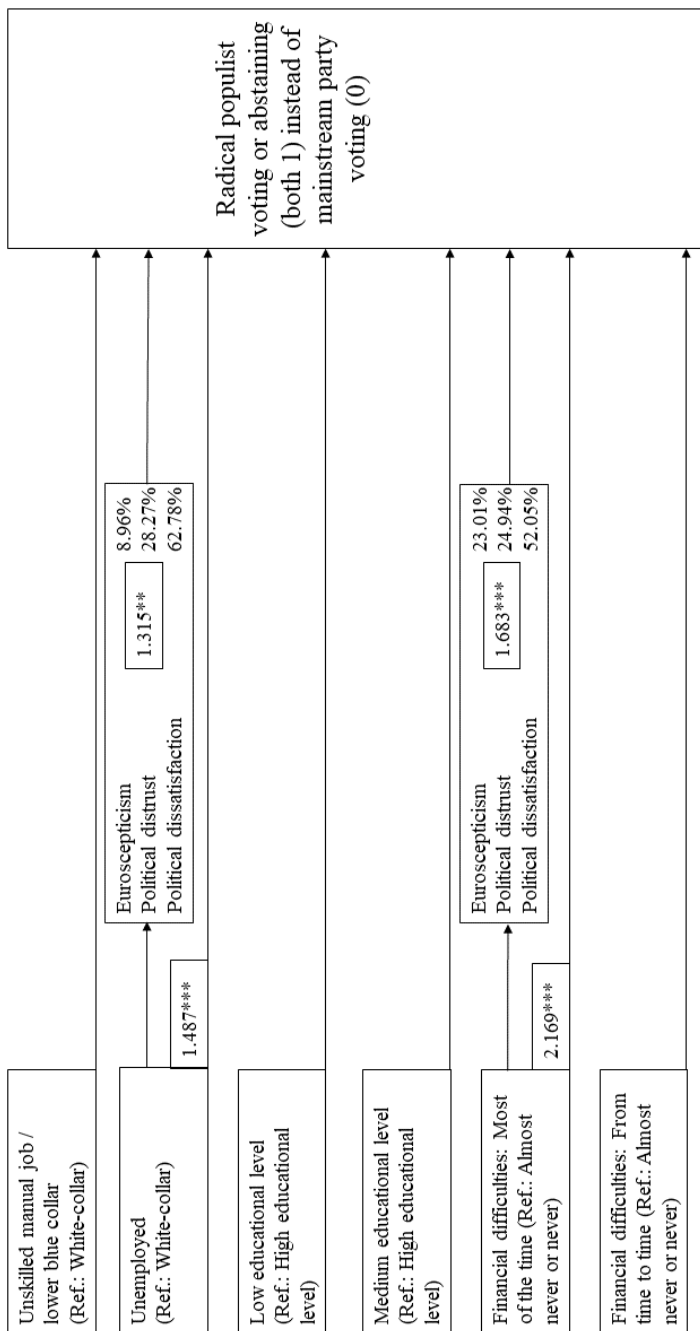
Figure 20: Mediation analysis of political disinterest and political powerlessness (Hypothesis 3). Only significant indirect effects included. Effects are Odds Ratio (** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$). Percentages report the contribution of each mediator to an indirect effect.



The odds ratio of not going to the polling station at all (instead of voting for any other party, including radical populist ones) of unskilled manual workers compared to service-sector employees decreases from 1.732 to 1.397 when controlling for these two attitudinal aspects. Likewise, a significant indirect effect of unemployment on abstaining is obtained. Considering the mediating role of political disinterest and perceived powerlessness proves to be particularly important for the effect of education among persons with a low or medium education as the total effect suggests that both these groups are more than twice as likely to abstain as highly educated voters. However, taking into account the indirect effect via these two political views shows that a low or a medium level of education both increase the odds ratio of abstaining only by a factor of about 1.6, both compared to highly educated. The positive effect of frequent financial distress on abstaining is furthermore considerably reduced by factoring in the related emergence of political indifference which may explain why voters chose not to vote at the EP elections. Despite this convergence in terms of mediation, the contribution of political disinterest and political powerlessness varies across the three socioeconomic aspects. While both attitude dimensions contribute almost equally to the indirect effect of working in an unskilled manual profession, it is mainly the impression of lacking political power as an individual that explains why unemployed persons did not go to the ballot boxes in the 2019 EP elections (70.38%). It is also political powerlessness that makes up for the largest part of the indirect effect of financial distress and of a lower educational level on abstaining, although especially among low educated persons a lack of political interest contributes considerably to the indirect effect on abstaining (45.22%). Accordingly, the findings support hypothesis 3.

When contrasting both radical populist voting and abstaining to mainstream party voting, the hypothesized intermediary impact of Euroscepticism, political distrust, and political dissatisfaction holds true for unemployed and for financially struggling persons (see figure 21).

Figure 21: Mediation analysis of Euroscepticism, political distrust, and political dissatisfaction (Hypothesis 4). Only significant indirect effects included. Effects are Odds Ratio (***) $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$). Percentages report the contribution of each mediator to an indirect effect.



Particularly political dissatisfaction is identified as a way of unemployed persons channeling their discontent towards the “voice” or the “exit” option (62.78%). Euroscepticism plays a subordinate role in explaining why the unemployed abstain or support a radical populist party instead of voting for a mainstream party (8.96%) but is a more relevant mediator between frequent financial distress and the two electoral options reflecting persons’ discontent (23.01%). Besides, around one quarter of each significant indirect effect is due to political distrust.

Thus, the first assumption expressed in hypothesis 4 is supported. In order to additionally ascertain if either radical populist voting or abstaining benefit more than the other from the evocation of these attitudes, these two outcomes that have been considered jointly for the testing of hypothesis 4 are contrasted using another binary dependent variable that leaves mainstream party voting aside. As hypothesized, there are no significant indirect effects⁶ which indicates that none of the considered aspects of socioeconomic vulnerability makes either radical populist voting or abstaining more likely than one another while being mediated by Euroscepticism, political distrust, and political dissatisfaction. This agrees with hypothesis 4.

5.5 Conclusion and Discussion

The first research objective pursued in this study was to ascertain whether socioeconomic vulnerability fostered radical populist voting and abstaining in the European elections 2019. Both these electoral outcomes proved to be more likely among lower educated and financially struggling persons whereas a disadvantageous labor market status (i.e. an unskilled manual profession or unemployment) only were positively associated with abstaining. Accordingly, the “losers” of globalization rather respond to their fate with withdrawal from electoral participation, at least in a “second-order” election. Predicted probabilities for multiple combinations of socioeconomic hardship furthermore illustrated non-voting as the preferred option among those who may feel “left behind” by established parties.

6. Due to a lack of significant findings, no figure for this mediation analysis is included.

The second intended contribution was to disentangle radical populist voting and abstaining from one another. For that, seven political attitudes were considered as possible mediators. Radical populist voting is more likely if a low educational level and financial difficulties lead to anti-immigration and protectionist views. Abstaining on the contrary is to be expected if next to a low educational attainment and trouble to make ends meet also an unfavorable occupational status reduces one's interest in politics and induces a feeling of political powerlessness. Euroscepticism, political distrust, and political dissatisfaction partially explain a preference for radical populist voting or abstaining among the socioeconomically vulnerable but not why one of these two outcomes is chosen over the other.

However, the findings do not indicate that mainstream parties are the least popular option among voters facing economic hardship. Particularly the predicted probabilities for variously combined socioeconomic characteristics show that non-populist voting is more likely than support for a populist party (see table 8). Although mainstream parties have been considered in this study as a homogenous group and not further differentiated in their political orientation, this evidence suggests that support for parties from the political center was quite prevalent among socioeconomically disadvantaged voters who only to a limited extent "voiced" a possible feeling of neglect in the EP election 2019. Hence, even at a "second-order" election there seem to be considerations by voters present that outweigh the mere wish to "punish" the incumbent and to express dissatisfaction. The high relative occurrence of abstaining, by contrast, reinforced the subordinate role of EP elections (see table 8). Furthermore, the mediating impact of political disinterest and perceived powerlessness is in line with the supposedly increased indifference with which supranational elections supposedly are met by parts of the electorate. Considering the socioeconomic predictors of abstaining underlines the underrepresentation of marginalized groups in voting their representatives and in European legislation.

A potential drawback of this study is related to abstaining as well. Since the respondents of the Eurobarometer 91.5 were interviewed in face-to-face settings, their answers may have been affected by a social desirability bias which possibly manifests itself in an exaggerated reporting of individual voting turnout. Nonetheless, the

willingness to participate in a personal survey about the European elections in the first place may come along with an increased truthfulness of personal information, also about socially undesirable electoral behavior. Besides, considering information possibly affected by such a bias for an inferential analysis is less problematic than using it for descriptive purposes (see Hadjar & Beck, 2010). Similarly, the respondents might have been more reluctant to tell an interviewer about their support for radical populist parties or their opinions about certain political issues. However, this risk of the interaction with an interviewer affecting response behavior needs to be taken into account when analyzing otherwise more advantageous face-to-face survey data, for instance regarding its increased representation of various social groups.

This study explicitly focused on the European elections as a “second-order” election in order to compare radical populist voting and abstaining to mainstream party voting. Although similar studies have already been conducted for presumably higher-ranking elections, further research may extend the major contribution of this study – the analysis of attitudes mediating the effect on “voice” and “exit” – to the national political level.

Appendix

Table 9: Parties categorized as radical populist (far-right and far-left)

Country	Far-right radical populist party	Far-left radical populist party
Austria	Freedom Party of Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ)	
Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flemish Interest (Vlaams Belang) People's Party (Parti Populaire) 	
Bulgaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attack (АТАКА) National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (ПАТРИОТИ ЗА ВАЛЕРИ СИМЕОНОВ (НФСБ И СЕК)) Bulgarian National Movement (ПП ВМРО - БЪЛГАРСКО НАЦИОНАЛНО ДВИЖЕНИЕ) Will (ВОЛЯ - Българските Родолюбци) 	
Czech Republic	Freedom and Direct Democracy Tomio Okamura (Svoboda a přímá demokracie - Tomio Okamura, SPD)	
Germany	Alternative for Germany (AfD)	The Left (Die Linke)
Denmark	Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti)	
Estonia	Estonian Conservative People's Party (Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond, EKRE)	
Spain	VOX	Podemos (Coalition Unidas Podemos Cambiar Europa (Unidas Podemos + Izquierda Unida + Catalunya en Comú + Barcelona en Comú))
Finland	Finns Party (Perussuomalaiset, PS)	
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Front/Rally (Rassemblement national) Republic Arise France Arise (Debout la France) 	France Unbowed (France Insoumise)
Greece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Popular Orthodox Rally (ΛΑΟΣ- ΠΑΤΡΙΕ) Greek Solution (Ελληνική Λύση) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SYRIZA: Coalition of the Radical Left (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς (ΣΥ.ΡΙΖ.Α.)) European Realistic Disobedience Front (ΜέΡΑ25)
Hungary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FIDESZ Jobbik Our Homeland Movement (Momentum Mozgalom) 	
Ireland		Sinn Fein
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> League (Lega Salvini Premier) Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia) 	
Lithuania		Lithuanian Liberty Union (Lietuvos Laisvės Sąjunga, LLS)

Malta	Maltese Patriots Movement (Moviment Patrijotti Maltin)	
Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Party for Freedom (Partij voor de Vrijheid) • Forum for Democracy (Forum voor Democratie) 	Socialist Party (Socialistische Partij, SP)
Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) • Kukiz'15 	
Portugal	Enough! (Party coalition "Basta!" for EP election 2019)	
Sweden	Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna, SD)	
Slovenia	Slovenian National Party (Slovenska nacionalna stranka, SNS)	The Left (Levica)
Slovakia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slovak National Party (Slovenská národná strana, SNS) • We are family (Sme rodina - Boris Kollár) 	

Figure 22: Binary logistic regression for radical populist voting (1) vs. abstaining (0). Results as log odds.

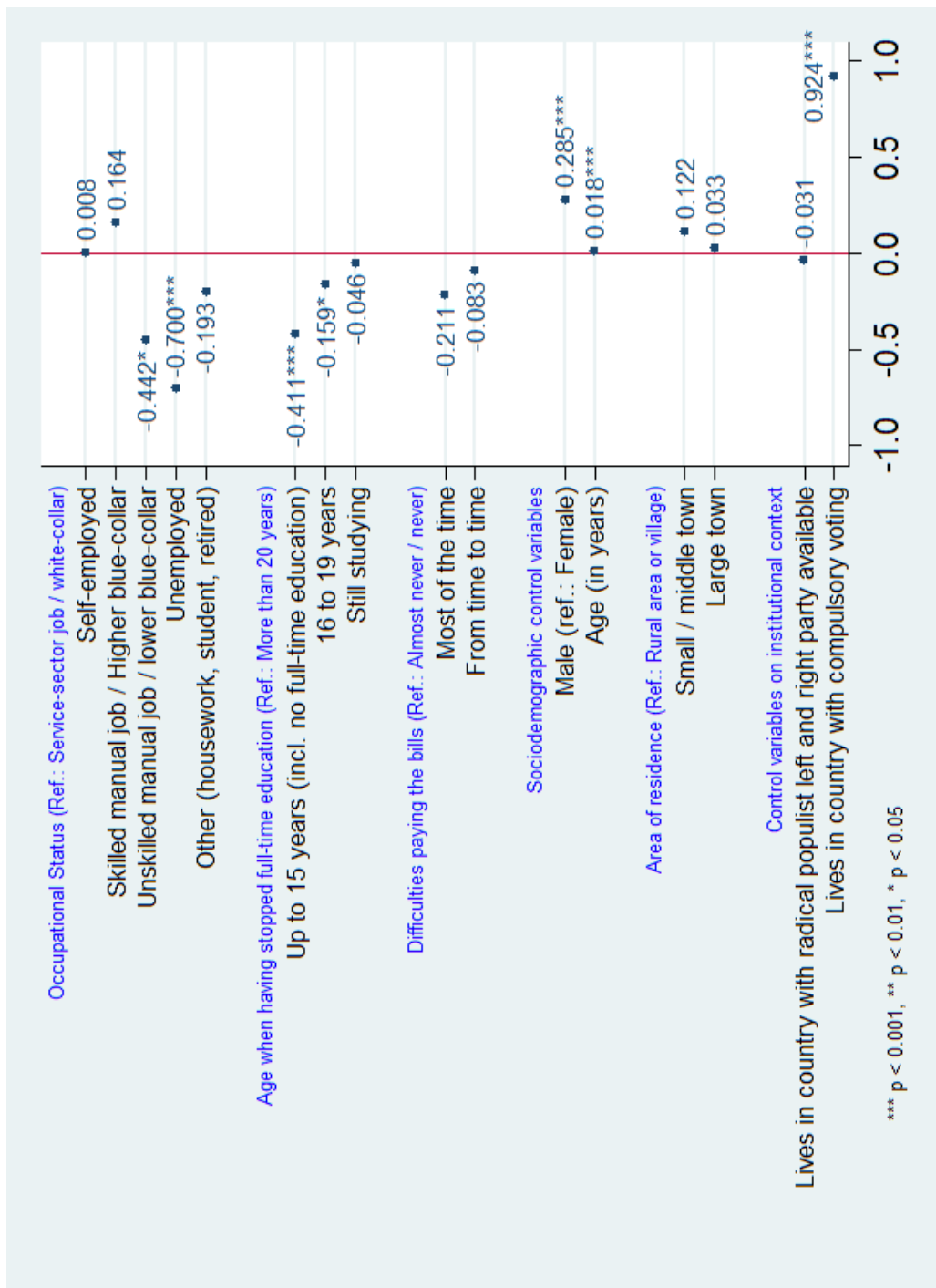
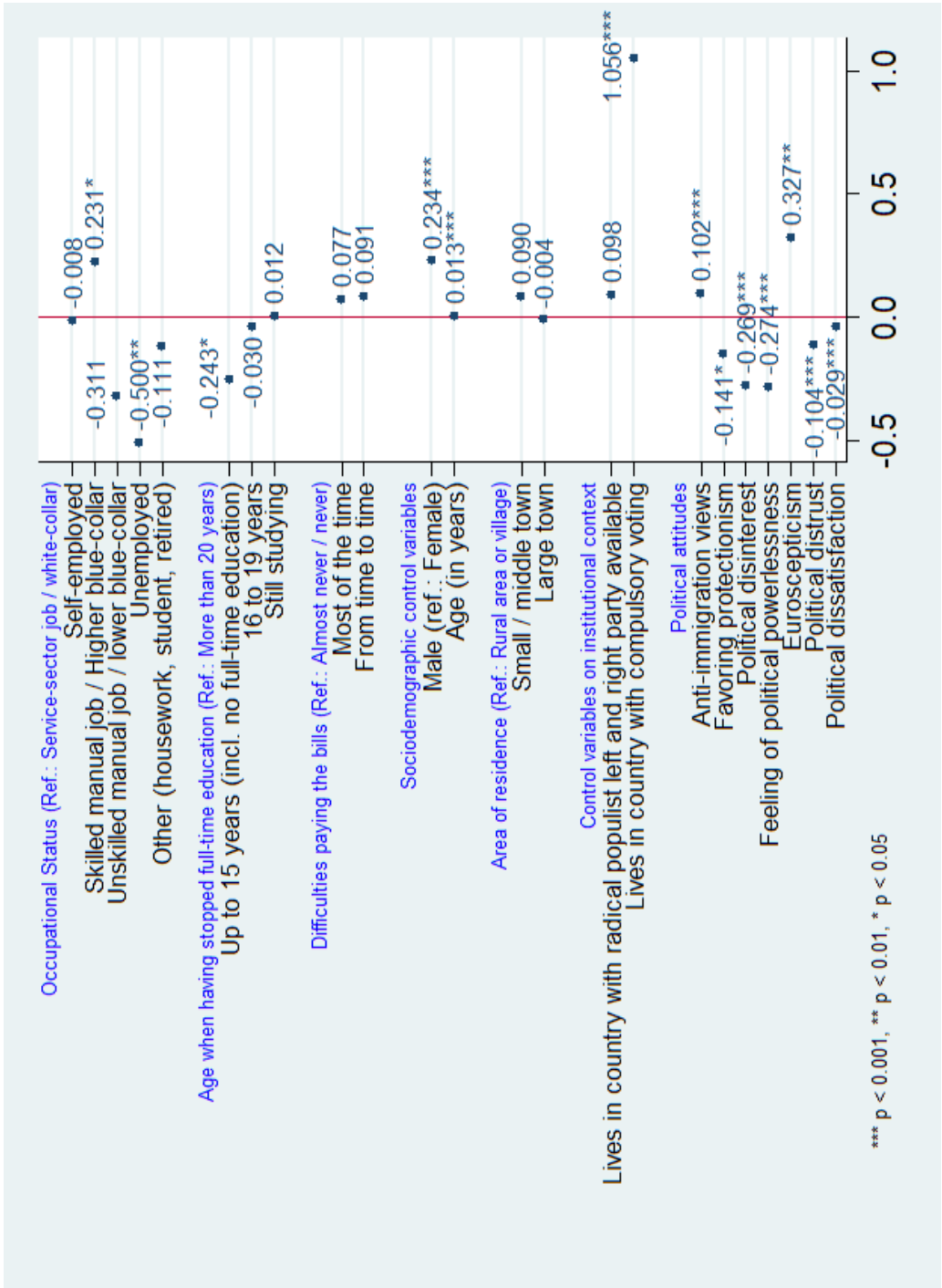


Figure 23: Binary logistic regression for radical populist voting (1) vs. abstaining (0), including political attitudes. Results as log odds.



*** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

6

Conclusion

The four empirical chapters of this study approached the research interest on socioeconomic deprivation possibly predicting the appeal of populism from different angles. Nonetheless, they all pursued similar objectives and relied on the same theoretical concepts. This makes their variation in terms of findings remarkable and worth discussing.

For a start, it was analyzed if socioeconomic deprivation has an impact on three attitudinal domains that are commonly attributed to populist party rhetoric. These were the support of popular sovereignty (people-centrism), despising the political elite (anti-elitism), and anti-immigration views. Together with the separate analysis for each view, the consideration of the local context and its reduced heterogeneity compared to regional or national conditions comprised the contribution to the state of research. Based on survey data and municipal statistics from Belgium in 2014, the findings accounting for the hierarchical data structure indicate that little educational attainment and relative deprivation both come along with intensified populist attitudes. Relative deprivation which was expected to be particularly context-dependent due to its theoretical link to social comparisons furthermore turned out to have a particularly strong positive effect on people-centrism in municipalities with a high net income per resident. Accordingly, witnessing others to be well off while at least thinking that one is unfairly disadvantaged boosts the agreement with bringing political power to the “common people”. However, such an effect was not obtained for anti-elitism and anti-immigration stances. Vulnerability on the labor market due to an unskilled manual profession or experiencing unemployment did not prove to affect the degree of populist attitudes in interplay with the local unemployment rate. Overall, the findings from the first empirical chapter highlight the negative relationship between the educational level and the agreement with populist positions same as the strong influence that the feeling of societal and political neglect has on people-centrism, anti-elitism, and the opposition towards immigration.

Actual voting in favor of a populist party came to the fore in the second sub-study. The focus on municipalities as units of analysis was maintained by using aggregate data from official statistics. Thus, evidence from this study does not allow for conclusions on

individual voting behavior but still entails analytic gains. These are for instance the use of municipal panel data ranging from 2006 to 2018. For a lack of panel survey data covering the same period and allowing the merging with data on respondents' home municipalities, the contribution of applying a longitudinal perspective on populist voting in municipalities required the limitation to a macro study. On a positive note, the mere consideration of macro data on municipalities means that the results are based on indicators that remain unaffected from common sources of bias in survey data such as social desirability or the underrepresentation of socially marginalized groups (see Schwander & Manow, 2017). Besides, analyzing the share of percentages obtained for radical right populist *Vlaams Belang* in municipal elections instead of their local support in national elections enables more detailed insights on whether populism benefits from unfavorable local conditions. Their non-incumbent status might also pay off for them in the local political arena with regard to the wide range of social and economic responsibilities for municipalities in Belgium.

The findings indicate that *Vlaams Belang* is significantly more successful in municipalities characterized by a larger population size, a wider party landscape, and low levels of unemployment. The latter is rather surprising as it contradicts the basic assumption of economic voting theory. However, given the fixed effects regression design relying on within-comparisons over time this evidence is also not to be attributed to *Vlaams Belang* running for office mainly in contexts witnessing economic decline. It gets even more noteworthy after the subsequent conduction of year-specific and pooled longitudinal analyses based on between-comparisons that yield contrasting evidence on the unemployment rate. Hence, despite a lack of substantive findings (e.g. on the interplay of the unemployment rate with the local presence of foreigners as suggested by group conflict theory), the second empirical chapter provided conclusive results by illustrating the methodological contribution of panel data when analyzing aggregate information regarding electoral behavior.

The benefits of exploiting the analytic potential of panel data were maintained for the third sub-study. For that, Dutch survey data covering a period of eleven years for the same sample of

respondents was used. With this kind of information, claims on electoral behavior can be made that are as close as possible to causality when referring to observational data. In substantial terms, the scope of research was expanded to voting for radical populist parties from the left wing and from the right wing which were contrasted to both mainstream parties as well as to one another. Transitions into unemployment among low educated persons and unskilled manual workers as well as relative deprivation (i.e. the actual income being below the subjective threshold of a good or sufficient amount) did not bring forward the preference for any of the anti-establishment parties claiming to represent the neglected “common people”. However, when only comparing populist parties across the ideological divide, those from the left wing appear to be more promising for those persons who became unemployed after having worked in a low-level blue-collar profession. Same as for the municipal level in the second sub-study, an illustration of the analytic gains stemming from fixed effects panel models emphasizes the possible sources of bias that similar studies in the field making use of cross-sectional data cannot provide. These are the static perspective on single election years that limits the generalizability of results and the distortion of unobserved heterogeneity. Both can be tackled when using panel data. The variation of findings that are obtained across both analytical approaches is exemplified best by the receipt of welfare benefits being positively related to the preference of the left-wing populist Socialist Party in nine of eleven considered waves whereas accounting for the hierarchical data structure yields no such effect.

For the most part, socioeconomic explanations of populist voting refer to a discontent with established parties rather than to the actual policy contents of populist parties. This suggests abstaining to be another probable outcome among disadvantaged persons. The fourth part of this study addressed this issue empirically through the example of the European elections 2019, a “second-order” electoral context that is likely to bring forward both phenomena. Contrasting them to mainstream party voting reveals that both supporting radical populist parties and not voting at all are more likely among persons with financial distress and a low educational level. Being an unskilled manual worker or being unemployed,

on the contrary, were only positively related to abstaining which indicates that facing unfavorable prospects on the labor market rather leads to “exiting” from political participation instead of “voicing” one’s discontent. Afterwards, this distinction was analyzed further through the mediating impact of political views that may be intensified by experiencing socioeconomic vulnerability and explain why some persons vote for populist parties while others abstain. These intermediary opinions comprise the agreement with issues commonly attributed to radical populist parties, the disapproval of (European) politics, and an indifference towards politics. Opposing protectionism and especially immigration due to one’s disadvantageous educational or financial profile leads to the support of a radical populist party whereas educational, occupational, and financial hardship boosting political disinterest and a feeling of political powerlessness translate into abstention. The evocation of Euroscepticism as well as of political dissatisfaction and distrust explains why the socioeconomically vulnerable persons abandon mainstream parties but not why radical populist voting is more likely than abstaining or vice versa.

Having gradually approached the overall research objective of this study, one can state that to some extent socioeconomic deprivation is linked to an increased appeal of populism. However, since there has been obtained only partial evidence across the sub-studies one must acknowledge that individually suffering from deprivation or being contextually exposed to hardship do not distinguish themselves as major drivers of voting or approving populism. In that regard, the findings of this study seem to be in line with the initially mentioned division in the field of research with a wide agreement that cultural explanations outperform economic approaches (e.g. Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018; Oesch, 2008, Ramiro & Gomez, 2017). The significant impact of views related to immigration and politics that was obtained in the sub-studies of this thesis additionally supports the cultural branch of research. However, cultural predictors of the approval of populism mainly comprise subjective concerns (such as anti-immigration stances) whereas the focus of this study was on objective aspects of economic hardship. Hence, and due to the scarcity of economic attitudes, the lack of significant evidence for the economic factors considered in this study does not necessarily confirm the explanatory predominance of cultural aspects.

Although the analyses of this study did not yield generalizable results for most of the manifestations of socioeconomic deprivation, the findings entail implications to be pointed out. In theoretical terms, the “losers of globalization” thesis has been clearly refuted. Across all four sub-studies, vulnerability on the labor market due to one’s occupational status did not prove to increase the intensity of populist views nor the tendency to vote for a radical populist party which casts doubts at the applicability of this theoretical approach despite its prevalence in the literature. With regard to the variety of research designs, measurements and contexts across the analyses, the disproof of this economic approach is even more obvious. Hence, the theorized feeling of being “left behind” in a post-industrial and globalized society does not translate into support for anti-establishment parties among those voters without a formal skill-set and without a job providing safe prospects for the future. As shown in the sub-study on the European elections, those persons rather opt for not voting at all instead, especially if their unfavorable objective situation fosters the emergence of a perceived powerlessness and disinterest towards politics. Radical populist voting on the contrary is more likely if a low level of education and financial troubles lead to higher anti-immigration sentiments but not if unemployment or working in a low-skilled manual profession strengthen these views. Hence, this study also considered cultural concerns and although they are frequently considered as explanatory “antagonists” of economic approaches, their mediating impact between socioeconomic deprivation and radical populist voting underlines the need to take into account both branches of research jointly (see Gidron & Hall, 2017; 2020; Margalit, 2019; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018). Accordingly, discontent with societal and political transformations does not just emerge by itself. Instead, it is obviously evoked and intensified by socioeconomic characteristics. With anti-immigration views only mediating the effect of a lower educational level and financial distress on populist voting but not the impact of unfavorable prospects on the labor market, the findings additionally contradict the assumption of the group conflict theory according to which the need for economic resources leads to perceiving out-groups (immigrants) as competitors. Thus, exploratory research is recommendable in order to capture the underlying mechanisms

more precisely. This need is further highlighted by the crucial role of little educational attainment for the understanding of the populist appeal within the electorate. Both the findings from Belgium as well as the evidence obtained for the European elections indicate that not only those persons with little education seem to be more attracted by populism. Instead, all those who do *not* have the *highest* level of education support populism to a greater extent. Put differently, also those persons who have a degree from secondary education but have not undergone higher tertiary education rather approve populism. As this group does not necessarily include persons who face difficulties on the labor market due to their skill-set, the findings on the impact of education are not fully in line with the “losers of globalization” thesis either.

However, this does not suggest that objective economic hardship is completely unrelated to the appeal of populism. Instead, the scientific focus could be shifted towards economic events that may be more adequate to capture an underlying feeling of neglect by politics. One might argue that risks related to the individual employability are not the most suited socioeconomic predictors of an estrangement from established parties and of an increased susceptibility for the populist appeal. First, persons who do not have a high set of formal skills and who work in a low-skilled manual profession or who are even unemployed may be aware that in a globalized world there are societal and economic forces at play that political parties cannot be blamed for. Second, a person’s educational and professional level is quite time-stable. The longitudinal approach of this thesis considered transitions into unemployment among low-educated persons and low-skilled workers which can be assumed to be perceived as particularly severe. However, given the wide range of concomitant circumstances also in this case the blame is not necessarily shifted on a failure of political parties. In order to capture an actual assignment of guilt to established and governing parties, further longitudinal studies may consider the individual experience of economic events that are rather attributable to policy-making. For instance, losing one’s job at a relatively high age and finding oneself forced to retire early might evoke stronger feelings of neglect. This can also be expected if searching for a new job requires the commencement of temporary work which comes

along with multiple unfavorable conditions. If suitable longitudinal data is gathered to distinguish specific forms and fine-grained manifestations of economic hardship over the life course, one may get a more in-depth understanding of how economic circumstances affect the appeal of populism.

What is more, the point of reference may have to be adjusted when referring to economic “losers”. Globalization is an ongoing phenomenon that nonetheless has been evolving for several decades until now and by that cannot be considered as an economic shock that catches voters off guard. In that regard, the Covid-19 pandemic may prove to have provided conditions that unexpectedly inflicted hardship on societal groups who might give in to the people-centrist and anti-elitist temptation of populism. Even if the crisis after the outbreak of the Corona virus affected society and the economy on a global scale, there certainly are professional groups that were hit harder by financial losses than others. Accordingly, a new group of economic “losers of the pandemic” may emerge that is determined to a lesser extent by their formal skill-set but more by someone being self-employed or having a profession in a sector that does not allow a smooth transition to working from home. At first sight, the outcomes of general elections in the aftermath of the pandemic do not hint at populist parties benefitting from economic distress. Germany for instance saw a loss of votes for its major right-wing populist party (*Alternative für Deutschland*) in 2021 same as the Netherlands where the Party for Freedom experienced a decline in support. However, its populist contender, the Forum for Democracy, explicitly opposed government measures due to the pandemic and considerably gained in terms of votes (from 1.8% in 2017 to 5% in 2021). Similarly, the 2021 elections in Germany witnessed the appearance of a new party (*dieBasis*) that received 1.4% of the overall votes for combining populist stances (such as the claim for popular sovereignty), far-right positions and the rejection of the governmental policies over the course of the pandemic. These are only two examples indicating that right-wing populism has seen the chance of exploiting the disapproval of how governments tackle the Covid-19 pandemic, be it for economic or ideological concerns. Since existential worries for certain electoral groups are likely to last and since populist parties may make use of the “elite” as a

scapegoat for the people's troubles, economic concerns could become more influential for populist voting in upcoming elections across various political contexts. Moreover, reflecting on the global changes coming along with the Covid-19 pandemic raises the question whether the predominance of cultural concerns is going to stand the test of time if populist parties portray themselves as advocates of those who undeservedly suffer from economic losses and if they shift their ideological focus from anti-immigration positions towards the exploitation of discontent with restrictions due to the pandemic. Consequently, the economic implications of the pandemic and the perceivable adjustment of populism suggest contextual changes which are that profound that they encourage future research on economic predictors of the support for populism – despite the scarce evidence in this study.

Besides, subjective views on the individual and contextual economic situation affect the support for populism as well. To some extent, this has been already taken into account in this study by including the concept of relative deprivation. Agreeing with statements on the neglect of “people like me” is positively related to attitudinal domains addressed by populism and people-centrist views are furthermore enhanced by witnessing economic wealth in one's municipal surroundings. On the contrary, a person's actual income being below her or his subjective threshold of a good or sufficient income does not alter the electoral preference in favor of radical populist parties. This contrasting evidence reflects the differentiation in group relative deprivation and individual relative deprivation (Runciman, 1966). Accordingly, a sense of belonging to a disadvantaged societal group fosters the approval of populism. This finding corresponds to the “us versus them” rhetoric of populist parties that portrays hardship as a struggle among the “common people” who may expect no help from the “corrupt elite”. Believing to lose out compared to others as an individual, however, does not increase the support for populist parties. While this agrees with the higher explanatory power of group relative deprivation on related outcomes of collective action and intergroup sentiments that has been identified in the literature (e.g. Abrams & Grant, 2012; Guimond & Dubé-Simard, 1983; Pettigrew et al., 2008; Urbanska & Guimond, 2018) it should be noted that the two sub-studies differed from one

another with regard to their outcome (populist attitudes and voting in favor of a radical populist party) and their analytic approach.

This underlying fear of being worse off than others, however, is not focused on immigrants as economic competitors and by that contradicts the group conflict theory. The local success of a populist radical right party proved to be unaffected by many residents being in need of a job while at the same time a high share of foreigners may symbolize an intensified competition for employment. Similarly, longitudinal evidence on individual behavior from the Netherlands indicates that neither losing one's job nor an increased welfare dependency has an impact on the tendency to support a radical populist party. Considered jointly with the significant effect of group relative deprivation, one may conclude that subjectively defined social reference groups are more relevant benchmarks in explaining populist support than more clearly distinguishable out-groups such as immigrants. What is more, group relative deprivation may capture another out-group that does not pose an economic threat for economically deprived persons but may represent a target of their discontent, namely the political elite. The inner conviction that "people like me" are neglected strata within society is in line with the antagonism between "the common people" and "the corrupt elite" that the thin-centered ideological core of populism emphasizes (Mudde, 2004; Stanley, 2008). The nativist – and ideological – stance of portraying immigrants as scapegoats and competitors on the labor market and within the social system does not boost support for populist parties on the contrary. As this conclusion comes with the caveat of referring to different sub-studies, additional research on the composition of social reference groups is to be suggested, same as more insights in the attitudinal mechanisms linking the need for scarce economic resources and support for radical populist parties.

Although the mediating role of attitudes has been analyzed in the fourth sub-study, subjective concerns with regard to economic issues have only been studied to a limited extent. As mentioned above, perceptions on economic hardship and risks were not the major objective of this study but their scarcity poses an obstacle to the conclusion that (subjective) cultural views outperform (objective) socioeconomic conditions. On a similar note, a critical

reflection on the frequently identified explanatory preeminence of cultural predictors (see Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018; Oesch, 2008; Ramiro & Gomez, 2017) should also shed light on the common operationalization of the outcome variable, namely support for radical populist parties. In line with the broadly accepted definition of populist parties as a thin-centered ideology emphasizing a supposed antagonism between “the common people” and “the elite” that may be extended by ideological elements such as nativism or redistributive claims (Mudde, 2004; Stanley, 2008), the measures considered as outcome variables in the four sub-studies mainly addressed those aspects of populism that reflect discontent with the political establishment as well as cultural concerns. Attitudes related to populism comprised people-centrist, anti-elitist, and anti-immigration views whereas the two single-context studies for Flanders and the Netherlands were limited on those domestic parties commonly considered as radical populist. For the cross-country analysis on the European elections 2019, populist parties were not separated along the ideological left-right divide, but their categorization according to the PopuList (Rooduijn et al., 2019) was rather based on their populist (anti-establishment) character same as their Eurosceptic stances. Hence, the economic positions and rhetoric of parties remained unconsidered when flagging them as populist. Since previous studies in the field relied on similar data sources and party classifications this limitation can be extended to the research field in general and suggests further refinements in party classifications. For that, one should not only take into account if parties portray themselves as advocates of neglected strata of society but also which aspects of deprivation they address in their communication in particular. For instance, when having theorized that unskilled manual workers or the unemployed vote for populist politicians who seem to understand the struggles among the “left behind” one might check if the parties labeled as populist actually do address hardship on the labor market, apart from their anti-establishment and nativist stances. Similarly, economic policies should receive additional attention when analyzing the populist character of parties. Although radical populist parties from the right wing are mainly characterized by their cultural concerns, the competition with other parties will drive them into focusing on economic issues as well. Thus, in order to increase the comparability

of cultural and economic explanations of populist voting the focus should be extended on economic elements of the party programs as well. For that, developing indicators of a people-centrist and an anti-establishment economic policy is advisable.

Although this study contributed to the state of research through its methodological enhancements as well, there are still some gaps regarding the research design that future studies should address. A possible point of critique is that it did not broaden the focus to countries that have been hardly studied so far. For that, however, not only the data infrastructure is to be blamed. Instead, populism being a quite recent political and electoral phenomenon in some countries simply does not yet allow for longitudinal analyses that cover a period as long as the one considered for Flanders and the Netherlands. Besides, with the Netherlands being one of only few EU member states with both types of populist parties present, comparisons of populist voting across the ideological divide are additionally inhibited. Thus, for some political contexts it is not possible or still too soon to extend the research scope to a longitudinal comparison of populist voting on both the left and the right wing. Examples for that are Germany and Spain where parties classified as left-wing populist have been active for a longer period whereas their right-wing counterparts have emerged only rather recently. For these contexts, future studies will tell if similar evidence is obtained than for the Dutch context.

Illustrating the analytic gains coming along with the use of panel data was another methodological contribution, pursued both in the second sub-study on the municipal level and in the third empirical chapter on individual voting behavior. It was stated that the estimation of fixed effects models would provide results that are as close as possible to causal claims when relying on observational data. Nevertheless, as these findings still are based on observational data, future research should aim at reducing the possibility of biased evidence even further. This may be achieved by collecting experimental data. Obviously, the aspects of socioeconomic deprivation considered in this study, such as the educational and professional attainment, must not be object to experimental manipulation but there are imaginable survey-based designs of randomly confronting respondents with scenarios and

afterwards enquiring the variety of political preferences. Similar approaches have been pursued in the field already (e.g. Marx, 2020; Marx & Schumacher, 2018) but they still are exceptional among the majority of studies making use of observational information. For the sake of a better understanding of the causal relation between socioeconomic hardship and the approval of populism, additional efforts in developing suitable experimental research designs are advisable.

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Acknowledgement

November 2, 2017. 11:34 AM. I am surrounded by a lively bustle, a babel of voices speaking in multiple languages, people getting ready and making themselves comfortable. A whistle sounds from the outside, the doors slam shut and Eurocity 85 is set in motion. Slowly persons standing and rushing along the platforms pass by, a few seconds later it is only advertising boards that are to be seen next to the train. Then, after having passed the outer end of the platform which the pigeons call home, daylight floods in through the windows and I look at a multitude of tracks glittering in the sunlight on this beautiful autumn day. For a short moment many paths seem reachable and all of them promising in their own way. But by picking this very train I have already set my course and quite soon the only other track I can see is the one leading back. Excited and with anticipation I lean back and get ready for what is to come.

The international train between Munich and Trento has been a constant companion in my first nineteen months of working on this dissertation. Of course, I was not aware of this while taking it for the first time but when looking back I realize that there are several similarities with my entire PhD journey, some more obvious than others. Just like the train ride of four and a half hours also my doctoral studies of four and a half years were characterized by a sequence of uphill sections when determination was required to keep going, despite the emergency brake dangling invitingly within reach. Luckily there were as many times when breakthroughs were made and when progress was more visible – the rewarding acceleration of downhill parts leading deeper and deeper in the sunny area of South Tyrol, indicating the finish line to come closer. Regular – and unexpected – stops made me aware what has already been achieved and how many milestones are still to come before I need to get ready for wrapping everything up and taking the luggage from above my head. All that comes with changing sceneries and weather conditions, with varying degrees of appeal. Some sections were more rewarding whereas others had me focus on the interior of the train.

And this brings me to an aspect that made this metaphorical train journey particularly worthwhile: the fellow passengers. I thank those people around me who made room when I was in need of a seat and reassured me that I was in the right train, even when the journey was not going too smoothly for them either. The line-up in the seating group around me may have changed throughout the years but all of these encounters were meaningful in some way, even those that just lasted for the blink of an eye. Nonetheless, the longer the distance covered together the more noticeable it gets if someone has to leave first. Thus, even greater gratitude goes to the long-term company I had and the people who showed me that such a train has more compartments to offer and that you reach the destination in even better condition if you go for a walk every now and then or enjoy a good cup of Wiener Mélange. I hope that all of them who are still on that journey will make it to their destination safe and sound.

Besides, Austrian trains like the one I am using for this retrospection are also known for their hospitality and for offering great accommodation. Hence, the four places that gave me shelter throughout the PhD journey deserve recognition – and they also match the course of this train journey as it first resembled the drafty atmosphere of the railway station in Munich but changed for the better soon and especially my final home during the second half of the trip was as pleasant as a ride through the sunlit landscape of Northern Italy. There I also encountered a hospitality that has me introduce the obvious analogy of a dining car, but one of the great ones, with fabric napkins and reserved seats for regular guests. A big thank you to everyone making me feel at home in the past few years.

What would this ride have been without the train staff? They aimed at making sure that everyone with a valid ticket has a chance to reach the destination, supported the travelers in the case of possibly emerging issues along the way and always kept the schedule in mind. I want to thank them for having been on board and for showing up in the aisle regularly to see how I was doing.

Lastly, whether a trip will be successful is not only determined after the train doors have closed. The course is mainly set before, by having made decisions that both expand and limit the options when looking at the departure board. Guidance was needed, and assistance, especially in the beginnings of my personal journey. I thank those who brought me to the station and prepared me for this journey and whatever connections are to come afterwards.

Freiburg im Breisgau, March 2022

Curriculum Vitae

Michael Kolander was born on January 8, 1992 in Germany. He studied Sociology at the University of Bamberg from 2011 onwards and obtained his BA degree in 2014 and received his MA degree in Sociology in 2017. In the same year he started as a PhD candidate in Sociology and Social Research at the University of Trento (Italy) and from 2019 to 2021 he continued the work on his dissertation at Tilburg University (The Netherlands). He currently works at the department for strategic planning in the rector's office at the University of Freiburg (Germany), being responsible for benchmarking, performance analysis, and university rankings.

