Not that different after all: radical right parties and voters in Western Europe

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“Immigration [...] has become both a catch-all explanation for unacceptable social change and a symbol of the failure of the liberal elite to understand the views of voters.”

European Populism and Winning the Immigration Debate

Edited by Clara Sandelind
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Chapter 4

Not that different after all: radical right parties and voters in Western Europe

Wouter van der Brug, Meindert Fennema, Sjoerdje van Heerden and Sarah de Lange

University of Amsterdam

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Since the 1980s parties have emerged in various West-European countries that have been labelled either ‘anti-immigration parties’, ‘extreme right parties’, ‘far right parties’, or ‘populist radical right parties’. For well-known historical reasons the rise of these parties has created the fear of a right-wing backlash and has therefore often evoked bitter reactions from grass root organizations, the political establishment, as well as the state. In Belgium established parties have made their antipathy towards anti-immigration parties most explicit by forming a ‘cordon sanitaire’, that is, by signing a formal agreement that they will not collaborate with anti-immigrant parties in any arena (e.g. electoral, executive or legislative) or at any level (local, national, or regional). Dutch, French and German anti-immigration parties (e.g., the Centrum Democraten, the Front National, and the Republika-ner) have also been treated as political lepers by the establishment, even though these parties are not subject to a formal cordon sanitaire. Such strategies of exclusion are often justified by claims that the anti-immigration parties in question are anathema to modern pluralistic democracies. On the same grounds established politicians, but also public figures, mainstream journalists and commentators, often advise voters not to support these so-called dangerous political outcasts.

In this chapter we demonstrate that these justifications are mostly unfounded and that the accompanying advise is counterproductive. Drawing on existing research of ourselves and others, we show, for example, that a vast majority of anti-immigration parties are not anti-democratic in the strict sense and that voters that support these parties are in many ways similar to established party voters. Moreover, we reveal that, for a variety of reasons, exclusionary strategies, are unlikely to prove effective and are also, by and large, unnecessary.

This chapter is organized as follows. First, we will discuss different conceptualisations of the parties under study. Second, we will discuss their support base, and examine in which respects these
parties’ voters are different from or similar to supporters of established parties. Third, we will discuss research on how these parties behave, especially once they assume office. Fourth, we will discuss the literature on the consequences of different responses to the rise of anti-immigration parties. Finally, we will discuss the practical implications of this research.

Which parties are we talking about?

Anti-immigration parties, such as the British National Party (BNP), the Dutch Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV), French Front National (FN), or the Norwegian Fremskrittspartiet (FrP) have contested elections since the 1970s, albeit with varying success. The most important ideological feature shared by these parties, irrespective of their lines of descent is their resentment against immigrants and the immigration policies enacted by European governments. They typically campaign, for instance, for a reduction in the inward flow of immigrants – especially from outside Western Europe – and for integration programmes that have strict requirements and are compulsory. Within the group of anti-immigration parties, a distinction can be made between different groups of parties: extreme right parties, radical right parties with roots in the ultra-nationalist milieu, and radical right parties without ties to neo-Nazi, neo-fascist or extreme right movements.

The first group of parties consists of, amongst others, the German Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD), the Greek Laïkós Sýndesmos - Chrysí Avgí or Golden Dawn, and the Hungarian Jobbík Magyarországt Mozgalom (Jobbik). These parties are the direct or indirect descendants from pre-war fascist movements and explicitly refer to neo-fascist or neo-Nazi symbols and ideas. Therefore, anti-communist, anti-democratic, anti-Semitic, and racists elements can be recognized in their ideology. Moreover, they have a tendency to glorify violence, or, as in the case of Golden Dawn, are actively involved in violent and
criminal acts. However, it should be noted that few extreme right or neo-fascist parties compete in elections in Europe and that they tend to be relatively unsuccessful.¹

A second group of parties also had ties to neo-fascists groupusacules when they were founded, but have transformed into radical right parties in the 1980s and 1990s. Prominent members of this group are the Belgian Vlaams Blok (VB), the Dutch Centrumapartij (CP) and CentrumDemocraaten (CD), and the French Front National (FN). More recently elected anti-immigration parties, such as the Swedish Sverigedemokraterna (SD), also have roots in the neo-Nazi or neo-fascist milieu. However, in recent years these parties have changed their discourse, avoiding any references to neo-Nazi or neo-fascist ideas and cutting ties with the extra-parliamentary extreme right. Instead, they have adopted an ideology that combines nativism with populism.

A third group of parties is ideologically very similar to the second group, but unlike the second group, they are not the offspring of neo-fascist clubs and cliques. The Austrian Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ), for example, developed from the Verband der Unabhängigen (VdU), which was founded in 1949 by two liberal journalists who wanted to stay clear of the socialist and Catholic ’Lager’. Other anti-immigration parties, like the Danish and Norwegian Progress Parties, the Italian Lega Nord (LN) and the short-lived Swedish Ny Demokarati (ND) and Dutch Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF), have also been created by leaders who had no links whatsoever to fascist groups. In recent years, parties such as the Dutch Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV), the Finnish Perussuomalaiset (PS) or the Swiss Schweizerische Volkspartei (SVP), have joined this group, by transforming from mainstream to radical right parties. The PS and SVP, for example, were originally founded as agrarian parties, while the PVV was established by a former member of parliament of the Dutch liberal Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD). Given that the ideology does not prominently feature anti-democracy, anti-Semitism, or classic racism², it would be misleading to call these parties extreme right.
While we can thus distinguish three groups of anti-immigration parties, the main distinction is between the first group (which we may call extreme right) and the second and third group (which we may call radical right). The second and third group have a different historical heritage, but their current political programs are largely identical. One key element that all of these radical right parties share is populism, in addition to the already discussed nativism. The most general characteristic of populist parties is that they consider the political establishment to be technically incompetent and morally corrupt. Populist parties find ‘something rotten in the state’. They assume that the common man is basically good and his opinions are always sound, whereas the political elite is — by its very nature — selfish and dishonest. Members of the elite hide their selfish interests behind a veil of democratic and technocratic rhetoric. Populist parties see a fundamental split between what politicians say and what they do. Subsequently, conspiracy theories frequently surface in populist discourse.

Populists claim to solve the social problems they see — whether it is public safety, immigration or medical care for the elderly — by introducing more direct forms of democracy. The populist politician has a conception of democracy that emphasises majority rule and direct democracy. Typical elements of liberal democracies, most notably individual rights and freedoms as well as minority rights, are trumped by majority rule. Such populist claims for more democracy are part and parcel of the democratic tradition that has always hovered between the constitutional protection of minority rights and untrammelled majority rule. So, populist parties are essentially democratic, because they accept the basic rule that decisions have to be taken by parliamentary majorities. However, they often have an uneasy relationship with the constitutional pillar of liberal democracies, which are institutionalized to protect individual citizens from majority decisions.

In sum, we may distinguish two groups of anti-immigration parties. The first group consists of radical right parties, which are generally
populist, and which accept the basic norms of parliamentary democracy. The second group consists of extreme right parties, which do not accept parliamentary democracy as the most appropriate form of governance. Most of the discussion below focuses on the first group and in these instances we will refer to radical right parties. When we speak of anti-immigration parties, we refer to both groups (extreme and radical right parties).

What determines support for these parties?

In the 1980s and early 1990s much research on anti-immigration parties concentrated on the political biographies of their leaders, in an attempt to find out whether or not they had links with neo-fascist groups. Other studies examined whether these parties promoted ethnic violence or used racist propaganda in their electoral campaigns. Most of these early studies were case studies, which resulted in monographs about individual anti-immigration parties (examples are Bakkes and Jesse (1990), Furlong (1992), Ignazi (1989), Mayer and Perrineau (1989), Luther (1988) and Van Donselaar and Van Praag (1983). In the early 1990s other scholars began to conduct comparative research on these parties. These comparative studies were primarily conducted by political scientists and sociologists, such as Meindert Fennema, Cas Mudde, Hans-Georg Betz and Piero Ignazi.

It was, however, not until the publication of Herbert Kitschelt’s *The Radical Right in Western Europe* (1995) that mainstream political science theories were employed to explain support for anti-immigration parties. Since then, the research on support for anti-immigration parties has flourished. In a very general sense, four models (not mutually exclusive) have been proposed to explain the support for these parties: socio-structural models, protest vote models, charismatic leadership models and policy voting models. We will discuss each of these in turn.
Socio-structural models

Until the late 1990s, socio-structural models inspired most research on anti-immigration parties. According to these models, the rise of anti-immigration parties should be seen as a backlash response to modernization. The crux of socio-structural explanations is that support for anti-immigration parties comes from citizens who feel threatened by rapid changes in post-industrial societies. Manual workers with low education tend to lose their jobs as a result of changes in modes of production. Moreover, they are competing with immigrant groups for scarce resources such as jobs and houses. These ‘losers of modernity’ feel threatened by rapid social change and tend to support anti-immigration parties out of generalized feelings of discontent. However, the results of much research shows that reality is more complex, or more nuanced, than implied by this modernization perspective.

Analyses of the socio-demographic profiles of supporters of anti-immigration parties indicate that there is indeed an overrepresentation of men, manual workers with low education and an underrepresentation of highly educated professionals, particularly from the public sector. Moreover, in some countries there is an underrepresentation of religious people among voters for anti-immigration parties. Yet, research from the late 1990s and early 2000s showed that all of these socio-demographic characteristics combined explain only seven percent of the differences in preferences for anti-immigration parties. In other words, the differences within social groups are much larger than the differences between them.

At the aggregate level, differences in socio-structural conditions do not explain the differences in support for anti-immigration parties very well either. Countries with very similar socio-structural conditions like Sweden and Denmark may differ enormously in the success of anti-immigration parties. VB, one of the most successful anti-immigration parties, surged in Flanders, which is one of Europe’s most pros-
perous areas. In Wallonia, which is known for its high unemployment, due to the fact that old industries relocated or went bankrupt, the anti-immigration party Front National belge (FNb) has had very limited support. Various studies have tried to link support for anti-immigration parties to economic conditions or to the presence of immigrants, but the results of those studies have been quite inconsistent and most studies did not show a statistically significant relationship.

While socio-structural models do not have much predictive power for explaining support for anti-immigration parties, there seems to be renewed interest in this model. In a volume edited by Jens Rydgren (2012), several scholars have looked at the class basis of support for anti-immigration parties, and at the implications of the rise of these parties for social democracy. Much of this research is inspired by the idea that the liberalization of economic markets have generated new inequalities between winners and losers of globalization. The losers are the low educated manual workers who therefore would be inclined to support parties that promote strict rules on immigration and who are against further European unification. The contributions to Rydgren’s volume mainly confirm that highly educated citizens are strongly underrepresented among the supporters for anti-immigration parties. Van der Brug et al. show that socio-structural and demographic variables explain a larger proportion of the variance in support for anti-immigration parties in a 2009 data set than in older data sets (from 1999 and 2004). So, these kinds of parties are now attracting voters more exclusively from specific layers of society than they did in the past. Having said that, they also conclude that the predictive power of these socio-structural models is still weak. So, the fact that lower educated citizens are on average more likely to support anti-immigration parties than people with a university degree, tells us very little about individuals. Most people with little education do not support anti-immigration parties, while some highly educated people do.
Political discontent

Some contributions to the literature have looked at the role of political discontent as drivers of support for anti-immigration parties. Since the vote for radical parties is related to political discontent, it has sometimes been concluded that voters for these parties are protest voters. In some of our research we have tested the protest-vote model. In line with Van der Eijk et al. we conceptualised protest voting as a rational, goal directed activity, with the prime motive to show discontent with ‘the’ political elite. Since anti-immigration parties are treated as outcasts by a large part of the elites in their countries, votes for these parties frighten or shock these elites, which is exactly what the protest voter wants to accomplish. So, the concept of a protest vote consists of two elements. The first element that distinguishes protest votes from other types of votes is that discontent with politics (reflected in political cynicism, or lack of political trust) should have a strong effect on support for an anti-immigration party. That is to say, that voters with low levels of political trust and high levels of political cynicism are more inclined to vote for anti-immigration parties, than voters with high levels of political trust and low levels of political cynicism. The second element is, in the words of Lubbers and Scheepers that »political attitudes ... are expected to be of minor importance«. So, protest voters do not support a party for substantive reasons, such as its policy proposals and ideological position, but rather to show their general discontent with the political establishment.

There are two causal mechanisms that might theoretically explain the relationship between support for anti-immigration parties and political discontent: expressing discontent and fuelling discontent. The protest vote model assumes that voters support anti-immigration parties in order to express their feelings of discontent. Yet, as argued by Van der Brug and by Rooduijn et al. (forthcoming), the causal effect can also run in the opposite direction. One of the messages of anti-immigration parties is that the elite in their countries is either corrupt or incompetent and has lost contact with the concerns of ordinary citizens. To the
extent that supporters of these parties are influenced by these messages, voters for anti-immigration parties might become more discontented as a consequence. Van der Brug and by Rooduijn et al. (forthcoming) have demonstrated that anti-immigration parties do indeed fuel discontent among their voters. So, the empirical evidence underlying the first element of the protest vote model is weak at best.

The second element was tested by Van der Brug et al. and Van der Brug and Fennema. These studies showed that policy preferences and ideological positions are the best predictors of support for the more successful radical right parties. Voters are attracted by these parties because of their programs, just as is the case for other parties. This does not rule out the possibility that some voters for anti-immigration parties, especially those who support small extreme right parties, do so mainly to express discontent with politics in general, but this explains the voting behaviour of a small group of voters. The overwhelming majority of voters who support radical right parties do so because they agree with its political program. Thus, votes for these parties cannot be considered protest votes, because the second element of the protest vote model (protest voters do not support a party for substantive reasons) does not apply.

Characteristics of the parties and their leaders
There is some limited support for the notion that the typical low educated ‘angry white man’ is the driver of support for these parties. So, if these structural characteristics of voters do not explain support for anti-immigration parties, characteristics of the parties themselves and their leaders might explain it? In this line of reasoning, some have argued that charismatic leadership would be very important for the success of anti-immigration parties. Yet, the evidence underlying this claim is often quite sketchy and there is some tautological reasoning, because the perception of charisma is inherently related to success. An unpopular politician will never be called charismatic.

Van der Brug and Mughan designed an empirical test of the claim
that the success of anti-immigration parties depends in particular upon the charisma of the party leader. Following Weber, they defined charisma as an unusually strong bond between party leaders and their supporters. So, they argued that if support for anti-immigration parties would depend particularly upon the charisma of the leader, there ought to be exceptionally strong effects from evaluations of the leader onto support for the party. Yet, they found that leadership effects are just as important for anti-immigration parties as they are for other parties. So, while all parties may well benefit from having leaders who are convincing in the media and in public debates, there is nothing exceptional that distinguishes anti-immigration parties from other parties in this respect.

Carter and Golder have pointed out that there is an enormous difference among anti-immigration parties in their electoral success, which is mainly the result of their ideological profile. Extreme right and neo-fascist parties tend to be small and electorally unsuccessful, while radical right parties can be quite successful. The main difference seems to lie in their acceptance of the core principles of parliamentary democracy. Parties that are perceived by the voter as posing a threat to democracy are unlikely to become successful. We want to stress here that it is the perception of potential supporters of these kinds of parties that matters. Parties like the FN, the FPÖ, VB and the PVV are seen by many mainstream politicians and by many left-wing voters as a threat to democracy. Yet, this does not hurt these radical right parties electorally as long as many voters on the right side of the spectrum do not share this image.

**Policy voting**

It appears that protest voting and charismatic leadership do not perform well in explaining support for radical right parties. Socio-structural models explain only 13 per cent of the variance in support for these parties. So, what motivates people to support them? The answer is: the substance of politics, that is policy preferences. Voters for radical right parties are motivated by the same substantive and pragmatic conside-
rations that motivate supporters for established mainstream parties. They vote for these parties because they are ideologically related (in left/right terms) or because they agree with them on their core issues.

Left/right distances are the most important driver of support for all sorts of parties, including anti-immigration parties. Yet, this does not mean that voters support these parties for their positions on socio-economic issues only. Rather, socio-cultural issues have become increasingly integrated in the left/right dimension as well. As for the issue of immigration, the left/right divide is quite straightforward: left wing parties advocate lenient immigration policies, while right wing parties promote stricter policies. Considering the issue of integration, the socio-economic left/right dimension is illustrated by left wing parties that stress the role of the government in elevating the socio-economic status of immigrants, opposed to right wing parties that emphasize the immigrant’s own responsibility to acquire a stable socio-economic position. On the socio-cultural left/right dimension, left wing parties advocate a multiculturalist society in which immigrants are able to keep their cultural identity, while right wing parties favour a monoculturalism where immigrant have to adapt to the culture of the host society. This implies that mainstream right-wing parties, rather than social democratic parties, are the main competitors of anti-immigration parties. After all, they are closest to anti-immigration parties on the left/right divide. Consequently, the potential level of support for anti-immigration parties depends to a large degree upon the policy positions of their main opponent on the right. If the main competitor takes a firm stand on immigration, there is less room for anti-immigration parties than if this party promotes an open border policy.

**Do anti-immigration parties behave like other parties?**

Although anti-immigration parties’ ideology clearly differs from that of established parties, their strategic motivations and behaviour closely resemble those of Christian-democratic, conservative, liberal and
social-democratic parties. The existing research that we present in this part of the chapter focuses primarily on the radical right, as little is known about the behaviour of the few extreme right parties that have entered Western European parliaments. This research shows that in many ways radical right parties are ‘normal parties’, in the same way their voters are ‘normal voters’. The parties do not simply shout from the sidelines, nor do they refuse to get their hands dirty in the executive or the legislative. Instead, they seek to realize the same party goals as established parties and go about achieving these in similar ways. Moreover, radical right parties are in many respects treated as ‘normal parties’ by established parties, because their approach to the radical right is primarily guided by strategic considerations (e.g. winning back electoral support and gaining office) and far less by normative considerations.28

Radical right parties’ goals and behaviour
Radical right parties have the same objectives as other parties: they aim to control cabinet portfolios, influence policy-making, and maximize their share of votes (cf. Müller and Strøm 1999). They formulate policy programmes, for example, to attract followers, whose support can be converted into parliamentary seats. Having a parliamentary presence enables the parties to directly or indirectly influence policy-making, which they greatly desire despite often being perceived as protest parties (De Lange 2008). However, like established parties, radical right parties are not always able to maximize office, policy and votes at the same time. Important trade-offs exist between these goals, because strategies that serve to maximize one goal hamper the maximization of others. Government participation, for example, provides parties with cabinet portfolios and direct influence on policy-making, but it is likely to lead to electoral losses in subsequent elections. After all, governing parties are often responsible for unpopular reforms and are therefore likely to be punished by voters. Although it has every so often been assu-
med that those trade-offs are more pronounced for radical right parties than for established parties, existing studies show the opposite (De Lange 2008).  

**Radical right parties in office**

The executive arena is an area in which the strategic behaviour of radical right parties and the strategic responses of established parties can be clearly observed. Despite their success at the polls, radical right parties have long been kept out of public office. In the 1980s and early 1990s, both established parties of the left and the right refused to ally with these parties. However, since the mid-1990s established parties of the right have invited these parties into national governments in a number of countries (see Table 1), for strategic reasons that will be outlined below. In Italy in 1994, for example, Silvio Berlusconi forged a coalition of the *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN), *Forza Italia* (FI) and the LN. Although initially short-lived, the coalition resigned the same year, it resumed office in 2001 and most recently in 2008. Austria was the second country to have a government in which a radical right party participated. In 2000 the Austrian *Österreichische Volkspartei* (ÖVP) formed a government with Jorg Haider’s FPÖ after lengthy coalition negotiations with the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs* (SPÖ) broke down. Three years later ÖVP-leader Wolfgang Schüssel decided to reform his coalition with the FPÖ and its successor the *Bündnis Zukunft Österreich* (BZÖ), despite the poor electoral showing of the latter party in the 2002 elections. In 2002 the LPF entered the Dutch parliament with an impressive 17 per cent of the popular vote and was immediately invited into a government alliance by Jan Peter Balkenende, leader of the *Christen Democratisch Appèl* (CDA). The SVP had been represented in Swiss Federal Council for many years, but in 2003 the radical wing of the party got the upper hand in the council when its leader Christoph Blocher was elected to it. Hence, most studies consider it to be a radical right party with government experience since this year. Most recently, the Norwegian FrP assumed office after
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Months in office</th>
<th>Incumbency result</th>
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<td>Austria</td>
<td>Schüssel I</td>
<td>ÖVP</td>
<td>FPÖ</td>
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<td>37</td>
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<td>Schüssel II</td>
<td>ÖVP</td>
<td>BZÖ/FPÖ</td>
<td>2003–2006</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>+4.1% / +1.0%</td>
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<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Rasmussen I</td>
<td>V, KF</td>
<td>DF*</td>
<td>2001–2005</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>+0.9%</td>
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<td>Rasmussen II</td>
<td>V, KF</td>
<td>DF*</td>
<td>2005–2007</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>+0.6%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Rasmussen III</td>
<td>V, KF</td>
<td>DF*</td>
<td>2007–2011</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>-1.6%</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
<td>Berlusconi I</td>
<td>FI, AN, CCD-UDC</td>
<td>LN</td>
<td>1994**</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Berlusconi II+III</td>
<td>FI, AN, CCD-UDC</td>
<td>LN</td>
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<td>59</td>
<td>+0.7%</td>
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<td>PdL-MpA</td>
<td>LN</td>
<td>2008–2011**</td>
<td>42</td>
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<td>Rutte I</td>
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<td>PVV*</td>
<td>2010–2012**</td>
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<td>Norway</td>
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<td>2013–</td>
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<td>Switzerland</td>
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<td>2003–2007</td>
<td>48</td>
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<td>FDP, CVP, SP</td>
<td>SVP</td>
<td></td>
<td>2011–</td>
<td>-</td>
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* Anti-immigration acts as support party to minority government
** Years include care take period
the 2013 elections, in a government led by the conservative Høyre (H).

Although the BZÖ, FPÖ, FrP, LN, LPF, and SVP are the only radical right parties that have held cabinet portfolios, other parties have acted as support parties to right-wing minority governments. Between 2001 and 2011 Denmark was governed by minority coalition consisting of the conservative Det Konservative Folkeparti (KF) and liberal Venstre (V), which survived by the grace of the support of the Dansk Folkeparti (DF). In the Netherlands, a country without a tradition of minority governance, the PVV concluded a gedoogakkoord (support agreement) with the Dutch Christian-democratic CDA and the liberal VVD in 2010. However, the government resigned a mere two years later after the PVV withdrew its support.

As the overview highlights, especially established parties of the right (e.g. Christian-democratic, conservative and liberal parties) have resorted to governing with radical right parties. In Western Europe, coalitions including on the one hand radical right parties, and on the other green, social-democratic or social-liberal parties have not (yet) been constructed, at least not at the national level. However, in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as at the regional and the local level, these alliances are not uncommon. Examples include the Carinthian coalition between FPÖ and SPÖ that was formed in 2004 and the Fico government in Slovakia, which included both the radical right Slovenská národná strana (SNS) and the social-democratic Sociálna demokracia (Smer).

Government participation in coalitions led by established parties of the right is an attractive possibility for the radical right. Radical right parties on the one hand and Christian-democratic, conservative and liberal parties on the other hand, have partially overlapping orientations, but prioritise different issues. This makes it possible to reach coalition agreements in which every party can implement preferred policies on its core issues. Radical right parties, for example, attribute high levels of salience to immigration and integration issues, while liberal parties are keen on economic reform. These differences make it possible for these
parties to exchange favours for mutual gain, that is to negotiate on a *quid pro quo* basis where advantages are granted in return for something. When this bargaining strategy is used, parties are willing to give each other free reign in policy domains that are not central to their party platforms. This trading of influence over certain policy domains facilitates the conclusion of a coalition agreement. Hence, the way in which radical right parties negotiate about coalition agreements with established parties differs from traditional ways of forming coalitions, which is based on compromising, meeting in the middle, and splitting the difference. As a result, coalition agreements between radical right parties and established parties of the right yield substantial policy pay-offs for all involved parties.\(^{31}\)

Despite this rationale for radical right parties’ government participation, it is often believed that they are either unwilling or unable to take up responsibility in the executive. However, reality proves otherwise. First of all, when invited to participate in government coalitions by Christian-democratic, conservative or liberal parties, radical parties are generally inclined to accept this invitation for the strategic motivations already mentioned. They negotiate about the contents of coalition agreements, trying to get concessions on issues that are important in their programmes, and make deliberate decisions to fill junior ministerial and ministerial portfolios, such as the Ministry of Interior Affairs or the Ministry of Justice, which preside over asylum, immigration and integration policies.\(^{32}\) Thus, contrary to popular belief, radical right parties are often willing to take up government responsibility when asked to do so.

Secondly, once they are in office, radical right parties seek to reform policies in key areas, such as immigration and integration policies. Although not all radical right parties in office have had equal levels of influence on policy output, especially the BZÖ, the DF, the FPÖ and the SVP have managed to tighten legislation that impacts upon immigrants’ rights.\(^{33}\) In this respect, the parties are capable government partners. At the same time it should be noted that a number of right-wing govern-
ments that have not included radical right parties have made similar adjustments to immigration and integration legislation, suggesting that these parties are not instrumental to policy reform.

Thirdly, coalition governments including radical right parties are not less stable than other kinds of coalitions. The governments that include these parties have an average tenure that is not significantly shorter than that of other types of government (see Table 1). The Balkenende I and Berlusconi I governments were, by comparative standards, rather short-lived (10 and 8 months respectively) and in both cases the radical right party caused upheaval in the governing coalition and was forced to resign (Netherlands) or quit voluntarily (Italy). The Rutte I cabinet lasted a little longer (25 months), but had to resign because the PVV refused to support a package of budget cuts. However, it should be noted that all governments in the Netherlands, also those not including radical right parties, that have assumed office in the past decade have been rather short-lived. Other governments that included radical right parties have been rather stable and have (come close to) finishing their terms. On average governments including or supported by radical right parties have governed for 37 months, which is considerably more than the 18 months the average post-war government in Western Europe lasts.

Fourthly, radical right parties have experienced both positive and negative incumbency effects (the effect on party support as a consequence of their government participation) (see Table 1). On average the incumbency effect has been negative, but a number of parties have gained support among voters in post-incumbency elections. For the FPÖ and the LPF the first elections after their term in office proved disastrous. The FPÖ lost 16.9 per cent of the voters in the 2003 elections, while the LPF was abandoned by 11.3 per cent of the voters in the same year. In other cases the losses were considerably smaller or minimal gains were made. When we compare the results of radical right parties to those of other parties, the former do not appear to have fared badly.
They have done better than radical left parties, a group in which no party managed to win votes after their government participation. Moreover, the average electoral punishment they have experienced is comparable to that endured by the green parties that have been in office.

Thus, it can be concluded that radical right parties are in many respects normal parties, or at least comparable to established parties. Of course, this does not mean they do not differ in any way in terms of strategy and behaviour from their established counterparts. Radical right parties have been known »to keep one foot in and one foot out of government« and maintain their populist profile even when taking up responsibility in the executive. In most cases, they no longer focus on criticising the establishment as a whole, but attack first and foremost left-wing parties (greens and social-democrats) and progressive parties (social-liberals). The PVV, for example, accuses Dutch left-wing parties *GroenLinks* (GL) and *Partij van de Arbeid* (PvdA) of promoting ‘left-wing hobbies’ and being part of a ‘left-wing church’ to which also Dutch mainstream media outlets and opinion leaders belong. Moreover, most governing radical right parties shift their criticism to other institutions and actors, such as the European Union, the judiciary, and the media, which are accused of preventing them from executing their policy reforms.

**How do established parties respond?**

Before we elaborate on the consequences of different responses to anti-immigration parties, we briefly discuss the different strategies available for established parties to combat these parties.

**Different responses to anti-immigration parties**

Established parties can choose between two strategies to respond to anti-immigration parties: to engage or disengage. By disengaging from anti-immigration parties, established parties deprive these parties
from any sense of legitimacy. To this end, established parties can either ignore or isolate anti-immigration parties. By ignoring anti-immigration parties, established parties hope to accomplish that these anti-immigration parties will quickly wither and fade due to a lack of attention and/or recognition. Isolation is achieved by way of legal or political means, such as raising the electoral threshold, outlawing the party, or forming blocking coalitions. Both strategies of disengagement – ignore and isolate – are so-called ‘clean-hands’ strategies; these strategies are politically correct and adhere to the advice of most anti-racism groups.42

Established parties can also pursue a strategy of engagement. One way of engaging with the anti-immigration party is to (partially) adopt their policy positions. Another way of engaging with anti-immigration parties is formal collaboration. This latter strategy of collaboration can occur in three domains: the legislative, executive, and electoral domain. Legislative collaboration entails that, from time to time, established parties vote together with anti-immigration parties on a particular piece of legislation. Executive collaboration takes the partnership one step further, and entails that established parties agree to form a governing coalition with the anti-immigration party. The highest order of collaboration is the formation of a formal coalition agreement between an anti-immigration party and one or more established parties, to contest elections jointly.43 Of course, the two strategies of engaging and disengaging may to some extent be combined. Established parties may partially adopt the policy positions of an anti-immigration party, while at the same time challenging its legitimacy.

All strategies entail possible drawbacks for the established party. Ignoring the anti-immigration party, for example, can seem as a renunciation of democratic duties. Also, while co-optation of policy positions might win back voters, in turn, the party now risks losing its own core constituents. And although collaboration may register immediate positive effects, established parties also run the risk that voters dismiss them as power-hungry politicians who sold their soul. Besides, the decision to
collaborate can cause friction within the party itself. For example, when the Dutch Christian democratic CDA took part in a minority government that was officially supported by the PVV, this led to a serious rift within the party. Legal and political containment most likely weakens anti-immigration parties, but it inherently concerns a strained relation with the democratic right of freedom of expression. To put legal or political restraints on certain actors, opposes this democratic principle.\textsuperscript{44}

**Consequences for anti-immigration parties**

Art\textsuperscript{45} maintains that when established parties enforce a strategy of disengagement, they can effectively weaken anti-immigration parties. Strategies of disengagement signal to potential voters that the party is illegitimate, and in general, elite cues are expected to reduce electoral support. Besides, strategies of disengagement impair anti-immigration parties’ ability to recruit qualified party members and thus to organize effectively; capable politicians are unwilling to work for parties that have no hope of gaining executive authority. Art\textsuperscript{46} takes Germany as an example of a country where anti-immigration parties have been successfully repressed. Germany’s Nazi past produced a ‘culture of contrition’ among all elite actors, making them extremely sensitive and vigilant towards parties that bore any resemblance to the Nazis, or sought to downplay the Second World War atrocities. Therefore, German political actors adopted a clear strategy of de-legitimization of *Die Republikaner* (REP), following this party’s electoral breakthrough in 1989. While political collaboration could have been beneficial for some established parties, this was not considered an option. The Germans followed a collective policy of seclusion (*Ausgrenzung*) that prohibited personal contacts with REP politicians, legislative collaboration with REP politicians, and support for any REP policy proposal or candidate. At the same time, REP was heavily combated and marginalized by media and civil society. In the end, these measures prevented REP from consolidating itself.\textsuperscript{47} Fennema and Van der Brug (2006) also maintain that
one of the main reasons that the Dutch anti-immigration party CD failed to establish itself in the late 1980s early 1990s, was that its message was widely and consistently de-legitimized by relevant political actors and the media.

The usefulness of strategies of disengagement is also illustrated by Bos and Van der Brug who show that party support for anti-immigration parties, depends to a large degree on the extent to which voters perceive these parties as legitimate. By this they mean that the party is seen as democratic. Voters are only willing to support an anti-immigration party, when they do not consider this party to be a threat to democracy.

More recently, Van Spanje and De Vreese (forthcoming) conducted a study into the electoral effects of the prosecution of PVV party leader Geert Wilders for hate speech. Their study shows that Wilders benefited electorally from the decision to prosecute him. The authors provide four reasons for why this may have been the case. First, the defendant’s party most likely wins a lot of media attention by being prosecuted, and an increase in media attention is expected to increase the party’s perceived effectiveness, and thus party support. Second, prosecution can lead to a stronger association between the defendant’s party and the political issue at stake. A further strengthening of the association between a party and a political issue, amplifies the party’s ‘issue ownership’. ‘Issue ownership’ is an important political strength since parties win votes most easily on the issues they ‘own’. Third, the electorate perceives an issue more important when it gets more media attention. Provided that prosecution indeed brings more media attention and voters are exposed to this, prosecution would increase the importance of the issues of immigration and integration. This increase in perceived importance benefits anti-immigration parties, since they ‘own’ these issues. Fourth, prosecuted politicians benefit from prosecution by portraying themselves as martyrs for freedom of speech. Political martyrdom is a successful populist strategy to attract voters that are suspicious of the political establishment.
This conclusion supports Fennema, who asserts that strategies of de-legitimization have been met with increasing opposition. From the 1980s onwards, elite actors started to reject the idea of a so called ‘militant democracy’ and argued that there is no moral or philosophical ground to restrict the freedom of political expression, even when it is directed at the fundamental principles of democracy.

Based on a broader survey of the apparent co-variation between anti-immigration parties’ success and the strategies adopted by the established parties, Downs concludes that overall strategies of constructive engagement have been more productive than strategies of disengagement. Downs observed counterproductive effects of legal and political repression of the VB in Belgium, while he also noticed that anti-immigration parties have been weakened or ‘tamed’ effectively in countries where it was granted at least some executive authority, such as in France, and to a lesser extent in Denmark and Norway. Constructive engagement can weaken or ‘tame’ anti-immigration parties in two ways. First, in search for greater legitimacy and effectiveness, anti-immigration parties challenge their hard line politics; they have to make concessions in order to stay in power. Second, anti-immigration parties in office have shown prone to internal divisions, poor candidate selection, party schisms and rifts, eventually causing these parties to self-destruct. Either by design or by chance, established parties have sown the seeds of anti-immigration parties’ undoing by granting them a taste of incumbency. Downs, however, does not suggest that national governments should carelessly welcome anti-immigration parties in their legislative assemblies. According to the author, collaboration should be coupled with an aggressive intellectual/educational campaign that alerts the public to the possible dangers of anti-immigration parties.

Art disputes the effectiveness of strategies of engagement more generally, and asserts that these strategies also have counterproductive effects; by legitimizing anti-immigration parties, the establishment allows these parties to become permanent forces in the political sys-
tem. Allowing anti-democratic forces to blossom can put the system in danger, especially in times of crises.\textsuperscript{61} Therefore, strategies of disengagement should not be readily dismissed. On that matter, Art stresses the importance of timing in order for strategies of legal or political repression to work. Once the organizations of anti-immigration parties have become strong, their supporters loyal and their official entrenched in government, efforts to de-legitimize them are likely to become ineffective or even counterproductive.\textsuperscript{62} A recent study indeed shows that ‘demonizing’ anti-immigration parties only has a negative effect on their support in the first years after the party was founded (Van Heerden, 2014).

However, it should be noted that responses of established parties to anti-immigration parties are often guided by strategic rather than normative considerations. As we discussed in the previous section, the government cooperation between radical right parties and established parties of the right, was mainly brought about by strategic factors.

**Conclusion**

In this contribution we distinguished between two kinds of anti-immigration parties, the extreme right and the radical right. Extreme right parties are anti-democratic, whereas radical right parties accept the main rules of parliamentary democracies. We discussed much research which shows that radical right parties are in many ways ‘normal parties’ and that the people that vote for them are in many ways ‘normal voters’. Some political commentators and policy analysist might find this conclusion somewhat controversial since it does not fit the ‘politically correct’ idea that radical right parties are anathema to modern day pluralistic democracies. Much research shows, however, that most citizens consider radical right parties to be like any other party, no matter what the intellectual and political elites think of them. For this reason, it is not likely that (potential) voters will be affected by appeals
not to support these parties because of their allegedly anti-democratic, anti-system and/or neo-fascist character. This leads up to the question of whether the approach to radical right parties and extreme parties should be different.

Moreover, debates about the government participation of radical right parties have often had a strong normative component. Many commentators have voiced concerns that the rise to power of these parties has had negative consequences for the stability of governments or the quality of democracy. Although these debates are certainly important, they should not distract from the fact that the interactions between radical right and mainstream parties are part of the broader process of party cooperation and competition, in which strategic considerations often prevail over normative ones. To understand why established parties in many countries stopped treating the radical right as political pariahs, it is necessary to analyse how the success of these parties has transformed the competitive and cooperative dynamics of the party systems in those countries. The rise of the radical right has shifted the balance of power in many West European parliaments to the right and has therefore provided some established parties with new coalition alternatives and hence a competitive advantage.

Notes

1. The four authors contributed equally to this chapter and are therefore listed alphabetically.
3. Eg., Golder (2003); Carter (2005); Van der Brug et al. (2005). However, Jobbik got 15 per cent in the EU election in both 2009 and 2014.


7  E.g., Van der Brug et al., (2000); Van der Brug (2003).

8  E.g., Van der Brug et al., (2005); Coffé, (2005).

9  E.g., Van der Brug et al., (2005); Carter, (2005); Norris, (2005).

10  E.g., Kriesi et al., 2008.


14  E.g., Van der Brug (2003).


17  Van der Brug (2003).


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22 E.g., Van der Brug et al. (2012).


24 Van der Brug and Fenemma (2009).

25 E.g. Kitschelt (2012); De Vries et al. (2013).

26 Van der Brug et al. (2012).

27 Carter (2005); Van der Brug et al. (2005).


31 De Lange (2012a) and (2012b).

32 Ibid.


36 Akkerman and De Lange (2012).


42 Ibid.


46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.


50 Bos and Van der Brug (2010).


Downs (2002).

Downs (2002); also see: Akkerman and De Lange (2012).

Downs (2002), pp. 50. However, one could argue that this allows radical right parties to both play the martyr and have all the benefits of being in the system.

Art (2007).


Art (2007).

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