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Rising Right-Wing Populism in Europe: The Welfare State as a Mitigating Factor?

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Rising Right-Wing Populism in Europe: The Welfare State as a Mitigating Factor?

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Abstract

The rise of right-wing populism has received much attention in academic literature. However, most of the research on right-wing populism focuses on what drives the electoral success of these parties. Less light has been shed on factors that mitigate voting on right-wing populist parties, although there are indicators that the welfare state can play a key role here. Therefore, this thesis investigates the relationship between welfare state generosity and right-wing populist vote share. Using a Tobit analysis, this thesis analyses 91 elections in 16 countries over the period 1997-2018. The results of this model indicate that a generous welfare state can weaken the positive effect of trade globalization on electoral support for right-wing populist parties.

Keywords: Welfare state, right-wing populism, social policies, immigration, globalization

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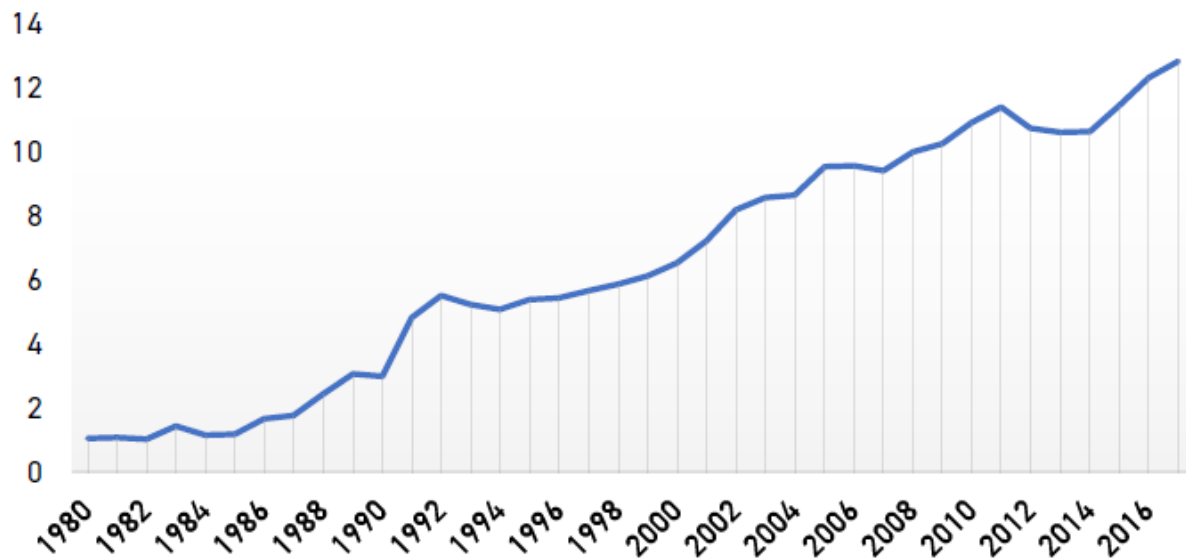
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1. Introduction

The end of the Second World War meant the end of extreme right-wing parties in Europe for a long time. The defeat of Nazism and fascism, and the genocide committed in their names delegitimized extreme right-wing parties to such an extent that they were forced into the margins of politics for several decades. Apart from a few exceptions, right-wing extremism had become irrelevant. However, in the 1980s a new ‘master frame’ was established (Rydgren, 2005), which led to the proliferation of right-wing populism in Europe during what Von Beyme (2019) calls the third wave of populism.

The rise in popularity of right-wing populism continued in the first decades of the 21st century, as right-wing populist parties entered parliament in an increasing number of European countries. The years following the Great Recession marked a breakthrough for many right-wing populist parties, as people sought to punish national governments that had been in charge and turned to fringe movements (Rama & Cordero, 2018). 2016 was a year marking two successes for populism that were widely covered in the global media: the Brexit referendum in June and Trump’s election as president of the United States in November (Margalit, 2019). However, the scope of the populist surge was much wider. In the subsequent years, many European countries saw a rise in popularity of right-wing populist parties. Although neither France’s *Front National* (FN) nor the German *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) managed to win the elections, several other European countries did see right-wing parties enter government, such as *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ) in Austria, and *Lega* in Italy. Simultaneously, several ruling parties grew increasingly populist, such as Orbán’s *Fidesz* in Hungary and *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (PiS) in Poland (Rodriguez-Pose, 2022).

Figure 1. Average vote share for right-wing populist parties (%) in Europe, 1980-2017 (Heinö, 2018).



It has been argued that social welfare policies can dampen the rise of right-wing populists (Colantone & Stanig, 2018; Swank & Betz, 2003). Hence, one would expect countries with strong welfare states and generous compensation policies to have relatively low support for right-wing populist parties (Roubini, 2016). However, even countries such as Sweden, Denmark, and Finland have seen significant successes for right-wing populist parties, despite their histories of strong welfare states. In Sweden, ‘the mother-party of European social democracy’ SAP has been steadily losing votes over the past decade. This is often attributed to the rise of the right-wing populist *Sverigedemokraterna* (Cuperus, 2017; Belfrage & Kuisma, 2017). In Denmark, the right-wing populist *Dansk Folkeparti* gave support to the coalition government for over a decade, leading to strict immigration policies (Rydgren, 2010). The large popularity of right-wing populist parties in these Nordic countries is surprising given their strong welfare states.

A potential explanation for this observation could be that redistribution policies have become increasingly hard to sustain due to the increased mobility of capital (Rodrik, 1998). Furthermore, reforms such as tax cuts and social spending austerity combined with the Great Recession have decreased the economic security of many citizens (Dal Bo et al, 2019). Therefore, it has been argued that the rise of right-wing populism occurred because right-wing populist parties have become the new champions of the welfare state, replacing the social democratic parties (Colantone & Stanig, 2018; Morgan, 2018). Indeed, right-wing populist parties have advocated for a particular type of welfare state tailored to their electorate. This

welfare state should be designed to benefit ‘deserving’ groups (e.g. the pensioned), while excluding ‘non-deserving’ groups such as the unemployed or immigrants (Busemeyer et al., 2022; Enggist & Pinggera, 2021). On the one hand, a generous welfare state might reduce support for right-wing populist parties as it reduces economic risks of citizens (Swank & Betz, 2003). By using relevant social policies for economically insecure groups such as the unemployed and low-income workers, the probability of such social groups voting for right-wing populist parties can be decreased (Vlandas & Halikiopoulou, 2022). On the other hand, as indicated by Rathgeb & Busemeyer (2022), the welfare state can also increase the popularity of right-wing populist parties. Since a more generous welfare state might make social services more accessible to groups such as immigrants, this could lead to cultural grievances as some natives might not feel that these groups are deserving of welfare state benefits. Hence, there seems to be an ongoing debate on the role of the welfare state in the rise of right-wing populism. Therefore, this thesis seeks to address the following research question: How does the generosity of a welfare state affect the popularity of right-wing populism?

While many studies focus on factors that increase support for populism, little research has been done on factors that can potentially counter populism (Guriev & Papaioannou, 2022). Thus, this study seeks to build upon existing research on this topic by testing these mechanisms using more recent data and an updated index of welfare state generosity, to see whether the relationships found in previous research still hold and are generalizable across countries. The primary focus of this study is to investigate how the generosity of a welfare state affects the electoral success of right-wing populist parties. More specifically, this thesis aims to replicate the study done by Swank & Betz (2003) using more recent data.

The rest of this thesis will be organized as follows. First a theoretical overview of the relevant literature on right-wing populism, its causes, and its relationship with the welfare state will be provided. In section 3, the Tobit model used for this analysis will be introduced, specifying the variables and their measurements. Following this, the empirical model will be tested and the results of these tests will be presented in section 4. Finally, this thesis will conclude with an overview of the findings and contributions, potential future research, and the limitations of this study.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Defining populism

The academic literature has long debated the exact definition of populism. Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser (2018, p.1669) define it as “a set of ideas that not only depicts society as divided between ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, but also claims that politics is about respecting sovereignty at any cost”. This anti-elite rhetoric is one of the few characteristics that can be found in every populist movement (Rodriguez-Pose, 2022). Furthermore, populism is not a classical ideology such as liberalism or socialism. Instead, populism is a weak ideology which is often combined with elements from other ideologies such as nativism or nationalism. Nationalism is employed by European right-wing populist parties to promote their country’s sovereignty and oppose EU influence in domestic affairs. Similarly, many right-wing populist parties have adopted an anti-immigration stance, portraying immigrants as a threat to the national identity (Rodriguez-Pose, 2022). Thus, different kinds of populism can attribute different meanings to “the pure people” and “the elite” (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018).

2.2 Economic and cultural grievances

The rise of right-wing populism has resulted in an academic debate on its causes. Two main theses can be identified. Firstly, there is the “economic grievance” theory. This theory argues that increased inequality between individuals and communities within countries has led to increased economic security which, in turn, is the key driver of the increase in popularity of populism. Both income and wealth inequality have been rising over the past decades (Piketty & Saez, 2014). As these people see themselves growing poorer relative to others, they become dissatisfied with the status quo, resulting in them voting for anti-establishment parties (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018).

There are several causes of this increased inequality, most of them related to globalization. Firstly, global trade has not benefitted everyone equally. As illustrated by Milanovic (2012), the greatest winners of globalization have been the elite in developed countries and the low-income class in developing countries. On the other hand, the low-middle income class in developed countries have seen themselves lose income relative to the rest of society. For instance, many firms decided to move their production facilities to countries with lower labor costs, resulting in job losses. Traditional industrial regions in developed economies suffered particularly from this shift, leading to a rise in unemployment and economic decline (Autor et al., 2013).

Secondly, the financial crisis and Great Recession, and the austerity measures adopted in many European countries to recover from this crisis have resulted in increased unemployment and inequality. Furthermore, the financial crisis caused voters to lose faith in the established political parties, as they were seen as responsible for the mismanagement causing the crisis (Margalit, 2019). This was worsened by the fact that private banks had to be rescued using taxpayers' money (Colantone & Stanig, 2019). Populist parties have used these developments to appeal to those segments of society who were hit the hardest by the economic downturn (Brubaker, 2017).

A second academic explanation for the rise of right wing populism is the “cultural grievance” theory. Cultural explanations argue that the increase in popularity of right-wing populism can be attributed to social changes such as mass immigration, multiculturalism, and the decline of traditional values (Berman, 2021). These changes in society have left some voters feeling estranged from society, because they feel they no longer belong to the society they live in (Rodriguez-Pose, 2022). White voters in both Europe and the United States feel like their group identity is under threat, leading to increased hostility to out-groups (Berman, 2021). By using elements from nativism, right-wing populist parties claim that the political elite is corrupt because it helps these immigrants to the detriment of the “pure people” (natives) (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018). The 2015 European refugee crisis, in particular, was used by right-wing populists to create a narrative of Europe being overrun by immigrants and being threatened by ‘Islamization’. This led to electoral successes for right-wing populists in various European countries, such as *Alternative für Deutschland* in Germany and *Sverigedemokraterna* in Sweden (Brubaker, 2017).

Although the economic and cultural explanations are often presented as mutually exclusive, this is not necessarily the case. Instead, Colantone & Stanig (2019) note that economic and cultural factors should be seen as closely related, rather than excluding one another. Golder (2016), for instance, suggests that an economic downturn leads to multiple social groups competing over a limited amount of resources, in turn, facilitating discrimination. Right-wing populists can use these sentiments to their advantage by linking unemployment to immigration (Golder, 2016). Similarly, Rodrik (2021) states that sudden economic shocks can serve to enhance pre-existing cultural divisions. In accordance with this, Inglehart & Norris (2017) find that while cultural backlash is the main reason for people to vote on right-wing populist parties, it is due to increasing economic insecurity that the support for these parties has increased so dramatically over the past decades.

2.3 The role of the welfare state

Welfare state politics has been affected by structural changes over the past decades. The rise of the service sector, demographic changes, educational expansion, and the Great Recession have led to increased support for the welfare state. Furthermore, as these structural changes have also brought new social risks, different voters prefer different types of welfare states (Enggist & Pinggera, 2022). The welfare state can be analyzed on different dimensions. The first commonly used dimension is the size of the welfare state, as measured by public spending on social policy. This ranged from 31.6% in France to 12.8% in Ireland as percentage of GDP (OECD, 2023). A second, equally important dimension is the design of the welfare state, in other words the main policies with which the welfare state seeks to address its objectives (Busemeyer, 2022). There is no such thing as *the* welfare state, rather welfare states in different countries are set up in different ways, with different goals, and leading to different societal effects. Esping-Andersen (1990) was one of the first authors to analyze the welfare state based on its design. He classified the welfare states into three categories. Firstly, he identifies the liberal welfare state, typically found in Anglo-Saxon countries, which offers modest benefits mainly intended for the low-income class and in which the private sector plays a large role. The second type, common to France, Germany, Austria, and Italy, is the conservative welfare state. In this type of welfare state, the state is the main provider of social welfare and policies are designed based on the traditional gender and family roles. The final category is the social democratic cluster, mainly found in the Scandinavian countries. Rooted in a social democratic history, the welfare state in these countries offers much more generous benefits than the other two types while also taking a universal approach regarding the beneficiaries.

Literature on the welfare state and party politics has mainly focused on left-wing parties, conservative parties, and Christian democratic parties. Thus, research on radical right-wing parties is still scarce. Similarly, research on the supply and demand factors affecting right-wing populist parties pays most attention to issues such as immigration and globalization (Rathgeb & Busemeyer, 2022). Hence, research on the relationship between right-wing populist parties and the welfare state is still in the early stages. Nevertheless, the small body of existing academic literature investigating the relationship between the welfare state and the popularity of right-wing populist parties does find a relationship. As described previously, a key factor driving the demand for right-wing populist parties is the fear of losing social status relative to other groups due to societal changes such as immigration and globalization. Policies associated with the welfare state are exactly the tools that can be used to counter such anxieties and provide security to these people. Therefore, the role of the welfare state has become increasingly

relevant (Swank & Betz, 2003). Swank & Betz (2003) find that the generosity of the welfare state affects the extent to which it mitigates support for right-wing populist parties. More comprehensive universal welfare states lower right-wing populist party popularity more than what they classify as corporatist conservative welfare states, since this latter type provides much less generous to no support for weaker social classes. The results of their research indicate that more generous welfare states have both a direct negative effect on the support for right-wing populist parties, as well as a negative moderating effect on positive effects of both immigration and trade openness on right-wing populist party popularity. These results indicate that the welfare state can have a mitigating effect on cultural and economic grievances. Further research into this topic by Vlandas & Halikiopoulou (2022) shows that relevant welfare state policies can reduce the probability of voting for right-wing populist parties for ‘at-risk’ groups such as temporary workers and low-income individuals. Therefore, the welfare state has a significant influence on the popularity of right-wing populist parties. In turn, this indicates that the rise of these parties may not just be caused by trends such as globalization, but also by the lack of an effective government response to these trends.

Of equal importance to understanding the relationship between the welfare state and right-wing populist parties are the policy positions taken by right-wing populist parties regarding the welfare state. Kitschelt & McGann (1995) argued that by combining an authoritarian stance on socio-cultural issues with a neoliberal stance on economic issues, radical right parties had filled a niche not yet occupied by any other party. Using this “winning formula” they could appeal to both voters from the anti-tax petite bourgeoisie and the anti-immigration working class. Hence, the initial argument was that these two social groups had become more liberal in their economic preferences. However, further research into this topic showed that working class voters had not become more liberal, nor had radical right parties, as these had actually adopted more centrist views (De Lange, 2007; Ivarsflaten, 2005). Afonso & Rennwald (2018) explain that this shift towards more pro-welfare positions was caused by the proletarianization of many radical right parties during the 1990s and 2000s, so that they can capitalize on the economic concerns of this social group. As a result of these developments, the position of right-wing populist parties on this subject can not necessarily be mapped using the traditional left-right spectrum. Right-wing populist parties take both a left-wing (e.g. support for public pensions) as a right-wing (e.g. anti-regulation) stance. Hence, it has been argued that right-wing populist parties deliberately maintain ambiguous economic positions (‘position-blurring’), as their electoral base is divided on issues such as the welfare state (Rovny, 2013). However, as the right-wing populist parties

grew larger and more relevant in many European countries, it became increasingly difficult to maintain a vague position on economic issues. Some right-wing populist parties took part in or supported coalition governments, while others have tried to gain more credibility by shifting away from a one-issue party and developing a broader policy agenda. Both these developments have caused right-wing populist parties to take a clear stance on economic issues, and were strengthened by the financial crisis which made economic issues more prominent for every political party.

Indeed, Enggist & Pinggera (2021) find that right-wing populist parties are very clear on how the welfare state should be calibrated and who it should be catered to. According to their study, these parties advocate a welfare state focused on consumption policies (e.g. pensions) because such policies are in line with the wishes of their electorate and can be more easily targeted towards specific groups that are deemed deserving, while excluding others (such as immigrants). Simultaneously, right-wing parties tend to oppose more universal social investment policies such as, for instance, education. These findings are aligned with the results from Busemeyer et al. (2022) who study the policy preferences of right-wing populist party voters. Using a survey, they show that although right-wing populist voters support a welfare state, the welfare state they prefer is a particular design that only supports the ‘deserving’ recipients (e.g. pensioners), while opposing benefits for the unemployed or non-natives. The fact that right-wing populist parties are now promoting their own type of welfare state further necessitates research into the relationship between the welfare state and support for right-wing populist parties, as this questions the idea that more generous welfare states mitigate this support.

This thesis contributes to the existing academic literature by shedding more light on the relationship between the welfare state and the popularity of right-wing populist parties. This study primarily seeks to explain how the generosity of a welfare state affects the electoral success of right-wing populist parties. This thesis will build on existing academic literature on this relationship to investigate whether the mitigating effect of a generous welfare state on the vote share for right-wing populism still holds. More specifically, this study will replicate the quantitative study by Swank & Betz (2003) as closely as possible by investigating the relationship between welfare state generosity and right-wing populist party vote across 16 European countries. To the author’s knowledge, the study by Swank & Betz was the last time such a comprehensive quantitative analysis was attempted. Therefore, research using more recent data is needed to see whether the direct negative and dampening moderating effect of welfare

state generosity on right-wing populist party vote still holds. As stated by Rathgeb & Busemeyer (2022), the welfare state can affect the support for right-wing populist parties in two directions. On the one hand, welfare state institutions and policies can reduce socio-economic risks, thus decreasing the economic grievances that lead people to vote for right-wing populist parties. On the other hand, a generous welfare state also means that these services are more accessible to social groups such as immigrants. In turn, this might fuel cultural grievances as supporters of right-wing populist parties might not feel that these groups are deserving of welfare state benefits. Hence, this thesis will attempt to shed more light on the direction of the relationship between the welfare state and support for right-wing populist parties.

3. Methods

To measure the effects of the welfare state on right-wing populist party popularity, this study uses the vote share for right-wing populist parties in national lower chamber elections in 16 countries between 1997 and 2018. Electoral data was obtained from Political Data Yearbook interactive (2023). Sources on the identification of parties as right-wing populist are listed in appendix 1. Combining these two elements, a list of the percentage of votes going to right-wing populist parties in each election was compiled. This study focuses on parliamentary elections as these elections are comparable in importance and structure between different countries and across time (Swank & Betz, 2003). Iceland, Luxembourg, and most Central and Eastern European countries are excluded from this thesis due to the absence of data on the welfare state in these countries over the whole time period that is studied. There are two cases in which two elections occurred in a single year due to snap elections. This is the case for Greece in 2012 and 2015. In these cases the average vote share of the two elections in the same year was taken. The final dataset includes 91 elections in 16 countries, table 1 shows the list of countries, principal right-wing populist parties, and the vote share they achieved in each included election.

Table 1. National vote share for right-wing populist parties, 1997-2018

Country	Principal parties	Election year (vote share %)
Austria	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ); Bündnis Zukunft Österreich (BZÖ)	1999 (26,9); 2002 (10,0); 2006 (15,1); 2008 (28,1); 2013 (25,0); 2017 (26,0)
Belgium	Vlaams Blok (VB); Vlaams Belang (VB); Parti Populaire (PP)	1999 (9,9); 2003 (11,7); 2007 (12); 2010 (9,1); 2014 (5,2)
Denmark	Dansk Folkeparti (DF); Nye Borgerlige (NB)	1998 (7,4); 2001 (12,4); 2005 (13,3); 2007 (13,9); 2011 (12,3); 2015 (21,1)
Finland	Perussuomalaiset (PS)	1999 (1); 2003 (1,6); 2007 (4,1); 2011 (19,1); 2015 (17,7)
France	Front National (FN)	1997 (14,9); 2002 (11,1); 2007 (4,3); 2012 (13,6); 2017 (13,2)
Germany	Alternative für Deutschland (AfD); Die Republikaner (REP)	1998 (1,8); 2002 (0,6); 2005 (0,6); 2009 (0,6); 2013 (4,7); 2017 (12,6)
Greece	Anexartitoi Ellines (ANEL); Elliniki Lysi (EL)	2000 (0); 2004 (0); 2007 (0); 2009 (0); 2012 (9); 2015 (4,3)

Ireland	None	1997 (0); 2002 (0); 2007 (0); 2011 (0); 2016 (0)
Italy	Lega Nord (LN); Lega (L); Fratelli d'Italia (FdI)	2001 (3,9); 2006 (4,5); 2008 (8,1); 2013 (5,9); 2018 (21,6)
Netherlands	Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF); Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV); Forum voor Democratie (FvD)	1998 (0); 2002 (17); 2003 (5,6); 2006 (6,1); 2010 (15,5); 2012 (10,1); 2017 (14,9)
Norway	Fremskrittspartiet	1997 (15,3); 2001 (14,6); 2005 (22,1); 2009 (22,9); 2013 (16,3); 2017 (15,2)
Portugal	None	1999 (0); 2002 (0); 2005 (0); 2009 (0); 2011 (0); 2015 (0)
Spain	None	2000 (0); 2004 (0); 2008 (0); 2011 (0); 2015 (0); 2016 (0)
Sweden	Sverigedemokraterna (SD)	1998 (0); 2002 (1,4); 2006 (2,9); 2010 (5,7); 2014 (12,9); 2018 (17,5)
Switzerland	Freiheitspartei (FP); Schweizerische Volkspartei (SVP)	1999 (23,4); 2003 (26,9); 2007 (28,9); 2011 (26,6); 2015 (29,4)
United Kingdom	UK Independence Party (UKIP)	1997 (0); 2001 (0); 2005 (2,2); 2010 (3,1); 2015 (12,6); 2017 (1,8)

The full empirical model is specified as follows:

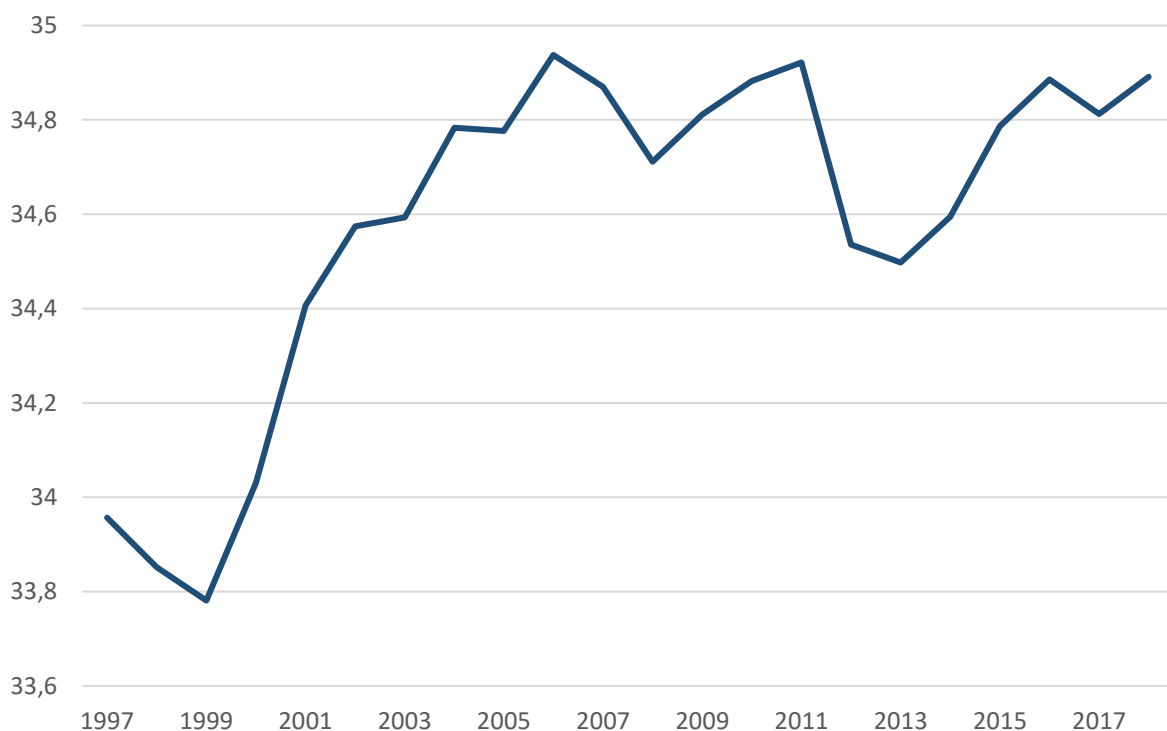
$$RWPP_e = \beta_0 + \beta_1(WELSTATE) + \beta_2(TAXES) + \beta_3(MANUFACT) + \beta_4(ASYLUM) + \beta_5(GROWTH) + \beta_6(TRADE) + \beta_7(FINANCE) + \beta_8(PROPORT) + \beta_9(LEFT) + \beta_{10}(RIGHT) + \beta_{11}(RWPP_{e-1}) + \varepsilon$$

In this estimation, e signifies a national election year, β_0 is the intercept, β_1 - β_{11} are the parameters linking the explanatory variables to the dependent variable, and ε is the error term for the regression. The model is closely based on the estimation developed by Swank & Betz (2003), using the same independent variables with only some minor deviations in measurement due to using more recent data sources, as will be explained further below.

To operationalize welfare state generosity I use an index from the Comparative Welfare Entitlements Dataset (CWED) (Scruggs, 2022). CWED provides data on social insurance programs across 33 countries. This index is based on the decommodification scores developed by Esping-Andersen (1990). Esping-Andersen's scores were based on the characteristics of

three social programs: unemployment insurance, sickness insurance, and pensions. These programs were assigned scores based on the generosity of provisions such as replacement rate, duration, qualifying conditions, and population coverage compared to the mean of the 18 countries included (all advanced industrial democracies). The sum of these scores is the decommodification index, which has been widely used as a measure of generosity. Similar to Esping-Andersen's original index, the CWED generosity index uses updated data from unemployment, sickness, and pension insurance programs at the national level. Each of these programs is assigned a z-score based on the benefit replacement rate, benefit duration, benefit qualification period, waiting days, and the insurance coverage (take-up rate in the case of pensions). The sum of these three indices is the overall generosity index (*WELSTATE*). This index is similar to the one composed by Swank & Betz (2003), as the variable used by them consists of universality, replacement rate, and government spending on social policies. For the countries included in this sample, the lowest value for the overall generosity index is 21,74 (United Kingdom) and the highest 45,46 (Norway). Figure 2 shows the development of the average overall welfare state generosity in all 16 countries from 1997-2018. Overall welfare state increased between 1999 and 2005, after a drop between 2010 and 2015 it seems to be recovering again.

Figure 2. Average overall welfare state generosity 1997-2018



Regarding the control variables, to test for the cultural grievances hypothesis, I include the number of asylum seekers as share of the population in thousands of persons, averaged over

the preceding 3 years (*ASYLUM*). Furthermore, to test for the economic grievance hypothesis I include the de facto trade globalization (*TRADE*) and de facto financial globalization (*FINANCE*) indices as composed by the KOF (Konjunkturforschungsstelle) institute, a Swiss institute conducting economic research (Dreher, 2006). These two variables give an indication of the globalization of a country's economy. The de facto trade globalization index consists of the imports and exports of goods services as percentage of a country's GDP, as well as an index for the diversity of trading partners. This index offers a more comprehensive measure of trade openness than the one used by Swank & Betz (2003), as they only take into account imports and exports as share of GDP. The de facto financial globalization index is composed of FDI, international portfolio investment, international reserve, and international income payments as share of GDP (Gygli et al, 2019). I also include several economic variables at the country level. To test for the effects of the economic performance of a country, lagged GDP growth (*GROWTH*) is included, since lower economic performance may be a driver for support for right-wing populism. I also include tax revenue as a share of GDP lagged by one year (*TAXES*), as this was one of the main factors driving support for right-wing populist parties in their early stages in Scandinavia (Rydgren, 2010). The number of people employed in the manufacturing sector as share of the total labor force lagged by one year (*MANUFACT*) is included to account for post-industrialization. Post-industrialization is the process of the growth of the services sector due higher levels of education, usually at the cost of the traditional manufacturing sector. In turn, the resulting loss of jobs and status for manufacturing workers may lead them to vote for right-wing populist parties. Next to economic variables, I include several control variables to take into account the domestic electoral and political system. An ordinal variable indicating the proportionality of the electoral system (proportional, mixed, or majority) is included (*PROPORT*). This data is obtained from IPU Parline data. Most European countries included in this sample use proportional representation, with the exception of Germany and Italy which use a mixed system, and France and the United Kingdom which use a majority/plurality system. Vote share of left-libertarian parties is also included (*LEFT*) to take into account the argument that right-wing populist parties may be a reaction against the post-materialist values promoted by such left wing parties. (*RIGHT*) measures the average vote share of established conservative right parties over the past two elections, as high support for existing right-wing parties may crowd out support for right-wing populist parties. This electoral data was obtained from Political Data Yearbook interactive (2023). The main source of party family indication is the Political Party Database (Poguntke et al., 2022). Finally, I also include the vote share for right-

wing populist parties in the previous election ($RRWP_{e-1}$) as this is indicative of the stability of right-wing populist party support (Swank & Betz, 2003).

Table 2. Overview of the variables and their measurement

Variable	Measurement	Source
Right-wing populist party vote share	Share of votes for right-wing populist parties at parliamentary elections (%)	PDYi
Welfare state generosity	An index based on unemployment, sickness, and pension programs at the national level	CWED
Taxes	Taxes as share of GDP (%)	OECD
Manufacturing employment	Number of people employed in the manufacturing sector as share of total labor force (%)	UNECE
Asylum seekers	Number of asylum seekers arriving in a year as share of the total population (x1000)	OECD, <i>International Migration Outlook</i> (various years)
Economic growth	Annual GDP growth (%)	World Development Indicators
Trade openness	De facto trade globalization index	KOF
Capital mobility	De facto financial globalization index	KOF
Left libertarian vote share	Share of votes for left-libertarian populist parties at parliamentary elections (%)	PDYi
Established right vote share	Average share of votes for established conservative right parties at previous two parliamentary elections (%)	PDYi
Proportional representation	Ordinal variable indicating proportional representation, mixed system, or plurality/majority	IPU Parline

Table 3 shows the summary statistics of the variables included in the analysis. The dependent variable right-wing populist party vote ranges from 0 to 29,40%. On average, Switzerland, Austria and Norway have the highest vote shares for right-wing populist parties. Overall, right-wing populist vote share has increased in the period of 1997-2018, from 7,7% between 1997 and 1999 to 12,3% between 2016 and 2018. The index for welfare state generosity varies

between 21,74 and 45,46. Norway, Sweden, Belgium, and the Netherlands have the most generous welfare states. The number of asylum seekers per thousand inhabitants is highest on average in Sweden (3,25), Austria (2,77), and Switzerland (2,60).

Table 3. Summary statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. dev.	Minimum	Maximum
Welfare state generosity	34,70	5,16	21,74	45,46
Right-wing populist party vote	8,89	8,93	0	29,40
Asylum seekers	1,34	1,29	0,01	6,59
Trade globalization	59,62	13,79	36,60	86,58
Financial globalization	84,68	9,21	51,94	96,94
Manufacturing jobs	14,47	3,37	8,67	21,68
GDP growth	2,22	3,36	-10,1	24,4
Left libertarian vote	4,50	3,78	0	14,40
Established right vote	30,04	13,49	7,65	66,45

The dependent variable, right-wing populist party popularity, takes on a value of zero in 25 out of 91 observations. This means that the variable is censored in these cases, as it may not actually mean that there is no support for right-wing populist parties, but rather that no such party exists in the country at the given election. Therefore, using an OLS regression would give distorted results. Hence, I use a Tobit model which allows for variables that are censored at a lower limit, as is done in previous research on electoral support for both left and right wing parties (Golder, 2003; Grant & Tilley, 2019; Swank & Betz, 2003). The results of this estimation are presented in the following section.

4. Results

Table 4 shows the results of the baseline model using a Tobit estimation in the second column. No significant direct relationship was found between welfare state generosity and right wing populist party vote share. However, a significant positive relationship is found between asylum seekers as share of the population and the vote share for right-wing populism. This finding seems to support the cultural grievance hypothesis. This is also in line with the results of Swank & Betz (2003), who find a significant positive effect of asylum seekers in all their models. The results of the Tobit analysis can be interpreted in the same way as one would interpret those of an OLS regression. Hence, an increase in asylum seekers equal to 0,1% of the population is related to an increase in voting share for right-wing populist parties of 1,60%.

Table 4. Baseline model results

	Baseline model	Welfare state x asylum seekers	Welfare state x trade globalization	Welfare state x financial globalization
Welfare state generosity	-0,109 (0,174)	0,030 (0,281)	1,291 (0,864)	1,845 (1,411)
Asylum seekers	1,602** (0,572)	5,611 (6,433)	1,597** (0,561)	1,604** (0,564)
Trade globalization	0,059 (0,107)	0,047 (0,108)	0,955* (0,548)	0,046 (0,106)
Financial globalization	-0,054 (0,122)	-0,045 (0,122)	-0,051 (0,120)	0,730 (0,582)
Welfare state generosity x asylum seekers		-0,112 (0,179)		
Welfare state generosity x trade globalization			-0,025* (0,015)	
Welfare state generosity x financial globalization				-0,024 (0,017)
Taxes	0,049 (0,133)	0,048 (0,132)	0,003 (0,133)	0,049 (0,132)
Manufacturing jobs	-0,221 (0,392)	-0,251 (0,393)	-0,195 (0,373)	-0,441 (0,418)
GDP growth	-0,116 (0,297)	-0,118 (0,297)	-0,160 (0,281)	-0,174 (0,298)
Left libertarian parties vote	0,275 (0,256)	0,245 (0,259)	0,220 (0,245)	0,341 (0,258)
Established right-wing party vote	-0,270** (0,090)	-0,271** (0,090)	-0,294** (0,085)	-0,256** (0,089)
Right-wing populist vote _{e-1}	0,770** (0,099)	0,775** (0,098)	0,739** (0,098)	0,798** (0,100)
Proportional representation				
Mixed system	5,992** (2,897)	6,079** (2,884)	6,636** (2,852)	6,544** (2,907)
Plurality/majority system	3,022 (2,997)	2,781 (2,992)	3,689 (2,963)	1,002 (3,261)

Intercept	10,983	6,743	-37,005	-49,675
Sigma	5,686	5,654	5,579	5,608
Log likelihood	-216,830	-216,635	-215,435	-215,829
Pseudo R ²	0,221	0,221	0,226	0,224
N	91	91	91	91

* Significant at the 0,10 level; ** significant at the 0,05 level.

Column 3-5 show models including the interaction between welfare state generosity and asylum seekers, trade globalization, and financial globalization respectively. Unlike Swank & Betz (2003), I do not find a significant direct effect of welfare state generosity on right-wing populist electoral success. However, I do find a significant negative moderating effect of welfare state generosity on the relationship between trade globalization and right-wing populist party vote share. This finding might suggest that the welfare state can help mitigate the unequal distribution of the gains from globalization across social groups, reducing economic grievances. However, the interactions between welfare state generosity and asylum seekers are both non-significant. Swank & Betz (2003) do find significant interactions terms for these variables.

The direct effect of asylum seekers on right-wing populist vote is no longer significant. However, this does not mean that this relationship no longer holds, as the interpretations of these coefficients are different in the presence of interactions. The significance test of the main effects in the presence of interaction now indicates whether there is a significant of X1 on Y when X2 is zero. Thus, in the case of welfare state generosity, the main effect indicates that there is no significant effect of asylum seekers on right-wing populist vote when welfare state generosity is zero.

As for the other control variables, the vote for right-wing populist parties in the previous elections has a positive impact on right-wing populist vote share. Across all models, approximately 77% of the current right-wing populist vote is explained by the vote share the party received in the previous elections, indicating continuity and stability in the popularity for these parties. Support for established right-wing parties, on the other hand, has a significant negative effect on voting for right-wing populist parties in all models, potentially indicating that right-wing populist parties have difficulties of positioning themselves in case of strong support for existing right-wing parties. The voting share for left libertarian parties does not have a significant impact on right-wing populist vote. I find no significant effects for financial globalization, taxes, manufacturing jobs, and GDP growth. Swank & Betz (2003), on the other hand, do find significant effects for taxes (positive) and manufacturing jobs (negative).

In order to test the robustness of this model, I include a regression excluding the countries without right-wing populist parties, as this might influence the findings. Hence, I conduct a regression using a sample including only those countries that have right-wing populist parties (excluding Ireland, Portugal, and Spain). The results of this model are shown in table 5. The exclusion of the three countries without right-wing populist parties leads to 74 remaining observations. I still use a Tobit model, as within this sample there are still several observations of countries that did not have a right-wing populist party in a given election year. I include both a model with and without interactions.

The results for this model are largely in line with what was found in the baseline model. The significant positive relationship between asylum seekers and right-wing populist vote share still holds in the base model. Similarly, right-wing populist vote share at the previous election is also still a good predictor of voting share in the current election. In the model with interactions, welfare state generosity is found to have a negative moderating effect on the relationship between trade globalization and right-wing populist party vote, confirming what was found in the base model. However, the negative effect of votes for established right-wing parties is no longer observed. This is a sensible finding as in all countries excluded from this model (Ireland, Portugal, and Spain), established right-wing parties perform very well while there exist no right-wing populist party. Hence, the negative relationship between established right-wing party vote and right-wing populist party vote observed in the base model may also be caused by reverse causality: traditional right-wing parties perform well due to the absence of right-wing populist parties. Regarding the electoral system, mixed systems also no longer show a significant higher support for right-wing populist parties than countries with proportional representation. This might be the result of Ireland, Portugal, and Spain all countries being countries using proportional representation while having no right-wing populist party. A significant positive effect of welfare state generosity on right-wing populist vote is found in the model with interactions. However, as stated before this coefficient has to be interpreted differently in the presence of interactions. It now indicates the intercept in the equation linking asylum seekers, trade globalization, and financial globalization to right-wing populist vote at varying levels of welfare state generosity.

Table 5. Results using only countries with right-wing populist parties

	Without interactions	With interactions
Welfare state generosity	0,020 (0,181)	3,822** (1,518)
Asylum seekers	1,166* (0,596)	5,087 (6,555)
Trade globalization	0,015 (0,127)	1,178* (0,638)
Financial globalization	0,028 (0,126)	0,783 (0,614)
Welfare state generosity x asylum seekers		-0,115 (0,183)
Welfare state generosity x trade globalization		-0,032* (0,017)
Welfare state generosity x financial globalization		-0,022 (0,018)
Taxes	-0,007 (0,134)	-0,093 (0,135)
Manufacturing jobs	-0,167 (0,448)	-0,306 (0,492)
GDP growth	-0,051 (0,314)	-0,097 (0,304)
Left libertarian party vote	0,173 (0,284)	0,042 (0,298)
Established right party vote	-0,131 (0,115)	-0,072 (0,111)
Right-wing populist vote _{e-1}	0,731** (0,099)	0,708** (0,100)
Proportional representation		
Mixed system	3,183 (3,240)	3,329 (3,154)
Plurality/majority	0,234 (3,287)	-1,910 (3,776)
Intercept	2,571	-125,317
Log likelihood	-213,355	-208,989
Sigma	5,622	5,338
Pseudo R ²	0,150	0,168
N	74	74

* Significant at the 0,10 level; ** significant at the 0,05 level.

As a second robustness check, I also test the model using two subsamples based on time. One subsample including the observations between 1997 and 2007, and a second one using the remaining observations between 2008 and 2018. The results of these models can be found in table 6. Again, the results are similar to the base model. The significant effects of asylum seekers and right-wing populist vote at the previous election remain in both time periods. The negative effect of the vote share for established parties is retained in the 1997-2007 period but is no longer observed in the 2008-2018 period. If the negative relationship between established

right-wing parties and right-wing populist parties is caused by these two party families struggling for the same bloc of voters, the non-significance of this relationship in the period 2008-2018 might indicate that right-wing populist parties have managed to successfully adopt an ideological position out of the shadow of established right-wing parties. It seems that right-wing populist parties are now able to grow despite established right-wing party popularity, thus they may have attracted voters from other parties than just the established right. The moderating effect of welfare state generosity on trade globalization is no longer observed when splitting the sample. However, there is a significant interaction between welfare state generosity and financial globalization in the 2008-2018 period. Furthermore, both taxes and manufacturing jobs have a significant positive effect on right-wing populist vote in this subsample. This could be in line with the tax grievance and post-industrialization hypotheses as discussed in the methods chapter. The effect of having a mixed system compared to proportional representation is no longer significant. However, in the 2008-2018 period, plurality/majority systems have significantly more vote share for right-wing populist parties than proportional systems.

Table 6. Results using subsamples based on time periods

	1997-2007	1997-2007 with interaction	2008-2018	2008-2018 with interaction
Welfare state generosity	-0,022 (0,218)	2,574 (1,738)	-0,076 (0,310)	-9,887* (5,595)
Asylum seekers	1,923* (1,012)	-7,145 (10,831)	1,383** (0,670)	12,955 (8,751)
Trade globalization	0,086 (0,159)	0,700 (0,757)	0,158 (0,190)	0,979 (0,959)
Financial globalization	-0,101 (0,131)	0,745 (0,683)	-0,392 (0,398)	-3,893** (1,778)
Welfare state generosity x asylum seekers		0,249 (0,293)		-0,334 (0,245)
Welfare state generosity x trade globalization		-0,017 (0,020)		-0,030 (0,026)
Welfare state generosity x financial globalization		-0,025 (0,020)		0,136** (0,066)
Taxes	-0,266 (0,170)	-0,273 (0,180)	0,186 (0,209)	0,475* (0,254)
Manufacturing jobs	0,204 (0,626)	-0,130 (0,699)	0,850 (0,823)	1,671* (0,901)
GDP growth	0,541 (0,708)	0,347 (0,697)	0,023 (0,376)	0,138 (0,362)
Left libertarian party vote	0,115 (0,312)	0,223 (0,319)	0,268 (0,454)	-0,085 (0,442)
Established right party vote	-0,508** (0,140)	-0,466** (0,127)	-0,283 (0,172)	-0,248 (0,156)
Right-wing populist vote _{e-1}	0,637** (0,121)	0,652** (0,128)	0,675** (0,183)	0,578** (0,179)
Proportional representation				
Mixed system	5,392 (3,937)	5,964 (4,076)	-1,397 (5,816)	-2,939 (5,630)
Plurality/majority	2,607 (4,408)	1,023 (4,938)	9,792 (5,964)	10,962* (5,860)
Intercept	20,995	-62,550	16,359	244,794
Log likelihood	-101,218	-100,175	-104,021	-104,088
Sigma	4,556	4,418	5,600	5,241
Pseudo R ²	0,274	0,282	0,220	0,241
N	48	48	43	43

* Significant at the 0,10 level; ** significant at the 0,05 level.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to analyze the relationship between welfare state generosity and electoral support for right-wing populist parties. Furthermore, it serves to investigate whether the findings from Swank & Betz (2003) still hold or whether the negative direct and moderating effects of welfare state generosity they find have changed over time. The findings of this thesis support the cultural grievance hypothesis. The share of asylum seekers is shown to contribute to the electoral success of right-wing populist parties in Europe over the past decades. Although no direct impact of welfare state generosity on the electoral success of right-wing populist parties is found, there is a moderating effect of welfare state generosity on the impact of trade globalization. This seems to indicate that the inequality and precarity that can be caused by economic globalization can be mitigated by welfare state policies. Furthermore, I find that voting for established conservative right-wing parties affects voting for right-wing populist parties. However, this relationship is likely to be caused by reverse causality given its absence when excluding countries with no right-wing populist parties. As such, it seems that conservative right-wing parties receive less electoral support in the presence of successful right-wing populist parties. Regarding economic variables, I find no relation between taxes, economic growth, or manufacturing employment and right-wing populist party vote share.

The results of this thesis are relevant to both academics and policymakers. This paper contributes to the existing literature on the welfare state and right-wing populism. This research further confirms the cultural grievance theory, indicating that large shares of asylum seekers lead to significantly increased voting for right-wing populism. Due to globalization and the increased mobility of both people and capital, a number of people perceives their socio-economic position as increasingly precarious. However, as indicated by this thesis, the government has tools to combat such developments. Using social policies such as unemployment insurance, sickness insurance, and pensions, the government can compensate social groups adversely affected by globalization. In turn, this can serve to preserve economic and political stability.

Due to a lack of data, most Central and Eastern European countries could not be included in this study. Therefore, future research can expand on this thesis by investigating the studied relationships in European countries not included in this dataset to see whether the observed relationships also hold in these countries.

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Appendix 1: Party Classification Sources

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Appendix 2: Party Classification

Left-libertarian

Austria	Die Grünen
Belgium	Ecolo; Groen
Denmark	Alternativet
Finland	Vihreä liitto
France	Les Écologistes; Les Verts
Germany	Bündis '90/Die Grünen
Greece	Oikologoi Prasinoi
Ireland	Green Party
Italy	None
Netherlands	GroenLinks
Norway	Miljøpartiet De Grønne
Portugal	Partido Ecologista "Os Verdes"; Pessoas-Animais-Natureza
Spain	None
Sweden	Miljöpartiet
Switzerland	GRÜNE Schweiz
United Kingdom	Green Party

Conservative right

Austria	Österreichische Volkspartei
Belgium	Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams; Christelijke Volkspartij

Denmark	De Konservative
Finland	Kansallinen Kokoomus; Suomen Kristillisdemokraati
France	Union pour un mouvement populaire; Les Républicains
Germany	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands; Christlich-Soziale Union
Greece	Néa Dimokratía
Italy	Forza Italia; Il Popolo della Libertà; Alleanza Nazionale
Ireland	Fine Gael; Fianna Fáil
Netherlands	Christen-Democratisch Appèl
Norway	Høyre
Portugal	Partido Social Democrata; CDS – Partido Popular
Spain	Partido Popular
Sweden	Kristdemokraterna; Moderaterna
Switzerland	Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei der Schweiz
United Kingdom	Conservative Party