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# Defying Europe? The Euroscepticism of radical right and radical left voters in Western Europe

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## ABSTRACT

Radical Left Parties (RLPs) and Radical Right Parties (RRPs) parties have adopted similar platforms over EU economic integration, rejecting further budgetary/economic authority transfers towards the EU. During the Euro crisis, EU-led management of the recession, constraining budgetary independency, may have worsened public concerns over the loss of state sovereignty on economic prerogatives. Although RLPs and RRP have conveyed to voters anti-EU budgetary messages, we do not know if the electors have responded to this cueing activity. Thus, this paper seeks to understand whether, during the Euro crisis, voters supported the RLPs and RRP due to anti-EU budgetary positions or not in Western Europe. On the one hand, we show that voters have electorally rewarded RRP on the anti-EU budgetary issues, profiling themselves as *Euro-rejectionists*. On the other hand, we found that voters have not significantly matched RLP anti-EU budgetary stances, perhaps expressing favourable orientations towards the EU interstate solidarity.

## KEYWORDS

Euroscepticism; radical left parties; radical right parties; voting behaviour; EU budgetary issues

## 1. Introduction

The Great Recession dramatically undermined the electoral stability of the Western European democracies, with mainstream parties suffering from major electoral losses. Different trends have occurred in each country, but the fleeing of votes from mainstream parties to the non-mainstream has been a constant in Western Europe (Hutter, Kriesi, and Vidal 2018; Hobolt and Tilley 2016). The literature has dealt with the different aspects related to this voting shift, identifying several predictors. Akkerman and Roodujin (2015) coined the term 'flank attack' to describe 'populist' radical left and radical right electoral growth. On the one hand, voters have been likely to reward radical right parties (RRPs) on the basis of socio-cultural issues (Akkerman *et al.* 2016), such as the opposition to immigration and, partially, to Euroscepticism (Werts, Scheepers, and Lubbers 2013). On the other hand, voters have rewarded radical left parties (RLPs) on the call for economic redistribution issues and anti-austerity platforms (Gomez, Morales, and Ramiro 2016). Therefore, voters have chosen RRP and RRP based on different policy options, where,

respectively, immigration and economic redistribution have been the major voting determinants.

However, RLPs and RRP have both cued voters on economic sovereigntism, blaming the international/supranational institutions for the worsening conditions of citizens (Basile, Borri, and Verzichelli 2020). In doing so, these parties have pledged to regain the nation-state control of budgetary, fiscal and monetary policies. These sovereigntist appeals have been complemented by the opposition to EU integration, with Euroscepticism being more likely to be found on the 'extremes' of the political poles (Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2002).

Relying on this literature background, this article proposes that RLP and RRP supporters have shared a common policy objective, revolving around *the opposition to the budgetary and economic prerogative transfer towards the EU*. This form of Euroscepticism has been entrenched in the ideological predisposition of both these party types, with RLPs and RRP opposing the EU authority on budgetary and fiscal policies.

The EU-led management of the Euro crisis seems to have given rise to a growing popular dissatisfaction with the economic embodiment of the EU, which may have been electorally channelled by the RLPs and RRP. In point of fact, the austerity policies, rescue packages and the inter-state solidarity issue could become contested and salient in domestic debates, probably affecting voting behaviour. Thus, the core aim of the paper is to understand whether, during the Euro crisis, voters supported the RLPs and RRP due to anti-EU budgetary issues in Western Europe.

The case-selection focuses on both creditor and debtor countries to provide general findings. Although the Euro crisis resulted in different economic outcomes in Western Europe, these groups of countries have witnessed some similarity in their political reactions, such as the growing politicisation of the EU conflict (Hutter and Kriesi 2019). Hence, Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain have been selected for observing the electoral trends, using the 2014 European Election Studies (EES; Schmitt et al. 2016) – a dataset capable of accounting for these voting patterns – capturing a critical moment in Western European politics. The article is organised as follows: the first section reviews the literature on parties and voting behaviour, introducing the hypotheses; the second examines the Eurosceptic ideology of the RLPs and RRP in the nine countries under study; the third focuses on the methodology used in the analysis, identifying the main variables; and, finally, the fourth part presents the findings.

## 2 Party types, voting behaviour and hypotheses

This work refers to the radical left parties (RLPs) and radical right parties (RRPs) based on their location along the left-right continuum and their association with different kinds of European party families (Mair and Mudde 1998). On the one hand, RLPs have been those traditionally placed on the far-left of the policy space, all rejecting the main values and practices of contemporary capitalism (March 2011) and possessing '*enough ideological and policy coherence to justify being conceptualized as a single party family*' (March and Rommerskirchen 2015, 41). On the other hand, Cas Mudde (2007) has defined the radical right as a party family, which includes those actors sharing a combination of authoritarianism, populism and nativism, hence, occupying the far-right of the space.

The literature has extensively acknowledged that Euroscepticism is to be found, albeit with different motivations, on the radical poles of the left-right ideological divide, rather than in the centre (Taggart 1998; Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2002). In fact, RLPs and RRPers have been more likely to initiate and mobilise a new conflict over the European integration, acting as EU issue entrepreneurs to win more votes (Hobolt and De Vries 2015).

Since the outbreak of the Euro crisis, many voters have defected from the mainstream parties, rewarding the RLPs and RRPers. Several works have identified the growing importance of migration and redistribution issues in drifting voters apart from mainstream actors (Gomez, Morales, and Ramiro 2016; Akkerman *et al.* 2016). Furthermore, Magalhães (2017) has shown to what extent the party-voter EU issue congruence has increasingly predicted the voting shifts in favour of the Eurosceptic parties, or abstention in the 2014 EP elections, pushing votes away from the mainstream parties. This electoral phenomenon has been defined as EU issue voting, referring to *'the process whereby individual preferences over European integration directly influence the voting choices in national elections'* (De Vries 2010, 92). However, this notion does not seem apt in fully describing the electoral trends during the Euro crisis, simply accounting for the voter-party proximity along a general pro-/anti-EU dimension and thus, overriding some of its policy complexity.

RLPs and RRPers have shown to have similar platforms over EU integration on the economic level, as the two families reject further economic integration as it is, i.e. they criticise neoliberal (RLPs) or globalist (RRPs) ideology beyond EU economic policy (Halikiopoulou, Nanou, and Vasiliopoulou 2012; Basile, Borri, and Verzichelli 2020). This does not mean that these families can be considered 'Eurosceptic' *per se*. In this paper, Euroscepticism is defined as *'contingent and conditional opposition to European integration as well as total and unconditional opposition to it'* (Taggart 1998, 364). The literature has shown how the Eurosceptic notion can be further split into meaningful subcategories (Keith 2017), which account for the rejection of the *principles*, the *future* and the *practices* of the European Union. Indeed, RLPs and RRPers have shared a marked opposition concerning the practice of the EU and, in particular, regarding the nation states' sovereignty losses in the drawing up of budgetary policies (Basile, Borri, and Verzichelli 2020), while they have had different profiles concerning the principles and future of EU integration. RLPs are against a 'neoliberal' Europe and further integration based on this ideology (Tarditi and Vittori 2019a). RRPers are against EU integration as such, as a supranational integration is in opposition to cultural, economic and political sovereigntism (Ivaldi and Mazzoleni 2020). Political scientists have extensively dealt with the opposition to EU integration in principle, both among radical voters and parties, yet, less has been said on practice, such as the opposition to EU economic embodiment.

According to some works (Basile, Borri, and Verzichelli 2020; Ivaldi and Mazzoleni 2020), these parties have conveyed to the voters, information shortcuts on the refusal of further EU economic integration. Nonetheless, cueing activity does not necessarily condition electoral preferences, especially when parties fail to clarify their actual positions (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Carrieri 2020). To understand whether party messages unleash electoral responses, we have analysed the voter-party proximity on the EU-budgetary policies, ascertaining its potential issue discrepancy or congruence. Thus, this article mainly seeks to compare the RLP and RRP voters, hypothesising that the opposition

to the budgetary prerogative transfer towards the EU was a key common denominator for these actors during the Euro crisis.

The EU management of the crisis has ushered in a new era for the Eurozone economic governance, leading to several treaty reforms, which have tightened the constraints of budgetary policies domestically (Laffan 2014). Western European citizens have probably reappraised the enhancement of state sovereignty vis-à-vis supranational integration and multilevel EU governance. Indeed, many voters may have identified the nation state – again starting from different perspectives – as the natural vehicle for reversing the new economic course implemented at the EU level, made up of austerity policies and rescue packages. These popular orientations in favour of state control over economic and budgetary policies can potentially explain the electoral support for the RLPs and RRP in Western Europe.

We cannot directly test to what extent this form of Euroscepticism had preceded rather than followed the Euro crisis<sup>1</sup> outbreak. However, we hypothesise that, during the crisis (2014), the EU-budgetary issues had been salient and controversial in the Western European political debate, influencing voting preferences for the RLPs and RRP.

Hence, two hypotheses emerge:

RRP Voting Hypothesis (H1): During the Euro crisis, voters electorally supported the RRP on the anti-EU budgetary issues in Western Europe.

RLP Voting Hypothesis (H2): During the Euro crisis, voters electorally supported RRLs on the anti-EU budgetary issues in Western Europe.

### ***3.1 Political context in debtor and creditor countries***

Before analysing the electorate of the two radical poles in relation to the EU, it is worth contextualising both the case-selection and the political systems where RLPs and RRP operated during the Euro crisis. The Euro crisis brought about many electoral changes within the European political systems and triggered an intra-state division between debtor and creditor countries in Western Europe. In the debtor countries (such as Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain), the crisis repercussions were particularly strong, due to the skyrocketing in both the unemployment rate and the national (public and private) debt, coupled with the EU-led austerity policies (Bosco and Verney 2012). Some works have found close links between the austerity measures and voter attitudes towards European integration in the South European debtor countries (Hutter, Kriesi, and Vidal 2018).

On the contrary, creditor countries (such as Finland, France, Germany and the Netherlands) had faced less strict austerity policies and, once having absorbed the shock, their economic and financial recovery was much quicker and less traumatic (Hutter and Kriesi 2019). Nonetheless, the creditor countries had been involved in the debate over the rescue packages for the debtors, with this issue peaking their political agendas (Grande and Hutter 2016). Popular opposition to bailout measures had probably become widespread, politicising an EU intra-state solidarity issue and revitalising radical ordo-liberal sentiments.

In spite of their differences, we contend that both these country clusters witnessed a public dissatisfaction with the economic embodiment of the EU, leading to a generalised pattern of voting behaviour in Western Europe. In fact, the mainstream

**Table 1.** Radical left positions on general European integration and EU budgetary/economic integration in 2014. Source: CHES 2014.

Party	Country	EU Position	EU Salience	EU Bud./Econ. Integration
KKE	Greece	1.1	6	1
SYRIZA	Greece	3.4	6.3	1.6
Left Front	France	2.4	6.6	1.5
VAS	Finland	4.3	4.6	2.5
BE	Portugal	3.1	6.9	1.3
CDU	Portugal	1.9	7.1	1
Podemos	Spain	4.4	6.2	1.5
IU	Spain	4.6	5.7	2.6
M5S	Italy	1.4	8.9	1.3
LT	Italy	2.6	4.9	1.5
AKEL	Cyprus	4.5	6.5	2
SP	Netherlands	2.1	6.7	1.5
Left	Germany	3	5.7	2.7

**Table 2.** Radical right positions on general European integration and EU budgetary/economic integration in 2014. Source: CHES 2014.

Party	Country	EU Position	EU Salience	EU Bud./Econ. Integration
ANEL	Greece	2.2	4.9	1.2
GD	Greece	1.1	4.4	1
Finns	Finland	1.6	8.2	1.7
FN	France	1.2	8.5	1.1
Fdl	Italy	2.2	6.8	1.4
League	Italy	1.1	8.9	1.1
PVV	Netherlands	1.1	8.4	1
AfD	Germany	1.6	9.5	2.5

lost votes in both these groups, though the decline was more evident in the debtor countries (Hobolt and Tilley 2016). Conversely, the RRP and RRL, both new and old actors, increased their share of votes, breaking into the mainstream of West European politics (see next paragraph). Thus, our selection includes both creditor (Finland, France, Germany and the Netherlands) and debtor (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain) countries, expecting there to be a common trajectory in their electoral patterns.

We have analysed all the RLPs and RRP polling at least 3% of votes in the 2014 EP elections, exerting a voice, to some extent, in their party systems. This section assesses the party positions on general European integration policies and on EU authority over the Member States' economic and budgetary policies, using the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES, Polk et al. 2017). Tables 1 and Tables 2 show that the parties diverged in their orientations on the general European integration issues, revealing a significant array of positions regarding the overall authority transfer process. However, they all opposed the EU economic embodiment, justifying an extensive enquiry into whether this Euroscepticism has been electorally profitable in Western Europe.

### 3.2 Radical left parties

Radical left parties (RLPs) were particularly successful in the debtor countries, while their share of votes was stable in creditor ones. In Greece, the demise of the Social Democratic

mainstream party, PASOK, in 2012 coincided with the rise of SYRIZA, a coalition of left-wing movements, parties and associations. Despite its long-standing tradition as an anti-system party (March 2011), the Greek Communist Party (KKE) was unable to electorally capitalise on the Greek financial and political crisis. The KKE was strongly critical of European integration, advocating for the country's withdrawal from the EU. On the contrary, SYRIZA's long-standing Euro-Communist tradition substantially moderated the party's opposition to EU-related issues (Nikolakakis 2016). Nonetheless, in 2014, SYRIZA adopted a critical position on the practice of the EU, fiercely criticising the austerity measures implemented in Greece (Tarditi and Vittori 2019b).

In the wake of the 2014 EP elections, the Italian RLPs, Left, Ecology and Freedom (SEL) and Communist Refoundation (RC), united under one list – *Other Europe with Tsipras* (LT).<sup>2</sup> The LT adopted the same position as SYRIZA, that is, criticising the practice of the EU, particularly on the economic and financial policies.

However, a large proportion of the radical left voters were probably attracted by the M5S. Some scholars have defined the M5S ideology as proto-typical populist (Vittori 2020). CHES 2014 places the M5S among the centrist parties on the left-right scale (4.6) with its electorate being equally divided among left-wing, centrist and right-wing voters (Vittori 2020). This appears to be consistent with the recent analyses on the M5S electorate, underlining the post-ideological and eclectic nature of its voters (Mosca and Tronconi 2019). The party centrist position is contradicted by its progressive scores on the redistribution (3.4) and on left-right economic scale (3.4), with the M5S being left of the centre-left mainstream parties on economic policies. Consequently, this paper argues that the M5S fell into the radical left cluster of parties between 2013 and 2014, being an anti-austerity Eurosceptic entrepreneur (Carrieri 2020).

As far as Spain is concerned, there have been two lefts – an anti-establishment left represented by Podemos and a 'traditional' left epitomised by the United Left (IU). Table 1 shows that the Spanish RLPs have been more pro-European compared to their Western European counterparts. This pattern is due to the long-standing Europhile characteristics of the entire political system and its electorate, with public opinion always unconditionally supporting European integration (Áviles 2004). IU and Podemos have never adopted a radical anti-EU stance, but have criticised the neo-liberal embodiment of the EU, positioning themselves on the Eurosceptic pole of contestation in the Spanish party system (Tarditi and Vittori 2019a).

The Portuguese case is also similar to the Greek and Spanish cases where the traditional left, represented by the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP-CDU), coexisted with another RLP, the Left Bloc (BE). After the 2015 general elections, both parties agreed to support the socialist-led government. The PCP-CDU position on the European Union was similar in many respects to that of the KKE, with a strong Eurosceptic platform, while the BE adopted a milder platform, akin to the one held by SYRIZA in Greece.

In France, the radical left has embraced the civic nationalist ideology, which identifies the EU's underlying neo-liberal character and its exploitative powers over the national-popular classes (Halikiopoulou, Nanou, and Vasiliopoulou 2012). The French Communist Party (PCF) and Left Party (PG) promoted an electoral coalition, the Left Front (FG), however, not resulting in a true merger between the two parties.<sup>3</sup> By stressing and owning an anti-austerity platform, the PCF and PG clashed head-on with the EU's

management of the Great Recession, promising treaty reforms to amend the EU neo-liberal foundation (Goodliffe 2015).

Cyprus has had one of the most successful RLPs in Europe, the Progressive Party of the Working People (AKEL). AKEL held a less critical position towards EU integration, even though it is much more similar to the other radical left parties when it comes to their stance on EU budgetary policies. AKEL was in government when the financial crisis erupted and the country fell under the EU surveillance mechanism due its financial imbalance, with the party suffering from electoral losses.

In the Netherlands, the radical left actor, the Socialist Party (SP) held a strong Eurosceptic position, both on the EU general policies and the budgetary integration (see Table 1). The party campaigned for the 'No to the European Constitution' referendum in 2005 and has always opposed the neo-liberal character of the EU, focusing on the potential threat to Dutch welfare state and social policy (De Vries and Edwards 2009). During the crisis, the party persistently emphasised the negative economic consequences and the loss of sovereignty related to European integration (Pirro and Van Kessel 2018).

In Germany, the Left Party (Die Linke) adopted a comparatively moderate Eurosceptic stance, never expressing an outright Euroreject position. Nonetheless, this party had constantly emphasised the potential threat posed by the EU to social rights and unemployment, without softening Eurosceptic opposition during the crisis (Carrieri 2019).

Finally, in Finland, the Left Alliance (VAS) was the result of the merging of different Communist factions, but it progressively attempted to develop an eco-socialist platform, inspired by the new environmental and civil-rights issues (March 2011). VAS has adopted an ambiguous stance on the European Union, endorsing the country's accession to the Parliament and the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon. Overall, similar to other RLPs, VAS was critical of the neo-liberal Europe, rather than the EU as a political project (March 2011).

### **3.3 Radical right parties**

In Greece, the radical right underwent a marked electoral growth during the Great Recession. On the one hand, a new RRP was founded in 2012, the Independent Greeks (ANEL), ending up forming a coalition with SYRIZA in 2015. On the other hand, an anti-system RRP, Golden Dawn (GD), consolidated its primacy in the same camp, before collapsing in the 2019 general elections. Yet, in the 2014 EP elections, GD became the third-largest party in Greece, adopting a radical Eurosceptic position and intent on writing off the illegal debts and the Memorandum to proceed towards an economic and budgetary autarky (Ellinas 2013).

In Italy, the League's position on the European Union had changed since its beginnings. In the past, the League (formerly known as Northern League) had considered the EU as a gatekeeper to overcome state bureaucracy and to acquire more power at the regional level in Northern Italy, the party's stronghold (Quaglia 2005). After the leadership turnover in 2013, the League re-profiled itself as a nationalistic party, focusing on Europe and immigration, rather than the North/South cleavage. During the Euro crisis, the party adopted a very radical Eurosceptic position, blending an *'anti-austerity platform with some nationalistic-identitarian arguments related to EU integration'* (Carrieri 2020, 60). Furthermore, a new RRP, Brothers of Italy (Fdi), was founded in 2012 resulting from

a split from the mainstream centre-right party, People of Freedom (PDL). The FDI's position on EU-related issues overlapped with the League's, but the party had only a limited success in both the 2013 general and 2014 EP elections.

In France, the National Front (FN), under Marine Le Pen's leadership, launched itself on a process of normalisation, dubbed as party *dédiabolisation*, relinquishing its more radical xenophobic and anti-Semitic stances (Betz 2015). This party had consistently expressed radical Eurosceptic positions, mainly defining the EU as a jeopardy to state sovereignty. The FN also questioned the EU-led austerity policies, supporting a more interventionist state role and abandoning its pre-established pro-market stand (Ivaldi 2015).

In the Netherlands, the Party for Freedom (PVV) electorally succeeded during the Euro crisis, becoming the third party between 2012 and 2014. There are few doubts that the PVV had always held a strong Eurosceptic position on both the general integration and EU budgetary policies (Table 2, De Vries and Edwards 2009). According to De Vreese, Azrout, and Moeller (2014), the explanatory power of EU attitudes has been the strongest among PVV voters compared to the mainstream constituents, notably increasing from 2009 to 2014. During the Euro crisis, the party further increased its Eurosceptic entrepreneurship, rejecting the rescue packages for the debtors and the austerity measures resulting from the EU-management of the recession (Pirro and Van Kessel 2018).

In Germany, a new RRP, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) was founded in April 2013 by several journalists and intellectuals, becoming the new-comer in the German party system. This party exploited the Reichstag approval of the rescue packages for the debtors, which triggered some public Euroscepticism and the resurgence of radical ordoliberalism in German society. Before the 2014 elections, the AfD had adopted a radical ordoliberal frame, mobilising the voters on withdrawing from the single currency (Grimm 2015). Although the AfD successively widened its identity, especially by strengthening its anti-immigration appeals, at that time, it was genuinely acting as a single-issue Eurosceptic party (Carrieri 2019).

In Finland, the Finns (previously, True Finns) were the electoral success story of the post-crisis period. The Finns are proto-typical RRP for their anti-establishment position, their socio-cultural authoritarianism and their nativism, also embodying a welfare chauvinist ideology. The Finns had always had a Eurosceptic identity, as testified by the rejection the Treaty for Lisbon, yet, without advocating for the country's exit from the EU (Ylä-Anttila and Ylä-Anttila 2015). In the aftermath of the crisis, the Finns' electoral messages increasingly revolved around EU integration and the rejection of the bailout packages, with Euroscepticism constituting one of its main ideological traits, jointly with migration, (Ylä-Anttila and Ylä-Anttila 2015).

## 4 Methodology and variable selection

### 4.1 The propensity to vote (PTV)

To test the impact of anti-EU budgetary policies on voting preferences, this work has developed two identical sets of voting models for each party type. We hypothesise that voter-party proximity to anti-EU budgetary issues was a common electoral driver for the

RLPs and RRP. Therefore, these sets of models are designed as homogeneous in order to carry out a comparison between the two electorates, including the same variables.

In order to assess the electoral preferences for the RLPs and RRP, the *Propensity to vote for a party* (PTV) has been adopted as the dependent variable, which is an 11-point scale, varying from 0 (not at all probable) and 10 (very probable). This dependent variable provides the system of individual preferences that each voter associates with each party competing in the elections. This derives from the notion of party utility developed by Anthony Downs, which was revisited by Van der Brug, Van der Eijk, and Franklin (2007), who took it beyond its mere utilitarian connotation.

Voting choice as a dichotomous variable (left vote vs right or government vs opposition party, Lewis-Beck 1990) may downplay some of the causal explanations behind electoral behaviour, also reducing the possibility of comparing these countries. Indeed, the propensity to vote for a party (*party support*; *electoral preference*; *voting preference*) is more well-suited to control for the national-based institutional and electoral law binding rules, which usually condition voting choices. To simultaneously analyse all RRP and RRL electoral support, a stacked data matrix has been developed, where each respondent is multiplied by the number of parties under study, allowing for dealing with those national cases with more than one important party.

#### 4.2 Proximity variables

Several issue proximity variables have been chosen as independent to confirm the hypotheses. This article conjectures that people's negative attitudes to the nation-state authority transfer of budgetary/economic prerogatives towards the EU have swayed their voting preferences towards the RLPs and RRP. By observing the voting patterns for these parties in 2014, the objective is to shed light on the impact of voter-party issue congruence on pro-/anti-EU budgetary policies during the Euro crisis. To observe the party/voter linkages on the issue positions, this work relies on the Downsian proximity theory (Downs 1957), which assumes that voters tend to reduce their distance from parties, choosing the closest party to their own position. Therefore, the models revolve around the assumption that voters are more likely to increase their probability to vote for a party, which is closest to their issue position. This work has created four proximity variables, estimating the distance between party positions (available on the CHES rounds) and the voter positions (relying on the EES studies) on the pro-/anti-EU budgetary, the left-right, pro-/anti-immigration and pro-/anti-EU issues. The EES asked the respondents to locate themselves on a scale from 0 to 10 on these three issue dimensions. These variables are coded as 11-point variables, varying from 0 to 1 (the Online Appendix explains the coding process, specifically referring to the EES and CHES survey questions employed to build the proximity variables). If voters increase their electoral preference for a party by consistently reducing their distance from it, a negative coefficient should appear in the regression. The different issue proximity variables, mathematically represented, are as follows:

- (1) Pro-/anti-EU budgetary proximity (EU\_Bud\_Dist.) where the extremes are labelled 'Member States should retain full control over their economic and budgetary policies' (position 0) and 'The EU should have more authority over the EU Member States' economic and budgetary policies' (position 1).

- (2) Left-right proximity (Left-Rig\_Dist.) where the extremes are labelled 'Extreme Left' (position 0) and 'Extreme Right' (position 1).
- (3) Pro-/anti-immigration proximity (Immig\_Dist.) where the extremes are labelled as 'You are fully in favour of a restrictive policy on immigration' (position 0) and 'You are fully opposed to a restrictive policy on immigration' (position 1).
- (4) General pro-/anti-EU proximity (Gen\_EU\_Dist.) where the extremes are labelled as 'European unification has already gone too far' (position 0) and 'European unification should be pushed further' (position 1).

The hypotheses are then tested by presenting two different sets of models for each party type in order to analyse the impact of pro-/anti-EU budgetary issues on their electoral preferences. In the first set of models (see next section: 1.1 and 2.1), the chief empirical test revolves around the party-voter proximity on pro-/anti-EU budgetary issues, controlling for the left-right and pro-/anti-immigration proximity. On the contrary, the second set of models (1.2 and 2.2) includes the pro-/anti-EU proximity variable to examine if the general Euroscepticism absorbs the meanings of the economic integration issues, reducing their explanatory power.

### **4.3 Control variables**

Party Closeness is chosen as a proxy for party identification, which has traditionally strongly influenced voting behaviour. Socio-demographic variables, such as Gender, Age and Education Years are contained in the models to control for their potential influence on voting preferences for the RLPs and RRP. Moreover, to estimate the relation between voting and the crisis, the socio-tropic retrospective voting (Retro\_Econ.) and unemployment status (Unempl.) are chosen as control variables (the Online Appendix explains the coding process, specifically referring to the EES survey questions employed to build the control variables). In addition, the country-fixed effects to control for the variations occurring in different national contexts have been included.

## **5 Results and discussion**

### **5.1 Radical right voting**

In both models (see: Table 3), several socio-demographic variables have affected the electoral preferences for the RRP, with younger, less educated males being more likely to vote for these parties. On the contrary, the unemployed voters and those considering the general economic situation as worsening have not shown any higher voting propensity for the RRP, with the traditional pocketbook theory failing in accounting for their electoral support. Party closeness is still a strong voting driver, proving the electoral importance of developing well-defined party-based allegiances for the political actors.

The effects arising from the different proximity variables lead to three core findings, substantially corroborating the background expectations. First and foremost, the left-right issues have significantly predicted the voting preferences for these parties, which are still electorally attached to this source of contestation. The voters have clearly responded to the policy package concerning the left-right issues, matching the radical right electoral

**Table 3.** Electoral preferences for RRP (2014).

	Model 1.1		Model 1.2	
	Coeff.	Se	Coeff.	Se
Woman	-0.223***	(0.059)	-0.230***	(0.060)
Age (18–24)	0	(.)	0	(.)
Age (25–39)	-0.092	(0.169)	-0.0213	(0.171)
Age (40–54)	-0.199	(0.173)	-0.139	(0.175)
Age (55+)	-0.446**	(0.172)	-0.351*	(0.175)
Educ. (15)	0	(.)	0	(.)
Educ. (16–19)	-0.057	(0.092)	-0.106	(0.093)
Educ. (20+)	-0.306**	(0.093)	-0.296**	(0.095)
Educ. (Stud.)	-0.289	(0.196)	-0.233	(0.199)
Educ. (None)	0.023	(0.344)	0.183	(0.377)
Unempl.	0.163	(0.115)	0.142	(0.116)
Retro_Econ.	-0.136***	(0.036)	-0.108**	(0.036)
Party Clos.	6.320***	(0.109)	6.251***	(0.111)
Left-Rig_Dist.	-2.515***	(0.142)	-2.458***	(0.145)
EU_Bud_Dist.	-0.845***	(0.122)	-0.606***	(0.128)
Immigr_Dist.	-1.064***	(0.124)	-0.926***	(0.127)
Gen_EU_Dist.			-1.075***	(0.125)
Country				
Finland	0	(.)	0	(.)
France	-0.202	(0.141)	-0.152	(0.142)
Germany	-0.339**	(0.131)	-0.219	(0.133)
Greece	-0.451***	(0.121)	-0.269*	(0.123)
Italy	-0.004	(0.124)	0.113	(0.125)
Netherlands	-0.517***	(0.130)	-0.388**	(0.131)
Constant	5.721***	(0.235)	5.762***	(0.333)
N	7098		6892	(0.240)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.332		0.342	

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

supply along this axis of contestation. Although the RRP have been committed to politicising the EU issues, acting as Eurosceptic entrepreneurs (Hobolt and De Vries 2015), the left-right dimension is foremost in influencing the electoral preferences of these parties.

Secondly, voters have significantly rewarded the RRP restrictive positions on the immigration issues, probably being dissatisfied with the mainstream permissive approach on these policies. However, immigration distance has not outweighed the explanatory power of other proximity variables, representing a minor voting determinant compared to the left-right and the general Euroscepticism.

Finally, the EU budgetary proximity stood out as a statistically significant variable, also controlling for the general European integration variable (Gen\_EU\_Dist.). Economic Euroscepticism is not absorbed by the general one (Model 1.2), holding its explanatory power and supporting the background hypothesis (H1). These two Eurosceptic-related explanations seem to be complementary. In fact, by enhancing their electoral preferences on both the EU-related issues, the RRP voters have probably expressed concerns over the loss of a national-cultural identity resulting from general integration policies, and also the economic anxieties related to the budgetary/economic integration processes. The voters have rewarded the RRP's Eurosceptic cueing activity, which has been consistent, encompassing a wide array of EU issues. Furthermore, the country 'dummies' do not support the national-based variations, with RRP showing a homogeneous voting pattern in both

creditor and debtor countries. In spite of the inter-state division between creditors and debtors, this test reveals a general electoral trend in Western Europe, with the RRP electorally benefitting from the economic sovereigntist issues related to European integration. Therefore, these empirical models substantially corroborate the Radical Right Voting Hypothesis (H1), showing that, *during the Euro crisis, voters electorally supported the RRP on the anti-EU budgetary issues in Western Europe.*

## 5.2 Radical left voting

In radical left models (see: Table 4), the main socio-demographic control variables (education, age, etc.) have proved to be quite insignificant. Leaving aside the unsurprising importance of party closeness and leftist ideology, it is worth noting that the budget-related variable is not significant, meaning that the economic sovereigntist position is not crucial for radical left voters. In the second model, as well, this variable does not appear to be important and, thus, H2, cannot be confirmed. During the Euro crisis, RLP voters were less concerned with the expansion of the EU budgetary prerogative, as they probably supported inter-state redistribution policies under the aegis of the EU. At the same time, party-voter left-right proximity may have merged voter support for the redistributive policies, the cornerstone of RLP platforms. In line with the literature on the 'new' cultural

**Table 4.** Electoral preferences for the RLPs (2014).

	2.1		2.2	
	Coeff.	Se	Coeff.	Se
Woman	0.064	(0.054)	0.0468	(0.055)
Age (18–24)	0	(.)	0	(.)
Age (25–39)	0.048	(0.143)	0.068	(0.145)
Age (40–54)	–0.049	(0.145)	–0.007	(0.146)
Age (55+)	–0.370*	(0.144)	–0.334*	(0.145)
Educ. (15)	0	(.)	0	(.)
Educ. (16–19)	0.169*	(0.078)	0.159*	(0.080)
Educ. (20+)	0.096	(0.081)	0.100	(0.083)
Educ. (Stud.)	0.237	(0.182)	0.295	(0.185)
Educ. (None)	–0.442	(0.309)	–0.241	(0.349)
Unempl.	0.130	(0.099)	0.120	(0.101)
Retro_Econ	–0.013	(0.031)	–0.013	(0.032)
Party Clos.	5.218***	(0.081)	5.204***	(0.083)
Left-Rig_Dist.	–5.035***	(0.139)	–5.058***	(0.142)
EU_Bud_Dist.	–0.162	(0.122)	–0.058	(0.127)
Immigr_Dist.	–0.579***	(0.126)	–0.545***	(0.129)
Gen_EU_Dist.			–0.559***	(0.133)
Country				
Cyprus	0	(.)	0	(.)
Finland	0.325*	(0.157)	0.273	(0.162)
France	–0.313*	(0.159)	–0.338*	(0.165)
Germany	–0.191	(0.151)	–0.232	(0.155)
Greece	0.357*	(0.144)	0.370*	(0.148)
Italy	–0.468**	(0.153)	–0.466**	(0.157)
Netherlands	1.311***	(0.157)	1.301***	(0.160)
Portugal	0.728***	(0.168)	0.675***	(0.174)
Spain	0.617***	(0.170)	0.519**	(0.177)
Constant	4.569***	(0.240)	4.705***	(0.147)
N	8883		8558	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.438		0.437	

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

cleavage (Kriesi et al. 2006), the immigration variable has been statistically significant, with the RLPs electorally benefitting from their multicultural/integrationist stances. The RLP permissive approach to migration has been a more meaningful electoral explanation than their sovereigntist positions on the EU budget. This result is quite surprising, showing us the relative importance of a non-materialistic issue, which has notably exceeded the explanatory power of an economic-related voting explanation, such the anti-EU-budgetary one, during the Euro crisis.

However, these findings should not be interpreted as a full support for EU integration among the RLPs voters. As a matter of fact, the second model (2.2) shows that the RLPs have electorally benefitted from their proximity to voters along the general pro-/anti-EU issue dimension. The voters have feared supranational integration, rather than merely contesting the implementation of austerity measures, probably perceiving the current embodiment of the EU as the vehicle for enacting these policies. Therefore, although the RLPs have targeted the anti-EU budgetary issues in their discourses, their voters have been distant from them for this form of Euroscepticism. This finding suggests that many RLP constituents may currently support further economic integration, perhaps considering the EU as the most suitable to tackle certain economic issues.

Although some important country-based variations have emerged, with the independent variables being more suited for describing the voting patterns in the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain, the models mirror a substantial generalisability in our findings, encompassing all of Western Europe. The RLP voters have revealed a different voting motivation compared to the RRP voters, where budgetary policies have been a significant explanatory variable, jointly with general integration issues. On the contrary, these voters have not significantly agreed with some appeals linked to the economic sovereignty expressed by the RPLs, supporting, instead, an inter-state economic redistribution at the EU level. Thus, this work rejects the RLP Voting Hypothesis (H2), demonstrating that, *during the Euro crisis, voters did not electorally support the RLPs on the anti-EU budgetary issues in Western Europe.*

## 6 Conclusions

This work shows that RRP and RLP voters share some common criticisms regarding EU integration, thus, unsurprisingly, highlighting that Euroscepticism is to be found on the extreme of the poles, rather than among the mainstream parties. Yet, the RRP voters have maximised their electoral performance also on opposition to EU economic integration, while this is not the case for the RLPs.

Voters have been significantly close to RRP anti-budgetary issues, with this explanation holding true also when controlling for immigration and general Euroscepticism. According to some overviews, RRP voters have traditionally framed their opposition to the EU in identitarian terms, cueing the voters on the cultural threats to the national community (Mudde 2007). On the contrary, voters have also expressed an economic insecurity related to the integration processes, with RRP voters successfully incorporating a utilitarian frame into their overall rejection of the EU. During the crisis, the austerity policies and EU inter-state solidarity issues may have reinforced the negative attitudes on EU pre-eminence in budgetary formation among RRP voters. The EU economic issues have appeared to be partially unrelated to the left-right dimension in the radical right voting equation. In the meantime, a general pro-/anti-EU

dimension, encompassing economic EU policies, is apparently becoming crucial for orienting the electoral preferences for RRP. The RRP have probably outlined an electorally winning formula to challenge European integration, including economic and cultural arguments to gain more votes. Thus, West European RRP voters have profiled themselves as *Euro-rejectionists* (Keith 2017), opposing both the general principles and economic practices linked to European integration.

On the other hand, RLPs have not benefitted from anti-EU budgetary issues, capitalising on other sources of voting related to the left-right and general anti-EU issues. RLPs have electorally relied on their proximity to voters on the pro-immigration stances, proving how much this post-materialistic issue has been rewarding for them. During the Euro crisis, the RLP voters displayed some Eurosceptic attitudes, probably being dissatisfied with the way the EU was functioning. Nevertheless, these voters have not significantly matched RLP anti-EU budgetary positions. RLP voters have seemed to be supportive of further economic integration, rather than identifying the nation-state as the unique means for addressing the inequality issues. On the contrary, within the context of multi-level governance, they may have perceived the EU as being more suited to adjust the economic problems, relinquishing economic sovereignty. For instance, during the Euro crisis, RLP voters probably supported the inter-state economic redistribution among the EU Member States for improving the economic conditions at the domestic level. This public opinion trend has characterised both creditor and debtor countries, with this inter-state divide not significantly affecting the preferences among the RLP voters in Western Europe. Thus, RLP voters epitomised a distinct pattern of criticism of the practice of the EU, rather than of its principles, differentiating themselves from the RRP voters. In a nutshell, RLPs voters can be defined as *Euro-critical* (Tarditi and Vittori 2019a).

Our core objective was to assess whether voters supported RLPs and RRP due to anti-EU budgetary issues or not during the Euro crisis. Despite some ideological similarities between these two party families, we found that their electorates have markedly diverged on the EU budgetary issues, with only RRP voters leaning towards economic sovereignty. Conversely, RLPs did not succeed in gaining electoral preferences on these issues, taking advantage of other issue explanations. This result is particularly striking, as it is not completely in line with RLP ideological background, where criticism of the EU had been entrenched in the economic-utilitarian frames. RLPs are probably holding the strategic incentive to modify their Eurosceptic positions, leaving behind their opposition to EU economic integration. Indeed, future research should monitor whether these parties are going to reframe their discourse on the EU, perhaps cueing voters on the economic benefits related to economic integration (e.g. inter-state fiscal redistribution), rather than on its threats.

## Notes

1. EES allow us to test contingent effects of the Euro crisis in 2014, with the variable on EU budgetary issues being absent from the prior or successive surveys.
2. In Table 1, the TL positions are reported by calculating SEL and RC arithmetic mean positions on these issues.
3. In Table 1, the Left Front positions are reported by calculating the PG and PCF arithmetic mean positions on these issues.

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