

# Commissioned Book Review

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## **Do They Make a Difference? The Policy Influence of Radical Right Populist Parties in Western Europe** by Benjamin Biard, Laurent Bernhard and Hans-Georg Betz (eds).

London and New York: ECPR Press/Rowman &amp; Littlefield International, 2019. 297 pp., £ 60 (h/b), ISBN 9781785523298

The literature on Radical Right Populist Parties (RRPPs) explored in-depth those factors enabling their success, deepening also on our knowledge of the features characterizing this party family. However, until recently, little attention has been paid to the RRPPs' impact on policies and policy making. This very welcomed collective volume aims precisely to fill this gap, and it questions whether RRPPs exercise a policy influence on their core issues (e.g. migration, law and order, welfare chauvinism). In doing so, the volume contributes to the development of a burgeoning strand of literature that conceptualizes RRPPs as an independent variable impacting and affecting the Western European political systems. With this aim, the volume comprises 11 empirical chapters that employ both qualitative and quantitative methods, examining carefully the role played by the RRPPs' government participation through an accurate case selection.

In the first empirical chapter, Melisa Zobel and Michael Minkenberg present a comparison between the radical right's policy influence on migration issue in Denmark, a paradigmatic case with a strong RRPP, and in Germany, characterized until recently by weak radical right actors. The authors show how even electorally marginal radical right actors can push mainstream parties to legitimize their positions and framing on migration issue. The National Front (FN) is the case of analysis in the next chapter, as João Carvalho investigates, employing process-tracing, how FN growing electoral threat led to its pervasive influence on immigration policies during Hollande's presidency.

Nathalie Blanc-Noël compares two similar Nordic RRPPs: the Danish People's Party (DF)

and the Finns Party (PS), revealing that a governing position does not inevitably increase the likelihood of policy influence. Following a similar focus, Flemming Christiansen, Mikkel Bjerregaard and Jens Thomsen explore the trajectory of DF and its shift from a pariah party to a political insider, showing both its direct influence on immigration policies when acting as a support party and its mainly indirect influence when in opposition.

The sixth chapter discusses the case of Northern League (LN) and its *unique* U-turn from a regionalist to nationalist platform. Christophe Bouillaud, employing a detailed historical narrative, acknowledges the LN's mostly symbolic influence on migration and its pervasive impact on the regional fiscal equilibria. In the following chapter, Fred Paxton compares the policy influence of LN and Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) in sub-national governments, showing how these parties increase – rather than simply react to – a sense of insecurity that strengthens their policy influence.

Continuing with the eight chapter, Farid Hafez and Reinhard Heinisch analyse how the FPÖ's influence on culture and migration issues has been persistent, even when the party was out of the cabinet. Benjamin Biard, in the next chapter, compares the policy influence of RRPPs on 'foreigners' criminality' issue in Switzerland, France and Belgium. Analysing interviews and parties' documents, the author concludes that RRPPs can influence indirectly the policy making, even when they are ostracized by a formal *cordon sanitaire*.


The last three chapters of the volume turn to a large-N quantitative analyses of the RRPPs' contagion effect in Western Europe, measuring also their direct impact on policy making. Juliana Chueri focuses on welfare chauvinism and shows how the participation in government of RRPPs increases the likelihood of a reduction of migrants' welfare benefit. In the same vein, George Wenzelburger and Pascal

König show how in law and order issue the RRPPs' contagion thesis is supported only towards those mainstream parties already *owning* this issue. The last empirical chapter, written by Philipp Lutz, unpacks migration policies in different sub-fields, concluding that RRPPs can successfully influence migrants' integration policy, while they largely fail to exert influence on admission and control policies that are characterized by a denser presence of veto-players.

The conclusive chapter written by Hans-Georg Betz and Laurent Bernhard pinpoints how the RRPPs' participation in government does not represent the catalyst of their influence. Along the empirical chapters emerges that those parties exploiting their blackmail potential have exerted a deeper impact in terms of both direct and indirect policy influence. The pervasiveness of RRPPs' influence is strongly related to the issues at stake, suggesting further fine-grained analyses. Despite this theoretical and empirical richness, an important question on RRPPs' influence remains unsolved: does the mainstream parties' politicization of RRPPs' core issues depend on the RRPPs' success, or – alternatively – is the

reactive politicization of RRPPs' issues by the mainstream parties driven by a shift of the mainstream voters' preferences? This question on causality – underlined in some of the qualitative chapters – is not fully explored by the volume, leaving room for further analysis.

In sum, the book represents the first comprehensive analysis on RRPPs' policy influence and it is a clever attempt to harmonize the more recent researches with a methodological eclecticism. The volume is a valuable resource for all the students, scholars and policymakers dealing with radical right and its impact on Western European political system.

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