

# Euroscepticism as a radical left party strategy for success

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## Abstract

The European Union has gained salience as an issue in political debate. Recent literature shows that successful radical right-wing parties are frequently in opposition to European integration. This article looks at how radical left-wing parties' positions on EU integration affect their electoral support. It argues that radical left parties can mobilize voters in their favour through positioning in opposition to EU integration because this allows voters to combine their left-wing economic and anti-EU preferences. Using expert and individual-level survey data, this research demonstrates that radical left-wing parties that position themselves against EU integration are more likely to gain individuals' vote choice. This finding is surprising, given that traditionally radical left-wing parties are defined through their economic, rather than their non-economic, positions. This article demonstrates that variation in positioning around non-economic issues such as EU integration can explain differences in voter support across radical left-wing parties.

## Keywords

Euroscepticism, Political Parties, Radical Left, Electoral Behaviour

## Introduction

Before the 2014 European Elections, the German radical left party Die Linke took up a Eurosceptic position after intra-party disagreement on EU integration (Meisner, 2013). However, prior to the 2019 European Elections only a few years later, Die Linke decided to move from their EU-critical stance to a more pro-EU position (Cveljo, 2019). This position shift coincided with the Eurosceptic radical right-wing party Alternative für Deutschland gaining momentum. Die Linke is not alone in trying to decide on the best strategy towards EU integration; many radical left-wing parties in the past few years have decided to oppose the radical right by adopting a pro-EU position. This research asks: could a Eurosceptic position be more beneficial for radical left parties to gain votes than a pro-EU position?

Non-economic issues have increasingly been gaining attention during elections (Dalton, 2002; De Vries, 2018; Hooghe et al., 2002; Inglehart, 1990; Kriesi et al., 2008). Voters overall are increasingly polarized on the non-economic dimension (Green-Pedersen and Otjes, 2019; Hutter et al., 2016). The increased polarization of voters on non-economic issues across many countries is also reflected in a lack of congruence between voters and parties

as 'on the culture dimension, most parties were found to have more liberal positions than their voters; while on the EU dimension, most parties were found to have more pro-EU positions than their voters' (Costello et al., 2012: 1228). This dissonance can also be found within the potential radical left party (RLP) voter base (Kitschelt and Rehm, 2014). Traditionally, RLPs have been defined almost exclusively by their redistributive economic policies (see Bale and Dunphy, 2011; Dunphy and Bale, 2011; March, 2011; March and Rommerskirchen, 2015). This paper rejects that premise and instead argues that RLPs are not unidimensional parties. In practice, RLPs do engage with other social and cultural issues, and their positioning on such non-economic issues can be an important strategy to mobilize voters in their favour. Specifically, this paper shows, both theoretically and empirically, that anti-EU positions are electorally beneficial for RLPs.

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This research takes an in-depth look at the mixed success of RLPs in Western Europe by examining the different strategies RLPs take towards EU integration. Throughout the process of dealignment, voters are more likely to be disenfranchised or not represented in their interests by the parties in the party system. One prominent group are voters with left-wing economic preferences but also Eurosceptic tendencies. Such voters are more likely to vote for a RLP if the RLP has an anti-EU position. Though the position a RLP has on the EU is important to their potential voters, it becomes less important the more economically right-wing voters get, as they are less likely to support a RLP due to their economic divergence. Although Euroscepticism seems a good strategy for RLPs in the abstract, the presence of radical right parties (RRPs) in the party system constrains RLP's appeal to voters, in part because voters may weigh their anti-EU preferences more heavily than their redistribution positions. Therefore, even if RLPs move towards a Eurosceptic position, there is little chance this will help them in the long run if a RRP is occupying the 'hard Eurosceptic' issue space (see Walgrave et al., 2012).

I test this theory by employing two different datasets: the party-level data from Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) (Bakker et al., 2015), and the individual-level data from European Social Survey (ESS). The results have several implications; RLPs have the ability to mobilize voters through non-economic issues. However, successful mobilization depends on the absence of a RRP in the party system. While studies in the past have emphasized the importance of European integration for RLPs (Beaudonnet and Gomez, 2017; March and Rommerskirchen, 2015; Ramiro, 2016; Visser et al., 2014), this research analyses when Euroscepticism can be beneficial and when it can harm RLPs' success. This article adds to a significant growing literature on how different party families compete in their own ways. Finally, the research is the first to analyse RLP strategy on a specific issue in depth and therefore highlights the diversity in RLP positions and strategy while also illustrating how party competition effectively influences voter choice on non-economic issues.

### Radical left parties

In his seminal work on the RLP family, March (2011) argues that RLPs have been shaped through their institutionalization causing a diversity within the party family from traditional communists to social populists. Yet, RLPs can be understood as having 'enough ideological and policy coherence to justify being conceptualized as a single party family' (March & Rommerskirchen, 2015: 41). According to March's (2011: 8) definition, RLPs oppose the 'socio-economic structure of contemporary capitalism... [and] advocate alternative economic and power structures involving a major redistribution of resources'.<sup>1</sup> Not only do RLPs emphasize economic issues significantly

more than any other party (Rovny, 2012; Williams and Ishiyama, 2018), but they also adopt more extreme positions than their mainstream counterparts (Wagner, 2012). This paper bases its argument on the assumption that RLPs are not niche parties but can be conceptualized as issue entrepreneurs, and thus, are able to communicate their own policy strategies 'to succeed in the political market' (De Vries and Hobolt, 2020: 4). RLPs are more successful when they choose a more moderate strategy on the economy and more extreme strategy on non-economic issues (Krause, 2020). Yet, there has not been any research on the specific issues and directionality which can cause this success.

General sentiments associated with those supporting populist or extreme parties is the 'losers of globalization' typology (Kriesi et al., 2008). The cleavage between the winners and losers of globalization shows that while some benefited, others were disadvantaged by the changes that came through globalization. As this 'losers of globalization' group has felt threatened by the opening of borders, economically but also culturally, the appeal of populist parties has grown. Supporters of radical parties are usually associated with strong support for reduction in economic inequalities (Visser et al., 2014).<sup>2</sup> Personal economic deprivation has been credited as one of the main reasons individuals choose to vote for the radical right (Oesch and Rennwald, 2018; Rydgren, 2012; Werts et al., 2013) and the radical left (Gomez et al., 2016; Ramiro, 2016; Roo-duijn et al., 2017). Thus, some of the 'losers of globalization' voice their grievances in Euroscepticism, from either an economically critical perspective (for example criticizing bailing out of banks during the financial crisis and the Troika programme) or in a culturally critical perspective (through feeling threatened by migration).

### European integration

European integration has moved from a bureaucratic policy field to a highly polarized and salient issue in European party systems. This increase in salience started during the 1990s and has grown since (Hooghe and Marks, 2009); in part, this has been due to political entrepreneurs who emphasize the issue of European integration (De Vries and Hobolt, 2012). Mainstream parties usually occupy pro-integration space and avoid emphasizing the issue (Green-Pedersen, 2012; Meijers, 2017).<sup>3</sup> More specifically, mainstream left parties typically take economically left-wing pro-EU positions while mainstream right parties often occupy economically right-wing pro-EU positions.

The literature has shown that EU integration is considered a multidimensional issue (Boomgaarden et al., 2011); certain aspects of European integration can be understood through a cultural framework; other aspects are better understood through economic lenses (Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Lerch and Schweltnus, 2006; McLaren, 2007). For example, while some Euroscepticism is based in demand

for less migration, other Euroscepticism is rooted in the idea that the EU is an ‘elite and great power domination at the expense of the popular classes’ (Halikiopoulou et al., 2012: 512). Right-wing Eurosceptic parties are usually associated with the cultural aspect of EU opposition, while their left-wing alternative traditionally root their scepticism in economics.

This research understands RLPs as vote seeking parties. Vote seeking parties will likely make decisions in order to maximize their vote share. In the context of European integration, RLPs can either take a pro-EU or Eurosceptic position. Research has argued that the far-left is fundamentally ‘strongly internationalist’ (Beaudonnet and Gomez, 2017: 321; Bornschier, 2010; March and Mudde, 2005) and therefore would not oppose EU integration for nationalist but economic reasons. Eurosceptic RLPs mainly argue that the EU is a capitalist organization that they fundamentally oppose. They often argue in favour of reform of or even withdrawal from the EU (Hooghe et al., 2002). In the case of Greece, ‘the KKE position is straightforward as the party carries on its traditional rejection of the EU, completely opposite of the SYRIZA position’ (Holmes and Roder, 2019: 26), which believes that they can be ‘critical yet constructive’ (Holmes and Roder, 2019: 28) towards the EU. Typically, RLP opposition to the EU has been considered ‘soft Euroscepticism’ as it has been interpreted as parties being critical of the EU’s current format rather than in the idea as a whole (Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2008).<sup>4</sup> The degree of Euroscepticism presented by RLPs considerably depends on institutional, historical and political factors. This translates to great diversity in not just how but also whether they are Eurosceptic. In France, the left was divided on Europe with PS representing a pro-EU position and PCF occupying a Eurosceptic stance (Holmes and Roder, 2019). Past research suggests RLPs specifically see electoral success when high Euroscepticism is present in the population (March and Rommerskirchen, 2015). It is not yet entirely clear whether RLP voters are Eurosceptic or RLPs thrive in countries with higher levels of Euroscepticism in society (Beaudonnet and Gomez, 2017). For example, Visser et al. (2014) found an effect for Eurosceptic voting among far-left voters. Also, Ramiro (2016) further shows that radical left voters tend to have higher Eurosceptic attitudes than other voters.

Hillen and Steiner (2020) have shown that there is a significant number of voters with economic left-wing and culturally right-wing voting preferences that are left out of party representation. This demand for parties that advocate for redistribution policies while also positioning on anti-immigration or Eurosceptic issues is not met in party systems (Hillen and Steiner, 2020; van der Brug and van Spanje, 2009). This means, that if there is no left-wing party representing their views on the EU or Eurosceptic party that is close to their policy preference on the economy, these voters are likely to be left unsatisfied with their

supply choices and often not aligned with any particular party. While there is a rationale to avoid positioning in a Eurosceptic direction for RLPs, as it may result in losing pro-EU left-wing voters, an often-overlooked aspect is that voters may also reward a RLP for a Eurosceptic position. Though some voters may have a preference for cultural Euroscepticism, it is not unreasonable to assume that in the absence of such supply, some of them may choose to vote for an economic Eurosceptic party over a pro-EU party.

RLPs can benefit from a Eurosceptic position as they therefore supply opposition to other left-wing parties that frequently position themselves in favour of EU integration. RLPs are able to frame this Euroscepticism through economic lenses, as the economic dimension is the primary dimension of those parties, which makes Euroscepticism reputationally feasible (Elias et al., 2015). Voters are expected to reward this if they already have left-wing preferences, thus are part of the potential voter base of RLPs, and also have anti-EU policy preferences. Though this is most likely to apply to voters with economic Eurosceptic preferences, the lack in supply may convince some voters with cultural Eurosceptic preferences to vote for a RLP. Due to the underrepresentation of these preferences in the party systems, voters are likely to vote for a party with these policy preferences as they are unlikely to be aligned with another party. Therefore I hypothesize that:

**H1:** Among more left-wing voters, RLPs are more likely to gain electoral support when taking a Eurosceptic position.

Since we know that a RRP entering the party system can influence the positions of mainstream parties (Abou-Chadi and Krause, 2020), I argue that RRP entering the party system will also affect RLPs. In some cases, RLPs shift their position on EU integration in response to a successful RRP. In the case of Finland, VAS became pro-EU to show opposition to the RRP (Holmes and Roder, 2019). However, is this an ideal strategy for vote maximization? Though not all RRPs focus on Euroscepticism, it aligns clearly with the overall ideology of the party family. When RRPs enter a party system, their incentive to be Eurosceptic is far higher than the incentive of mainstream parties to be Eurosceptic (Vasilopoulou, 2018; Wagner, 2012). For mainstream parties, this is due to the high costs usually associated with having a polarizing stand on a technocratic issue (Hix, 1999; Hooghe et al., 2002; Whitefield and Rohrschneider, 2015). The EU is a frequent and salient issue in manifestos of RRPs (Vasilopoulou, 2018). Thus, if a RRP enters a party system, it will usually occupy the Eurosceptic policy space. Furthermore, some RRPs pursue redistributive policies or blur their position on the economy (Rovny, 2013). Therefore, it is unsurprising that some voters have moved from left-wing parties to RRPs (Jylhä et al., 2019), as voters may prioritize their preferences on EU

integration over their economic preferences or, through blurring or otherwise, believe that the RRP has left-wing economic positions.

Voters are more likely to vote for parties that they perceive as the most competent (Lachat, 2014). This is especially the case if a party is perceived as more competent than other parties on a salient issue. Frequently, if a party owns an issue (such as in the case of the Greens over environmentalism), voters perceive this party to be the most competent on such issue. Though an anti-EU position might not be an issue that RRP owns, it is still likely that voters will associate Euroscepticism with the RRP, due to their ownership of nationalism (Gómez-Reino and Llamazares, 2013; Vasilopoulou, 2011). It is likely that RRP will be seen as so-called 'issue entrepreneurs' (De Vries and Hobolt, 2012). In this case, voters with left-wing economic preferences will perceive RRP as more competent on Euroscepticism than RLPs.

This research argues that a Eurosceptic position would be vote maximizing for RLPs; yet, the presence of a RRP could influence this outcome. With the presence of a RRP, RLPs are facing competition on the Eurosceptic position. While some RRP occupy anti-redistribution positions, many also position left-wing on economic issues. Thus, RRP may not only compose of a highly reputable source for Euroscepticism, due to their ownership of nationalism, but also supply for the aforementioned cultural right-wing and economic left-wing gap in the party system. Therefore, instead of rewarding RLPs for filling this supply gap, voters may be convinced by the emphasis placed on Euroscepticism by RRP. Some of the cultural Eurosceptics that, in absence of another Eurosceptic party, may have been convinced by the economic Euroscepticism from RLPs will likely vote for RRP. From this, this article argues that although a Eurosceptic position of RLPs may be rewarded by voters, the entry of a RRP can constrain these prospects. Therefore,

**H2:** When a RRP is present in the party system, RLPs are less likely to benefit from a Eurosceptic position.

## Data

This paper uses the party positions from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) (Bakker et al., 2015). This is merged with the individual-level dataset from the European Social Survey (ESS) (European Social Survey Cumulative File, 2018). The ESS is a cross-national survey that measures attitudes, beliefs and political behaviour every 2 years since 2001. The ESS makes use of newly selected, cross-sectional samples for their data collection. In this research, the ESS is used to understand the voting behaviour of the electorate. As policy positions need to be estimated and are often considered latent variables, expert's judgement is used as an estimate in this research to understand where

the parties are located on the relevant issues.<sup>5</sup> The CHES surveys country experts on questions of the positioning of political parties in their respective countries. Once all experts have submitted their judgement on where the parties are positioned on the issue scales, the average of the expert responses makes up the final estimated party position. The CHES was selected as experts and voters alike will base their information on speeches, media appearances and overall party statements. This is contrary to using manifestos to determine party positions, as they are not widely read by voters.<sup>6</sup> From both datasets, this research only makes use of data from Western European countries, for comparative clarity in terms of party competition, party legacy and to provide a more stable comparison of the issues concerning the EU. The data cover Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden. This is selected due to data availability and the existence of a RLP in the party system.<sup>7</sup> I use ESS rounds from 2002 to 2016 and CHES years until 2014. As a result of the focus on this period, there is also a strong implication that voters are less ambiguous towards the EU than they were prior to the 2000s (Duchesne et al., 2013; Hurrelmann et al., 2015).

The pooled cross-sectional data is obtained by combing data from ESS with CHES party position data for RLPs. As the datasets do not match perfectly in years (ESS collects data every 2 years while CHES roughly every 4), the closest years were used to match the datasets, using the earlier years of CHES to match later years of ESS (e.g. for the CHES round of 2010, the ESS data of round 6 in 2012 was used).<sup>8</sup> Due to the hierarchical structure of the data (voters, country, years), a multilevel mixed logistic model is applied. As there are multiple years per country, random intercepts for each country and country-election were used.

The dependent variable understands whether an individual voted for a RLP in the previous election using a binary variable. When two or more RLPs were present in the party system, the main relevant party was selected. This was achieved by using the most stable entered RLP to ensure voter's knowledge of the party's existence. In the case of Greece, the party selected was SYRIZA.<sup>9</sup> In the case of Portugal, the data includes BE.<sup>10</sup> This research looks at the demand-side of the success of RLPs on a more micro-level and builds on existing research by March and Rommelskirchen (2015), Hernández and Kriesi (2016) and Grittersova et al. (2016) who use aggregate data. Non-voters are excluded from the analysis as the population of interest is voters.

This research assumes that the effect of Euroscepticism on RLP vote choice will be stronger for the potential voters of RLPs, who are most likely more left-wing voters. Thus, a left-right self-identification variable is included and is also interacted with the main independent variable. The main independent variable is RLPs position on EU integration. CHES takes the averages of the experts' responses, which

**Table 1.** Regression results on vote choice for RLPs.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
RLP EU Position	-.892* (.498)	-.855* (.512)	-1.224*** (.429)	-1.056*** (.318)
Left-Right Self-Identification Scale	-.57*** (.026)	-.565*** -.855*	-.565*** (.03)	-.565*** (.03)
Mainstream Left EU Position			1.504 (1.043)	.349 (.909)
Mainstream Right EU Position			-.361 (.825)	-.947 (.981)
RRP Presence				-2.731 (1.705)
RLP Economic Position	1.796* (.975)	1.773* (.983)	1.862* (1.032)	1.652** (.75)
Migration Rate	-.089 (.164)	-.09 (.176)	-.076 (.152)	-.088 (.106)
Small Business Owners		-.152 (.155)	-.152 (.155)	-.151 (.155)
Technical (semi-)professionals		-.046 (.148)	-.046 (.148)	-.046 (.148)
Production workers		.038 (.212)	.038 (.212)	.038 (.212)
(Associate) Managers		-.081 (.21)	-.081 (.21)	-.081 (.21)
Clerks		-.027 (.163)	-.027 (.163)	-.026 (.163)
Socio-Cultural (semi-) professionals		.189 (.201)	.189 (.201)	.19 (.201)
Service Workers		.024 (.209)	.024 (.209)	.025 (.209)
Education: Upper Sec + Non-Tert.		.377** (.167)	.379** (.167)	.379** (.167)
Education: Tertiary		.465** (.23)	.466** (.23)	.467** (.23)
Age		-.007** (.003)	-.007** (.003)	-.007** (.003)
Gender		.007 (.04)	.007 (.04)	.007 (.04)
Constant	-.347 (1.267)	-0.195 (1.226)	-6.508 (5.416)	5.201 (8.85)
Sd(Country)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	.122 (.495)	.008 (.04)
Sd(Country ~ Study)	8.371 (5.905)	8.323 (5.872)	8.001 (4.930)	6.867* (3.617)
Obs.	40860	36231	36231	36231

Standard errors are in parenthesis.

\*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ .

were used in this research. Though this is treated as continuous, the marginal effects in the results below are displayed as dichotomous for ease of interpretation.

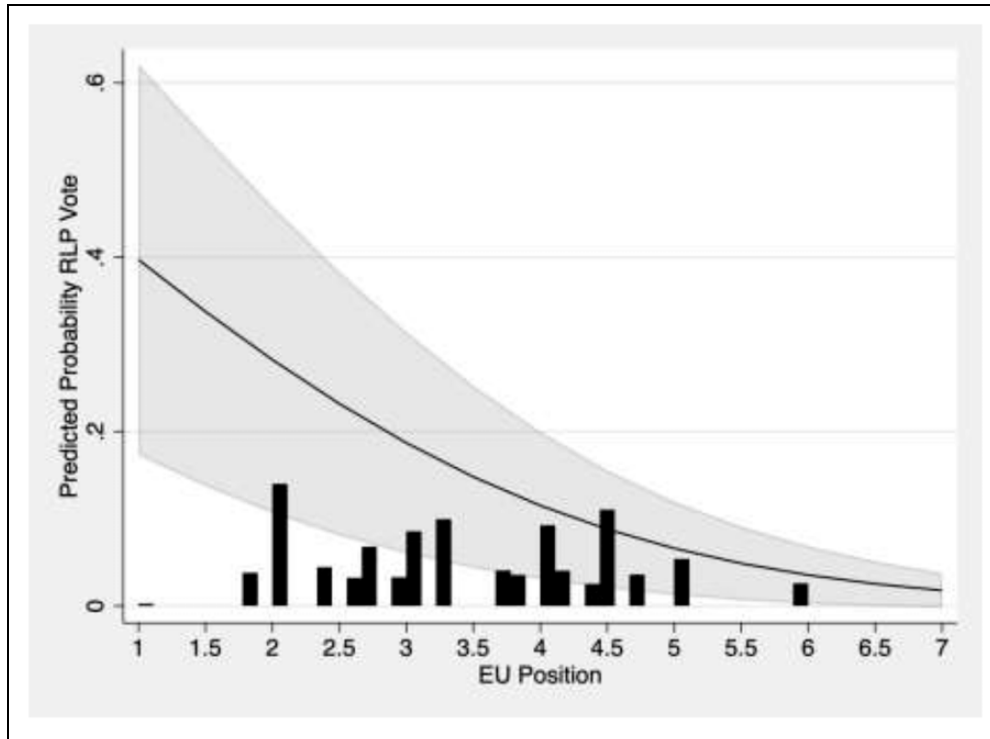
An important control is positions of mainstream parties, in which the main centre-left and centre-right parties of each were selected following Abou-Chadi and Wagner (2020). Their positions were operationalized in the same manner as the independent variable above. The presence of a credible RRP was recorded when their vote share exceeded 3% (Abou-Chadi and Wagner, 2020). Robustness checks included using different country-level controls and excluding overly influential cases (e.g. SYRIZA) from the case selection (Beaudonnet and Gomez, 2017; Gomez et al., 2016; Krause, 2020). Dropping these cases shows that they have not driven the results. Further controls include country-level measurements like migration rate (net migration using OECD), GDP change per capita and unemployment are used.<sup>11</sup>

Age, education and social class have also been used as controls in this research. The class coding is based on the category scheme by Oesch (2006), who codes class into eight separate categories. Class is important to control for as some evidence suggests that the electorate of RLPs has predominantly consisted of working-class votes (Moschonas 2002), while other research found that recently it has become more difficult for RLPs to stay in touch with the working-class voter base (Knapp, 2004). More middle-class voters have recently gained interest in voting for a

RLP, in particular public service white collar workers (González, 2004). Education is divided into three categories; tertiary; upper secondary and non-tertiary; lower secondary or less. Hakhverdian et al. (2013: 18) finds 'people with low or medium levels of educational attainment... [are] significantly more eurosceptical than highly educated Europeans'. Other controls in the results below are individual-level sociodemographic variables, where gender is measured using a binary measurement (male, female) and age is measured using a continuous measure.

## Results

Table 1 includes a build-up of four models of the multilevel logistic regression results on the effect of RLP positions on European integration on voter choice. In all models, a statistically significant effect indicates that a Eurosceptic position will improve the possibility of an individual choosing to vote for a RLP. This result is robust to adding controls in Model 2. From a party competition perspective, voters have a multidimensional choice. They are usually presented with pro-EU parties (such as the centre-right or social democrats) or Eurosceptic parties (such as the radical right). Past research has shown how a two-dimensional analysis of voters and parties changes the party competition, as 'left-authoritarian views are held by many voters across Europe but find no direct correspondence at the party level' (Lefkofridi et al., 2014: 79; Thomassen,



**Figure 1.** Predicted probability of RLP vote along EU positions (seven meaning in favour of EU integration and one fully against EU integration). Based on Table 1 Model 3.

2012). As centre-left parties often find themselves as pro-EU, RLPs can use this space to optimize the votes from the left-authoritarian voters.

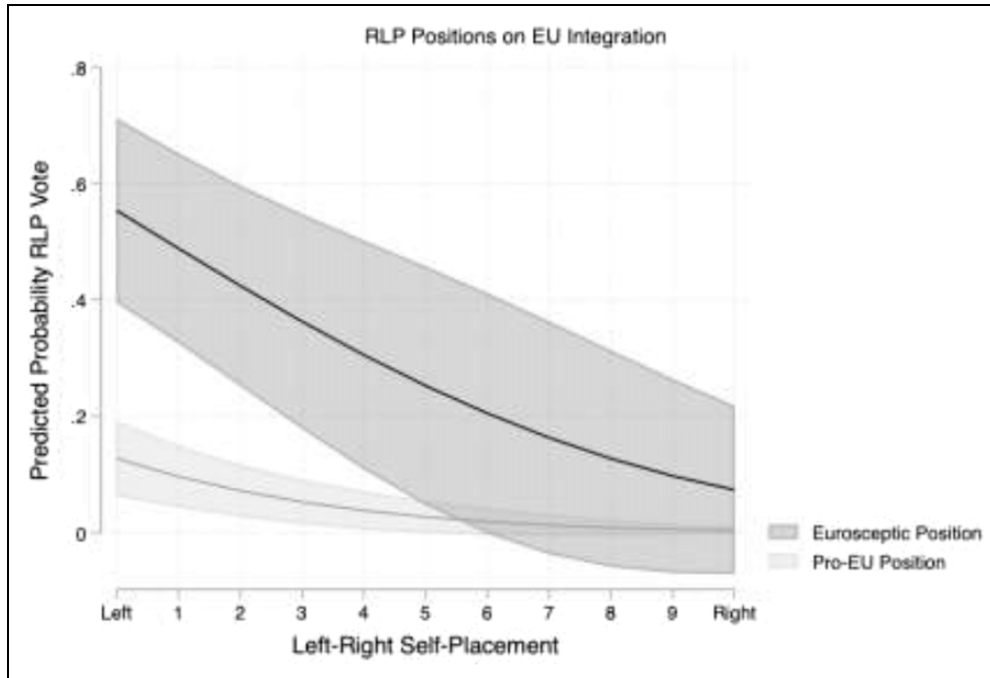
Models 3 and 4 control for competition and the coefficient of RLP EU position is statistically significant and higher in comparison to Models 1 and 2. I included the position of the main centre-left party on the EU, the position of the main centre-right party on the EU (Model 3) and the existence of a RRP in the party system (Model 4). The reasoning behind including the radical right existence in the competition control is that the radical right would include a party that owns the hard Eurosceptic issue. The centre left could be one of the main competitors of RLPs in a given party system and is therefore essential to control for. The centre-right is included for the purpose of accounting for the voter's options, instead of it having a direct impact on the positioning of RLPs.

For the controls, unsurprisingly voters who identify more to the right are less likely to vote for a RLP. This finding will be further analysed later, in Figure 2. Another interesting control is RLP economic position, indicating that a more right-wing economic position is rewarded. This has been shown in the literature, as a more moderate economic position can be helpful for RLPs (Krause, 2020). Table 1 shows no significant class indicators however education shows significant effects in all models. Although I find some effects in Table 1 for younger voters, the

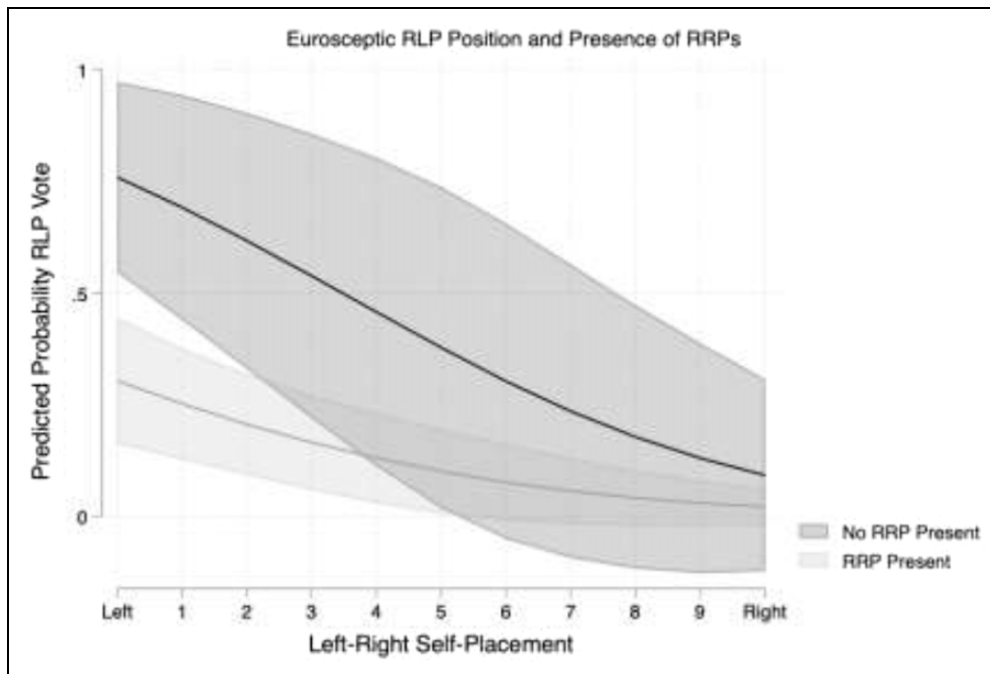
coefficient is relatively small and would most likely not hold up to substantial interpretation.

Figure 1 visualizes a decrease in the probability to vote for a RLP when the position of the RLP becomes more pro-EU integration. Figure 1 is based on the results in Table 1, Model 3 to account for mainstream competition, excluding a control for challenger parties. Challenger parties will be closely examined in Figure 3. The histogram on the x-axis of Figure 1 shows the distribution of the European integration position among RLPs. The distribution is relatively diverse and thus this is an important and interesting finding. However, it is important to note that there is a lack in datapoints on the extremes of this scale.

Table 1 does not supply enough information to support the hypotheses as we are still unsure whether potential voters, who in this research are assumed to be left-wing voters, are responding to Eurosceptic positions of RLPs. Therefore, it is necessary to interact these variables. Table 2 Model 1 shows the two-way interaction between the EU Position of RLPs and left-right self-identification of the voters. Model 2 shows a three-way interaction between the above, EU Position of RLPs and left-right self-identification, and the presence of a RRP in the party system. This research argues that radical right entry into a party system will change the perception of Euroscepticism and voters may find themselves identifying Euroscepticism with the cultural rather than the economic dimension. In



**Figure 2.** Predicted probability of RLP vote interacted with left-right self-placement controlling for mainstream party position on EU integration. Based on Table 2 Model 1.



**Figure 3.** Predicted Probability of Euro-sceptic RLP vote interacted with left-right self-placement and RRP presence, controlling for mainstream party position on EU integration. Based on Table 2 Model 2.

Table 2, the coefficient of the effect of RLP EU Position on vote choice increases in both Models from the previous results displayed in Table 1. The displayed interactions between the EU positions of RLPs and the left-right self-identification are not statistically significant. It is important

to note that when examining this result more closely in Figure 2, this interaction is not consistently insignificant. In the relevant parts for this research, among the left-wing voters, the effect is significant. In a similar vein, there are no consistent significant effects for the three-way

**Table 2.** Regression results with interactions.

	(1)	(2)
RLP EU Position	-1.265*** (0.307)	-1.334*** (0.302)
Left-Right Self-Identification	-0.571*** (0.156)	-0.730*** (0.092)
RLP EU Position × Left-Right Self-Identification	0.002 (0.040)	0.036 (0.028)
Radical Right Presence		-5.376** (2.638)
Radical Right Presence × RLP EU Position		0.777 (0.719)
Radical Right Presence × Left-Right Self-Identification		0.266 (0.203)
Radical Right Presence × RLP EU position × Left-Right Self-Identification		-0.058 (0.065)
RLP Economic Position	1.848** (0.878)	1.563** (0.702)
Mainstream Right EU Position	-0.219 (0.813)	-0.821 (0.987)
Mainstream Left EU Position	1.426 (0.980)	0.353 (0.902)
Migration Rate	-0.078 (0.129)	-0.096 (0.106)
Education: Upper Sec + Non-Tert.	0.379** (0.168)	0.385** (0.167)
Education: Tertiary	0.466** (0.230)	0.473** (0.228)
Small Business Owners	-0.152 (0.155)	-0.149 (0.153)
Technical (semi-) professionals	-0.046 (0.148)	-0.044 (0.147)
Production workers	0.038 (0.211)	0.039 (0.210)
(Associate) Managers	-0.081 (0.211)	-0.080 (0.209)
Clerks	-0.027 (0.162)	-0.022 (0.162)
Socio-Cultural (semi-) professionals	0.189 (0.201)	0.193 (0.200)
Service Workers	0.024 (0.208)	0.027 (0.207)
Age	-0.007** (0.003)	-0.007** (0.003)
Gender	0.007 (0.040)	0.007 (0.042)
Constant	-6.707 (5.297)	5.683 (8.544)
Sd(Country)	0.002 (0.014)	0.000 (0.000)
Sd(Country ~ Study)	7.836 (4.957)	6.591* (3.622)
Obs.	36231	36231

Standard errors are in parenthesis.

\*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ .

interaction in Table 2 Model 2, however the effect is statistically significant among the most left-wing voters. While the interactions are displayed in Table 2, interpreting those in this form is unintuitive and therefore, these results will be visualized.

Figure 2 shows an interaction between left-right self-identification of voters and the position that RLPs choose to take on the EU, from Table 2 Model 1. The way the results are presented in Figure 2 understand the position on EU integration as dichotomous, meaning that a party is either in favour of EU integration or against EU integration.<sup>12</sup> The graph depicts a clear advantage to being Eurosceptic for RLPs. This supports H1 as the predicted probability of

voting for a RLP is higher with a Eurosceptic position than with a pro-EU position. Although the confidence interval of the Eurosceptic strategy is larger than for the pro-EU strategy (due to data availability), the predicted numbers are still showing a significant gap and relationship. Looking at the self-identification voter interaction with RLP EU position, there is a significant difference in the likelihood of very left-wing voters to vote for a RLP depending on their EU position. The further right-wing the scale goes the more strategies converge. This is exactly as expected as the more right-wing people self-identify, the less likely they are to vote RLP overall. While this is most likely the case, in terms of operationalization the self-identification variable serves as a proxy, as the exact meaning that voters place on the left-right dimension is ambiguous. This indirect test is also a good way to avoid endogeneity in the results.

Figure 2 shows that a Eurosceptic position of RLPs is more beneficial in gaining votes from left-wing voters. An alternative interpretation by looking at the slopes is that parties with a pro-EU position are relatively more successful among centre-left voters, whereas ideological extremism is more important for Eurosceptic parties, as they are much more successful among voters with extreme positions. However, looking at the overall probability of voting for a RLP, it is higher for a Eurosceptic position up to left-right identification 5, after which the probability of voting for a RLP, independent of its EU position, is unlikely.

So far, the research has shown that RLPs will be more successful, when choosing a Eurosceptic position. Although the figure above includes the positions on EU integration of mainstream parties, it does not show all the possible competition that RLPs could face on Euroscepticism. Figure 3 shows a three-way interaction between RLP EU position, left-right self-placement, and the presence of RRP in a party system. For ease of visualization, the position of RLPs on EU integration has been held constant at a Eurosceptic position. Figure 3 supports H2. This interaction shows the predicted probability of voting for a RLP with Eurosceptic position, when there is a RRP present or not. Overall, Figure 3 shows that the more left-wing voters self-identify, the more likely they are to vote for a RLP, irrespective of the presence of a RRP. The larger confidence interval in the nonexistence of RRP is due to data availability.

The predicted probability of voting for a Eurosceptic RLP is higher when there is no RRP in the party system.<sup>13</sup> This is only the case though when the voter is between 0 and 2 on the left-right self-placement scale. Similarly to Figure 2, a convergence in the effect towards the right end of the self-identification spectrum can be noted, as these voters are less likely to support RLPs irrespective of the factors analysed in this research. Figure 3 displays this more clearly than in Figure 2, as a Eurosceptic positioning overall appeals to voters who identify between 0 and 4 on the left-right self-placement scale.



This is overall an important finding. Although it would be beneficial for RLPs to be Eurosceptic, there is a caveat to this finding. In most countries today, RRP are present in the party system. Therefore, the findings in Figure 3 are important in order to understand the full picture. This means, that although Figure 2 shows that a Eurosceptic position is rewarded by voters, RLPs are not fully in charge of their election results, as this is constrained when a RRP is present in the party system. This constrain may come from the general issue ownership and emphasis of RRP over Euroscepticism, which makes them appear more competent on the issue, or it could simultaneously come from cultural Eurosceptics shifting their vote from RLPs to RRP, due to the nature of their Euroscepticism. This result also shows that the lack of cultural shift is not the reason why RLPs are not as successful as their radical right counterparts.

## Conclusion

As the EU has become a more salient and polarizing issue in Western European party systems, many parties need to carefully consider where they stand on EU integration. Through the rise of RRP, many left parties have been losing voters to the right (Jylhä et al., 2019). Whether or not mainstream left parties can gain these voters back through a Eurosceptic or cultural right positioning has been addressed in the discipline (Abou-Chadi and Wagner, 2020), however we know very little about the possibility of RLPs changing their position to maximize their votes from the economic left and cultural right. There is a substantial number of voters who are on the authoritarian left spectrum that are not represented by political parties (Hillen and Steiner 2020). In terms of ideology, RLPs are more flexible than their centrist competition to change their positions on non-economic issues like European integration as shown through the noticeable variance in the existing positions of RLPs in Western Europe; can a Eurosceptic position be useful in order to maximize the votes for RLPs?

The results show that RLPs can benefit from a Eurosceptic position. This on its own is an important finding. RLPs are mostly associated with their clear position on pro-redistribution economic preferences, yet this shows that non-economic positions also matter to their voters. RLPs are better off positioning themselves Eurosceptic than pro-EU – the difference in preferences on this issue becomes clearer the more left-wing voters are. As we can assume that most RLP voters have a left-wing economic preference, this finding is important to show that there is a voter base preference on where RLPs stand on EU integration.

Yet, if a Eurosceptic party family enters a party system, is this finding stable? When RRP enter a party system, they are typically associated with Eurosceptic and nationalist ideology. Thus, even if RLPs are Eurosceptic, when a more credible or extreme Eurosceptic party enters the party

system, RLPs benefit from a Eurosceptic position will be constrained. This is an important finding as it clarifies the question of whether RLPs can accommodate to RRP through taking their positions. Some of the reasons for this dynamic may be found might be the ownership of RRP on Euroscepticism or the priorities of voters on cultural Euroscepticism. This means that from a voter's perspective, a voter may have a cultural Eurosceptic preference but will vote for a RLP if they supply an economic Eurosceptic position. With the presence of a cultural Eurosceptic party, this voter will be likely to no longer vote for a Eurosceptic RLP. Overall, this is significant for all parties, not just RLPs, as this study adds to the growing literature of position shifts of challenger parties and shows that non-economic issues are important for voters to decide their electoral choices.

From here, future research should investigate the voter's preferences and party positions on cultural or economic Euroscepticism and how this affects vote choice. Future research should also consider understanding vote choices of non-voters, as those may be more actively mobilized through change in non-economic positions by RLPs. As previously found in the literature, those with authoritarian left-wing preferences are less satisfied with democracy (Hillen and Steiner 2020) and thus, may be less likely to participate in elections. If RLPs fill this demand, does the increase vote maximizing come from mobilization of non-voters? This would be a very interesting future research path.

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## Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

## Notes

1. See Table A1.
2. Yet, while those with a lower income tend to be more likely to support RLPs; the same does not apply on the aggregate level,

- meaning when a country is going through economic hardship, radical left success becomes less likely (Visser et al., 2014).
3. Electoral success of Eurosceptic parties encourages mainstream parties to move towards anti-EU positions; Eurosceptic RLPs are able to cause positional adjustment among centre-left parties (Meijers, 2017).
  4. This is in opposition to 'hard' Euroscepticism, which describes usually RRP 'who object in principle to the idea of any European economic or political integration' (Taggart and Szczerbak, 2004: 3).
  5. 'All tests of spatial models in comparative politics rely on the ability to estimate party positions', as there is no direct way of knowing a party's position (Slapin and Proksch, 2008: 705).
  6. See Appendix for robustness check using manifesto data.
  7. Irish Sinn Fein was not included as it is also commonly identified as a nationalist party.
  8. To account for this discrepancy of the two datasets, I include a control in the Appendix.
  9. This is a possible limitation in the case selection as this restricts the data of Greece to ESS rounds 1, 2, 4 and 5. While in 2010, SYRIZA was not major government party, this is a conservative case selection to avoid data being driven by high election results in subsequent years.
  10. A list of RLPs can be found in the Appendix.
  11. See Appendix for elaboration on country-level controls (A3 and A4).
  12. As this is a seven-point scale, this was operationalized by using the second most extreme position on pro-EU and anti-EU. The results are robust to other operationalizations of this dichotomization.
  13. In line with the theory, pro-EU positions cause no difference on RRP presence (see A5).

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