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Walking into the extremes: How does migration affect the vote for the far-right and far-left in the European Union

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Abstract

This paper investigates the relationship between the "extreme vote" and the percentage of foreigners in a selected group of European Union (EU) countries. The study explores the hypothesis that an increase in the foreign population within an EU country positively influences support for extreme parties, particularly on the far-right side. Quantitative methods, including OLS regression models, are employed to analyse the electoral support for far-right and far-left parties. The study considers variables such as the total number of newly arrived foreign population (divided into EU and non-EU categories), the percentage share of foreigners in the total population, and the variation of these metrics over time. Geographical location is also taken into account using binary variables representing regional groupings. Data are sourced from Eurostat, national government departments, and the Chapel Hill Expert Survey. The analysis focuses on a group of 14 EU member states with varying levels of immigration between 2013 and 2019, aiming to shed light on the complex relationship between immigration and extreme voting tendencies.

Keywords: Extreme vote, Far-right, Far-left, European Union, Immigration

1. Introduction

The 2010s were a turbulent decade for the European Union (EU) due to multiple crises. The global economic crisis in 2009 was followed by the Eurocrisis, which heavily impacted Euro-adopting member states, particularly in Southern Europe. Subsequently, the Union faced another crisis triggered by protests in Northern African and Middle Eastern countries, leading to conflicts (Peters 2012) like the ongoing Syrian Civil War. These conflicts forced hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes, seeking safety for themselves and their families. European countries with Mediterranean coastlines, such as Malta, Italy, and Greece, became the primary entry points for these refugees attempting to cross into the EU.

2015 is the year that is most remembered as the year of what was to be called "the refugee crisis". The use of the term "crisis" for this development in European

politics, however, has been rather criticised in the literature as not being adequate to describe the situation (Agustín et al. 2019). Furthermore, the use of the term has been explained as a means of politicisation and mediatisation thereof. As summarised by Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou, and Wodak 2018:

> the main problem is not whether/if certain issues are politicized (as most are anyway) but indeed how and when and if they are, for example, scandalized or not, become viral in the social media and their echo-chambers (Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou, and Wodak 2018, p.5).

Fractures in European cooperation among member states were exposed. On one hand, German Chancellor Angela Merkel defended granting asylum rights to refugees, immortalising her motto "wir schaffen das" (we can manage it), while Sweden showed openness towards accepting more refugees. On the other hand, contrasting reports highlighted Hungary's installation of barbed wire fences and Denmark closing its border to prevent refugee influx (Die Bundesregierung, n.d.; Dagens Nyheter 2015; DW 2015; The Guardian 2015).

The media attention on refugees entering the European Union has brought far-right politicians and parties to the forefront (DW 2016; The Times of Israel 2016; DW 2018; The Guardian 2018). Scholarly studies by Steinmayr (2017), Davis and Deole (2017), and Edo et al. (2019) have shed light on the correlation between immigration and support for far-right parties, providing theoretical explanations and empirical analyses. Building upon these works, this paper aims to contribute to the debate by taking a different and more general approach to this key issue.

This paper aims to examine the relationship between the "extreme vote", referring to support for far-right or far-left parties, and the percentage of foreigners arriving or residing in a selected group of EU countries. The underlying hypothesis is that an increase in the proportion of foreign population within an EU country will positively influence support for extreme parties in national elections, especially those on the far-right side of the political spectrum. Furthermore, it is hypothesised that the geographical location of the countries, as well as their history of immigration—or the lack thereof—have an impact in this dynamic.

To address these assumptions, this study employs quantitative methods, specifically OLS regression models, focusing on electoral support for "far-left" and "far-right" parties. The models consider various independent variables, including the total number of newly arrived foreign populations divided into "EU-foreign population" (citizens of other EU member states) and "non-EU foreign population" (citizens from outside the EU), the percentage of foreigners in the total population of the analysed EU member states, and the temporal variation of these metrics. Geographical location is also incorporated using binary variables to assess the impact of regional groupings on the share of extreme vote in national elections. The data for this analysis were gathered from Eurostat for population statistics, national government departments for electoral results, and the Chapel Hill Expert Survey for the definition of far-right and far-left parties.

This paper examines the relationship between immigrants and the extreme vote in national elections by shifting the focus to groups of countries with varying changes in immigrant shares between 2013 and 2019. Fourteen member states were selected based

on their immigration levels, including those with the highest and lowest numbers of immigrants during this period. The chosen time frame was driven by data availability on Eurostat, which provided annual figures on the total foreign population, EU foreign population, and non-EU foreign population. The selected countries include Austria, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, and Sweden.

The rationale for selecting states with varying levels of immigration is based on two distinct yet seemingly contradictory hypotheses found in existing literature. The first hypothesis, supported by studies such as Becker, Fetzer, et al. (2016), Davis and Deole (2017), and Halla, Wagner, and Zweimüller (2017), suggests a positive relationship between immigration and extreme voting, specifically with far-right parties. This hypothesis aligns with observations from news sources. In contrast, the second hypothesis is derived from the "contact hypothesis" proposed by Allport, Clark, and Pettigrew (1954), which argues that interactions between foreigners and natives can reduce prejudice and promote understanding. Steinmayr (2017)'s study in Upper Austria supports this hypothesis with positive findings. By considering these divergent hypotheses and supporting studies, the selection of states with varying immigration levels aims to shed light on the complex relationship between immigration and extreme voting tendencies.

Furthermore, it is important to differentiate between two categories of foreign individuals: EU foreigners and non-EU foreigners. This distinction holds theoretical significance, as demonstrated by studies such as Mendez and Cutillas (2014) in Spain and Brunner and Kuhn (2018) in Switzerland, which indicate that economic factors alone cannot explain the impact of immigration on the rise of extreme voting. While recognising that cultural variations within the current composition of EU member states may generate effects similar to immigration from non-EU countries, this paper asserts that the EU maintains a significant level of value homogeneity, allowing for differentiation from non-EU nations. Moreover, to gain a deeper understanding of the differences between these groups within the EU, additional geographical binary variables are included, as well as another binary variable that will account for the immigration background that countries may or may not present.

This paper is structured into three sections. The first section focusses on the discussion involving the influx of foreigners—migrants in general—arriving and/or residing in EU member states. The selection of countries for the main analysis is made and justified. Moreover, the grouping of the selected countries according to their geographical location is also undergone. The second section treats the definition of what will be considered to be an "extreme party", outlining the criteria for analysing specific national parties in the selected countries' national elections. It also explains how the data concerning the electoral results were treated. Finally, the third section presents and explains the models proposed to provide answers to the hypothesis defended in this study. It finalises by showing the results of the regression and key considerations.

2. Immigration in the European Union:

Numbers, statistics, and definitions

Even if the so-called "Refugee Crisis" is commonly associated with 2015, the increase in the influx of refugees arriving at the outer borders of the European Union began a year before that and continued shortly thereafter. In a news release in 2016, Eurostat (2016b) reported that 1.2 million first time asylum applications were made in EU member states. This number was shared between Germany (that accounted alone for 35% of all applications), Hungary (14%), Sweden (12%), Austria (7%), Italy (7%), and France (6%) (Eurostat, 2016). It is interesting to observe, that although Germany and Sweden shared together almost 50% of all asylum applications in 2015, they are not located at the EU border. It means that refugees arriving in these countries had to pass at least other two EU states, which could have led to duplication in requests, making the official numbers grow.

The present investigation, however, does not propose a closer look at this particular "crisis", but at the broader effects of foreigners in national elections in member states of the European Union. Therefore, the numbers of all immigrants entering the Union are taken in consideration and analysed, as well as the numbers of foreigners already residing in the EU. Two datasets from Eurostat are chiefly used in this paper: the *"migr_immi"*[1] —which present the data concerning the yearly new arrivals of migrants in the EU member states—and the *"demo_pop"*[2] —which displays data concerning the yearly population numbers of EU member states on the 1st of January. The terms reported are defined by Eurostat as follows: a "foreigner" is someone who has a different citizenship of the country in which this person is living in—and this person could be either an EU citizen or a citizen of a third country. "Immigration" is characterised by the establishment of a person's usual residence in the territory of a Member State for a period that is expected to be at least 12 months—and this person may have come from another Member State or from a third country (Eurostat 2016a).

This definition is important, since a "migrant" in this dataset could also be a national who has left the country and has come back. For this reason, the variables used from this specific dataset are the so-called "EU28_FOR"—which displays migrants from EU28 countries, except those who are nationals of the reporting country—and the "NEU28_FOR"—which displays migrants from all other countries outside the EU28[3] group, including the reporting country. Using only these two variables, nationals who have come back to their countries are excluded from the analysis, as well as stateless people, and those labelled as "unknown".

Nevertheless, this choice also imposes limitations on the time framework as the available data for these two variables is confined to the period of 2013-2019, despite the existence of yearly reports spanning from 2012 to 2021 in the entire database, and the data concerning the foreigners residing in EU member states ranges from 2014 to 2020. Thus, the time frame chosen for the analysis spans from 2013 to 2019. Furthermore, the utilization of these specific datasets restricts the possibility of analysing the effects of individual countries or other forms of aggregation. However, from a pragmatic standpoint, considering the substantial level of homogeneity

1. The online data code is registered as "MIGR_IMM1CTZ" in the Eurostat database.
2. The online data code is registered as "MIGR_POP1CTZ" in the Eurostat database.
3. Since all analysed data refer to data collected prior to 2021, and therefore prior to Brexit, the UK and UK citizens are also included in the tables.

among EU member states—despite cultural, economic, and language differences—it is assumed that differentiating between EU states and non-EU countries provides pertinent theoretical validation for this analysis.

To compile the lists of countries with the highest and lowest number of migrants between 2013 and 2019, three tables from the dataset migr_immi were employed. These tables consisted of the following: (1) the total number of migrants recorded during the specified years, encompassing nationals returning from abroad, stateless individuals, and those categorised as "unknown"; (2) foreigners originating from EU28 countries; and (3) foreigners originating from non-EU28 countries. It is noteworthy that the Eurostat dataset utilises the EU28 group, which includes the United Kingdom. However, for the purposes of this paper, the analysis focuses on the current EU27 group. The outcome of this selection process, specifically limited to the top five and bottom five countries, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. List of EU countries by the number of migrants (2013-2019)

-	Total migrants received	Migrants from EU28	Migrants from outside EU28
1	Germany (6,875,841)	Germany (2,740,797)	Germany (3,272,117)
2	Spain (3,269,382)	Spain (849,352)	Spain (1,983,879)
3	France (2,563,435)	France (568,583)	Italy (1,442,489)
4	Italy (2,174,528)	The Netherlands (476,094)	France (1,088,538)
5	Poland (1,519,120)	Austria (458,518)	Sweden (562,940)
...	...	...	...
23	Croatia(126,015)	Slovakia (16,483)	Cyprus (53,585)
24	Cyprus (125,853)	Croatia (15,520)	Luxembourg (41,805)
25	Estonia (91,670)	Bulgaria (8,722)	Latvia (28,939)
26	Latvia (68,536)	Lithuania (5,236)	Estonia (26,935)
27	Slovakia (46,646)	Latvia (5,125)	Slovakia (4,060)

Note: The numbers in parentheses represent the sum of all migrants registered yearly between 2013 and 2019 in each specified category. Data gathered from Eurostat, author's own formatting.

The result of this selection is a group of 16 EU countries, namely Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, and Sweden. These constitute the units that will be used in the analysis. As mentioned before, the justification for the selection of countries which received more immigrants, but also those which received less, is theoretically based on two opposing hypotheses. By admitting that the relation "the more immigrants, the more extreme vote"—especially that to far-right parties and candidates—that has already been investigated and resulted in positive evidences in support thereof, one could expect that, in the countries that the numbers of incoming foreigners was the highest, the increase in the extreme vote (whether to far-left or far-right parties or candidates) should also be observed. The opposite, though not necessarily, could be hypothesised, meaning that in the countries with less foreigners, the extreme vote should not be expected to be as high. On the other hand, if one admits that the so-called "hypothesis contact" plays a role in the voters' decision to

elect extreme parties or candidates, one could expect that, in the five top countries, the extreme vote would not be high, and, conversely, in the five bottom countries, the choice for these political groups would be highest.

Notwithstanding, still building up on Allport's arguments, it is noteworthy to mention that it is not all kind of contact that tends to impact positively in a native's vision about foreigners. In fact, Allport differentiates between "casual contacts" and "acquaintances", arguing that whilst studies investigating the latter resulted in improvements in the way locals relate to foreigners (or "others"), the former, which is commonly more "superficial", tends to have the opposite effect. He asserts that "such evidence as we have clearly indicates that such contact does not dispel prejudice; it seems more likely to increase it" (Allport, Clark, and Pettigrew 1954, p.261). So, whilst what has been called "the contact hypothesis" may indicate a tendency to a positive attitude towards foreigners, it could also explain why the opposite could be true. This is especially pertinent to highlight, since another attribute of these countries—not yet mentioned—could impact the results researched here.

Germany appears on the pole position in all three groups showed in Table 1, yet it is not an EU "border country". Of course, Angela Merkel's "open door" policy helps explain why so many refugees had Germany as their desired destination. But, again, Germany is not only in the first position in comparison to those countries that received the most non-EU foreigners. Under the researched period, Germany received three times more immigrants from other EU countries than the second position in the list. Indeed, even after summing the results of all other countries in the second column of Table 1, there is still a gap of 337,164 immigrants that Germany alone took in. This an example that explains why the term Einwanderungsland (or "immigration country") is so often discussed in Germany—it is also useful for the discussion of this paper. Since it is not the goal of this paper to develop on this particular issue of German politics, a brief explanation of the term's history given by Danielak 2019 is enough: it is

> a controversial term in Germany that was previously reserved for countries traditionally receiving many immigrants, such as the USA. In Germany, the long-time prevailing designation of immigrants as gastarbeiter (guest workers) implied a temporary stay in Germany, even if the reality proved otherwise. The increasingly frequent labeling of Germany as einwanderungsland points to a widening general acceptance of migrants coming to stay in the country (Danielak 2019, p.2) .

This description is further detailed by Ronge (2000) who discusses that a "classical immigration country" (klassiches Einwanderungsland) would be one which people migrate to in order to populate it. Therefore, there are also laws and regimes that are aimed to facilitate the immigration of different people. In this sense, as she points out, only countries such as the US, Canada, or Australia, would fall in this categorisation. These were originally colonies—chiefly settler colonies—which had the main purpose of being populated. Considering this, it would not make sense to consider any European country an "immigration country"—until some decades ago, at least. The history of European countries has, however, changed.

European countries such as France (Leggewie 1990) and Spain (Kreienbrink 2008) have already been characterised as "immigration countries", and this since the end of

the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s. In fact, Ronge, at the wake of the 2000s, argues that the European integration, and evolution of the EU, turned the immigration tide, meaning that Europe had become an immigration region. She also described the "to be recognised" title of Germany as an immigration country being justified not by the development of an official immigration regime, but by other means such as asylum requests, familiar reunion, and illegal immigration (Ronge 2000, p.405). What these arguments have to offer to the analysis in this paper is that it must be recognised that some of the countries selected already have a history with immigration, and that the contact between natives and foreigners is therefore not a novelty.

In order to accurately determine which countries can be classified as "immigration countries", or as it will be named here, a "country with an immigration background". To assess the demographic characteristics of the selected countries, the Eurostat dataset "demo_pop" is utilised. This dataset provides information on the total population of each EU member state on an annual basis, specifically on the 1st of January, spanning the years 1998 to 2022. However, it is important to note that the data specifying the country of citizenship as EU28 or non-EU28 is only available for the period between 2014 and 2020. Therefore, the analysis of foreign populations relies on a comparative approach. By examining the number of individuals holding the citizenship of the reporting country, it is possible to estimate the total number of foreigners by subtracting this figure from the overall population—for the purposes of this comparison, foreigners are defined as individuals who do not hold the citizenship of the reporting country. By employing this methodology, it becomes feasible to compare the relative percentage of foreign residents within the total population of the original selection of 16 countries. The results are shown in Figure 1.

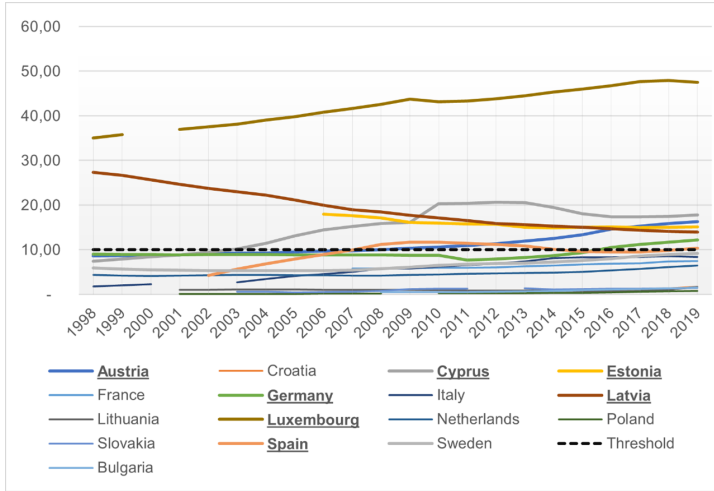

Figure 1. Percentual share of foreign population in selected EU member states

Note: Thicker lines and country's name in underlined and bold mean that these countries have passed the 10% threshold in one or multiple displayed years. Data gathered from Eurostat, author's own formatting.

The normative approach utilised to determine what is considered a "country with an immigration background", for this study's purpose, is that any country that passed the defined threshold of a 10% share of the entire population and maintained this position for multiple years prior to 2013—the first year of the electoral analysis—is labelled as such. During this 21 years interval, the countries that fulfil this criterium are Austria (steadily increasing above 10% from 2009 onwards), Cyprus (since 2003 always above 10%), Latvia (above 10% in all years), and Luxembourg (also above 10% in all years). Germany also passes the 10% threshold, but only from 2016 onwards—three years after the beginning of the time framework proposed for the analysis. Therefore, it will not be labelled as a country having an immigration background.

Before conducting the main analysis of this paper, it is necessary to establish an additional categorisation. The selected countries in this study are distributed across various geographic regions within the European Union. Therefore, it is crucial to assign each country to its respective geographical group for addressing this variable effectively. Several sources can be utilized to define these groups, and for this study, the classification from EuroVoc, the multilingual and multidisciplinary thesaurus of the Publications Office of the European Union, has been chosen. According to EuroVoc's homepage (EUR-Lex, n.d.), the member states of the European Union can be classified into one of four geographical groups: Central and Eastern, Northern, Southern, and Western (Figure 2). This categorisation provides a framework for organizing and analysing the data in a manner that takes into account the geographic diversity of the selected countries.

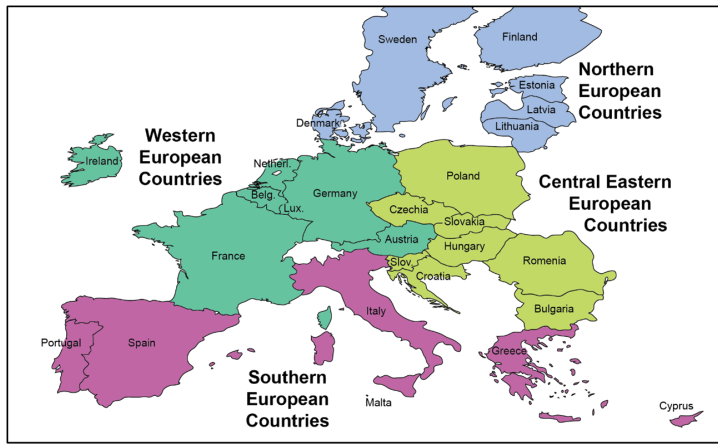

Figure 2. EU members divided in geographical groups

Note: Grouping based on the division provided by EuroVoc (EUR-Lex, 2023), author's own formatting.

Considering this geographical grouping, it can be concluded that the selected countries represent a balanced representation across the four geographical regions of the European Union. This includes three countries from the Southern group (Cyprus, Italy, and Spain), four countries from the Western group (Austria, France, Germany, and the Netherlands), three countries from the Central Eastern group (Bulgaria,

Croatia, Poland, and Slovakia), and four countries from the Northern group (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Sweden). This selection ensures a balanced representation across all regions, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of each geographical group.

3. Establishing the extremes and their observations

The first step in this third section is to define what will be considered in this study as an extreme party, especially what is to be called "far-left" and "far-right". To this end, the data provided by the 1999-2019 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) is used. This dataset gathers information about political parties of all EU member states, offering "party position data on ideological dimensions, European integration, specific policy positions, along with other party characteristics like salience of anti-establishment rhetoric" (Jolly et al. 2022, p.1). The variable of interest is "LRGEN" which evaluates a party's ideological stance. It ranges from 0 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right), with 5 representing the political centre. For this study's purpose, parties scoring between 0 and 2 are considered "far-left", while those scoring between 8 and 10 are labelled "far-right".

In light of this definition, it is crucial to determine which parties will be included in the final analysis. To accomplish this, the national elections held in the selected countries between 2013 and 2019 are examined. During this period, the dataset was updated twice, specifically in 2014 and 2019. The categorisation of each national party into the "far-left" or "far-right" categories is determined by the scores obtained by the participating parties in the national elections of each selected country closest to the dataset updates. Parties participating in elections held in 2013, 2014, or 2015 will be classified based on the 2014 update. For elections after 2015, the 2019 update is used. If a party's electoral participation year does not align with this rule, the closest update is used, regardless of whether it is older or newer. Moreover, the elections that are considered for this study are those that would affect the formation of national executive of each selected country. Table 2 summarises which elections are considered for each country and when they took place.

Some clarifications are necessary regarding the voting data. For presidential elections, the share of votes associated with a party or candidate includes all the votes they could have received, even in cases of two-round elections where a party may only participate in the first round. In parliamentary systems, specific considerations apply. In Germany, the total valid votes comprise the combined sum of the valid first and second votes in the Bundestag election. In Lithuania, the valid votes include those cast in the multi-member constituency, also known as the "first round", during the Seimas elections. For countries with a bicameral system, the valid votes pertain to the elections for the respective chambers, such as Nationalrat (Austria), Camera dei Deputati (Italy), Tweede Kamer (Netherlands), Sejm (Poland), and Congreso de los Diputados (Spain). In countries with a single parliamentary chamber, such as Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Slovakia, and Sweden, the valid votes encompass all those available in the national election.

Analysing the data of the elections data made available by the national institution responsible for the publication of election results in each of the 16 listed countries an extensive list of parties appears. This list is however shortened after crossing the

Table 2. Elections in the selected countries between 2013 and 2019 by political level and year

Country	Political level	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
Austria	Parl.	1				1		1	3
Bulgaria	Parl.	1	1			1			3
Croatia	Parl.			1	1				2
Cyprus	Pres.	1					1		2
Estonia	Parl.			1				1	2
France	Pres.					1			1
Germany	Parl.	1				1			2
Italy	Parl.	1					1		2
Latvia	Parl.		1				1		2
Lithuania	Parl.				1				1
Luxembourg	Parl.	1					1		2
Netherlands	Parl.					1			1
Poland	Parl.			1				1	2
Slovakia	Parl.				1				1
Spain	Parl.			1	1			2	4
Sweden	Parl.		1				1		2
Total		6	3	4	4	5	5	5	32

Note: Parl.: parliamentary; Pres.: presidential; data gathered by the author in the homepages of the state institutions responsible for the publication of the national elections of each country. Author's own formatting.

information of parties taking part in these elections and the available data in the CHES dataset. Table 3 presents the results of the categorisation of national parties into the categories "far-left" and "far-right" according to the criteria mentioned before.

After having analysed the data, it is necessary to review the original list of countries selected for the analysis, as two countries do not provide valid observations for the regression. In the case of Bulgaria, none of the political parties participating in the 2013, 2014, or 2017 elections meet the set criteria of scoring 0–2 or 8–10 in the CHES dataset. Similarly, in the case of Croatia, the data provided by the Croatian State Election Commission does not allow for the codification of votes for each individual party. The available data is compiled by national constituency and presents votes by coalition of parties, with different coalitions in each constituency. Consequently, both countries are excluded from the list, resulting in a shortened list of 14 countries instead of 16. The number of elections analysed dropped to 27, and the number of parties is 34—being 14 considered to be "far-left" and 20 to be "far-right".

Between 2013 and 2019, the electoral support for far-left and far-right parties in the analysed 14 EU countries displayed distinct trends. Far-left parties experienced a decline in vote share, while far-right parties witnessed an opposite trend, as shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4. It is worth noting that the far-left parties in Figure 3 generally obtained less than 15% of the national vote, with most failing to reach even 10%, except for Spain in 2015. In Spain, Podemos achieved significant growth, securing 12.78% of valid votes with over 3 million votes. However, Figure 4 reveals that

Table 3. List of parties considered to be “extreme” that took part in national elections in the selected EU countries

Country	Far-left parties (LRGEN <= 2)	Far-right parties (LRGEN =>8)	Total
Austria	-	Freiheitliche Partei Österreich – FPÖ (9.1b)	1
Bulgaria	-	-	0
Croatia	-	-	0
Cyprus	Ethniko Laiko Metopo – ELAM (1.0b)	-	1
Estonia	-	Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond – EKRE (8.46b)	1
France	Lutte Ouvrière – LO (0.00c); La France Insoumise – FI (1.25b)	Rassemblement National – RN (9.75b); Debout la France – DLF (9.00b)	4
Germany	Die Linke – LINKE (1.23a, 1.43b); National-demokratische Partei Deutschlands – NPD (1.00a)	Republikaner – REP (9.21c); Alternative für Deutschland – AfD (8.92a, 9.24b)	4
Italy	Sinistra Ecologia Libertà – SEL (1.29a)	Fratelli d’Italia – FDL (9.05b); Lega Nord – LN (8.86a, 8.79b)	3
Latvia	-	Nacionālā apvienība – NA (8.30a, 8.45b)	1
Lithuania	-	Partija "Jaunoji Lietuva" – JL-PKS (9.8c)	1
Luxembourg	Déi Lénk – DL (0a, 1.5b)	Alternativ Demokratesch Reformpartei – ADR (8.00a,b)	2
Netherlands	Socialistische Partij – SP (1.38b)	Partij voor de Vrijheid – PVV (8.69b); Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij – SGP (8.54b); Forum voor Democratie – FvD (9.54b)	4
Poland	-	Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość – Konfederacia (9.53b)	1
Slovakia	Komunistická strana Slovenska – KSS (0.00c)	Slovenská národná strana – SNS (7.44b); Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko – LSNS (9.31b)	3
Spain	Izquierda Unida – IU (2.00a, 1.87b); Euskal Herritarrok – EH (1.27c); Podemos (1.67a, 1.93b)	Partido Popular – PP (8.07b); Vox (9.71b)	5
Sweden	Vänsterpartiet – V (1.71a,b); Feministiskt initiativ – FI (1.81a)	Sverigedemokraterna – SD (7.76a, 8.47b)	3
Total			34 parties Far-left:14 Far-right:20

Note: The scores of each party are displayed in parentheses and the superscript letters refer to the year that from the score, meaning: a = 2014; b = 2019; c = older. Data gathered from CHES dataset and crossed with the information concerning official national electoral results made available by the respective national institution responsible for publicising the results of each country. Author’s own formatting.

far-right parties have been more successful in gaining larger portions of the national electorate compared to their far-left counterparts.

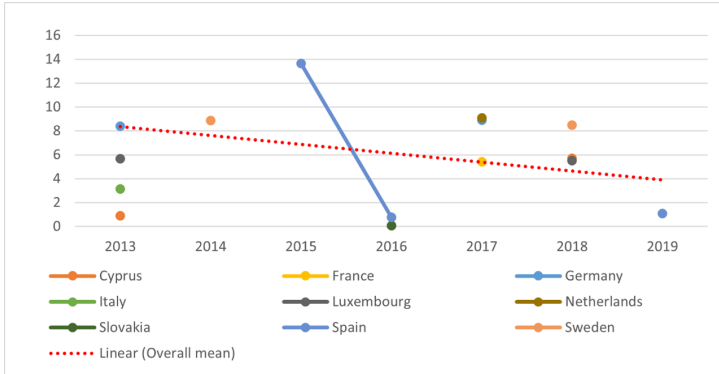

Figure 3. Evolution of electoral support for far-left parties in selected EU member states between 2013 and 2019

Note: Austria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland are not displayed in the chart, since there were no parties taking part in the analysed elections of these countries that fulfil the criteria set in this study to be categorised as "far-left". Data gathered from official national institution responsible for publicising the results of each country. The "linear (overall mean)" is the result of a liner tendency originating from the sum of yearly results displayed in the graph. Author's own formatting.

The analysis of far-right party electoral support reveals a clear linear trend, indicating substantial growth over the analysed period. These parties have not only increased their national share of votes by nearly 10 percentage points but have also consistently demonstrated an upward trajectory. Conversely, far-left parties experienced a decline of approximately 4 percentage points during the same period. In general, far-right parties have hovered around the 25% threshold of national valid votes, except for Spain in 2019—when far-right parties gathered over 30% of all valid votes. This deviation can be attributed to the Partido Popular, which exhibited a tendency towards the far-right end of the political spectrum according to the CHES dataset. It scored above the criteria of 8.00 in the LRGEN variable, despite having an average score of 7.38 between 1999 and 2019, which would suggest a stronger alignment with the centre-right rather than the far-right ideology. The analysed data indicate that there is evidence to support the argument that far-right parties have indeed grown under the selected period.

4. How does migration relate to increased support for extreme parties in EU countries?

After having considered all the variables mentioned in the two sections before, the hypothesis is tested using different models, which allows for the examination of the evolution of the electoral support of far-left and far-right parties. Taking into consideration that the main hypothesis is that "the greater the number of immigrants, the greater the electoral support for extreme parties", five models are proposed, that analyse the respective aspects:

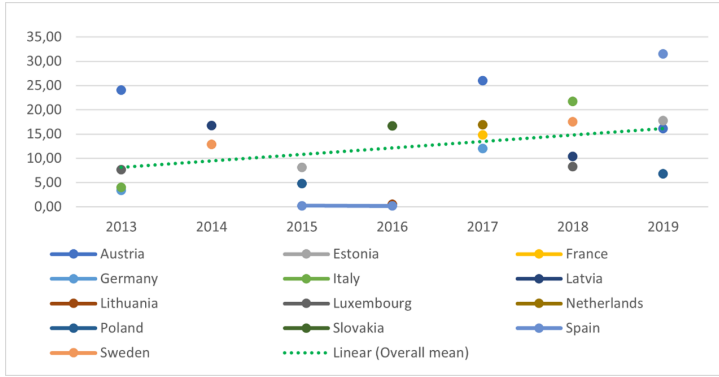

Figure 4. Evolution of electoral support for far-right parties in selected EU member states between 2013 and 2019

Note: Cyprus is not displayed in the chart, since there were no parties taking part in the analysed elections of this country that fulfil the criteria set in this study to be categorised as "far-right". Data gathered from official national institution responsible for publicising the results of each country. The "linear (overall mean)" is the result of a liner tendency originating from the sum of yearly results displayed in the graph. Author's own formatting.

I. The number of new immigrants in the year (t) of the national election.
II. The number of new immigrants in the year prior ($t-1$) to the national election.
III. The percentual variation of new immigrants between the year prior ($t-1$) and the year (t) of the national election.
IV. The percentual share of foreigners related to the total population of the country (i) on 1st of January of the national election year (t).
V. The percentual variation of the share of foreigners related to the total population of the country (i) on 1st of January of the year prior ($t-1$) and the year (t) of the national election.

The mathematical equations proposed for each of these models are similar. The first one can be read as follows:

$$(1)\ \text{ExVot}_{i,t} = \beta_1 \cdot \text{MigEU}_{i,t} + \beta_2 \cdot MigNEU_{i,t} + \gamma_1 \cdot IB + \gamma_2 \cdot R_1 + \gamma_3 \cdot R_2 + \gamma_4 \cdot R_3 + \varepsilon$$

The dependent variable is the vote share of far-left and far-right parties (ExVot) in a specific country (i) in a specific year (t). ExVot equals $(\Sigma\,(ExPa_{it,x}, x) * 100)$ / ValidVotes, being " $ExPa_{i,t,x}$ " the valid votes gathered by a national party ($ExPa$) in a country (i), in a specific election (t) that meet the criteria set for their categorisation as "far-left" or "far-right". Whereas $\text{MigEU}_{i,t}$ stands for the number of foreigners originating from EU countries who entered the analysed EU member state (i) in the same year that the national election was conducted (t); and $\text{MigNEU}_{i,t}$ represents the number of foreigners originating from rion-EU countries who entered a particular EU member state (i) in the same year that the national election was conducted (t).

To address the immigration background and regronal grouping of the analysed

country binary variables are used. *IB* undicates wherher the country has an immigration background as defined in section 2. R_0, R_1, R_2, and R_3 categorize the country into one of the four geographical regions explained in section 2 . R_0 represents the Western region, R_1 the Southern region, R_2 the Central Eastern region, and R_3 the Northern region. ε denotes the error term. For the second model, a similar equation is proposed:

$$(2)\quad \text{ExVot}_{i,t} = \beta_1 \cdot \text{MigEU}_{i,t-1} + \beta_2 \cdot \text{MigNEU}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_1 \cdot IB + \gamma_2 \cdot R_1 + \gamma_3 \cdot R_2 + \gamma_4 \cdot R_3 + \varepsilon$$

The only difference between equation (1) and equation (2) is that the time now is subtracted one unit, so that the effect of the number of new migrants in the year prior $(t - I)$ to the national election can be assessed. In this sense, $\text{MigEU}_{i,t-1}$ stands for the number of new arrived migrants originating from other EU member states (MigEU) in a specific EU member state (i) one year before the national elections $(t - I)$, whereas $\text{MigNEU}_{i,t-1}$ represents the new arrived migrants originating from countries outside the EU (MigNEU).

For the third model, however, the equation itself does not present a remarkable change, but the way two of its variables is calculated does. The following equation is proposed:

$$(3)\ \text{ExVot}_{i,t} = \beta_1 \cdot EMigBU_{i,t,-1} + \beta_2 \cdot \text{BMigNEU}_{i,t,-1} + \gamma_1 \cdot IB + \gamma_2 \cdot R_1 + \gamma_3 \cdot R_2 + \gamma_4 \cdot R_3 + \varepsilon$$

The two independent variables represent the percentage change in the number of new arrivals of immigrants originating from EU member states (EMigEU) and non-EU member states (EMigNEU) in a specific EU member state (*i*) between the year of the national election (*t*) and the previous year $(t - 1)$. EMigEU is calculated as $((MigEU_{i,t} \cdot 100)/MigEU_{i,t-1}) - 100$, and EMigNEU is calculated as $((\text{MigNEU}_{i,t} \cdot 100)/\text{MigNEU}_{i,t-1}) - 100$. The last two models also only present changes in the two main independent variables, they are shown below:

$$(4)\quad \text{ExVot}_{i,t} = \beta_1 \cdot \text{MigEUSh}_{i,t} + \beta_2 \cdot \text{MigNEUSh}_{i,t} + \gamma_1 \cdot IB + \gamma_2 \cdot R_1 + \gamma_3 \cdot R_2 + \gamma_4 \cdot R_3 + \varepsilon$$

$$(5)\quad \text{ExVot}_{i,t} = \beta_1 \cdot \text{EMigEUSh}_{i,t,t-1} + \beta_2 \cdot \text{EMigNEUSh}_{i,t,t-1} + \gamma_1 \cdot IB + \gamma_2 \cdot R_1 + \gamma_3 \cdot R_2 + \gamma_4 \cdot R_3 + \varepsilon$$

In the fourth equation, $\text{MigEUSh}_{i,t}$ represents the percentage share of migrants in relation to the entire population of an EU member state (i) on the 1^{st} of January of the national election year (t). It is calculated as $((\text{MigEUPop}_{i,t} \cdot 100)/\text{EntirePop}_{i,t}) - 100$. MigEUPop refers to the total number of people who hold citizenship of another EU member state but reside in the analysed member state (*i*) in the year of the national

election (t), while $\text{EntirePop}_{i,t}$ denotes the entire population of the same member state (i) on the 1st of Jantary of the same year (t). Similarly, $\text{MigNEUSh}_{i,t}$, follows the same calculation, considering the number of people who hold citizenship of a non-EU country. In the last equation, $\text{EMigEUSh}_{i,t,t-i}$ and $\text{EMigNEUSh}_{i,t,t-i}$ represent the percentage change in the EU and non-EU foreign populations, respectively, in the analysed EU member state (i) between the year of the national election (t) and the previous year ($t-i$). They are calculated as $((\text{MigEUPop}_{i,t} \cdot 100/\text{MigEUPop}_{i,t-1}) - 100$ *and* $((\text{MigNEUPop}_{i,t} \cdot 100/\text{MigNEUPop}_{i,t-1}) - 100$.

Table 4 presents the results of the OLS regression models assessing the impact of variables on electoral support for far-left parties. Among the five models, only the first model, which predicts far-left party votes based on the number of newly arrived immigrants, reaches a significance level of $p < 0.05$. With 15 degrees of freedom and a confidence level of 95%, the F-value of 4.717 exceeds the critical value, providing evidence for the relationship between the number of new arrivals and the vote for far-left parties.

Table 4. The impact of (im)migrants on the vote for far-left parties in EU member states

	I	II	III	IV	V
MigEUt	1.737e-05				
	(1.436e-05)				
MigNEUt	-1.961e-05				
	(1.263e-05)				
MigEUt-1		4.911e-05			
		(3.675e-05)			
MigNEUt-1		-3.780e-05			
		(2.664e-05)			
EMigEUt. t-1			0.038		
			(0.201)		
EMigNEUt. t-1			-0.247		
			(0.162)		
MigEUSht				2.488	
				(6.095)	
MigNEUSht				-1.162	
				(2.746)	
EMigEUSht. t-1					-4.522
					(12.142)
EMigNEUSht. t-1					5.167
					(11.765)
R0	8.701**	8.169*	5.204	3.738	2.940
	(3.006)	(3.820)	(2.784)	(10.776)	(6.694)

R1	7.928**	8.985*	10.508*	0.144	2.671
	(3.151)	(4.108)	(4.246)	(13.161)	(5.098)
R2	0.030	-0.058	-0.756	-1.150	-4.708
	(3.551)	(4.458)	(6.296)	(6.137)	(10.189)
R3	9.692***	10.122**	9.082**	4.904	5.719
	(2.632)	(3.358)	(3.086)	(10.279)	(7.235)
IB	-3.947	-3.346	2.825	-8.767	0.555
	(3.257)	(4.694)	(4.603)	(24.827)	(5.084)
R-square	.85	.86	.87	.80	.80
F			3.904	2.435	1.776
Sig.	0.01**	0.16	0.14	0.24	0.40
N	15	11	11	11	10

Note: Table entries are the coefficients obtained by the regression using the models previously explained. The standard errors are presented in parentheses. The dependent variable analysed was the vote for far-left parties (author's own coding) in the selected EU countries during the national elections that took place between 2013 and 2019. *p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01.

The model demonstrates a small positive impact for each newly arrived migrant from other EU member states and a negative impact for migrants from countries outside the EU. Since this coefficient relates to each individual entering the EU, it is helpful to put it into perspective, so that their impact can be better understood. Considering that 100,000 immigrants originating from an EU member state arrive at another member state, it would mean an increase of 1.73 percentage points in the voting for far-left parties, while the same number of immigrants from outside of the EU would mean a decrease of 1.96 percentage points. Significant results are observed for variables R_0, R_1, and R_3 at $p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.01$. This indicates that, in member states located in the Western region, new immigrants contribute to an 8.7 percentage point increase in the share of votes for far-left parties. In the Southern region, the impact is slightly lower, resulting in a gain of 7.9 percentage points. The Northern region shows the highest predicted effect, with an improvement of 9.6 percentage points.

The significance values of the four models, however, except for the variables representing geographical location, do not provide sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis. It is still worth mentioning that the variables related to the Southern and Northern regions show significance in the third model with p-values below 0.1 and 0.05, respectively. Models IV and V do not support the impact of foreigners or its variation on far-left party votes. The immigration background of the countries does not present a significant effect in any of the models, even if, in models I, II, and IV, it suggests a decrease in far-left party votes, while, in models III and V, an increase in the vote for far-left parties is predicted. Generally, it is possible to interpret the results of Table 4 as showing that immigrants from EU member states tend to have a positive impact in the voting for far-left parties, while those coming from outside the EU tend to decrease their share of votes.

This positive impact can be interpreted as in line with studies about the effects of globalisation, specifically focussing on individuals fears about their security in the labour market, which in turn would lead to an increase in the preference for redistribution policies (Ventura 2006; Rehm 2009) or, more directly, support for left parties (Walter 2010). The arrival of "cheaper" work force, especially from less developed EU countries, could be a justification for this effect—which would also help explain why this effect is higher in Western and Northern member states, though not in the Southern region. On the other hand, the negative effect of immigrants from outside the EU could be understood as a preference change from (far-)left parties to (far-)right parties. Indeed, when examining far-right party votes, the results are significantly different and opposed, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. The impact of (im)migrants on the vote for far-right parties in EU member states

	I	II	III	IV	V
MigEUt	-8.80e-05***				
	(2.82e-05)				
MigNEUt	8.88e-05***				
	(2.31e-05)				
MigEUt-1		-0.0002**			
		(5.57e-05)			
MigNEUt-1		0.0001***			
		(3.94e-05)			
EMigEUt. t-1			0.018		
			(0.010)		
EMigNEUt. t-1			-0.203**		
			(0.093)		
MigEUSht				2.497	
				(3.643)	
MigNEUSht				-1.382	
				(1.805)	
EMigEUSht. t-1					-7.320
					(11.977)
EMigNEUSht. t-1					7.225
					(11.923)
R0	12.841**	13.866**	12.538**	11.194	11.935
	(4.910)	(5.120)	(4.299)	(8.863)	(8.167)
R1	-4.058	-2.112	16.351***	9.744	11.199
	(5.069)	(6.378)	(4.344)	(7.787)	(6.350)
R2	5.323	5.904	13.840**	9.020	9.523
	(4.316)	(4.278)	(5.182)	(5.348)	(6.009)

R3	9.158***	8.655**	17.497***	9.733**	12.316*
	(3.117)	(3.146)	(4.497)	(4.248)	(6.110)
IB	4.882	6.090	2.842	3.360	0.719
	(4.263)	(4.683)	(4.930)	(5.896)	(6.858)
R-square	0.81	0.85	0.81	0.76	0.73
F			8.010	6.109	4.266
Sig.	0.00***	0.00***	0.00***	0.00***	0.02**
N	26	20	20	20	18

Note: Table entries are the coefficients obtained by the regression using the models previously explained. The standard errors are presented in parentheses. The dependent variable analysed was the vote for far-right parties (author's own coding) in the selected EU countries during the national elections that took place between 2013 and 2019. *p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01.

All five models show high significance levels below 0.01, except for the fifth model with a p-value of 0.02, indicating statistical significance at a 1% level. The analysis of model I reveals that immigrants from EU member states have a negative impact on far-right party support, while immigrants from non-EU countries have a positive impact, both significant at a 1% level. Using the same number as before, 100,000 newly arrived immigrants would represent a decrease of 8.80 percentage points, if they originate from another EU member state, and an increase of 8.88 percentage points, if they originally come from outside the EU, for the share of votes for far-right parties. However, this impact varies depending on the region. Immigrants arriving at Western and Northern EU member states have a positive impact on far-right party votes, with increases of 12.8 and 9.15 percentage points, respectively. In contrast, the Southern region experiences a decrease of 4.05 percentage points in far-right party support.

Considering the year before the national election, in model II, the influx of immigrants also affects the support for far-right parties. The same figure of 100.000 immigrants from another EU member state produces a negative impact of -20 percentage points, while the same number for immigrants from outside the EU has a positive impact of 10%. The impact in Western and Northern regions represents the highest increase in support for far-right parties, while the effect remains negative in the Southern region. In the third model, only non-EU immigrants have a significant impact, negatively affecting far-right party votes. Model III provides strong evidence of increasing support for far-right parties in all regions, including a significant 17.49 percentage point increase in the Southern region, which indicates that countries in these regions are sensible to variation in the number of incoming foreigners, even if for every percentage point increase in immigrant influx, a decrease of 0.20% in the support for far-right parties is predicted.

Surprisingly, model IV shows a similar pattern: a positive impact from the percentage of EU foreigners and a negative impact from non-EU foreigners. However, only variable R3 is highly significant. Model V also supports this finding, indicating that a change in the share of EU foreigners negatively affects far-right party support, while the share of non-EU foreigners has the opposite effect. Notably, the variable

for Northern region location is the only one statistically significant, though with a lower p-value. Importantly, none of the proposed models demonstrate high significance for immigration background, despite its apparent positive impact on far-right party voting. This suggests that familiarity with foreigners in a country does not significantly deter voters from choosing an extreme right-wing party—and would conversely foster this choice.

These findings are consistent with previous studies that researched on the relation of immigration and support for far-right parties. The increased supported brought by immigration from outside the EU concours with the observations made by other scholars, specifically in what concerns the conclusions that economic factors alone cannot explain this relation (Mendez and Cutillas 2014), and thus the level of cultural difference between natives and foreigners can be the reason for this relation (Brunner and Kuhn 2018).

5. Conclusion

Independently of how one analyses the increased influx of immigrants that Europe received in the middle of the 2010s, one thing is clear: the electoral politics have been changed—in many cases, reviving the support for far-right parties. It is believed that the questioning made at the beginning of this paper, of whether the so-called "Refugee Crisis" had indeed a positive impact in the electoral support for far-right parties, has been responded by presenting high significant evidence that point to this positive relation. Whereas the original interest was to assess the effect of immigrants—or foreigners in general—in the support for extreme parties in elections across member states of the European Union, it has become clear that the political groupings that have mostly profited from the increase of foreigners in their country were those closer to the far-right side of the political spectrum. The causality observed in the news holds.

Many existing studies in political science have already analysed the impact of refugees on electoral gains for far-right parties in European countries, providing strong evidence for a positive relationship. However, this paper takes a broader approach by considering extreme parties instead of focusing on one political spectrum and examining the effect of foreigners rather than just refugees. Additionally, using EU member states as units of observation allows for comparisons among countries involved in an ongoing process of integration. The results of this study support the use of two categories of foreigners (EU foreigners and non-EU foreigners) for analysis, highlighting the comparability of the effects of migration within the EU and migration from outside the EU. However, it is important to note that the hypothesis regarding the influence of a country's immigration history on the tendency to choose extreme parties lacks significant supporting evidence. Further studies such as those of Steinmayr (2017)'s, who builds his arguments on the contact hypothesis of Allport, Clark, and Pettigrew (1954), would help to shed more light on this relation.

It must be noted that this study does not present itself as a novelty, nor assumes that its results are indisputable. It acknowledges that the number of observations represent a small universe and that, by broadening it by adding more data, it could lead to different results, that could also prove to be divergent to those reached here.

Especially the results on the far-left share of the valid votes could have been affected by the small—or non-existent—amount of far-left parties in many selected member states, mainly in those located in the Central Eastern region. However, it is believed that this paper has achieved its original purpose of contributing to the discussion by providing reliable results that shed light on the relation between migrants and extreme vote. This is paramount, especially because of its crucial meaning that has both theoretical—but mostly practical—implications.

The results presented in this paper should be viewed within the broader context of a global political shift. While the location and origin of foreign migrants can potentially influence support for parties advocating stricter measures against foreigners or promoting xenophobia—as studies such as this have shown—the rise of such political movements is not exclusive to Europe, nor limited to periods of increased immigration. This trend has been observed in various countries across different continents, including the US, Brazil, and India. The dissemination of misinformation and the exploitation of social media, as discussed in the literature, also play a role in amplifying the effects highlighted in this study. Understanding how these variables affect diverse societies is crucial for decision-makers and governments to address these issues and prevent the proliferation of hatred among people, which can have disastrous consequences.

Received: 6/5/2023.
Approved: 7/7/2023.

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