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# THE SUCCESS OF THE RADICAL RIGHT IN WESTERN EUROPE

- The effect of mainstream parties' policy positions?

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## Abstract

The electoral gains of the radical right in Europe have been remarkable during recent years. There is not one single cause explaining the phenomenon but scholars are to a great extent agreeing on the fact that convergence between mainstream left and right parties has had an excessive impact on the success of the family. The sociocultural policy dimension has been gaining more attention in research as it is seen as the primary basis for these new parties. Drawing on theories on party competition and political opportunity structures this study seek to study policy positions and reanalyse (with an inclusion of a sociocultural dimension) the question of whether convergence of positions held by mainstream left and right parties can explain variation in success of radical right parties in Western Europe. Looking at recent time variant cross-country data and using a two-step approach the study first explores the relationship between distance on party positioning of mainstream parties in Western Europe and the likelihood of a country having a radical right party. At second it explores the relationship between mainstream party positioning and electoral success of the radical right parties. Distance on party positioning is measured on a left-right economic dimension and a left-right sociocultural dimension. The findings do not give proof to the convergence theory. Looking at the positioning at sociocultural dimension it rather it shows the opposite. The main finding is that, the more to the right mainstream right parties are positioned on the sociocultural dimension the higher electoral support for the radical right.

Keywords: Radical right, convergence, GAL-TAN, mainstream parties, statistical method, expert surveys, time series analysis, Western Europe

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# 1. Introduction

There is a so called “populist movement” in Europe (Mudde 2016, October 22), radical right parties are no longer outsiders and have thus become important players in the political landscape. The rise has been remarkable and even in, for example Sweden, which was long seen as a case in which the radical right had failed to mobilize, the radical right party Sweden Democrats (SD) in the 2010 election, was elected to the Swedish Riksdag with 5.7 per cent of the vote. In 2014, with 12.86 per cent of the vote, the party doubled its score and became the third biggest party in parliament (Valmyndigheten 2016). A similar development applies for numerous radical right parties in European countries such as Austria, France, Denmark, Finland and others. In fact, the radical right is the most successful emerging party family in post-war Europe (Mudde 2014:1).

The electoral gains of the radical right around Europe have been covered extensively among political scientists and sociologists, but still the demand for research on the topic has not been reduced. There is still substantial interest among media and society to understand which factors drive the electoral success of the radical right. Scholars are eager to fill the demand for explanations to questions such as, how come radical right parties succeed in some countries while they fail in others?

There is no unanimous answer to what explains variation in the success of the radical right. It is not a single-issue phenomenon that can be understood only as a response to the economic crisis or the influx of immigrants from non-European regions (Kitschelt and McGann 1995). In a majority of previous research, focus has been on demand-side explanations, socioeconomic conditions and factors that shape voters’ preferences. Nevertheless, several recent studies (eg. Van der Brug, et al. 2005; Arzheimer and Carter 2006; Meguid 2005) have provided evidence that the explanations to the electoral success of these parties are rather to be found on the supply-side of the equation.

This study takes its point of departure in the concept of political opportunity structures and the convergence of party positions between mainstream parties. Mudde (2016, October 22) argues that the convergence between mainstream left and right parties has created a “fertile breeding ground for populism” since the voters see these parties as being all the same. In general, there seems to be an agreement among scholars that convergence between the major mainstream left and right parties opens up a space for radical right parties to emerge. However, many studies testing the convergence hypothesis have only measured convergence on one dimension, mostly

left-right positions on economic issues and not left-right positions on sociocultural issues even though political competition between parties takes place on multiple issue dimensions (Rovny 2013).

Interestingly, recently published case studies (Loxbo 2014; Oskarson and Demker 2015) found that convergence does in fact matter more on the sociocultural dimension than on the traditional left-right economic. In light of such considerations, there is reason to investigate party positions on the sociocultural dimension more closely in combination with applying a cross-national comparative approach.

The thesis will study the concept of convergence of political parties' policy positions and how it affects the success of the radical right. A quantitative method will be used in order to analyse expert placements of mainstream political parties. The analysis contains a two-step approach and at first, it explores the relationship between distance on party positioning of mainstream parties in Western Europe and the likelihood of a country having a radical right party. At second it explores the relationship between distance on the party positioning of mainstream parties and electoral success of the radical right parties. Distance on party positioning is measured on a left-right economic dimension and a left-right sociocultural dimension. The cross-national time series data on party positioning is derived from the Chapel Hill expert surveys and covers five waves of surveys (1999, 2002, 2006, 2010 and 2014).

As pointed out by Mudde (2016, October 22) coalition governments, so called "*cordon sanitaire*" are created around Europe in order to curb radical right parties. These are created with the aim of excluding radical right parties but they may also have an unintended effect of recreating the conditions that led to the success of the radical right party in the very first place. Hence, I do believe that if we would like to see a changed development, research on the phenomenon of mainstream parties convergence is of especially high importance from a societal perspective.

## 1.2 Thesis outline

This thesis is divided up into seven major sections. In the following chapter, definitional issues and main concepts of the radical right are discussed. Moreover research that is relevant for the understanding of, and continued work on, the presented research topic and question is introduced. The third section outlines the aim and research question. The fourth section

introduces the theoretical framework on spatial theory and political opportunity structures and derives five hypotheses. Section five, the methods section, discusses the data sources, operationalizes the concepts and presents the statistical models that will be used to test the theoretical claim. The sixth part tests the hypotheses and presents the results of the analyses. In the last section, concluding remarks will be made, implications of potential findings will be discussed and suggestions for further research will be provided.

## **2. Previous research**

This section presents the research field and situates this thesis in it. It covers both definitions of main concepts, and relevant studies of convergence of party positions. In the first section some definitional issues on the radical right will be discussed. The following subsections are devoted to present previous research on the concept of political opportunity structures and convergence of party positions and thereafter, previous studies on the importance of the sociocultural dimension. These sections are highly interlinked with the core theoretical framework of Downs (1957) Kitschelt (1994,1995, 2004) and Meguid (2005) introduced more in detail in the theory section. The final subsection discusses the identified research gaps the analysis aims to address.

### **2.1 Definitional issues**

In the early 1980's radical right parties started to emerge in Europe and created a new party family. This raised questions such as - who belongs in the family and what are we actually talking about?

To begin with, it is important to point out that the terminology used to define the radical right parties differs among scholars. As pointed out by Ennser (2012:157) its difficult to agree on a label when the definition of the objects to be classified under that label is missing. Scholars have failed to agree on a definition and this also leads to somewhat different conclusions in research (Mudde 2014). The purpose of this thesis is not to take part in the big debate but below I will present some of the different standpoints and main concepts.

Mudde (2007:12) means the growing debate about how to define these parties and the so called "terminological chaos" is due to a lack of clear definitions. He argues that the radical right parties share a core ideology that includes a combination of nativism, authoritarianism and populism.

The concept of "nativism" includes nationalism and xenophobia. Authoritarianism is defined as "the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely". The last feature, populism Mudde (2004) defines as "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people". Rydgren (2007:242) uses a similar definition and states that these parties share "a core of ethno-nationalist xenophobia and anti-establishment populism".

Rydgren (2007) highlights that even though scholars usually agree on which parties to include, the lack of consensus regarding the definition and the core ideological characteristics is not very satisfying. Kitschelt (2007:1178) states that different scholars apply different concepts and that the "radical right has been introduced as an "undefined primitive term". Some (eg. Mudde 2007) use the definition "radical populist right", others (eg. Kitschelt 2007, Meguid 2005, de Lange 2007, Rydgren 2007) settles on "radical right" while (eg. Van der Brug, et al. 2005, Rooduijn, et al. 2014, Loxbo 2014, Dahlstrom and Sundell 2012) prefer the definition "anti-immigrant parties" since the parties primarily compete over issues related to immigration and that their political agenda also mainly concerns limiting immigration.

Hereinafter these right-wing parties will be defined as "radical right" due to the simple fact that this is the term most used. Moreover, it's the term used in the dataset that serves as the main source in this study. As Mair and Mudde point out (1998) when comparing parties across space or time prior classification of the families is required. Thus, a more detailed discussion on classification and on which parties to include will be provided in the methods section in which the dependent variables is operationalized.

## 2.2 Political opportunity structures - Convergence of party positions

When studying what determines variation in electoral success of radical right parties, scholars in the field usually distinguish between demand and supply factors. Previous research has showed that the supply factors (such as political opportunity structures) do to a higher degree than demand-side factors explain why these parties gain support in some countries and not in other (Van der Brug, et al. 2005). Party competition, and more specifically, convergence between the mainstream left and right on ideological positioning is a political opportunity structure, which has



been given great attention by many scholars.

Herbert Kitschelt, an influential researcher in the field, has in collaboration with Anthony J. McGann (1995) produced one of the most prominent studies, *The Radical Right in Western Europe: a Comparative Analysis*, explaining the rise of the radical right in Western Europe. Besides various other findings, he develops the theory on how radical right parties benefit when mainstream right and left parties converge on economic policy issues. If the distance between these parties is small, it creates opportunities for radical right parties to gain influence. Hence, the opportunity structure in each country is crucial for the success of radical right parties. One of the main ideas presented is the so called “winning formula” of the radical right parties. According to Kitschelt the appeal of the radical right has to do with the parties’ combination of neoliberal and authoritarian positions. In later work, Kitschelt (2004) himself has modified his standpoint, and argues that even though the winning formula was applicable in the 1980’s, since the 1990’s there has been a political transformation in Western European party systems and that radical right parties have given up their neoliberal economic appeal and taken a more centrist position. Sarah de Lange (2007) study examines Kitschelt’s developed theory by looking at France, Belgium and the Netherlands. In her comparative study she analyses the party programmes of the radical right and how these are related to the other parties in the party system. Her results are largely consistent with the claims of Kitschelt. The study shows that the three parties included, French FN, the Flemish Vlaams Blok and the Dutch LPF had all taken an economic position closer to the centre but that the authoritarianism still remained present.

Kitschelt (2007) himself highlights the fact that more recent studies have some advantages in relation to his own (Kitschelt and McGann 1995) in terms of quality of data, larger number of observations across countries and over time. For example, Elisabeth Carter (2005) also focuses on the supply side explanations and finds evidence for the argument that ideological convergence between mainstream left and right parties is one of the most important factors when explaining the success of radical right parties. Carter examines if radical right parties’ failure or success can be explained by the parties’ different kinds of radical right ideology and by the different kinds of organization and leadership. Furthermore she looks at whether the uneven electoral success can be explained by the different patterns of party competition and institutions factors in the party systems in which these parties compete. Carter uses expert judgements as her data and in contrast to Kitschelt and McGann (1995) tests the convergence hypothesis over time (at four timepoints).

Carter's study is carefully constructed but also limited by the fact that party positioning is measured only on a general left-right dimension.

Similar to Kitschelt and Carter, Van der Brug, et al. (2005) favour the supply side explanations rather than the demand side. They argue that, since sociostructural developments (demand factors) are so similar within the European Union (EU), those cannot explain the variance in electoral support for radical right parties. Their findings also give proof to their standpoint. With demand and supply side factors included in their model, it explains 83 % of the variance in success of the radical right. However when only including supply side factors the model still explains as much as 73 % of the variance. Van der Brug et al. explore the electoral potential of radical right parties by using data on voters' preferences from the European Election Studies. In line with the convergence theory, their findings show that the more centrist stance of the main competitor, the stronger the radical right wing parties.

### 2.3 The sociocultural dimension

A limitation, which characterises many of the studies testing the convergence hypothesis, is that they often fail to include different issue dimensions. This is problematic, since the sociocultural dimension has gained importance in relation to the socioeconomic (Oskarson and Demker 2015:4). Radical right parties have benefitted from the fact that issues concerning identity, immigration, multiculturalism, feminism and environment has been politicized.

Mudde (2007:132-135) states that it's a big misunderstanding that socioeconomic conditions are crucial for the success of the radical right party family. These are in fact secondary issues that receive little attention in party programs and propaganda. Instead, the parties base their economic policy agenda on their core ideology of nativism. Radical right parties are very rarely in government and can therefore vote-maximize and get away with party programs that contradict on economic issues. The class-base of radical right parties isn't homogenous, rather the electorates have opposing economic interests. By treating economics as a secondary issue or even present a "schizophrenic" socioeconomic agenda, these parties can attract and make promises to all groups without having to choose between neoliberal or welfare chauvinist rhetoric.

Somewhat in line with previous arguments presented by Mudde, Jan Rovny (2013) looks at radical right parties placements and questions the utility of measuring placement of the radical

right parties on economic issues. He finds that parties compete on multiple issue dimensions and prefer to compete on some issues over others. In order to gain support, radical right parties seek to compete on secondary (neglected) issues while blurring their stance on more established issues (such as socioeconomic policies). Rovny argues that parties therefore, in order to attract as many voters as possible, stress their stance on some issue dimensions, while adapting a strategy of “position blurring” on others (2013:2).

In his case study, Karl Loxbo (2014) applies the concept of political opportunity structures of radical right parties by using the example of Sweden and Sweden democrats. He studies how voters’ perceptions of policy convergence on economic-redistributive issues and immigration policy play out at the individual level and explores whether such convergence improves the electoral opportunities of radical right parties. The results in his study show that voters’ perceptions of policy convergence on the immigration policy dimension increases the short term propensity of viewing SD as an electoral option. Yet, opposite to previous research on the topic, Loxbo did not find any proof of convergence on the left-right economic dimension and increased short-term propensity of viewing SD as an option. In fact the relationship was actually the opposite. Nevertheless Loxbo did find that perceived policy convergence between mainstream parties in the field of immigration increases the short-term propensity of viewing SD as an electoral option. One can ask if this is true only in Sweden? Loxbo uses a micro-level approach and tests short-term individual behaviour. Both hypotheses in his article cover voters’ perceptions of the policy alternatives supplied by mainstream parties at given point of time.

Rydgren (2005:420) highlights the processes of “dealignment” and “realignment” as important political opportunity structures. When the socioeconomic cleavage dimension loses salience, the sociocultural dimension gains it. According to Rydgren (in Bakardjieva Engelbrekt, et al. 2012) the divide between the mainstream left and right on socio-economic issues needs to be clearer in order to slow down the success of the radical right. A revitalization of the left-right debate would naturally overshadow sociocultural issues such as immigration and could potentially limit the influence of the radical right parties.

In their recently published article, Oskarson and Demker (2015) find that, in the case of Sweden, a structure in which room is left for realignment between large parts of the working class and the Sweden Democrats has been created, partly as a result of the weakened left-right polarization between the main parties. Decreasing left-right polarization (convergence) between the main parties is together with a dealignment between the Social democratic party and the working class

providing an opportunity for a populist right party (such as the Sweden Democrats) to gain support. Their findings show that radical right parties mobilize along the sociocultural dimension rather than the economic left-right dimension and that most radical right parties mobilize support based on their anti-immigrant views. A decreased left-right polarization (convergence) in the traditional Swedish party system, at the same time as most parties have moved towards a libertarian position on cultural issues such as immigration, has formed a 'window of opportunity' and made it possible for the Sweden Democrats to take the authoritarian ideological position and mobilize parts of the Swedish working class (Oskarson and Demker 2015).

## 2.4 Research gaps

When going deeper in to the huge research field of the radical right party phenomena you find that the empirical findings regarding what determines their success are quite inconsistent. Moreover, studies have shown different results when testing the convergence hypothesis. A general problem seems to be that scholars have focused mostly on specific countries in which these parties have been successful without comparing these cases with countries in which they failed to emerge (which is the case in several European countries). As Rydgren (2007:247) points out, the focus on national cases and lack of comparative perspective has resulted "ad-hoc theorizing". It's problematic to ignore research done on similar parties in other countries and instead trying to find causes within each country (Rydgren 2005). There seems to be a majority of qualitative within country case studies in the field. There is a shortage of comparative studies and many of those that exist are limited by the fact that they only compare a few country case studies.

A majority of previous cross-country studies have either looked so called demand side factors such as socioeconomic conditions or at the individual level and voters perceptions of policy positions rather than studied convergence and policy positions at the party level. As Rydgren (2012:235) states when discussing the shortcomings of Kitschelt (1995)'s famous study (which uses voters' perceptions of party positions) - even though a voter might prefer a liberal standpoint on economic issues, it does not necessary mean that the party drives such an agenda. It's also problematic to derive voters' perceptions of party positioning and use these in broad cross-national comparisons since national public opinion surveys uses different questions and wordings.

Even if the radical right is covered extensively among scholars there is clearly a need to study the uneven success of the radical right in Western Europe further. What previous research lacks is a comparative cross-country analysis focusing on mainstream party positioning by using some more recently published data including not only the left-right economic positioning but also the sociocultural dimension.

### **3. Aim and research question**

The aim of this study is to look at major mainstream party policy positioning and test the theory stating that convergence of the mainstream left and right parties on policy positions might open up for influence of far right parties (Kitschelt 1994, Kitschelt 2007). A two-dimensional approach will be applied and party positioning will be studied both on the left-right economic and on the left-right sociocultural dimension.

Following research question is identified:

*How may party positioning of the mainstream left and right parties affect the success of radical right parties in Western Europe?*

### **4. Theoretical model**

In the previous research section I was introducing research related to the theories that are of prime interest for this thesis. The theoretical approach that will be used is built on the theory of classic party competition (Downs 1957) taking place in a two-dimensional space including not only the socioeconomic but also the sociocultural dimension (Kitschelt 1994) and taking into account the importance of policy positioning by the mainstream parties (Meguid 2005). In the following subsections I will first present the key theoretical concepts, second I will discuss potential delimitations to the theoretical framework and my interpretation of it. Finally I will present the five hypotheses that will be used to test the theory.

## 4.1 Left-right convergence as a political opportunity structure

The first part of the theory relates to the spatial argument originally developed by Anthony Downs (1957) stating that when mainstream parties' policy positions become more similar, voters will look for alternatives which better represent their preferences. Political competition occurs in a dimensional structure in which rational parties choose policy positions to minimize the distance between themselves and the voters. Meguid (2005:348) explains it the following way "parties competing for votes are faced with two possible strategies: movement toward (policy convergence) or movement away from (policy divergence) a specific competitor in a given policy space". In order to attract voters from competitors, parties are employing a strategy of policy convergence while diverging on policy issues on the other hand incites voter flight to the competitor. However Downs only refer to the general left-right dimension when discussing party positions. Kitschelt (1994; 1995) and later also Meguid (2005) extends the spatial theory further. I will discuss this more in detail below.

The key theoretical explanation to be used in this thesis derives from the core theoretical argument devolved by Kitschelt in his work *The Transformation of European Social Democracy* (1994) and then later extended in *The Radical Right in Western Europe: a Comparative Analysis* (1995) . Due to a change in competitive space in West European democracies, Kitschelt develops a new more complex pattern, with a shift from a one-dimensional axis (traditionally including the socialist vs. capitalist dimension) to a two-dimensional competitive space also including libertarian vs. authoritarian politics. Within this two-dimensional space, Kitschelt locate both voters and political parties. A change of voter distribution may create vacuums in the competitive space that creates an electoral opportunity structure and open up for a radical party to gain electoral success (De Lange 2007: 412-415). Kitschelt states that the support for radical right parties "depends on the strategic interaction of competing parties in the party system" (1995:14).

As already mentioned in the previous research section, whether or not the radical right parties then manage to succeed, according to Kitschelt, depends on if they provide a "winning formula". Kitschelt argues that the success of these parties depends on their strategic appeal and only if they choose an economic liberal standpoint combined with ethnocentrism and authoritarianism, they would attract a broad spectrum of voters. As already mentioned the "winning formula" has been criticized (and later moderated by Kitschelt himself 2004). Therefore I have chosen to neglect the theoretical reasoning around the winning formula in this thesis and only make use of

Kitschelt's theoretical core about left-right convergence on different issue dimensions and how it may create a political opportunity structure.

*“The conditions for the rise of the extreme-rightist parties become favourable if moderately left and right parties converge toward the median vote. Under these conditions, the established parties fail to attend to a wide uncovered field of more radical right authoritarian voters who will search for an for a new political alternative” (1995: vii).*

The theory states that the degree of convergence in the political space facilitates for radical right parties to emerge. It may create a feeling that no real difference exists between the mainstream parties. A convergence on the economic dimension may also lead to a de-politicization of this dimension and facilitating for radical right parties to mobilize on other issue dimensions such as the sociocultural (Rydgren 2005:423).

As previously mentioned, Meguid (2005:348-349) has extended the spatial theory by focusing on mainstream party strategies and the behaviour of the competitors to the radical right (by her referred to as niche parties). According to her theoretical claim, mainstream parties play a role in shaping the success of radical right parties by adding *salience* and *issue ownership* as important components that affect the support. Meguid argues that parties do not compete on all issues in the political space in each election. Rather, a party can shape the importance of different issue dimensions when deciding on which issues it wants to compete on in a specific election. According to Meguid the combination of strategies used by the mainstream parties is what matters. They can choose an *accommodative* (adopt the positions of the new competitor) or an *adversarial* strategy. When a mainstream party uses a so called *adversarial* strategy it encourages niche party electoral support as it forces the other mainstream party (that is maybe closer to the new party and probably competing for the same voters) to take a position on the “new” issue. The argument is quite complex but Kitschelt describes it in a simple way:

*“- a new party taking a radical position on a hitherto dormant issue dimension will do well when a mainstream party that is far distant from that position politicises the new dimension by adopting the opposite position on the issue” (2007:1187).*

The issue dimension will then be included within the mainstream political debate and this helps the niche party to gain votes from the other mainstream party. According to her theoretical argument this can even have extreme effects and in the long run completely eliminate the

mainstream party opponent and replace it with a niche party (Kitschelt 2007; Meguid 2005:348-349). Bale et al. (2010) have in a case study covering five countries, looked closely at mainstream left parties and found that these often use a mix of strategies in order to respond to the radical right. The social democratic response is influenced not only by the radical right but also by the reactions of mainstream centre-right parties.

To sum up, in accordance to the theoretical arguments presented, I expect that when convergence is taking place between the major mainstream parties due to their ambition to attract the median voter in either one or both dimensions this creates a void and an opportunity structure and thus facilitates for the radical right parties to emerge and attract voters in search for a new political alternative. However taking the modification of the spatial argument made by Meguid into account, I will also explore if there is any correlation between the major mainstream parties' position on the "new issue" dimension, namely the sociocultural and the electoral success of the radical right. In line with Meguid's theoretical claim, I expect that a more right wing party of the major mainstream right might legitimize issues around which the extreme right mobilizes and that this in turn facilitates its electoral success.

## 4.2 Delimitations of the theory

The theory focuses on the mainstream parties and how their policy positioning on an economic and/or a sociocultural dimension may create favourable conditions, which facilitate success for the radical right parties. However as already pointed out there is not one universal cause for the rise of the radical right and the theoretical elements included in this thesis do not capture all potential reasons behind why radical right parties succeed in some countries while they fail in others. There are many other potential reasons behind why voters find it appealing to vote for the radical right such as for example the political strategies used by the radical right party in order to attract voters.

Previous research has also given attention to structural demand side factors such as economic conditions, levels of unemployment and level of immigration. Even though many studies have shown that the explanation of the success of these parties is rather to find on the supply side of the equation I will include some of these factors by controlling for aggregate levels of annual increase/decrease in GDP per capita, number of asylum applicants and unemployment level in



each country. However, when looking at convergence between mainstream parties I do ignore micro level factors in general and therefore do not look individual characteristics related to voting for the radical right such as education, gender and socioeconomic conditions.

Another potential limitation of how I have chosen to interpret the theory is the choice not to include institutional factors such as electoral systems. For example Arzheimer and Carter (2006) in their study found that electoral systems have an effect on the electoral opportunity structure of political parties. The reason behind why such factors are excluded is simply due to time constraints and that the variation in these do not seem to be that big in Western Europe.

In sum, there are many possible alternative explanations to the rise of radical right but taking all of these into account in a cross-country analysis would constitute a huge task and outside the scope of a study this size.

### 4.3 Hypotheses derived from the theory

In order to test the theory of convergence of mainstream parties' positioning on the left - right economic dimension and the sociocultural dimension following hypotheses are derived:

*Hypothesis 1: The closer the mainstream left and right parties are positioned on the economic left-right dimension, the greater likelihood of there being a radical right party in a country.*

*Hypothesis 2: The closer the mainstream left and right parties are positioned on the sociocultural dimension, the greater likelihood of there being a radical right party in a country.*

*Hypothesis 3: The closer the mainstream left and right parties are positioned on the economic left-right dimension, the greater electoral success for the radical right party.*

*Hypothesis 4: The closer the mainstream left and right parties are positioned on the sociocultural dimension, the greater electoral success for the radical right party.*

The first four hypotheses are testing the theoretical arguments about spatial theory and policy convergence taking place on different issue dimensions (presented by Downs and later extended by Kitschelt). However since the spatial theory has also been modified by Meguid, a fifth hypothesis testing her theoretical argument has been included and focuses on the positioning of the major mainstream right party on the "new issue" dimension, namely the sociocultural.

*Hypothesis 5: The more to the right the major mainstream right party is positioned on the sociocultural dimension, the greater electoral success for the radical right party.*

## **5. Method and operationalization**

This section will present the dataset and introduce the statistical methods used in this study. The units of analysis are 15 different party systems in 14 countries. Belgium will be treated as two separate systems, due to the fact that Flanders and Wallonia has two separate party systems. First I will discuss potential delimitations of the methods used. Then I will introduce the data sources used to construct the dataset. Thereafter I will explain how I measure the two dependent variables and discuss the operationalization of the independent and the control variables. Finally I will discuss the statistical methods used to test the hypotheses of my theoretical model.

### **5.1 Delimitations**

When trying to explain variation in success of the radical right in Western Europe and whether convergence of policy positions held by mainstream left and right parties have an impact a quantitative method is more suitable than a qualitative. Carefully constructed case studies can take more factors into account and may therefore be better at explaining the success of a radical right party within a specific country. However, in order to be able to draw conclusions across countries and over time a cross-country time variant study at the macro level seems like the most suitable type of statistical method.

As previously mentioned when presenting the theory, to keep this analysis within a reasonable size while at the same time covering the central parts of the theoretical concepts, a number of delimitations has been made. As regards to the method, the thesis is limited by the fact that it does not include any data from the 1980's and the early 1990's. The reason behind is a simple one, the main data source used, namely the CHES expert survey, covers only timepoints from 1999 and onwards. Since the radical right started to emerge earlier there could have been reason to combine the source with other expert surveys, however it would make the model more complex as regards to operationalization of main concepts and so on. The thesis is also limited by the fact that I'm only looking at countries in Western Europe. For example, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia also have radical right parties (Mudde 2016, October 22). Previous research has left out Eastern Europe in order to keep structural conditions constant (since they are so similar in

Western Europe) and stated out by Mudde, Eastern European countries do not really fit in the main theory since post communist politics has been experiencing polarization rather than convergence (Mudde 2007:239).

## 5.2 Data sources

The dataset used is covering party positions in 15 countries/party systems in the EU member states of Western Europe. It's constructed by the use of country-level data from Chapel Hill expert surveys (CHES) from five different timepoints (1999, 2002, 2006, 2010 and 2014) (Bakker, et al. 2015). A total of 15 countries included at five different timepoints, makes 75 observations in the dataset. Further down in this section, the following subsections on how to operationalize the theoretical concepts will present and discuss the various variables in the dataset more in detail.

The Chapel Hill expert surveys (CHES) rely on placements by academic experts. As pointed out by Bakker et al. (2015) expert surveys do have some advantages do have some advantage when measuring party positions. Regardless of the size of a party, its parliamentary status, whether it has manifesto or not and independent from the electoral cycle an expert survey allow researchers to obtain a large number of party positions.

However, as Mudde (2007) points out, even though expert studies provide a reliable source of data for studies of the supply side, such datasets can also be questioned. For example not every political scientist in country X is an expert on radical right politics in that country. This is also something pointed out by Hooghe et al. (2010: 6), who states that it might be challenging for experts to have a task which includes interpreting and analysing signals from various sources of information such as speeches, party manifestos and information reported in newspapers, television and on the Internet. However as also highlighted by Hooghe et al., when looking at the respondents one can identify professional researchers who have been published in either the field of political parties and/or European integration in a specific country. Budge (2000) has questioned expert surveys in terms of validity, he argues that expert surveys produce only a "snapshot" of where parties are located at a specific timepoint but that the definition behind is not clear. Budge is asking questions such as: Are the positions reported the one of the leaders of the party or the electorates? In regards to time, are the judgments done by the experts representing the present moment or the past? If the conceptions of what parties are differ this

might result in experts using different criteria when positioning parties (2000:111).

As pointed out by Steenbergen and Marks (2007:348-349) it all comes down to the fundamental question of how the experts interpret the questions in the survey. There are ways of evaluating how well questions in surveys are constructed and if it is the case that experts are basing their judgments differently. The key is to look at the standard deviations among expert placements. Bakker, et al. (2015) look at the 2010 survey and the reliability of the CHES experts' placements by doing so and find that these are quite small. Experts tend to agree on the placement of parties. They also cross-validate the 2010 survey with other sources (European Election Study 2009 and the Comparative Manifesto Project dataset) and find a considerable common structure across the different measures. In line with such findings, when studying the reliability of the CHES expert judgments and comparing their validity with the Comparative Manifesto data and the Benoit-Laver and Rohrschneider-Whitefield expert surveys, Hooghe et al. (2010:13) also find that "the CHES data are a reasonably valid and reliable source of information on party positioning on European integration and ideological positioning".

An important fact pointed out by Van de Brug and Van Spanje (2009:316) is that expert surveys might miss some relevant issue dimensions. However since my aim is to do a cross-country analysis over time using already predefined scales, I do not consider this as big problem for me. Rather, I find expert surveys the most useful in order to understand something as complex as party positions.

### **5.3 Measuring the dependent variable: Radical right party**

The first dependent variable that is to be explained in the analysis captures whether a country has a radical right party or not. The original variable, found in the 1999-2014 Chapel Hill trendfile, there classifying party family association, is computed into a binary variable in which no presence of a radical right party was coded as 0 and presence of radical right party was coded as 1. The likelihood of there being a radical right party is what is of interest in the analysis. Countries in which the support for radical right parties is extremely low (below 1 %) will be excluded from the analyses. In the second model the other dependent variable, electoral success of the radical right is operationalized as the percentage of votes received by the radical right party in the election most prior to the year of evaluation.

As previously mentioned in the theory section, the classification of radical right parties in this study is made by Chapel Hill's family classification which is based on Hix and Lord (1997). The parties included are *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ) in Austria; *Vlaams Blok/Belang* (VB) and *Front National* (FN) in Belgium; *Dansk Folkeparti* (DF) in Denmark; *True Finns* (PS) in Finland; *Front National* (FN) in France; *Die Republikaner* (REP) and *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NPD) in Germany; *Golden Dawn* (XA), *Laikós Orthódoxos Synergarmós* (LAOS) and *Anexartitói Ellines* (ANEL) in Greece, *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN) in Italy; *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV) in Netherlands; *Ny demokrati* (NyD) and *Sverigedemokraterna* (SD) in Sweden and *United Kingdom Independence Party* (UKIP) in the United Kingdom. In countries/party systems where there were more than one radical right party at a specific timepoint, I made the decision only to include the one with highest vote share in the analysis.

The Northern Italian separatist *Lega Nord* (LN) is a special case since it's often recognised as both regionalist and radical right. However it's categorized as a regionalist party in the CHES data and therefore not included as a radical right party in the analysis. Nevertheless, Mair and Mudde (1998) argue that if one applies the ideological criterion, the party is to be considered belonging in the radical right family. Several scholars have also made such decision and considers LN as radical right party in their studies (eg. Rovny 2013; Van der Brug, et al. 2005; Ennsner 2012; Lubbers, et al. 2002; Rydgren 2007).

The newly formed *Alternative für Deutschland* (Afd) in Germany is in the CHES dataset classified as not belonging to any family at all and hence not included in the study as radical right party. According to Arzheimer (2015) the party is located at the right spectrum but does not qualify as radical (even if that's how its usually described by its competitors). It's a young party that is hard to classify and there is clearly a grey zone since the party's core issues are Euroscepticism and nationalism. However as Arzheimer points out, AfD belongs in the ECR political group in the European Parliament and is probably closer to the British conservatives than the FN in France or the FPÖ in Austria.

See Table A3 in Appendix for complete list of included radical right parties/year.

## 5.4 Mainstream left and right parties

When defining the major mainstream left and right parties I will use the definitions provided by Rovny (2013). Included in the analyses will be the most significant mainstream political party on

either side of the left-right spectrum in each political system. Often meaning the primary governing party and the main opposition party. Opposite to Rovny, in order to simplify the construction of the variables I made a decision only to include one (in most cases the largest) major mainstream left and right party in each country/party system.

When constructing my independent variables I was faced with making the choice of which major mainstream left and right parties to include from each country/party system. Since the party systems are highly diversified the case selection turned out to be quite complicated. Hence I am aware that this may constitute a weakness in the analysis. Particularly difficult was the case selection of Flanders in Belgium where the largest right party is the *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* (NVA). However this party is in the CHES data coded as regionalist and therefore I made the decision not to include it as the major mainstream right and instead include the *Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams* (CD&V) party. Moreover, it was also complicated to choose the major mainstream left party in Italy. I decided to include the no longer existing socialist party *Partito Democratico della Sinistra* (PDS, DS) for the 1999, 2002 and 2006 and then the *Partito Democratico* (PD) (founded in 2007) the years 2010 and 2014. In addition, Netherlands was a particularly tricky case. Here I decided to include *Christen-Democratisch Appel* (CDA) instead of the liberal VVD as the major mainstream right party. In the case of Finland I decided to include *Kansallinen Kokoomus* (KOK) (in the data coded conservative/liberal) as the major mainstream right party over the *Suomen Keskusta* (KESK) since it's coded as agrarian/centre in the CHES data.

See table A2 in the appendix for a complete list of included major mainstream left and right parties.

## 5.5 How to measure convergence of mainstream party positions

The two main independent variables measure the absolute distance on positioning between the major mainstream right and major mainstream left party in each country. One variable measures the distance on the positioning of parties in terms of its ideological stance on economic issues. The other computed variable measures the distance between the two parties in each country on positioning on the sociocultural (GAL-TAN) dimension. It is important to highlight that, in order to measure convergence or polarization, the computed variables used in the analyses only measure the distance on positioning and not positioning itself. Minimum distance between the parties on positioning is 0 and maximum is 10 on both dimensions. Low score indicates a high degree of convergence and high score denote a low degree of convergence between the two

mainstream parties (divergence).

### **5.5.1 The economic left-right dimension**

When operationalizing the distance of party positioning on the economic left right dimension I use the original variable from the CHES dataset. The wording in the questions in the questionnaire provided to the experts has been more or less the same in throughout the whole period 1999-2014 (see table A4 in the appendix). The original 11-point scale ranges from 0 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right). Parties positioned on the left want the government to play an active role in the economy (favors a stronger welfare state with higher taxes) while parties positioned on the right want the government to play a less active role in the economy (for example wants privatization, deregulation, lower taxes, less government spending (Bakker, et al. 2015; Hooghe, et al. 2010). Based on the variable in the CHES data I have created two new independent variables measuring the major mainstream right and left parties' positioning on the economic dimension (*MRecon*, *MLecon*) and another independent variable (*Distecon*) that covers the absolute distance of the two major mainstream parties' positioning on the economic policy dimension.

### **5.5.2 The GAL-TAN dimension**

As previously mentioned, in order to operationalize the mainstream party positioning distance on the sociocultural dimension I will use the variable in CHES data covering party positioning on a “green/alternative/libertarian” (GAL) to a “traditional/authoritarian/nationalist” (TAN) dimension. As was the case on the economic left right, the wording has been essentially the same throughout the whole period 1999-2014 (see table A4 in the appendix). Depending on their views on democratic freedoms and rights, parties are classified on a scale that ranges from 0 (libertarian/postmaterialist) to 10 (traditional/authoritarian). The parties that are classified as left and libertarian value personal freedoms such as for example access to abortion, immigration and same-sex marriage. On the contrary, at the right side of the spectrum the more traditional parties often reject the very same ideas (Bakker, et al. 2015; Hooghe, et al. 2010). With help of the GAL-TAN variable in the CHES data I have created two independent variables in my dataset measuring the major mainstream left and right parties' positioning on this dimension (*MRgalton*, *MLgalton*) and another independent variable (*Distgalton*) that covers the absolute distance of the major mainstream parties' positioning on the GAL-TAN dimension.

## 5.6 Operationalization of control variables

It is important to control for other factors that might influence the presence and success of radical right parties. Therefore, when testing the effect of mainstream party positioning and convergence, some control variables on an aggregate level are included in the analysis. As noted by Mudde (2016, October 22) globalization and the economic crises in Europe together with increased immigration are usually seen as explanations behind increased populism and the emergence of the radical right. I will therefore control for some factors usually looked at when measuring these conditions.

As one control variable aggregated unemployment data has been included, the variable measures yearly percentage of unemployed people in the work force. Arzheimer and Carter (2006) in their model finds that unemployment (as a macro variable) has a very big impact and that higher unemployment reduced the probability of a vote for a radical right party. This negative relationship indicates that these parties perform better in countries where unemployment is low. The same results were found by Lubbers, et al. (2002). However in the same study, an opposite relationship was found when tested on an individual level. On a micro level, they found that persons who were unemployed were more likely to vote for a radical right party.

Second I will control for inflows of refugees. Previous studies (eg. Lubbers, et al. 2002) have showed that the number of asylum applicants has a positive effect on support for radical right parties while others (eg. Van der Brug, et al. 2005; Arzheimer and Carter 2006) found no significant relationship, and concluded that this did not affect support for the radical right.

Finally, I will control for economic growth by including data measuring (% annual change in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita from previous year). Previous research (eg. Van der Brug, et al. 2005) has found that where economic growth is smaller in relation to other Western European countries, support to the radical right party tends to be stronger.

The data measuring the number of asylum applicants, the total level of unemployment (%) and annual GDP growth per capita in each country at every timepoint are all taken from Eurostat (see more detailed information on the obtained variables in table A1 in the Appendix).

## 5.7 Statistical method

This thesis uses a quantitative methodological approach. Since I want to explain variation in two



different dependent variables I have decided to employ a two-step method. First, I will use a logistic regression in order to test the first set of hypotheses (1 and 2). Second, an OLS regression will be used when testing the second set of hypotheses (3 and 4) and hypothesis 5. The data is from five different timepoints, 1999, 2002, 2006, 2010 and 2014. In the logistic regressions, since the data is time-series-cross-section with a binary dependent variable, so called BTSCS-data insights from Beck et al (1998) and Beck (2001) has been useful and methodological decisions has been made according to their suggestions. As suggested, the data is recognized as grouped duration data and therefore issues ignoring temporal interdependence of the date are taken into account.

The logistic regression model tests the proposition that the likelihood of there existing a radical right party or not in a country varies according to the distance between the mainstream left and right parties positioning on a socioeconomic dimension and the distance between the mainstream left and right parties on a sociocultural dimension. Hence, the model allows me to estimate the probability of there being a radical right party conditional on the distance on positioning of major mainstream parties on the economic policy and the sociocultural policy dimension (GALTAN). The statistical analysis builds on a dataset constructed with data from the CHES survey (Bakker, et al. 2015) and Eurostat. It is grouped in countries and year and the command *tsset* was used in order to tell the statistical program that I was dealing with time-series data. For each country-case the binary dependent variable expresses whether there exists a radical right party (1) or not (0) the different timepoints of evaluation. The logistic regression analysis will be run on 75 observations grouped by 15 countries and 5 timepoints.

As a second dependent variable I will include the percentage of votes received by the radical right party (in the national election most prior to the timepoint of evaluation) and as a second step test hypotheses 3, 4 and 5 using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions. Since vote share is measured as a continuous scale I believe that an OLS is the most suitable type of method. The OLS-regression analysis will be run on 45 observations since only parties having a radical right party will be included. As was the case in the logistic regression, the data is grouped by countries and timepoint of evaluation.

As previously mentioned, two of the independent variables are used to operationalize convergence between mainstream left and right parties. They are newly computed from the original variables in the CHES datasets. Four hypotheses will be tested by logistic and OLS-

regression models including following main independent variables:

- Distance on party positioning of the major mainstream left and right party at the economic dimension (*Distecon*)
- Distance on party positioning of the major mainstream left and right party at the sociocultural dimension (*Distgaltan*)

The fifth hypothesis is somewhat competing with the other four and will be tested using OLS-regressions model including variables measuring positioning of the major mainstream left and the major mainstream right party on each dimension (*MRecon*, *MLEcon*, *MRgaltan*, *MLgaltan*).

Furthermore, as previously argued, following control variables will be taken into consideration:

- Level of total unemployment in % in each country the specific timepoint of evaluation (*Unemployment*)
- The natural logarithm of number of asylum applicants in each country the specific timepoint of evaluation in the (*Ln asylum*). Using the natural logarithm enables a normal distribution of the coefficient and avoids errors affecting the results.
- Annual change in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita (in %) in each country the specific timepoint of evaluation (*GDPgrowth*)

As for the control variables, unemployment and number of asylum applicants is expected to have a positive relationship with the dependent variables while GDP growth is expected to have a negative relationship. Moreover as suggested by Beck, et al. (1998) and Beck (2001) a series of time dummy variables will be incorporated, hence allowing for temporal dependence. As a robustness check I will control for country effects by clustering the standard errors on the country level.

## 6. Results

Before testing the hypotheses, I first present characteristics of the dependent variables and the key independent variables; major mainstream party policy positioning and convergence of mainstream parties' positions on the economic and the GAL-TAN dimension.

*Table 6.1. Radical right parties in 10 Western European countries 2014*

Country	Radical right party	Election results in the latest election (percentage)	Election year
Austria	FPO	20.5	2013
	BZO	3.5	2013
Belgium:			
Flemish region	VB	3.7	2014
Denmark	DF	12.2	2011
Finland	PS	19.1	2011
France	FN	13.6	2012
Germany	NPD	1.3	2013
Greece	XA	6.9	2012
	ANEL	7.5	2012
	LAOS	1.6	2012
Netherlands	PVV	10.1	2012
Sweden	SD	12.9	2014
United Kingdom	UKIP	3.1	2010

Source: 1999-2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey trendfile (Bakker, et al. 2015.)

*Table 6.2. Descriptive statistics on the main independent variables*

	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
MRecon (0-10)	75	6.889	.873	5.25	8.63
MLecon (0-10)	75	3.668	.740	2.13	5.63
Distecon (0- 10)	75	3.219	1.061	0.46	5.019
MRgaltan (0-10)	75	6.426	1.118	3	8.46
MLgaltan (0-10)	75	3.647	.787	2.15	5.5
Distgaltan (0-10)	75	2.780	1.503	0.19	6.13

Source: 1999-2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey trendfile (Bakker, et al. 2015.)

Table 6.1. above shows the countries/party systems which had a radical right party at the most recent timepoint of evaluation (2014). In 2014, 10 out of the 15 countries/party systems included in the analysis had at least one radical right party with a vote share over 1 %. The vote shares (%) received by radical right parties were especially high in countries such as Austria, Finland, France, Sweden and Denmark. Looking at descriptive statistics on the main independent variables in table 6.2, the data shows that the variance of party positioning is higher among the major mainstream right parties than among the major mainstream left parties on both the economic and sociocultural dimension. In general, variance is higher on the sociocultural dimension, which means that policy positions are more spread out on this dimension.

## 6.1 Regression results

In the theory section I presented five hypotheses that predict how my main independent variables affect the two dependent variables, (*Radical\_right\_party* and *Vote\_share*). The first two hypotheses specify how the independent variables measuring distance between the major mainstream parties on each dimension, are expected to theoretically explain the likelihood for a country to have a radical right party. I first hypothesized that whether or not a country/party system has a radical right party would be affected by the distance of the policy positions of the major mainstream parties on the economic dimension. I expected a negative relationship, the larger distance on policy positioning between the mainstream parties, the smaller likelihood of radical right party.

Second, I hypothesized that the likelihood of a country/party system having a radical right party would be affected by the distance of the policy positions of the major mainstream parties on the sociocultural dimension (GAL-TAN). As stated in theory section, I expected to find a negative relationship, the smaller the distance between the parties, the greater likelihood of having a radical right party. To test the hypotheses logistic regression models allow me to estimate the probability of having a radical right party conditional on the closeness of positioning of mainstream parties on the economic and sociocultural dimension. Controlling for level of unemployment, number of asylum seekers and GDP growth.

Table 6.3. Logistic regressions with robust standard errors: The effect of several independent variables on the likelihood of having a radical right party

DV – Radical right party (0-1)	Model 1 (Bivariate regressions)	Model 2 (Multivariate regressions without controls)	Model 3 (Multivariate regressions with controls)	Model 4 (Multivariate regressions with controls and dummies)
Distecon (0-10)	.312 (.244)	.276 (.259)	.224 (.273)	.112 (.352)
Distgaltan (0-10)	-.137 (.218)	-.0828 (.250)	-.108 (.252)	-.204 (.286)
<i>Control variables</i>				
Unemployment (%)			-.059 (.073)	-.065 (.092)
GDP growth /capita			-.370 (.109)***	-.645 (.184)***
Ln (Number of asylum applicants)			.517 (.252)**	.626 (.274)**
Constant			-3.3596	-3.658
Year dummy variables				Included
Cox and Snell R2		0.030	0.216	0.290
N	75	75	75	75

Notes: Coefficients are in log-odds units. \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001

Robust standard errors adjusted for clustering on country within parentheses

Source: 1999-2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey trendfile (Bakker, et al. 2015.); Eurostat

Table 6.3 presents the results of the logistic regressions analysis. For the interpretation of the models, a positive parameter which is significant at the a  $p < 0.05$  level indicates that the likelihood of having an extreme right party has increased, while a negative parameter denotes a decreased likelihood. Model 1 includes bivariate regressions, Model 2 includes multivariate regressions without controls and Model 4 multivariate regressions including both control variables and the time dummy variables. By looking at the results in the Table 6.3 I can immediately conclude that hypotheses 1 and 2 not are supported and that these can be rejected.

Since the findings do not reach the level of significance, and the true effect can be regarded as zero, I decided not to interpret the coefficients any further. Hence there was no reason for transforming odds into probabilities and calculate the predicted probabilities for the independent variables.

With regard to the control variables included, the analysis arrives at the following findings. As expected, an increase in the annual percentage of GDP/capita is associated with a decreased likelihood of having a radical right party. As also expected, an increased amount of asylum applicants in a country is associated with an increased likelihood of having radical right party.

*Table 6.4. OLS-regressions with robust standard errors: The effect of independent variables measuring distance on policy positioning on the electoral success of radical right parties*

DV – Vote share (%)	Model 1 (Bivariate regressions)	Model 2 (Multivariate regressions without controls)	Model 3 (Multivariate regressions with controls)	Model 4 (Multivariate regressions with controls and dummies)
Distecon (0-10)	.444 (.882)	1.095 (.871)	.798 (1.105)	.731 (.998)
Distgaltan (0-10)	1.238 (.764)	1.483 (.795)	<b>1.760</b> <b>(.671)*</b>	<b>2.643</b> <b>(.757)**</b>
<i>Control variables</i>				
Unemployment (%)			-.195 (.209)	-.328 (.285)
GDP growth /capita			-.559 (.461)	.061 (.451)
Ln (number of asylum applicants)			-1.730 (1.020)	-3.543 (1.23)*
Constant			21.432 (12.661)	32.258 (14.58)*
Year dummy variables				Included
R-square		0.111	0.224	0.404
N	45	45	45	45

Notes: \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001

Robust standard errors adjusted for clustering on country within parentheses

Source: 1999-2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey trendfile (Bakker, et al. 2015.); Eurostat

It is important to point out that my non-findings do not prove that previous research has been wrong or that the convergence thesis is not valid, more likely they are results of problems associated with limitations of the measurements and the models used in this study. For example there is most likely a small N-problem - the number of repeated observations per unit is a too small. Moreover, another shortcoming of the logistic regressions above is that there is not enough variation in the dependent variable used.

The third and fourth hypotheses will be tested by using OLS-regressions. These specify how the independent variables are expected to explain the electoral success of the radical right party (% of votes received in the election most prior to the timepoint of evaluation). In both hypotheses I hypothesised negative relationships, expecting that when the distance between the parties' policy positions decrease, this will have a positive effect on vote share.

Table 6.4 illustrates the results of the OLS-regression analysis. Model 1 includes bivariate regressions, Model 2 includes multivariate regressions without controls and Model 4 multivariate regressions including both control variables and time dummy variables. Since only countries/political systems with a radical right party are included the numbers of cases have decreased from 75 to 45. As illustrated in the table, the effects of *Distecon* are insignificant in all models.

I therefore conclude that in my analysis, distance on positioning between the major mainstream right and major mainstream on the economic policy dimension has no effect on the electoral success of the radical right and that hypothesis 3 can be rejected.

However, when testing hypothesis 4, Model 3 and 4 supports that distance of major mainstream parties positioning on the sociocultural dimension (*Distgaltan*) has an effect on the electoral success of the radical right (*Vote\_share*). As hypothesised in the theory section, it can be concluded that there is a relationship between the two variables. Yet opposite what I expected, the findings show that when distance on party positions increases on the sociocultural dimension, this has a positive effect on electoral success of the radical right. Thus, hypothesis 4 can also be rejected since the direction of the relationship was opposite to what was expected.

Looking at *Distgaltan*, the coefficient in model 4 tells us that there is a positive relationship, when the distance increases by one step on the scale (0-10), the vote share of the radical right party will

increase by 2.643 percent on average. The findings here go against a majority of the literature and what was expected when formulating the hypothesis. Rather it makes a case for divergence between the major mainstream parties on the sociocultural dimension being associated with electoral success of the radical right party.

Since the results do not hold, or as in the case of *Distgaltan* show an opposite relationship, I fail to establish the relationships expected in the first four hypotheses.

*Table 6.5. OLS-regressions with robust standard errors: The effect of independent variables measuring policy positioning of mainstream parties on the electoral success of radical right parties*

DV – Vote share (%)	Model 1 (Bivariate regressions)	Model 2 (Multivariate regressions without controls)	Model 3 (Multivariate regressions with controls)	Model 4 (Multivariate regressions with controls and dummies)
MRecon (0-10)	0.305 (1.142)	1.397 (1.530)	.815 (1.535)	.449 (1.753)
MLecon (0-10)	-.495 (1.670)	-1.531 (1.343)	-1.881 (1.789)	-1.808 (1.577)
MRgaltan(0-10)	<b>2.056</b> <b>(.909)*</b>	<b>2.634</b> <b>(.868)*</b>	<b>2.860</b> <b>(0.834)**</b>	<b>3.272</b> <b>(.743)***</b>
MLgaltan (0-10)	-.361 (1.484)	.366 (1.642)	.611 (1.260)	-.778 (1.482)
<i>Control variables</i>				
Unemployment (%)			-.107 (.199)	-.241 (.29)
GDP growth /capita			-.810 (.437)	-.219 (.529)
Ln (Number of asylum seekers)			-1.728 (1.187)	-3.437 (1.354)*
Constant				
Time dummy variables				Included
R-square		0.175	0.295	0.44
N	45	45	45	45

Notes: \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001

Robust standard errors adjusted for clustering on country within parentheses

Source: 1999-2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey trendfile (Bakker, et al. 2015.); Eurostat



The fifth hypothesis is tested by the use of OLS-regressions including the variables measuring policy positions of the major mainstream right and the major mainstream left party on the both dimensions in each party system. Looking at table 6.4 the findings show a positive and significant effect of the position of the major mainstream right party on the sociocultural dimension (*MRgaltan*). A one step move towards the right would have an impact on the vote of the radical right party with 3.27 %. Thus, the results give some support to hypothesis 5. However, as the R-square value increases when adding the control and time dummy variables this gives an indication that major mainstream right party positioning on GAL-TAN doesn't very well explain variation in success of the radical right.

Looking closer at the control variables, the number of asylum applicants seems to have a negative effect on the vote share. This is a result opposite to what was expected and what was shown in the logistic regression. The reason behind seems to be major outliers, as there are some countries with a very high number of asylum applicants in which the radical right party still has a very low support (as is the case with NPD and Germany for example).

A possible objection to the results in the models is the risk of misclassifying the major mainstream parties. Seen in retrospect, when measuring convergence/divergence, in order to avoid such problems, I could have looked at the standard deviation of the positioning of all mainstream parties instead of computing the distance between the major mainstream left and right party. That could have simplified the measurements and increased in the validity in the results.

Summing up the results, I originally expected to find a negative relationship between convergence of policy positions of the major mainstream right and left party in a country/party system and the success of the radical right. However, my findings when testing hypotheses 1- 4 did not show any significant effect or the relationship was opposite to what was expected (as in the case of *Distgaltan* in the OLS-regression). Moreover, a big problem with the logistic regression (which turned out showing nothing) was that there was not enough variation in the dependent variable used. In this regard, the OLS-regression turned out working better.

Only when looking specifically at the positioning of the major mainstream right parties a relationship could be found with the electoral success of the radical right. The findings shows that when a major right party takes a more right position, this increases the vote share of the radical right.

## 7. Concluding discussion

### 7.1 How may party positioning of the mainstream left and right parties affect the success of radical right parties in Western Europe?

In this thesis I initially sought to explain the relationship between policy positioning convergence among the major mainstream parties and the success of radical right parties in Western Europe. However, according to the findings in this study, a potentially better explanation is rather to be found when looking specifically at the positioning of the major right party on the sociocultural dimension.

Although it, due to shortcomings of the model, makes sense that my hypotheses testing convergence were rejected, I still find the results important. According to my non-findings, convergence on the economic or the sociocultural (GAL-TAN) dimension does not seem to increase the likelihood of having a radical right party. When looking at the sociocultural (GAL-TAN dimension) and vote share received by the radical right, the results in fact show the opposite. When there is an increased distance (divergence) between the major mainstream left and right parties on this dimension that has a positive effect on the electoral success of the radical right.

The aim of this study was to look at major mainstream party policy positioning and test the theory stating that convergence between the mainstream left and right parties on policy positions might open up for influence of far right parties. I did not find proof of the convergence theory. However, this is not to say that the findings in my study disconfirms Kitschelt's theoretical claim. Rather the findings find some support for the modified spatial theory presented by Meguid (2005) also referred to in the theory section. Looking at the OLS-regression models, the results show that when there is divergence on the sociocultural dimension that increases the radical right vote share. If the major mainstream left party applies a what Meguid (2005) defines as an *adversarial* strategy towards the radical right party, that increases the saliency of the radical right party's core issue (most likely immigration) this in turn might "force" the major mainstream right party (who is probably closer to the radical right party) to compete over the voters and then uses an *accommodative* strategy and takes a tougher stance on the issue. In the long run, when issues such as immigration become more salient in the political debate, increased competition from the radical right party may result in tougher stances taken by the major mainstream right parties on

more polarized issues (such as the ones often included in sociocultural dimension). This may have societal consequences since it could result in the mainstream parties legitimizing the issues driven by the radical right and at worst, ending up in changed political landscape. Loxbo (2014:255-256) also refers to Meguid and take Sweden and the liberalising immigration policy in 2011 as an example. By adopting an adversarial strategy towards the Sweden democrats, the mainstream parties in Sweden increased saliency of the SD's core issue. Nevertheless, at one quite important point – my findings differ with the ones of Loxbo. He finds the biggest risk to be convergence but according to my rather modest findings I find it to be polarisation.

In sum, when trying to understand the success of the radical right the importance of looking at the sociocultural dimension cannot be highlighted enough. This study has contributed with new evidence by looking at more recent data and a larger group of countries than what has been included in the majority of previous research. In line with previous research, it shows that policy positioning of the major mainstream right parties on the sociocultural dimension is of paramount importance when trying to understand the success of the radical right.

## 7.2 Further research

Research has come very far in the field of radical right parties. As it's regarded as the primary basis for this "new" family the sociocultural dimension has already received great attention among prominent scholars. Nevertheless, since these parties are becoming increasingly powerful political actors, understanding the phenomenon is becoming increasingly important. Therefore, more research is still needed in the area. My study (including more recent data and a larger amount of countries than many of the previous ones of a similar kind) showed the importance of major mainstream right parties' positioning on the sociocultural dimension when understanding the success of radical right. I believe that this should be explored further. What drives what? How may different positions taken by the mainstream parties on more polarised issues (such as for example immigration) affect the success of the radical right? As already mentioned, in order to produce more valid and reliable results, future studies could look at for example standard deviation among all the mainstream parties' positioning on different issue dimensions across countries and over time.

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## 8.1 Additional data sources

Eurostat - Unemployment statistics 1999, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2014

*Unemployment rate - % of active population*

Available at:

<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tsdec450> (Accessed 160328)

Eurostat – Asylum applicants statistics 1999, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2014

*Total number of asylum applicants aggregated data*

Available at: [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr\\_asyctz&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_asyctz&lang=en)

[http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr\\_asyappctza&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_asyappctza&lang=en) (Accessed 160509)

Eurostat – Main GDP aggregates per capita statistics 1999, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2014

*GDP per capita annual change in %*

Available at: <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do> (Accessed 160509)

## Appendix

Table A1: Overview of variables

Country	Unique identifier for each country Codes: 1 Belgium-Flanders, 2 Denmark, 3 Spain, 4 France, 5 Germany, 6 Greece, 7 Ireland, 8 Italy, 9 Netherlands, 10 United Kingdom, 11 Austria, 12 Finland, 13 Portugal, 14 Sweden, 15 Belgium-Wallonia
country_name	BE-FL, DK, ES, FR, GE, GR, IRL, IT, NL, UK, aus, fin, por, sve, BE-WA
YEAR	Timepoint of evaluation (1999, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014)  Recoded into dummies for each year
MRecon (0-10)	Positioning of major mainstream right party on the economic policy scale. 0 = left 10=right
MLecon (0-10)	Positioning of major mainstream left party on the economic policy scale. 0 = left 10=right
Distecon (0-10)	The distance on positioning between the major right and left party on the economic policy scale
MRGaltan (0-10)	Positioning of major mainstream right party on the GAL-TAN scale. 0 = left 10=right
MLGaltan	Positioning of major mainstream left party on the GAL-TAN scale. 0 = left 10=right
Distgaltan (0-10)	The distance on positioning between the major right and left party on the economic policy scale
Radical_right_party (0;1)	Existence of radical right party Codes: 0 = No radical right party 1= Radical right party
RR_party_name	Radical right party name
Vote_share	Vote of radical right party in national election most prior to Year (see table A3 for included parties)
Unemployment	Unemployment rate - % of active population (1999, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2014)
Ln(asylum)	The natural logarithm of the total number of asylum applicants, aggregated data (1999, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2014)
GDPgrowth	GDP per capita annual change in % (1999, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2014)

Source: 1999-2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey trendfile (Bakker, et al. 2015.), Eurostat



Table A2: List of major mainstream left parties / mainstream right parties included

Country	Major mainstream right party	Major mainstream left party
Belgium Flanders	Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams (CD&V) - previously CVP	Socialistische Partij Anders (SPA) - previously SP
Belgium Wallonia	Mouvement Reformateur (MR)	Parti Socialiste (PS)
Denmark	Socialdemokraterne (SD)	Venstre (V)
Spain	Partido Popular (PP)	Partido Socialista Obrero Espanol (PSOE)
France	Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP)	Parti Socialiste (PS)
Germany	Christlich-Demokratische Union (CDU-CSU)	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD)
Greece	Nea Dimokratia (ND)	Panellinio Sosialistiko Kinima (PASOK)
Ireland	Fianna Fail (FF)	Labour (Lab)
Italy	Forza Italia (FI) - in the form of PDL 2010	Partito Democratico della Sinistra (PDS, DS) and after 2010 Partito Democratico (PD)
Netherlands	Christen-Democratisch Appel (CDA)	Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA)
United Kingdom	Conservative Party (Cons)	Labour Party (Lab)
Austria	Osterreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP)	Sozialdemokratische Partei Osterreichs (SPÖ)
Finland	Kansallinen Kokoomus (KOK)	Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen (SDP)
Portugal	Partido Social Democrata PSD (previously PPD)	Partido Socialista (PS)
Sweden	Moderaterna (M)	Arbetarpartiet – Socialdemokraterna (SAP)

Source: 1999-2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey trendfile (Bakker, et al. 2015.)

Table A3. List of radical right parties included (the largest/ election, > 1 % vote share)

Country/party system	Radical right party	Year
Belgium Flanders	Vlaams Belang/VB	All years
Belgium Wallonia	Front National/FN	1999, 2002, 2006
Denmark	Dansk Folkeparti/DF	All years
France	Front National/FN	All years
Germany	Republikaner/REP Nazionaldemokratische Partei/NPD	1999 2014
Greece	Laikos Orthodoxos Synagermos/LAOS Anexártiti Éllines/ANEL	2006, 2010 2014
Italy	Alleanza Nazionale/AN	1999, 2002, 2006
Netherlands	List Pim Fortuyn/LPF Partij voor de Vrijheid/PVV	2002 2006, 2010, 2014
United Kingdom	UK Independence Party/UKIP	2006, 2010, 2014
Austria	Freiheitliche Partei Osterreichs/FPO	All years
Finland	Perussuomalaiset/PS	2006, 2010, 2014
Sweden	Ny Demokrati/NyD Sverigedemokraterna/SD	1999 2010, 2014

Source: 1999-2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey trendfile (Bakker, et al. 2015.)

Table A4: The ideological questions asked to experts in CHES expert surveys

LRECON=	Position of the party in YEAR in terms of its ideological stance on economic issues. Parties can be classified in terms of their stance on economic issues. Parties on the economic left want government to play an active role in the economy. Parties on the economic right emphasize a reduced economic role for government: privatization, lower taxes, less regulation, less government spending, and a leaner welfare state. 0 = extreme left 5 = center 10 = extreme right
GALTAN=	Position of the party in YEAR in terms of their views on democratic freedoms and rights. “Libertarian” or “postmaterialist” parties favor expanded personal freedoms, for example, access to abortion, active euthanasia, same-sex marriage, or greater democratic participation. “Traditional” or “authoritarian” parties often reject these ideas; they value order, tradition, and stability, and believe that the government should be a firm moral authority on social and cultural issues. 0 = Libertarian/Postmaterialist 5 = center 10 = Traditional/Authoritarian

Source: Bakker, et al. 2015.