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**Explaining Variation in the Extreme  
Right Vote:  
The Individual and the Political Environment**

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## **Explaining Variation in the Extreme Right Vote: the Individual and the Political Environment\***

*West European right-wing extremist parties have received a great deal of attention in the academic literature over the past two decades due to the success that many of these actors have experienced at the polls. What has received less coverage, however, is the fact that these parties have not enjoyed a consistent level of electoral support across Western Europe in this period. In view of the general shortage of studies on this subject, and given that the few works that have addressed this issue have tended to offer only partial explanations for this phenomenon, this paper seeks to put forward an account for the variation in the right-wing extremist party vote across Western Europe that incorporates a wider range of factors than have been previously considered. It begins by examining the impact of socio-demographic variables on the right-wing extremist party vote and it assesses the extent to which the variation in the parties' vote scores may be explained by such variables as gender, age, education and class. Then, in a second section, the paper turns its attention to a whole host of structural factors that may potentially affect the extreme right party vote. These include institutional variables, party system variables and conjunctural variables. The paper concludes with an assessment of which variables have the most power in explaining the uneven electoral success of right-wing extremist parties across Western Europe.*

\* A version of this paper was presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> General Conference of the ECPR, University of Marburg, 18-21 September 2003.

## **Explaining Variation in the Extreme Right Vote: the Individual and the Political Environment**

West European right-wing extremist parties have received a great deal attention in the academic literature over the past two decades due to the success that many of these actors have experienced at the polls. The electoral victories of the Austrian Freiheitliche Partei (FPÖ), the French Front National (FN) and the Italian Movimento Sociale Italiano / Alleanza Nazionale (MSI/AN)<sup>1</sup> have been well documented, for example, and the resurgence of the Scandinavian Progress Parties and the advance of the Danish People's Party (DF) have also been well reported.

What has received less coverage, however, is the fact that these parties have not enjoyed a consistent level of electoral support in this third wave of right-wing extremist party activity (von Beyme, 1988). Instead, their electoral fortunes have risen and fallen over the last two decades. It is all too often forgotten, for instance, that before its success in the 1990s, the Belgian Vlaams Blok (VB) secured only a limited share of the Flemish vote. Similarly, the ups and downs experienced by the Danish Progress Party since the late 1970s are often overlooked. The success of parties like the FPÖ, FN and MSI/AN has also obscured the fact that other right-wing extremist parties in Western Europe have not performed well at the polls at any point in the last 20 years. For example, the German parties of the extreme right have recorded only marginal scores in national parliamentary elections over the last two decades.

The fact that this question of variation in the electoral support for the parties of the extreme right – both over time and across countries – has attracted relatively little attention in the literature is not overly surprising. For one thing, there continues to be a shortage of comparative studies on the extreme right and in particular there continues to be a shortage of comparative empirical studies on the extreme right's voters. In addition, as far as the studies that do exist are concerned, it is not surprising that many of these

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<sup>1</sup> In the winter of 1993/94, the MSI's leader Gianfranco Fini set up the 'Alleanza Nazionale' (AN) as an electoral alliance of the MSI and some minor christian democrat groups, thereby creating a 'moderate shell' for the neo-fascists. In 1995, the AN was officially transformed into a party that replaced the old MSI (Gallagher, 2000: 72-73).

have tended to focus only on the successful right-wing extremist parties. After all, it is only to be expected that observers will tend to comment on developments and events that have taken place rather than on those that have failed to do so. This said, however, the issue of variation in the electoral support of the parties of the extreme right remains an important one and failure to document and explain this phenomenon has meant that a comprehensive account for the success of right-wing extremist parties has continued to elude us. Strictly speaking, we can only hope to fully explain the reasons for the success of right-wing extremist parties when we understand why these parties sometimes perform well at the polls while, in other instances, they do not.

In addition to there being a shortage of studies on the subject, the few works that have addressed the issue of the variation in the electoral support for the parties of the extreme right across Western Europe have tended to offer only partial explanations for this phenomenon. Jackman and Volpert (1996), for example, assess the importance of electoral system, party system and economic factors on the right-wing extremist party vote, but they do not consider the impact of different socio-demographic variables. Likewise, Abedi (2002) concentrates on the effect of party system factors – and in particular on the impact of ideological convergence between the mainstream parties – but fails to examine the influence of socio-economic variables and of other institutional characteristics.<sup>2</sup> Knigge (1998), by contrast, explores the effect of some socio-economic factors – namely immigration, political dissatisfaction and declining economic conditions – but does not examine the impact of electoral system or party system factors. Thus, while these studies each add to an overall explanation for the variation in the electoral fortunes of the parties of the extreme right, on their own they offer an account for the phenomenon that is far from comprehensive.

A more extensive explanation for the uneven electoral success of the parties of the extreme right is to be found in the influential work by Kitschelt (1995) and in the useful study by Lubbers and his colleagues (2002). Both these analyses consider a range of factors that are believed to have a potential influence on the right-wing extremist party vote, including socio-economic determinants, institutional determinants and party-centric

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<sup>2</sup> Abedi examines the influence of party system factors on anti-political-establishment parties rather than on just right-wing extremist parties.

characteristics. In spite of its more comprehensive nature and of the significant contribution that it makes to research on right-wing extremism, the study by Kitschelt also has a number of limitations, however. In particular, the framework employed does not allow for a precise assessment of the relative influence of the different independent variables on each of the right-wing extremist parties under observation. Rather than a truly comparative framework that would allow such an analysis, Kitschelt instead favours a series of country specific chapters, which do not follow a uniform methodology.

The study by Lubbers and his colleagues certainly does not suffer from this limitation. Yet, while this work is without doubt one of the most interesting and innovative analyses of the extreme right's success, it is problematic, too, in terms of its methodology, its time-span and the countries that it covers. As far as its methodology is concerned, the decision to combine data from national election studies with data sets from supra-national projects (such as the European Election Studies, the Eurobarometer survey, and the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP)) raises potential problems of validity and reliability.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the decision to analyze the issue of the uneven electoral success of the parties of the extreme by using multi-level analysis is open to question. While multi-level analysis provides an elegant and efficient means for dealing with hierarchically structured data, given the nature of the data in the Lubbers et al. study (a very high number of level-one units (i.e. respondents) and a low number of level-two units), we would suggest that traditional methods of data analysis (i.e. pooling the cases across countries after adding country-dummies and/or contextual variables) are possibly more appropriate.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The reliability of data derived from an election study conducted only weeks before or after an election is clearly much greater than the reliability of data derived from surveys carried out either some considerable time before or after the election and that contain only a few questions on voting (e.g. the ISSP survey). Pooling these different data thus introduces a potential for error. This potential for error is particularly obvious in the case of Belgium, for which data from a national election study conducted in 1995 were fused with data from the European Election Survey of 1994 and data from the Eurobarometer of 1997. The result of this pooling was that respondents who had voiced support for the Vlaams Blok in any one of these three surveys conducted over the course of four years were labeled 'Vlaams Blok voters of 1995'.

<sup>4</sup> According to much of the literature on multi-level modeling, the number of level-two units (the 'most restrictive element') should be at least 30, and, depending on the research question, should sometimes exceed 50 if at all possible (Snijders and Bosker, 2000: 140; Kreft and de Leuw, 1998: 124-5; Hox, 2002: 173-9). Furthermore, if one is interested in the variance components (as Lubbers et al. are, see 2002: 365-6), then the number of level-two components should be even higher (Hox, 2002: 175). The number of level-two units in Lubbers et al.'s study (n=17) is therefore rather on the low side, rendering the variance estimates potentially unreliable. By contrast, the number of level-one units (i.e. respondents) in the Lubbers et al. study is unusually high for multi-level analysis. In general, multi-level (i.e. random coefficients) analysis is used when the number of individuals per group is between 2 and 100. In the Lubbers et al. study, however, the number of level-one units is in the range of thousands per level-two units. With huge numbers

As for the countries examined in the Lubbers et al. study, the inclusion of countries where support for the extreme right is extremely low (or non-existent) in the analysis is also not without consequences (an issue which we come back to below). Finally, in terms of the time-span covered, Lubbers and his colleagues analyze data from the mid-1990s only (1994-1997), and do not cover the period of time (the early to mid-1980s) in which many right-wing extremist parties of the third wave broke through into the electoral arena. This short time-span is rather limiting as it means that the variance in explanatory factors such as unemployment, immigration and the positions of other parties is not as great as it might have been had the period of time under analysis been greater. Since these factors vary across time as well as space it is important to include data that are as dynamic as possible if a more complete explanation of the uneven electoral success of the parties of the extreme right is to be found.

In light of the limitations in the scope of the existing studies, this paper seeks to put forward an explanation for the variation in the right-wing extremist party vote across Western Europe that incorporates a wider range of factors than have been previously considered and that covers a longer time period. The analysis begins – after some brief words on data and methodology – with an examination of the impact of socio-demographic variables on the right-wing extremist party vote and an assessment of the extent to which the variation in the parties’ vote scores may be explained by such variables as gender, age, education and class. Then, in a second section, the paper turns its attention to a whole host of structural factors that may potentially affect the extreme right party vote, and that may therefore help explain the variation in the parties’ vote shares. The factors considered in this second section include institutional variables, party system variables and conjunctural variables. The paper concludes with an assessment of which variables have the most power in explaining the uneven electoral success of right-wing extremist parties across Western Europe.

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of level-1 units per group, traditional methods like ANCOVA will give very similar results (Snijders and Bosker, 2000: 43-44) without the overhead of multi-level analysis.

## Data and methodology

Before beginning the investigation into the impact of socio-demographic variables a few words should be said about the data employed in this paper and the choice of methodology. As far as our data is concerned, they are derived from several different sources, and are then combined. The bulk of the data comes from national election studies, which are available from the European data archives. These studies provided us with information on the individual vote choices and the socio-demographic characteristics of West European electors.<sup>5</sup> The pooling and harmonizing of the data was carried out under the auspices of the Extreme Right Electorates and Party Success (EREPS) Research Group.<sup>6</sup> The major advantage of using national election studies is that they reflect voter behaviour at election time. This contrasts to supranational surveys (such as the Eurobarometer survey and the International Social Survey Programme), which may be carried out at a time close to the beginning of the electoral cycle in one country, but near the end of the cycle in another.

The countries included in our analysis are: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany Italy and Norway.<sup>7</sup> This means that the parties included in our analysis are: the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ), the Vlaams Blok (VB); the Fremskridtspartiet (FRPd) and the Dansk Folkeparti (DF); the Front National (FN); the Deutsche Volkunion (DVU), the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD) and the Republikaner (REP); the Movimento Sociale Italiano / Alleanza Nazionale (MSI / AN); and the Fremskrittspartiet (FRPn). In contrast to the study by Lubbers et al., we have chosen to exclude countries where support for the extreme right is extremely low or non-existent. While we recognize that including countries in which there is no effective extreme right is certainly necessary in a macro-level explanation of the extreme right's success (and failure to do so would result in selection bias), we believe that incorporating such countries in an analysis of individual voting decisions is problematic for a number

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<sup>5</sup> We do not include variables that capture the different attitudes of voters because national election studies do not provide these data in any comparable form (across time and across countries). In our view, this is not a significant drawback, however, since attitudinal variables tend often to be correlated with socio-demographic variables, and in contrast to attitudinal data, socio-demographic data are relatively easily compared and are measured with much less error.

<sup>6</sup> See EREPS' homepage: <http://cidsp.upmf-grenoble.fr/guest/ereps>

of reasons. First, including such countries in an analysis of individual voting decisions is problematic for conceptual reasons. Voting for the reasonably established extreme right parties in countries like Belgium, France or even Germany is not comparable to voting for a tiny (and often fanatical) political sect elsewhere like one of the several Falangist parties in Spain for example. The right-wing extremist parties in Belgium, France and Germany may well be disliked by broad segments of the population and by the established elites, but they nonetheless manage to send delegates to local, regional and sometimes even national parliaments. The political act of opting to vote for these parties is therefore significantly different than the political act of choosing to support a tiny group that has no chance of ever winning a seat in the foreseeable future.

Second, including countries in which there is no effective extreme right in an analysis of individual voting decisions is problematic for the reason that extreme right voters are extremely rare in such countries and that, because of social desirability, even fewer respondents report having voted for a party of the extreme right than the electoral results suggest. Indeed, in countries like Portugal, Spain, Great Britain, and Ireland not a single respondent out of several thousand reported having voted for an extreme right party (see Lubbers et al., 2002: 357, Table 1). Finally, it is also important to recognize that in countries where the extreme right is only very weak, prospective extreme right voters are often prevented from supporting an extreme right party because candidates of these parties are only fielded in certain constituencies. This limitation of voting choice is not reflected in surveys, as such voters are coded either as non-voters or as supporters of another party, making the analyst unable to distinguish between potential extreme right voters and their fellow citizens. The inclusion of survey data from countries where support for the extreme right is extremely low or non-existent therefore dilutes and distorts any analysis of individual voting decisions. On balance, therefore, we favour including in our analysis only countries where the extreme right is politically relevant.

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<sup>7</sup> Despite our best efforts, we were forced to exclude Sweden, the Netherlands and Switzerland from our analysis as we were unable to access national election studies in these countries.

**Table 1:** Number of respondents in national election surveys, 1984-2001.

Country	Year	Non extreme right vote	Extreme right vote	Total
Austria	1986	1,665	181	1,846
	1990	1,753	161	1,914
	1994	1,729	426	2,155
	1995	1,868	390	2,258
	1999	1,569	473	2,042
Total			1,631	10,215
Belgium	1991	2,040	224	2,264
	1995	1,652	154	1,806
	1999	1,659	196	1,855
Total		5,351	574	5,925
Denmark	1984	777	17	794
	1987	785	30	815
	1990	710	35	745
	1994	1,617	93	1,710
	1998	1,515	169	1,684
Total		5,404	344	5,748
France	1997	1,821	194	2,015
	Total	1,821	194	2,015
Germany (West)	1990	9,590	138	9,728
	1994	1,486	28	1,514
	1998	1,652	33	1,685
Total		12,728	199	12,927
Italy	1992	611	20	631
	1994	1,344	195	1,539
Total		1,955	215	2,170
Norway	1985	1,748	66	1,814
	1989	1,591	206	1,797
	1993	1,610	82	1,692
	1997	1,498	186	1,684
	2001	3,725	564	4,289
Total		10,172	1,104	11,276
<b>Total</b>		46,015	4,261	50,276

Note:

For details of the proportion of missing cases, see footnote 9.

Our timeframe spans the years 1984-2001. Our start date is informed by the broad consensus in the literature on right-wing extremism that the 1980s saw the beginning of a third wave of right-wing extremist activity in Western Europe, distinct from the ‘neo-fascism’ of the immediate post-war period, and different too from the ‘new waves of social deprivation of the 1960s and 1970s’ (von Beyme, 1988). The majority of scholars of right-wing extremism also agree that the Scandinavian Progress Parties only became part of the right-wing extremist party family in the mid-1980s when refugee and immigration policies became their primary concerns. Prior to then, these parties had been more preoccupied with the issues of taxation and regulation (Kitschelt, 1995: 121;

Andersen and Bjørklund, 2000: 203-204; Hainsworth, 2000: 6-7). We therefore began with the Danish election survey of 1984, and collected all available data for polities where the extreme right was a relevant player in national parliamentary elections.<sup>8</sup> Table 1 shows details of our data.<sup>9</sup>

It is apparent from Table 1 that the sample sizes vary greatly from election study to election study. In light of this, we calculated a variable to be used in our analysis that gives each of the 24 elections the same weight. All our analyses are based on this weight, although it is interesting to note that there is no great difference between weighted and unweighted results.

For our examination of the influence of structural factors on the right-wing extremist party vote, we augmented the socio-economic data derived from the pooled and harmonized national election studies with information on the political systems and the party systems of the countries under investigation. To assess the impact of institutional variables we made use of data on electoral systems (derived from Carter, 2002), data that reflect the degree of territorial decentralization (taken from Lijphart, 1999), and data that relate to the format of the governmental coalition (drawn from EJPR Data Yearbooks). Then, in order to examine the influence of party system factors, in contrast to Lubbers et al. who made use of expert judgements<sup>10</sup>, we obtained information on the parties'

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<sup>8</sup> That is, elections to the lower house of parliament. In the French case there was only one parliamentary election survey conducted in the period under investigation – that following the legislative elections of 1997.

<sup>9</sup> In our data, the proportion of missing cases for the socio-demographic variables is extremely low (less than 1 percent). The proportion of missing cases for reported voting behaviour (our dependent variable) is much higher, as is to be expected. Since we are only interested in the sub-sample of respondents who voted in the last election, respondents who declared that they did not vote, left their ballot papers blank or spoiled their ballot papers were excluded from our data *a priori* and were thus not counted as missing cases. Approximately 12 percent of respondents reported voting for some 'other' party, could not remember which party they voted for, or simply refused to disclose which party they had voted for. These respondents were counted as missing cases. Cases with missing values for any of the variables were omitted (i.e. we engaged in listwise deletion). Although it would have been preferable to use multiple imputation techniques since these provide for better solutions (see Little and Rubin, 1989; Schafer and Olsen, 1998), given the large number of cases, these computationally-intensive methods were simply not feasible.

<sup>10</sup> Lubbers et al. asked country experts a number of questions about the parties' stands on immigration, and from this they derived measures on the 'immigration restriction climate' and the political space available to the parties of extreme right. In addition, they questioned the experts about the strength of the parties' organizations, the activities of their members, and the charisma of the parties' leaders (Lubbers et al., 2002: 355-60). This second set of questions is somewhat problematic because asking experts about organizational and leadership characteristics runs the danger of reaching tautological conclusions. As van de Brug argues,

ideological positions from the dataset created by the Manifesto Research Group / Comparative Manifesto Project.<sup>11</sup> Using these data we constructed a left-right measure specifically tuned to the issues around which the extreme right mobilizes and competes (see below). Finally, to evaluate the effect of conjectural factors on the decision to vote for the extreme right, we drew on unemployment data at the aggregate level (derived from ILO sources),<sup>12</sup> and on data reflecting the number of asylum seekers in the countries under observation (obtained from OECD-SOPEMI sources).<sup>13</sup>

In terms of methodology, we estimate a logit model with contextual variables.<sup>14</sup> In other words, our model allows us to estimate the probability of a voter voting for a party of the extreme right given (i) his/her individual socio-demographic attributes, and (ii) the particular political opportunity structures present in his/her country at the time of the election. This design is simple and straightforward, yet truly comparative, since we do not run separate regressions for each country but rather analyze our data within one unified model that accounts for country-specific variations. Its simplicity, however, comes at a price: multi-level models as employed by Lubbers et al. partition the error variance into a micro- and a macro-component and provide both random intercepts and slopes as an efficient means for dealing with causal heterogeneity across countries. Traditional regression models, on the other hand, incorporate random error only at the micro-level and require dummies for country-specific intercepts or interactions to cater for country-specific slopes (Steenbergen and Jones 2002: 220-1). This is costly in terms of degrees of freedom and a potential source of multicollinearity.

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‘country specialists [...] will tend to give higher charisma ratings to successful than to unsuccessful politicians, irrespective of the personal characteristics of the candidate’ (2003: 92).

<sup>11</sup> Budge, Ian, Hans-Dieter Klingemann, Andrea Volkens, Judith Bara and Eric Tanenbaum (2001), *Mapping Policy Preferences: Estimates for Parties, Electors and Governments 1945-1998*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>12</sup> For aggregate level data, see LABORSTA (<http://laborsta.ilo.org>), an International Labour Office database on labour statistics operated by the ILO Bureau of Statistics; and Statistics Norway ([http://www.ssb.no/english/subjects/06/01/aku\\_en/](http://www.ssb.no/english/subjects/06/01/aku_en/)).

<sup>13</sup> OECD-SOPEMI, *Trends in International Migration*. Paris: OECD, 1992 and 2001 volumes. Data for 2001 were obtained from the UNHCR web site (<http://www.unhcr.ch>).

<sup>14</sup> Among other areas of study, a similar design has been employed in the examination of non-voting (Jackman and Miller, 1995) and in the analysis of people’s satisfaction with democracy (Anderson and Guillory, 1997). Until now, however, this methodology has not been applied to the study of the extreme right. The contextual variables in such a model can be problematic if they are derived by aggregating micro-level information or if the respondents select themselves into territorial units (i.e. countries) along

While nothing can be done about the first problem because multi-level modeling is not appropriate for the research question at hand (see footnote 4), the second issue is not really a problem in our view. Since there is no strong theoretical argument as to why socio-demographic or system-level explanations for an extreme right vote should vary over countries and across time, we assume that (i) the true regression coefficients (i.e. the effects of our explanatory variables) and (ii) the true base probability of an extreme right vote (i.e. the intercept of our logistic model) are constant across countries and across time *after controlling for individual and contextual variables*. Therefore we refrain from inserting dummies and interactions to capture cross-country differences in intercepts and slopes.

Though these claims might appear rather bold, they enable us to build a simple model, something that we believe is of utmost importance. After all, by definition, models should be more simple than reality, and the more parsimonious the model, the better.

Having provided an overview of our data and our methodology, we now turn to examining the influence of socio-demographic variables on an individual's propensity to vote for a party of the extreme right.

### **Socio-demographic factors**

To begin with we estimated a pure socio-demographic model. The variables included in this model are:

- (i) gender,
- (ii) age (up to 24 years, 25-34 years, 35-44 years, 45-54 years, 55-64 years, 65 years and older),
- (iii) formal education (no education / primary education, mid-school, secondary education, university degree), and

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the dependent variable – i.e. according to their propensity to vote for a party of the extreme right (Achen and Shively, 1995: 219-33). In our design neither of these problems is present, however.

- (iv) social class (measured by a simplified Goldthorpe classification: professionals / managers, routine non-manual, self-employed, manual).<sup>15</sup>

Since the dependent variable is dichotomous, we employ binary logit analysis. The structure of our model is given by the equation:<sup>16</sup>

$$\ln\left(\frac{P_{ER}}{1 - P_{ER}}\right) = a + b_1 \times MALE + b_2 \times AGE_{below24} + b_3 \times AGE_{25to34} \dots,$$

This simply means that we assume the logit of an extreme right vote to depend linearly on the socio-demographic variables (the constant equals the expected logit of an extreme right vote for people who fall in the reference category for all variables<sup>17</sup>). The estimates for the socio-demographic model are shown in Table 2. The coefficients in the first column (b) are equivalent to the change in the logit from the constant, when the respective independent variable is equal to 1 (e.g. respondent is male, aged between 25-34, has successfully completed secondary school but does not hold university degree etc.). Since the substantive meaning of a logit or of its change is very difficult to grasp, the second column (e<sup>b</sup>) shows the change in the odds that is to be expected given that particular attribute (controlling for all others). Rather than being interested in logits or in odds, one would usually prefer to know how the *probability* of extreme right voting is affected by the independent variables. However, it is unfortunately not possible to tell this directly from the coefficients, since the expected probabilities depend on the respective levels of *all* independent variables (see below) and can therefore only be communicated in the form of tables or graphs that depict interesting scenarios. We will come back to this below.

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<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately it was not possible to retrieve more detailed information from the original data (e.g. whether a manual worker was skilled or unskilled).

<sup>16</sup>  $P_{ER}$  denotes the probability of voting for the extreme right,  $\frac{P_{ER}}{1 - P_{ER}}$  the ratio between the probability of voting for the extreme right and the probability of not voting for the extreme right (the ‘odds’), and  $\ln\left(\frac{P_{ER}}{1 - P_{ER}}\right)$  the natural logarithm of the odds, also known as the logit.

Looking at the tables, we can see that, by and large, our findings conform to expectations and are also in line with much of the previous research on the impact of socio-demographic factors on the right-wing extremist party vote (e.g. Falter and Schumann, 1988; Betz, 1994: 141-68; Lubbers et al., 2002: 364; for country-specific analyses see among many others Arzheimer and Klein, 1997: 55-59, Mayer, 1998: 17-20, Plasser and Ulram, 2000, 2002, Swyngedouw, 1998: 68-71, Hainsworth, 2000: 20-24, Lubbers et al., 2000, Bjørklund and Goul Andersen, 2002: 118-120). The results show that being male clearly raises the probability of voting for the extreme right: for men, the odds of voting for the extreme right are about 61 percent  $((e^{0.476}-1)*100)$  higher than they are for women. Put differently, depending on the respondent's other attributes, being male increases the probability of an individual being an extreme right voter by more than 50 percent. This coefficient – which, like all others was estimated for the pooled data set that encompasses 24 elections – suggests that there is a substantial gender-gap in the support for the extreme right voting in Western Europe even when we control for other socio-demographic variables such as age, education, and social class. Hence, we can be quite sure that the propensity to vote for a party of the extreme right is very different among men as compared to women, and that these gender-specific differences are not explained by underlying differences in age, education and social class. This finding supports results from existing national studies that found that right-wing extremist parties have consistently attracted a considerably higher number of male voters than female voters (Betz, 1994: 142-149).

Turning to the influence of age, Table 2 illustrates a U-shaped effect of this variable – a pattern that has been documented in some of the existing national studies (see e.g. Falter, 1994 for Germany). A Wald test shows that there are no significant ( $p = 0.68$ ) differences in the respective levels of extreme right support among those voters who are 35-44 years old, 45-54 years old, or 55-64 years old. The level of support for parties of the extreme right among both younger and older voters is higher, however. The propensity to vote for a party of the extreme right among voters who are aged between 25 and 34 is identical ( $p$

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<sup>17</sup> Respondents who fall into the reference category for all variables would be female, aged 65 or older, would hold a university degree and would belong to the 'unclassified' class.

**Table 2:** Socio-demographic model

<b>Independent Variables</b>	<b>b</b>	<b>e<sup>b</sup></b>
Male	0.476** (0.037)	1.609** (0.060)
Age: -24	0.280** (0.069)	1.324** (0.092)
Age: 25-34	-0.012 (0.063)	0.988 (0.062)
Age: 35-44	-0.174** (0.065)	0.841** (0.054)
Age: 45-54	-0.223** (0.065)	0.800** (0.052)
Age: 55-64	-0.186** (0.067)	0.830** (0.055)
No/Primary Education	0.388** (0.071)	1.474** (0.105)
Mid-School	0.832** (0.061)	2.299** (0.140)
Secondary School	0.624** (0.062)	1.866** (0.116)
Professionals/Managers	-0.054 (0.067)	0.948 (0.063)
Routine Non-Manual	0.116* (0.059)	1.123* (0.066)
Self-employed	0.243** (0.071)	1.275** (0.091)
Manual	0.345** (0.057)	1.412** (0.080)
Constant	-3.239** (0.084)	
Observations	50 276	
Adj. Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup> (Mc-Fadden)	0.03	
BIC	-515 293	

Notes:

Robust standard errors are shown in parentheses

\* significant at 5%; \*\* significant at 1%

= 0.84) to that of the reference group (voters who are 65 or older), while voters who are younger than 25 years old are much more likely to vote for the extreme right than any other voters, including the reference group. Indeed, in terms of the odds of voting for the extreme right, our model shows that being younger than 25 increases the odds of such a vote by 32 percent (compared to the reference group). By contrast, our findings illustrate that being aged between 35 and 64 years old reduces the odds of voting for the extreme right by approximately 18 percent.

A number of theories of social and political integration help to explain this fact. It has been well documented, for example, that the decline in the effects of social structure has

not affected all generations equally and that it is young voters who are most detached from established group loyalties (Franklin, 1992: 395). It is thus unsurprising that young voters are more likely to support new or extreme parties than older age cohorts (Butler and Stokes, 1974). A second explanation for these trends is to be found in the non-voting literature, which points to the degree of social integration of different groups. This literature argues that younger voters are likely to lack social ties, whereas people in the middle age categories are likely to be more integrated into society – they are more likely to have a job, a family and have commitments to voluntary associations, for example (Verba and Nie, 1972; Kleinhenz, 1995). The greater social integration of these people in the middle age categories is likely to be reflected not only in higher levels of electoral participation but also in a tendency to refrain from voting for a party of the extreme right, which can be considered as well as a deviant form of political behavior. Yet another explanation for the greater propensity of both young and old voters to support the extreme right rests on these people's interests and their access to welfare. Both young and old voters depend disproportionately on welfare: young voters suffer more from unemployment than people in the middle age categories, and older voters depend heavily on pensions. Given this dependence on welfare, these two age groups are more likely to view immigrants as competitors than are people of other age groups, who are less dependent on welfare.

As regards formal education, it is often hypothesized that levels of formal educational attainment have a negative and almost linear effect on extreme right voting (Falter, 1994: 69-71 for Germany, for example). A number of explanations exist for this. In the first instance, there is an economic or an interest-based argument to support this presumption: voters with lower levels of education tend to be less skilled and/or less qualified for the workplace, and hence are more likely to fall victim to market forces in today's post-fordist, global economy than other sections of the workforce. In other words, they are more likely to become victims of modernization (Scheuch and Klingemann, 1967; Falter, 1994: 69). The precariousness of the economic situation of these voters is in turn linked to a propensity to support parties of the extreme right because right-wing extremist parties pledge to defend the economic interests of these voters by a variety of means, not least by limiting the rights of immigrants and asylum-seekers – two groups that are

perceived as being in direct competition with less skilled and less qualified voters both in the workplace and in accessing social services and housing.

In addition to this economic argument, there is also a value-based argument that is frequently advanced as an explanation for why people with lower levels of education are more likely to support parties of the extreme right than people with high levels of educational attainment. This rests on the premise that through education, people are intensively exposed to liberal values, and hence the longer a person spends in education, the more likely they are to embrace such values (Warwick, 1998: 595-599; Weakliem, 2002: 142-143). Third, a closely related argument holds that cognitive style effects explain the link between a person's propensity to vote for a party of the extreme right and their level of education. This argument emphasizes the relation between education and a person's frames of reference, and maintains that education requires and furthers more complex frames of reference, which make for greater open-mindedness. Voters with these characteristics are thus less likely to respond to social, cultural or political change with explanations and solutions that contain xenophobic elements (Weil, 1985: 459-460). Finally, a further argument suggests that voters with lower levels of education are likely to have fewer opportunities to express themselves than voters with higher levels of education, and they are therefore more likely to rely on a strong identification with an (ethnically-defined) in-group than their more highly educated contemporaries (Blank and Schwarzer, 1994: 109). For a number of reasons, therefore, we may expect levels of educational attainment to be indirectly related to support for the extreme right.

When we examine our model, however, things are not as clear-cut. Indeed, while the low level of support that extreme right parties receive from university-educated voters (the reference group) seems to support the predications advanced above, the comparatively small proportion of extreme right voters in the group of voters with no education or with primary education only runs contrary to expectations. We find, instead, that it is people with 'mid-school' diplomas who appear to form the core social base of the extreme right – a finding that Valen, Aardal and Vogt (1990) also reported in their study of the Norwegian Progress Party's electorate.<sup>18</sup> Our model shows that, for voters educated to

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<sup>18</sup> By contrast, Lubbers et al. found a more linear relationship between education (measured in years spent in education) and the propensity to vote for the extreme right (2002: 365).

‘mid-school’ level, the odds of voting for a party of the extreme right are a massive 130 percent ( $(e^{0.832}-1)*100$ ) higher than they are for voters educated to university level (the reference group). In other words, depending on his or her other characteristics, having a mid-school education more than doubles the probability of an individual voting for the extreme right. By contrast, being educated to secondary level increases the odds of voting for the extreme right by 87 percent as compared to voters with university education, while having no education or having primary education raises the odds of voting for the extreme right by (only) 47 percent as compared to voters with university level education.

Finally, we explored the effect of social class on right-wing extremist voting. The findings in Table 2 show that professionals and unclassified voters (the latter being the reference group) exhibit the lowest propensity to support extreme right-wing parties.<sup>19</sup> The odds rise by 12 percent if the respondent has a routine non-manual job, by 28 percent if he or she is self-employed, and by 41 percent if he or she is a manual worker. A Wald test shows that difference between the effects for the two latter of these classes is statistically insignificant by conventional levels ( $p=0.10$ ): being either self-employed (i.e. being a farmer or a shopkeeper) or a worker substantially increases the odds of extreme right voting by about the same amount, when compared with the reference category.

These findings are in line with our expectations. Indeed, a number of national studies have shown shopkeepers, artisans and small-business people to be particularly well represented among the electorates of right-wing extremist parties. Nonna Mayer and Pascal Perrineau have pointed to the strength of these groups in the voting base of the French Front National, for example, both in the early electoral years of the party (from 1984 to 1988 or so) and later during the radicalization of the FN (Mayer and Perrineau, 1989, 1992). Similarly, Fritz Plasser and Peter Ulram (2002) have reported self-employed groups being over-represented in the electorate of the Austrian FPÖ. The same is true of the electoral base of the Danish Progress Party during its early years (Bjørklund and Goul Andersen, 2002), and of the electorate of the German Republikaner during the late 1980s and early 1990s (Falter, 1994: 65).

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<sup>19</sup> The tiny difference between the coefficients for these groups is neither statistically nor substantively significant.

Many national studies have also shown there to be an over-representation of working-class voters among those who support the parties of the extreme right. Workers have always predominated in the electorate of the German Republikaner (Noelle-Neumann, 1993; Roth, 1990; Falter, 1994: 64-67) and the same is true for the voting base of the Belgian Vlaams Blok (Swyngedouw, 1992, 1998). In other instances, the working-class base of the party has grown as the party has radicalized its ideology and abandoned neo-liberal policies. The FN, the Danish Progress Party and the FPÖ, for example, all saw their support among skilled and unskilled workers increase significantly as they became ideologically more radical in the late 1980s. In the case of the FPÖ, the party increased its support among these groups to such an extent that, in 1999, it became the most popular party among blue-collar workers (Mayer and Perrineau, 1992; Plasser and Ulram, 2000; Hainsworth, 2000; Bjørklund and Goul Andersen, 2002).

In a bid to summarize the findings of our socio-demographic model in a manner that is easier to understand, we employed the methodology advocated (among many others) by Long and Freese (2001) and calculated the expected probability of an extreme right vote across varying levels of the independent variables. Table 3 shows the combined impact of gender, age, education and class. For the sake of brevity, class was restricted to unclassified voters (the reference group) in the upper section of Table 3, while in the lower section of the table it was restricted to workers (the group with the highest propensity to vote for a party of the extreme right. (Figures for other classes would reflect the coefficients reported in Table 2).

Above all, Table 3 shows the significant variation in the support for the extreme right that exists across the different socio-demographic groups. If we compare the predicted probability of a vote for the extreme right being cast by a female voter, aged 24 or less, with a university education and whose class is 'unclassifiable' with the predicted probability of an extreme right vote being cast by a male voter from the same age group, with a mid-school education and a manual job, we can see the full extent of this variation. Indeed, the figures in Table 3 illustrate that the predicated probability of the female voter just described voting for a party of the extreme right is roughly 5 percent. Assuming conventional levels of confidence (the 95% confidence interval in this instance ranges from 4.3 to 5.7 percent), we can be quite sure that no more than one voter out of 20 with

**Table 3:** Predicted probabilities (in percent) of an extreme right vote, depending on gender, age, education, and social class.

class: unclassified								
Age/Educ	female				Male			
	no/primary	mid	secondary	university	no/primary	mid	secondary	university
-24	7	11	9	5	11	16	13	8
25-34	5	8	7	4	8	13	10	6
35-44	5	7	6	3	7	11	9	5
45-54	4	7	6	3	7	10	9	5
55-64	5	7	6	3	7	11	9	5
65-	5	8	7	4	9	13	11	6

  

class: manual								
Age/Educ	female				Male			
	no/primary	mid	secondary	university	no/primary	mid	secondary	university
-24	10	14	12	7	15	21	18	11
25-34	7	11	9	5	11	17	14	8
35-44	6	10	8	4	10	15	12	7
45-54	6	9	8	4	10	14	12	7
55-64	6	10	8	4	10	15	12	7
65-	8	11	9	5	12	17	14	8

Notes:

Typical 95%-confidence intervals: female, less than 25 years old, university educated, class ‘unclassified’: 4.3 – 5.7; male, less than 25 years old, mid-school education, manual worker: 19.4 – 23.4.

these socio-demographic characteristics would opt for an extreme right party on polling day. By contrast, the predicted probability of the male voter described above voting for a right-wing extremist party is about 21 percent (the confidence interval in this case ranges from 19.4 to 23.4 percent). Thus, according to our model at least one in five – and maybe almost as many as one in four – voters from this socio-demographic group is likely to support a party of the extreme right come election time.

This example clearly illustrates that gender and education in particular have a sizeable impact on the probability of a person voting for a party of the extreme right. Age and class are somewhat weaker predictors of a voter choosing a party of the extreme right. Though differences between those aged 35-64 and those who are either younger or older do exist, these are comparatively small – a fact that is reflected in the lower variation down the columns of Table 3 as compared to the variation across the rows.

So far, therefore, our discussion has illustrated that a voter’s socio-demographic attributes go a long way in helping to explain his or her propensity to vote for a party of the extreme right at election time. In addition to this, our results have by and large also been

in line with those of many of the existing studies on right-wing extremism. In particular, our comparative study of 24 elections in 7 countries confirms that parties of the extreme right are strongest among the more marginalized sections of society, and that (when we control for all other variables) their support is predominantly male.

This agreement with the existing studies notwithstanding, our results point to another important finding: the low adjusted (McFadden) pseudo  $R^2$  in our model (a mere 0.03) indicates that the variation in the electoral success of right-wing extremist parties over both time and space cannot simply be explained by the different composition of the respective electorates.<sup>20</sup> Instead, the variation in the electoral fortunes of the parties of the extreme right must be explained by factors other than socio-demographic ones.

To confirm this we added a series of dummies for the 24 elections under study in our model (not shown as a table) so as to create a model that captured all variation in the extreme right vote that could potentially be due to system-level factors. The  $R^2$  of this model was substantially higher than the  $R^2$  of the model in Table 2 (it was 0.09, as compared to 0.03), thereby indicating that the extreme right's electoral success varies considerably across time and space even if we control for the socio-demographic composition of the electorate.<sup>21</sup>

Given the low explanatory power of socio-demographic factors in helping to account for the uneven electoral success of the parties of the extreme right, our interest in political opportunity structures therefore appears quite justified. In light of this, we now turn our attention away from socio-demographic factors and move to consider the impact of structural factors on the right-wing extremist party vote. Under this wide heading are variables that relate to the institutional environments in which the parties of the extreme right are located, to the party systems in which they compete, and to contextual or conjunctural features.

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<sup>20</sup> Low levels of pseudo  $R^2$  (as compared with  $R^2$  in linear regression) are relatively common in logistic regressions, especially if – like in our analysis – the distribution of the independent variable is skewed and the number of cases is large (Andreß, Hagenars and Kühnel, 1997: 288-89). This said, however, the reading of 0.03 points to rather weak relationships.

## Political Opportunity Structures

The concept of political opportunity structures was originally developed in the context of research on social movements to denote the degree of ‘openness’ or ‘accessibility’ of a given political system for would-be political entrepreneurs. In a very influential study Kitschelt describes political opportunity structures as ‘specific configurations of resources, institutional arrangements and historical precedents for social mobilization, which facilitate the development of protest movements in some instances and constrain them in others’ (1986: 58). As their name implies, political opportunity structures therefore emphasize the *exogenous* conditions for party success and, in so doing, contrast to actor-centred theories of success (Tarrow, 1998: 18).

The concept of political opportunity structures is a broad one (some even say too broad, and accuse it of leading researchers to include virtually anything under the heading ‘opportunity structure’) and different authors have included different items in their definition of the term. In spite of the differences, however, the majority of studies agree that fixed or permanent institutional features combine with more short-term, volatile or conjectural factors to produce an overall particular opportunity structure (e.g. Kriesi et al., 1995). In view of this consensus, we propose to adopt a three-pronged approach with which to examine the influence of political opportunity structures on the right-wing extremist party vote. A first set of variables captures the impact of long-term institutional features on the parties of the extreme right; a second set examines medium-term factors which relate to the party system; and a third set of variables examines short-term contextual or conjectural variables. Taken together, these three sets of variables allow us to explore the overall effect of political opportunity structures on the right-wing extremist party vote. In doing so, they thus enable us to say more about the reasons behind the significant variation in the vote scores of the parties of the extreme right across Western Europe.

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<sup>21</sup> Absolute standards by which to judge the value of  $R^2$  do not exist. Instead,  $R^2$  is best seen as a tool that allows us to compare the strength of competing models (Longe and Freese, 2001: 80).

## Long-term institutional variables

Two institutional variables we regard as being of potential importance to how well parties of the extreme right perform at the polls are (i) the electoral system, and (ii) the degree of decentralization/federalism. As far as electoral systems are concerned, it has long been established that the more proportional the electoral system, the greater the incentives for political entrepreneurs to enter the electoral race and for voters to decide to support a new or a small political party. By contrast, the less proportional the electoral system, the more leaders of new or small parties will be dissuaded from fielding candidates and the more discouraged voters will be from voting for such parties since they stand little chance of gaining representation (Duverger, 1951; Blais and Carty, 1991; Cox, 1997). In view of this relationship, we anticipate that unless they have already reached a certain size and have a chance of continuing to attract a sizable section of the electorate, right-wing extremist parties are likely to suffer from disproportional electoral systems. We measure the disproportionality of the electoral systems under observation with the Gallagher index.<sup>22</sup>

The effect of decentralization or federalism is less clear-cut than that of the electoral system. On the one hand, it can be argued that a high degree of decentralization (including regional assemblies or parliaments) may foster the development of right-wing extremist parties because voters are often more willing to support new and/or radical parties in so-called 'second order' elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). The fact that there is less at stake in these elections than there is in 'first order' contests (such as national parliamentary or presidential elections), and the fact that turnout rates are typically lower in second order elections tends to benefit parties of the extreme right. These second order races may therefore provide the parties with opportunities for recruiting members, gaining political experience, becoming legitimate players in the eye of the general public and thus gaining a toehold in the electoral arena.

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<sup>22</sup> The Gallagher (least-squares) index is calculated by taking the vote-seat share differences for each party in a party system, squaring these differences and then summing them. This total is then divided by 2. Finally the square root of this value is taken as the disproportionality score of that election (see Gallagher, 1991).

However, on the other hand, it can be argued that decentralization or federalism is likely to be detrimental to right-wing extremist party success at the national (i.e. federal) level. Rather than allowing extremist parties to gain a toehold in the electoral arena, it may instead be the case that second order elections serve as a kind of security valve for the political system by providing citizens with an opportunity to express their political frustration with the mainstream parties without overly disturbing the political process on the national level. Therefore, while right-wing extremist parties may experience success at the regional or provincial level, it is possible that the part they play in channeling public disaffection in second order elections may work against them come national election time when voters return to the established, mainstream parties.

To test these two contrasting – and equally convincing – hypotheses as to the effect of decentralization/federalism on the right-wing extremist party vote, Lijphart's index of federalism is used (Lijphart, 1999). This ranges from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating a unitary and centralized state and 5 referring to a federal and decentralized state.

### **Medium-term party system variables**

Party system variables may vary considerably from election to election, and are therefore less fixed or constant than institutional factors that change only rarely. A whole host of variables could be used to tap the format of the party system but for reasons of parsimony we restrict ourselves here to examining the impact of three such variables: (i) the influence of the ideological position of other competitors in the party system, (ii) the degree of convergence or divergence between the mainstream parties, and (ii) the coalition format in the respective party systems.

To explore the influence of the position of other political competitors on the right-wing extremist party vote, and to assess the impact of mainstream party convergence and divergence we draw on the data and analysis of the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) to locate the parties on a left-right scale. From the CMP data we construct our own left-right measure, based on the parties' policies on the issues of multiculturalism, internationalism, the 'national way of life', and law and order. As well as reflecting many

of the components that make up the overarching left-right dimension of party competition, these policy items are particularly important to the parties of the extreme right as it is primarily along these dimensions that they compete with their mainstream rivals.<sup>23</sup> In view of the fact that party manifestos relate to upcoming elections rather than elections past, our measure is prospective rather than retrospective.<sup>24</sup>

We begin by including in our model the position (on our measure) of the major party of the mainstream right in each of the respective party systems. While we expect the location of the major party of the mainstream right to have an impact on the success of the party of the extreme right, it is difficult to predict the exact nature of this impact. Indeed, two competing hypotheses emerge as to the influence of the ideological position of the mainstream right on the electoral scores of the extreme right. On the one hand it can be argued that the more right wing the party of the mainstream right, the less well the party of the extreme right is likely to perform at the polls because a more right-wing party of the mainstream right will leave less political space available to the party of the extreme right. By contrast, a more centrist mainstream right party will leave more political space for the party of the extreme right, something that, according to this line of reasoning, would result in greater electoral success for the party of the extreme right.

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<sup>23</sup> We decided against using the left-right scale already constructed by the CMP on the grounds that it contained many policy items that reflect dimensions along which parties of the extreme right and parties of the mainstream (especially those of the mainstream right) do not directly compete, even though they may feature in their overall programmes and manifestos (e.g. attitudes toward military expenditure). Lubbers et al. make similar warnings about using the overarching left-right dimension as a tool with which to chart the political competition between the parties of the extreme right and those of the mainstream. Referring to Kitschelt's spatial analysis (1995), they argue that 'the opportunity structure approach would be more useful if it were not operationalized in such general left and right terms' (2002: 350), and they instead prefer to position the parties according to their immigration policy. Ideally, we would have included the parties' policies on immigration in our measure as well but, unfortunately, we were unable to do so because the CMP did not collect information on this policy item. We are nonetheless confident that the policy items we have included in our left-right measure are highly correlated with the parties' statements on immigration. Moreover, on balance, we believe it is more important to locate the parties using a measure that combines a number of different policies items than to restrict ourselves to locating the parties on the basis of their attitudes towards immigration only.

<sup>24</sup> Three of the elections for which we have national election study data (Austria 1999, Belgium 1999 and Norway 2001) took place after the CMP data were gathered. This means that we do not have data on the positions of the parties in Austrian election of 1999, the Belgian election of 1999 or the Norwegian election of 2001. Rather than exclude these three elections from our study, however (and hence lose a significant number of cases), we have instead made use of the positions of the parties at the most recent election for which CMP data do exist. In other words, for the national election study data on the Austrian and Belgian elections of 1999 we have used the CMP data relating to the elections of 1995, and for the data on the Norwegian election of 2001 we have used the CMP data relating to the election of 1997.

On the other hand, it can be argued that a more right wing party of the mainstream right might boost the electoral scores of the party of the extreme right by legitimizing the issues around which the extreme right mobilizes and competes. Indeed, the French mainstream right's toughened stance on immigration in the 1980s and early 1990s did nothing to stop the advance of the Front National – on the contrary, Le Pen's party appeared to have gained legitimacy and credibility during this period. This in turn, led Le Pen to claim that the mainstream parties were stealing the FN's policies but that voters would prefer 'the original to the copy' (Mayer, 1998).

Next, we examine the degree of convergence (again on our scale) between the parties of the mainstream right and the parties of the mainstream left in each of the party systems under observation. Here too, two contrasting hypotheses present themselves. On the one hand we can argue that right-wing extremist political parties will benefit electorally in situations where the mainstream right and the mainstream left converge ideologically (Kitschelt, 1995: 17). In instances of such convergence, the parties of the extreme right are more likely to play the populist, anti-establishment card and argue that if voters wish to see a real alternative to both the government and the mainstream opposition, then they should put their support behind the right-wing extremist party. By contrast, when the mainstream parties are ideologically distinct from each other, it is more difficult for the parties of the extreme right to adopt this populist strategy.

On the other hand, however, two plausible explanations exist for why we might see the extreme right perform well at the polls when the mainstream parties are ideologically quite distinct. First, this distinctiveness may signal the lack of elite consensus (Zaller, 1992: chap. 6), something that might pave the way for extreme right party success. Second, the mainstream parties may have diverged ideologically in an attempt to curb the advance of the parties of the extreme right in upcoming elections. Either way, it is quite possible that ideological divergence between the mainstream parties may be associated with extreme right party success.

Turning away from the ideological positions of the parties, we then move to consider the coalition format of the party systems under investigation. More specifically, we explore whether the presence of grand coalitions (i.e. coalitions that involve both the main

mainstream leftwing and the main mainstream rightwing parties) has an impact on the right-wing extremist party vote. We suspect that voter dissatisfaction may well be higher during periods of grand coalitions than during periods of alternating government because voters are more likely to feel that there is a lack of political alternatives during a grand coalition. Furthermore, supporters of the governing parties may become alienated if, as a result of their party having to accept coalition compromises, they do not see their preferred policies being enacted or enjoy the consolation of seeing their party play the role of a principled opposition, preparing to replace the existing government (see Kitschelt, 1995: 17 for a similar argument). In view of this increased sense of voter dissatisfaction, we therefore anticipate that the right-wing extremist party vote will be higher in (or shortly after) periods of grand coalition government than it will be in periods of alternating government. To examine this hypothesis we include a dummy variable in our model (with 1 indicating the presence in government of both the main mainstream leftwing and the main mainstream rightwing parties in the period directly before a general election, and 0 indicating the absence of such a grand coalition in this pre-election period).

### **Short-term contextual variables**

In addition to long-term institutional variables and medium-term party system variables we also consider a number of short-term factors that may influence the right-wing extremist party vote. Since right-wing extremist parties place considerable emphasis on the issue of immigration from non-EU countries and on the supposed competition between immigrants and the indigenous population we include variables in our model that tap rates of immigration and unemployment. More specifically, we include a measure of the yearly number of asylum-seekers per thousand inhabitants<sup>25</sup>, and a measure of the

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<sup>25</sup> We chose to use this figure because (i) when asked about ‘foreigners’, the majority of citizens in the countries under study think of people from outside Western Europe (Fuchs et al., 1993) and (ii) the alleged ‘flood’ of refugees in general, and asylum-seekers from outside Western Europe in particular, became the main target of the extreme right’s appeals in the countries under study. While this measure is not ideal, we believe it to be more useful than a number of other indicators such as the percentage of non-(EU) nationals present in the various counties. The sizeable differences in the percentage of non-(EU) nationals that exist between some of the countries under study (e.g. France and Germany) reflect differences in the naturalization policies of these countries rather than significant differences in the number of people considered ‘foreign’ by the indigenous population (Thorogood and Winqvist, 2003: 5).

yearly percentage of unemployed people in the total workforce. We also include change rates for both variables in our model because, according to the classical ‘J-curve’ reasoning (see Davies, 1974: 608-609 for a brief review of this concept), people might respond to changes rather than to the actual level of both measures.

Having examined the different components that make up a political opportunity structure, it is now possible to assess their influence on the right-wing extremist party vote. To do this, we augment the socio-demographic model shown in Table 2 with the long-term institutional, the medium-term party system and the short-term contextual variables discussed above.

### **Socio-demographic factors and Political Opportunity Structures: Results**

Table 4 shows the results of our augmented model. Looking at the table, the first observation to make is that the coefficients for the socio-demographic variables have not greatly changed since we have augmented the model with the political opportunity structure variables.<sup>26</sup> Second, we see that many of the additional variables have statistically significant and sizeable effects on an individual’s propensity to vote for a party of the extreme right – although not necessarily in the direction one would expect.<sup>27</sup> Finally, we see a significant improvement in the model-fit: the adjusted (McFadden) pseudo  $R^2$  more than doubles and thereby comes close to the reading for the dummy-model which treats every election as unique, and the BIC is reduced by 1106, meaning

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<sup>26</sup> The one notable exception to this is the coefficient for no/primary education, which increased from 0.383 to 0.570 and is now closer to the coefficient for mid-school.

<sup>27</sup> Throughout this paper we report ‘robust’ (Huber-White) standard errors, which unlike normal standard errors correct for heteroscedasticity. Failure to correct for heteroscedasticity is common in comparative survey research and tends to result in low standard errors, which in turn lead to overoptimistic confidence intervals and significance tests. By contrast, the larger ‘robust’ standard errors yield more truthful (and conservative) t-statistics and confidence intervals. An even more conservative variant of the standard error exists which not only assumes heteroscedasticity, but which also assumes a correlation of disturbances within ‘clusters’ (i.e. countries). Respondents sampled from within one country, for example, may well share unobserved characteristics for which a model does not account, in which case their disturbances would be correlated, which again would lead to low standard errors (Moulton 1990: 334-35). Even if we correct for this additional complication, our key findings by and large still hold.

**Table 4:** Complete model

Independent Variables	b	e <sup>b</sup>	e <sup>b*SD(x)</sup>
Male	0.471** (0.038)	1.602** (0.060)	1.266
Age: -24	0.364** (0.071)	1.439** (0.102)	1.118
Age: 25-34	0.084 (0.065)	1.087 (0.071)	1.034
Age: 35-44	-0.096 (0.066)	0.909 (0.060)	0.962
Age: 45-54	-0.200** (0.066)	0.819** (0.054)	0.926
Age: 55-64	-0.148* (0.068)	0.863* (0.059)	0.949
No/Primary Education	0.571** (0.075)	1.770** (0.132)	1.287
Mid-School Education	0.753** (0.064)	2.123** (0.136)	1.405
Secondary School Education	0.600** (0.062)	1.822** (0.114)	1.302
Professionals/Managers	0.007 (0.068)	1.007 (0.069)	1.003
Routine Non-Manual	0.082 (0.060)	1.085 (0.065)	1.036
Self-employed	0.265** (0.073)	1.304** (0.095)	1.084
Manual	0.361** (0.058)	1.435** (0.083)	1.171
Disproportionality	0.073** (0.006)	1.076** (0.007)	1.414
Index of Decentralisation	-0.116** (0.023)	0.890** (0.021)	0.848
Ideo. position of major party of mainstream right	0.087** (0.010)	1.091** (0.011)	1.354
Distance between major party of mainstream right and major party of mainstream left	0.058** (0.007)	1.060** (0.007)	1.290
Grand Coalition	0.699** (0.064)	2.011** (0.129)	1.390
Asylum Seekers per 1000 inhabitants	0.114** (0.023)	1.121** (0.026)	1.118
Asylum Seekers: Change	-0.000* (0.000)	1.000* (0.000)	0.905
Unemployment Rate (%)	-0.222** (0.011)	0.801** (0.009)	0.527
Unemployment Rate: Change	0.006** (0.001)	1.006** (0.001)	1.113
Constant		-2.439** (0.148)	
Observations	50 276		
Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup> (Mc-Fadden)	0.07		
BIC	-516 399		

Notes:

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\* significant at 5%; \*\* significant at 1%

that the full model is clearly superior to the socio-demographic one.<sup>28</sup> It is also worth noting that multicollinearity is not an issue in our model.<sup>29</sup>

Starting with the two long-term institutional variables, we can see that the coefficient for the disproportionality of the electoral system is in fact positive, rather than negative as was anticipated.<sup>30</sup> A one-point increase in this systemic variable is associated with an increase of between 7 and 8 percent in the odds of voting for the extreme right.

We should be cautious in the interpretation of this coefficient, however: France has extremely high disproportionality scores (in 1997 the disproportionality score was 25.55), whereas all other countries have disproportionality scores in the region of 0.7 to 4.9. For this reason, the French cases (where the extreme right is quite successful) must be considered a little problematic. A simple calculation may clarify the problem: if we compute a dummy that indicates whether a case is French and correlate this dummy with the disproportionality score, we get an (unweighted)  $r$  of 0.98. By contrast, there is no substantial correlation between disproportionality and any other country dummy (and there is no substantial correlation between the French dummy and any other system-level variable). Therefore, our variable could be confounded with other factors that are specific about the French system but not included in our model.

Even without this correlational problem, the disproportionality variable must be interpreted with care as the French two-ballot majority-plurality electoral system provides voters with some incentives to vote for a party of the extreme right in the first round of

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<sup>28</sup> The Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) is based on the deviance, the number of cases and the degrees of freedom, and allows us to compare models. The smaller the BIC, the better the fit between the model and the data. An absolute difference (between models) of more than 10 is often regarded as lending very strong support to the model with the smaller BIC (Long and Freese 2001: 86-87). Therefore the full model (with a BIC of -516 399) is clearly superior to the pure socio-demographic model (with a BIC of -515 293).

<sup>29</sup> Even though some of our system-level variables are inter-correlated and do not vary very much over the countries under observation, multicollinearity is not an issue in the model. The mean variance inflation factor (VIF) for our full model is 1.92, with a maximum of 3.15 for the position of the major party of the mainstream right. Given that the rule of thumb is that a VIF of 5 or over is generally considered problematic, we have no reason to be concerned. The correlations between our system-level variables are moderate – the strongest relationships are the one between the position of the major party of the mainstream right and the grand coalition dummy (0.47) and the one between the position of the major party of the mainstream right and unemployment (0.45), hence the comparatively high VIF for that variable. The other correlations are lower.

the election in spite of the high disproportionality scores to come out of the second round of the contest. The French electoral system enables voters to choose to support an outsider or a minority candidate on the first ballot if they so wish, only to change their preferences to a more mainstream candidate come the second ballot (presuming, of course, that the mainstream candidate gets through to the second ballot). The high disproportionality scores therefore do not reflect the potential for protest voting on the first ballot.

In spite of the high correlation between the French country dummy and the disproportionality score, and in spite of the different effects that the French two-ballot majority-plurality electoral system might produce, we are still confident that the disproportionality of the electoral system exerts an effect on our dependent variable. We say this because if we temporarily exclude France from the analysis (not shown as a table), the effect of the disproportionality of the electoral system hardly changes – when France is included in the model (as in Table 4) the coefficient is 0.073, and when it is excluded it is 0.081. Thus, although we cannot explain it, we are fairly certain that in the countries under study the disproportionality of the electoral system exerts a positive effect on the decision to vote for a party of the extreme right.

As concerns our variable that taps the degree of decentralization and federalism in the countries under observation, our results show that the right-wing extremist vote is lowest in the more decentralized/federal countries. It may well be the case, therefore, that decentralization and federalism do indeed work as a security valve for the political system (as our second hypothesis advanced above suggested), providing citizens with an opportunity to express their political frustration with the mainstream parties in second order contests and without overly disturbing the political process on the national level. Our findings show that a one-point increase on Lijphart's index of federalism (on which 1 indicates unitary and centralized states and 5 refers to federal and decentralized states) reduces the odds of an extreme right vote by nearly 12 percent.

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<sup>30</sup> This variable reflects the disproportionality score of the *previous* election, as voters are expected to take some time to become aware of the effect of any disproportionality. The psychological effect of the disproportionality will therefore only be reflected in the voters' behaviour at the *next* election.

Turning to the medium-term party system variables we can see that the position of the major party of mainstream right (on our scale) has a positive effect on the right-wing extremist party vote. A one-point move to the right by the major party of the mainstream right *raises* the odds of an extreme right vote by about 9 percent. This suggests that the second hypothesis advanced above (that a right wing mainstream right may legitimize the policies of the extreme right, and hence lead to the extreme right experiencing greater levels of electoral success at the polls) has some validity.

The findings also show a positive relationship between the distance between the mainstream parties (again on our scale) and the right-wing extremist party vote. The distance between the two mainstream parties is measured by an index with an empirical maximum of 14.25 (Denmark 1994 and 1998) and a minimum of 0.22 (Denmark 1990), and the results indicate that each one-point increase on this index is associated with an increase of roughly 6 percent in the odds of voting for the extreme right.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the second hypothesis put forward above appears to be borne out in practice – i.e. the parties of the extreme right benefit when the mainstream parties are ideologically distinct either because this signals the lack of an elite consensus, or because this indicates that the mainstream parties are attempting to curb the advance of the parties of the extreme right, and are thus legitimizing right-wing extremist policies.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Each score is calculated by subtracting the position (on our scale) of the major party of the mainstream left from the position of the major party of the mainstream right. High scores thus indicate a higher degree of ideological divergence between the two parties than low scores.

<sup>32</sup> It should, of course, be borne in mind that the ideological position of the major mainstream right party and the degree of ideological convergence between the mainstream parties are conceptually related: the effect of the ideological distance between the two major parties on the odds for an extreme right vote is likely to be moderated by the position of the major party of the mainstream right. A multiplicative interaction term can be used to test this conjecture. Adding such a term further improves the model. In the presence of an interaction term, the interpretation of the coefficients for the main effects changes because the now rather weak (0.026) effect of ideological distance is conditioned on the position of the rightmost party being zero (Jaccard, 2001: 20; 43), i.e. at the neutral point of our scale. The sign of the interaction effect (-0.028) conforms to our expectations. That is, the further to the right the major party of the mainstream right, the weaker the positive effect of ideological distance. If the major party of the mainstream right locates itself more than about one unit to the right of the neutral point on our scale, then the effect of ideological distance is reversed – i.e. the odds of an extreme right vote decline (very slowly) with increasing distance between the two major mainstream parties, which is in line with the first hypothesis. However, the net effect of a major mainstream party's movement to the right will usually still be positive because the main effect of the position of the major party of the mainstream right (0.307) considerably outweighs the effect of ideological distance and the interaction. For the sake of brevity, we will not pursue these issues any further here.

The final medium-term party system variable that we included in our model was one that referred to the coalition format of the party systems under investigation. More specifically, we wished to investigate the impact of the grand coalition governments on the right-wing extremist party vote, and we suggested that since grand coalition are likely to give rise to increased levels of voter dissatisfaction, it may well be the case that right-wing extremist parties will at the polls from such periods of government. To test this hypothesis we created a dummy variable, with 1 indicating the presence of a grand coalition government and 0 reflecting no such government. Our findings in Table 4 show that the existence of a grand coalition government before the election in question has a striking effect. As we anticipated, the presence of such a governing coalition raises the odds of voting for the extreme right, and it does so by about 100 percent.<sup>33</sup>

Our last set of variables refers to short-term, contextual variables. More specifically, we included measures that tapped the number of asylum-seekers and the unemployment rate in each of the countries under investigation and variables that captured the change in these figures. The effect on the extreme right vote of the number of asylum-seekers, which ranges from 0.03 (Italy in 1994) to 3.29 (Norway in 2001) per thousand inhabitants is in line with the expectations. An increase of one asylum seeker per thousand inhabitants raises the odds of an extreme right vote by about 12 percent. By contrast, our findings show that the *change* in the number of asylum seekers has no effect whatsoever on the right-wing extremist party vote.<sup>34</sup>

The effect of unemployment (as a macro variable) on extreme right voting is markedly *negative*. While this clearly does not allow us to draw any conclusions about the extreme right's appeal to unemployed people (since this would be an instance of ecological fallacy), we can surmise that extreme right parties perform better at the polls in societies

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<sup>33</sup> Although it could be argued that we may be confusing cause and effect in this instance because extreme right strength might actually *necessitate* a grand coalition, the fact that we are considering the composition of the *pre*-election government minimizes the possibility of this tautology.

<sup>34</sup> The coefficient is marginally significant ( $p=0.048$ ) by conventional standards but *negative* and extremely small: a 1 percent change in the number of asylum seekers reduces the odds of an extreme right vote by only 0.08 percent. This means that even a substantial increase of 50 percent or so would hardly affect the odds of voting for the extreme right. The variation of the change rate is large: its range is between -92 percent for Italy in 1992 and an all time high of 1333 percent for Denmark in 1984 (which might be due to a change in the way government statistics were collected). The Danish figure might distort our findings, but if we exclude this potential outlier from our data, the coefficient becomes even smaller. Therefore we are confident that the yearly change has indeed no substantial effect on the right-wing extremist party vote.

where unemployment is low. A 1 percentage point increase in the unemployment rate *decreases* the odds of an extreme right vote by just over 20 percent.

A substantial explanation for this finding cannot easily be given, even though similar results have been reported in other studies (e.g. Knigge, 1998; Lubbers et al., 2002). One potential (yet untested) reason for this negative relationship is that people may turn to the more established and experienced mainstream parties in times of economic uncertainty rather than to the parties of the extreme right, which lack such experience (Knigge, 1998: 269-270).

In contrast to the unemployment rate, the effect of the change in the unemployment rate is in line with expectations. That is, the change in the unemployment rate has a positive effect on the right-wing extremist vote. If the unemployment rate changes by 1 percent (i.e. if the unemployment rate rises from 10 percent to 10.1 percent), this raises the odds of voting for the extreme right by 0.6 percent. While this effect might seem small at first sight, it is important to remember that an increase or decrease of 1 per cent (rather than a 1 *percentage point*) in the unemployment rate is very small compared with the variability of the unemployment rate across time in the countries under study – e.g. the unemployment rate for Denmark was 5.5 per cent in 1986 and 7.15 per cent in 1987. While the difference between the two rates is less than two percentage points, this is an increase of 30 per cent.

In the same way that we summarized the findings of our socio-demographic model in Table 3, Tables 5a and 5b summarize the findings of our complete model and show the combined impact of the four strongest system-level predictors on two segments of the population. Table 5a depicts the expected probability of an extreme right vote of a group that is least likely to support parties the extreme right (female voters, aged 45-54, with university education, and from the ‘unclassified’ class category); and Table 5b shows estimates for a small, marginal segment of the general population among which the extreme right is usually quite successful (male manual worker, aged 24 or younger, with no or primary education only).

**Table 5a:** Predicted probabilities (in percent) of an extreme right vote, depending on the presence of a grand coalition government, the unemployment rate, the disproportionality of the electoral system and the ideological position of the major party of the mainstream right. Female voters aged 45-54, with university education, and from the ‘unclassified’ class category.

Female, class unclassified, university education, aged 45-54								
Grand Coalition: No								
Ideo Pos of MR→ ↓Unempl Rate	Disproportionality: 1				Disproportionality: 5			
	-5	-1	1	3	-5	-1	1	3
2	3	5	5	6	4	6	7	8
4	2	3	4	4	3	4	5	6
6	1	2	2	3	2	3	3	4
8	1	1	1	2	1	2	2	2
10	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
12	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1

  

Grand Coalition: Yes								
Ideo Pos of MR→ ↓Unempl Rate	Disproportionality: 1				Disproportionality: 5			
	-5	-1	1	3	-5	-1	1	3
2	6	9	10	12	8	12	13	16
4	4	6	7	8	6	8	9	11
6	3	4	5	5	4	5	6	7
8	2	3	3	4	2	3	4	5
10	1	2	2	2	2	2	3	3
12	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2

Notes:

Probabilities are calculated for class unclassified, university-educated female voters aged 45-54. The ideological distance between the two major mainstream parties, the change in the unemployment rate, the number of asylum seekers, the change in number of asylum seekers, and the degree of federalism are held at their respective means. The means were calculated giving equal weight to every election.

Typical 95%-confidence intervals: no grand coalition, unemployment 6 percent, disproportionality 1, ideological position of major party of the mainstream right -1: 1.6 – 2.4; grand coalition, unemployment 2 percent, disproportionality 5, ideological position of major party of the mainstream right 1: 11.3 – 15.9.

Tables 5a and 5b show the expected probability of an extreme right vote from these two types of voters in situations where there is a grand coalition in place in the preceding period of government and when there is not, where the disproportionality of the electoral system is 1 and where it is 5, where the ideological position of the major party of the mainstream right is –5, –1, 1 and 3, and where the unemployment rate is 2 percent, 4 percent, 6 percent, 8 percent, 10 percent and 12 percent.

**Table 5b:** Predicted probabilities (in percent) of an extreme right vote, depending on the presence of a grand coalition government, the unemployment rate, the disproportionality of the electoral system and the ideological position of the major party of the mainstream right. Male manual workers, aged 24 or younger, with no or primary education only.

Male, manual, no/primary education, aged 24 or younger								
Grand Coalition: No								
Ideo Pos of MR→ ↓Unempl Rate	Disproportionality: 1				Disproportionality: 5			
	-5	-1	1	3	-5	-1	1	3
2	20	26	29	33	25	32	36	40
4	14	18	21	24	17	23	26	30
6	9	12	14	17	12	16	19	21
8	6	8	10	11	8	11	13	15
10	4	6	7	8	5	7	9	10
12	3	4	4	5	3	5	6	7

  

Grand Coalition: Yes								
Ideo Pos of MR→ ↓Unempl Rate	Disproportionality: 1				Disproportionality: 5			
	-5	-1	1	3	-5	-1	1	3
2	33	41	45	50	40	48	53	57
4	24	31	35	39	30	37	42	46
6	17	22	25	29	21	28	31	35
8	11	16	18	21	15	20	23	26
10	8	11	12	14	10	14	16	18
12	5	7	8	10	7	9	11	13

Notes:

Probabilities are calculated for manual, male voters with no or primary education only, aged 24 or younger. The ideological distance between the two major mainstream parties, the change in the unemployment rate, the number of asylum seekers, the change in number of asylum seekers, and the degree of federalism are held at their respective means. The means were calculated giving equal weight to every election.

Typical 95%-confidence intervals: no grand coalition, unemployment 6 percent, disproportionality 1, ideological position of major party of the mainstream right -1: 10.8 – 14.5; grand coalition, unemployment 2 percent, disproportionality 5, ideological position of major party of the mainstream right 1: 47.8 – 57.7.

First, we note that the socio-demographic variables have a considerable and consistent impact even if we control for system-level variables. Across the 24 elections at hand, the extreme right’s support is disproportionately high among those voters who are male and those voters who are classified as manual workers.<sup>35</sup> If we compare equivalent cells from Table 5a and Table 5b, it is obvious that the *probability* of an extreme right vote is about five to six times higher for the young male, primary-educated worker than for the mid-aged, unclassified, university educated female voter.

<sup>35</sup> The notable exception here is Austria, where the extreme right is fairly popular among professionals, managers and routine non-manual workers as well.

This said, the impact of the system-level variables is considerable, too. Depending on the variable constellation, the presence of a grand coalition government before the election almost doubles the support for the extreme right (to see this we can compare equivalent cells in the upper and lower parts of Table 5a, and compare equivalent cells in the upper and lower parts of Table 5b). The position of the major party of the mainstream right (on our scale) has almost the same impact: if the major party of the mainstream right is near the empirical right end of our scale, the probability of a vote for the extreme right is about 1.5 to 2 times higher than in situations where this party is further to the left of our scale. To see this effect, we can look at each row and compare the first and the fourth, and the fifth and the eighth cell respectively. For example, when there is no grand coalition, when the disproportionality of the electoral system is 1, when the unemployment rate is 2 percent and when the ideological position of the major party of the mainstream right is  $-5$  on our scale, we can see that the probability of an extreme right vote from our female voter is 3 (top left cell in the upper half of Table 5a). However, when the ideological position of the party of the mainstream right is 3 (and all the other conditions stay as before), the probability of our female voter casting her vote for a party of the extreme right is now 6 (first row, fourth column in the upper half of Table 5a

By contrast, the effect of disproportionality is only moderate: the probability of a vote for the extreme right is 1.1 to 1.5 times higher in a situation in which there is high disproportionality (i.e. where the disproportionality score is 5) than in a situation where disproportionality is low (i.e. where the score is 1). We can see this if we compare the left and the right halves of Tables 5a and 5b.

Lastly, our model shows that unemployment has a massive impact on the probability of a vote for the extreme right. A two percentage point increase in the unemployment rate (e.g. a change in the unemployment rate from 4 to 6 percent) reduces the probability of a vote for the extreme right by between one third and one fifth (depending on the other variables). To see this, we can compare any cell in Table 5a or 5b with the cell directly above or beneath it.

The combined impact of these four system-level variables alone is enormous – something which becomes obvious if we compare a situation where, according to our findings

above, the extreme right is anticipated to be least successful with a situation where the extreme right is expected to be most successful. In situations where the extreme right is thought to be least successful (i.e. a situation in which unemployment is high, where there is no grand coalition, where disproportionality is low, and where the major party of the mainstream right is located far to the left on our scale), our prototypical female voter has an expected probability of voting for the extreme right of (almost) 0 percent<sup>36</sup> (first column, last row of the upper half of Table 5a). By contrast, in situations where the extreme right is thought to be most successful (i.e. where unemployment is low, a grand coalition is present before the election, disproportionality is high, and the major party of the mainstream right is located to the very right on our scale), this same voter has an predicted probability of voting for the extreme right of 16 percent<sup>37</sup> (last column, first row of the upper half of Table 5a). In other words, when we compare the two situations, the expected probability of an extreme right vote from our female voter varies by a factor of about 40.

If we look at the expected probability of an extreme right vote from our male voters in the two different situations, we expect a support of 3 percent (first column, last row of the upper half of Table 5b)<sup>38</sup> in a situation where the extreme right is expected to be least successful, and a support of 57 percent in a situation where the extreme right is expected to be most successful<sup>39</sup> (last column, first row of the upper half of Table 5b). The expected probability of an extreme right vote from our male thus varies by a factor of roughly 19.

Clearly, these probabilities are open to interpretation and should not be seen as set in stone as our model does not fit the data perfectly, is based on only 24 elections, and might not contain all the relevant system-level predictors even though our range of variables is considerably broader than in previous analyses of the extreme right vote. Furthermore, our scenarios are somewhat counterfactual in that, in the past, all the conditions that according to our model favour the extreme right (low unemployment, a grand coalition, a high degree of disproportionality, a centralized state and a tough stand by the party of the

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<sup>36</sup> The confidence intervals are 0.3-0.5.

<sup>37</sup> The confidence intervals are 13.1-18.5.

<sup>38</sup> The confidence intervals are 2.1-3.2.

mainstream right on the extreme right's issues) have never been present simultaneously in one country – and neither have all the conditions that seem to hinder the success of the parties of the extreme right.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, in reality, there would probably be some kind of 'ceiling effect' at work, which would limit the potential of the parties of the extreme right, whereas our model assumes that the effects of the system-level factors are linear-additive. This said, however, even if we take the probabilities estimated by our model as guidelines rather than exact prognoses of an extreme right vote, they nonetheless provide clear testimony to the importance of system-level factors in explaining the probability of an extreme right vote, and hence in accounting for uneven electoral success of the extreme right across the countries of Western Europe.

## **Conclusion**

In the course of the analysis carried out above we have shown that a voter's socio-demographic attributes go a long way towards explaining his or her propensity to vote for a party of the extreme right. Our results have indicated that being male, being young (under 25), and being a manual worker significantly raises the probability of voting for the extreme right in all the elections under study, whereas being female, being in the middle age categories and being a professional markedly decreases the probability of voting for a party of the extreme right. As we made clear throughout the discussion, these findings were not unexpected – indeed they confirmed many of the conclusions reached in existing country studies. The only slightly unanticipated result was the finding that it is voters with mid-school levels of education (rather than those with no education or with primary levels of education only) who appear to form the core social base of the extreme right.

Our findings have done significantly more than confirm the results of existing country studies on the extreme right, however. Indeed, we have shown that although a voter's socio-demographic characteristics provide a good basis for predicting an extreme right

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<sup>39</sup> The confidence intervals are 51.9-61.8.

vote, they do not help explain why the parties of the extreme right have encountered greater levels of electoral success in some instances but have experienced relative failure in others. In order to account for this disparity over time and space we therefore augmented our socio-demographic model and introduced political opportunity variables (long term institutional ones tapping the electoral system and the degree of decentralization/federalism, medium term party system ones, and short term conjectural ones tracking levels of immigration and unemployment). We found that this augmented model explained far more variance in the extreme right vote than the socio-demographic model did on its own.

More specifically our results show that the level of unemployment, the position of the major party of the mainstream right, the disproportionality of the electoral system, and the presence of a grand coalition government are particularly important in explaining the uneven success of the right-wing extremist parties across Western Europe. The effects of some of these variables were as we anticipated (e.g. the positive effect on the extreme right vote of the position of the major party of the mainstream right, and the positive effect of a grand coalition government). By contrast, some of our other findings were not as we expected. For example, we found that the coefficient for the disproportionality of the electoral system was in fact positive, rather than negative as we had assumed. Similarly, our results showed that the effect of unemployment (as a macro variable) was markedly negative, rather than positive as we had expected.

We must of course acknowledge the limitations of our model. Throughout our analyses we have taken care to talk about the likelihood of an extreme right vote, rather than the certainty of such a voting decision. Hence we have talked about association rather than causation, even though we have made sure we established the correct temporal order (e.g. the presence of grand coalitions *before* the election, the disproportionality of the *preceding* election, the parties' positions for election manifestos etc.). In addition, we recognize that our findings rest on a relatively limited set of data points (24 separate points in time and space) and it clearly would have been preferable to have had more

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<sup>40</sup> Austria however, where the extreme right has been strongest, comes closest to the 'positive' scenario, while Germany with its almost marginal extreme right is the country that resembles the 'negative' scenario most closely.

variation in our contextual variables and less covariance between them. This said, however, we believe it fair to claim that, by methodically exploring the effect of system-level factors, our model has nonetheless produced a number of significant findings that go beyond many of those of the existing studies, and that the data on which it is built are most probably the best available at present.

Above and beyond their academic worth, our findings also have implications for the real world. In particular, they suggest that the ring-wing extremist vote will not be curbed by simply looking after economic conditions. Furthermore, our results imply that, on the West European level at least, a move to the right by a party of the mainstream right is more likely to legitimize the extreme right than channel the demand for the latter's policies. These findings thus go some distance towards challenging the conventional wisdom as to how the advance of the parties of the extreme right may be halted.

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