

Essays on the Links Between Vertical and Horizontal Social Stratification, Political Attitudes, and Radical Right Support

Evidence from Sweden and Europe

Amanda Almstedt Valldor

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Academic dissertation for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology at Stockholm University to be publicly defended on Friday 25 April 2025 at 10.00 in Hörsal 3, Vån 3, Hus B, Södra huset, Universitetsvägen 10B.

Abstract

This dissertation investigates the links between vertical and horizontal social stratification, political attitudes, and radical right support. It focuses on how individual sociodemographic attributes interact in forming radical right support, how grievances mediate support for different groups, and how horizontal and vertical dimensions of education and occupation shape radical right support and political attitudes.

Study I explores how gender, class, education, rural/urban residence, age, native/non-native background, and income interact to shape radical right support, using the Swedish Society-Opinion-Media (SOM) Survey (2015–2021). The results reveal that age is the most influential moderating factor, with educational and rural-urban political divides being much stronger among younger generations. Thus, there are stronger links between one's position in the social structure and the probability of supporting the radical right among the younger generations. A replication with the European Social Survey (ESS) shows these results are generalizable to other Western European countries. Additionally, the study found some distinct pathways to radical right support across sociodemographic groups, with cultural threat perceptions driving support among particularly low-educated individuals, while crime concerns are a stronger driver among older individuals. However, contrary to common theoretical expectations, economic concerns do not disproportionately drive the socio-economically vulnerable toward the radical right.

Study II examines the links between horizontal aspects of education, political attitudes, and radical right support, using the SOM Survey 2011–2019, the ESS 2008, and the Swedish Level of Living Survey (LNU) 2000, 2010, and 2021. The study finds that support for the radical right varies significantly across fields of study, with graduates from sociocultural fields exhibiting substantially lower support than those from technical or agricultural fields. Analyses with panel data and comparisons of students who have spent different years in their respective fields of study in upper secondary school further suggest that sociocultural education is more liberalizing than education in other fields. These differences are partially mediated by horizontal, but not vertical, labor market allocation. On theoretical grounds, the study suggests that these patterns are likely partially explained by stronger political socialization into liberal-democratic values in sociocultural education.

Study III investigates the links between horizontal aspects of occupations and political attitudes. It evaluates the theoretical foundations of the Oesch class schema, which categorizes occupations based on vertical aspects (occupational skill content) and horizontally distinguished work logics. Using cross-sectional and panel data from the LNU survey 2010 and 2021, the study finds that technical object-oriented tasks are linked to cultural authoritarianism, partially explaining production workers' authoritarian inclination. However, other key aspects of the schema's links to political attitudes require theoretical reconsideration, as interpersonal tasks are not linked to cultural libertarianism, and increased managerial tasks are instead linked to more economic leftist views. The study proposes that the horizontal classification of occupational groups should be refined based on educational field requirements rather than subjective assessments of work logic.

Keywords: *Radical right, Sweden Democrats, Political opinions, GAL-TAN, Social structure, Grievances, Sociodemographic attributes, Horizontal dimensions, Education, Field of study, Occupation, Generation, Gender, Class, Work logic.*

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List of studies

Study I

Radical right support and the deepened rural-urban and educational divides among younger generations

Accepted in Acta Sociologica (2025-03-20).

Study II

Valldor, A. A. (2024). Field of study, political attitudes, and support for the radical right in Sweden and Europe. *Social Science Research*, 124, 103091.

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Study III

An Empirical Evaluation of the Theoretical Links Between the Oesch Class Schema and Political Attitudes

Manuscript.

Abstract of the dissertation

This dissertation investigates the links between vertical and horizontal social stratification, political attitudes, and radical right support. It focuses on how individual sociodemographic attributes interact in forming radical right support, how grievances mediate support for different groups, and how horizontal and vertical dimensions of education and occupation shape radical right support and political attitudes.

Study I explores how gender, class, education, rural/urban residence, age, native/non-native background, and income interact to shape radical right support, using the Swedish Society-Opinion-Media (SOM) Survey (2015–2021). The results reveal that age is the most influential moderating factor, with educational and rural-urban political divides being much stronger among younger generations. Thus, there are stronger links between one's position in the social structure and the probability of supporting the radical right among the younger generations. A replication with the European Social Survey (ESS) shows these results are generalizable to other Western European countries. Additionally, the study found some distinct pathways to radical right support across sociodemographic groups, with cultural threat perceptions driving support among particularly low-educated individuals, while crime concerns are a stronger driver among older individuals. However, contrary to common theoretical expectations, economic concerns do not disproportionately drive the socio-economically vulnerable toward the radical right.

Study II examines the links between horizontal aspects of education, political attitudes, and radical right support, using the SOM Survey 2011–2019, the ESS 2008, and the Swedish Level of Living Survey (LNU) 2000, 2010, and 2021. The study finds that support for the radical right varies significantly across fields of study, with graduates from sociocultural fields exhibiting substantially lower support than those from technical or agricultural fields. Analyses with panel data and comparisons of students who have spent different years in their respective fields of study in upper secondary school further suggest that sociocultural education is more liberalizing than education in other fields. These differences are partially mediated by horizontal, but not vertical, labor market allocation. On theoretical grounds, the study suggests that these patterns are likely partially explained by stronger political

socialization into liberal-democratic values in sociocultural education.

Study III investigates the links between horizontal aspects of occupations and political attitudes. It evaluates the theoretical foundations of the Oesch class schema, which categorizes occupations based on vertical aspects (occupational skill content) and horizontally distinguished work logics. Using cross-sectional and panel data from the LNU survey 2010 and 2021, the study finds that technical object-oriented tasks are linked to cultural authoritarianism, partially explaining production workers' authoritarian inclination. However, other key aspects of the schema's links to political attitudes require theoretical reconsideration, as interpersonal tasks are not linked to cultural libertarianism, and increased managerial tasks are instead linked to more economic leftist views. The study proposes that the horizontal classification of occupational groups should be refined based on educational field requirements rather than subjective assessments of work logic.

Sammanfattning

I denna avhandling undersöks kopplingarna mellan vertikal och horisontell social stratifiering, politiska attityder och stöd för radikala högerpartier. Fokus ligger på hur individuella sociodemografiska attribut samverkar i bildandet av stöd för den radikala högern, hur olika typer av missnöje eller oro leder olika sociodemografiska grupper till att stödja dessa partier, samt hur horisontella och vertikala dimensioner av utbildning och yrke är associerade främst med politiska attityder och högerradikalt stöd. Medan tidigare forskning framför allt undersökt genomsnittliga kopplingar mellan vertikala attribut på individnivån (till exempel utbildningslängd och inkomst) och stöd för den radikala högern, belyser denna avhandling vikten av interaktioner mellan sociala attribut samt horisontella utbildnings- och yrkesdistinktioner.

I studie I undersöks hur kön, klass, utbildningslängd, stads-/landsbygdsboende, ålder, inhemsk/utländsk bakgrund och inkomst interagerar i att forma högerradikalt stöd. Datamaterialet består av 56,311 observationer från den svenska Samhälle-Opinion-Media (SOM)-undersökningen (2015–2021). Resultaten visar att ålder är den mest inflytelserika modererande faktorn. De politiska skiljelinjerna mellan låg- och högutbildade, och mellan boende i urbana och rurala områden, är betydligt större bland yngre generationer. Sammantaget finns det starkare kopplingar mellan en individs position i den sociala strukturen och sannolikheten att stödja den radikala högern bland de yngre generationerna. En replikering med data från European Social Survey (ESS) visar att dessa resultat är generaliserbara till andra västeuropeiska länder. Studien finner också att vissa faktorer utgör olika stark bas för stöd för radikala högerpartier för olika sociodemografiska grupper, där kulturella hotuppfattningar om invandring förklarar stödet särskilt bland lågutbildade individer, medan oro för organiserad brottslighet förklarar stöd särskilt bland äldre individer. Däremot, i motsats till vanliga teoretiska uppfattningar, driver inte oro för ekonomin de ekonomiskt utsatta till den radikala högern i någon högre utsträckning, och oro för arbetslöshet är endast minimalt korrelerat med att sympatisera med den radikala högern.

I studie II undersöks kopplingarna mellan horisontella aspekter av utbildning, politiska attityder och stöd för högerradikala partier. Studien använder sig av tre undersökningar: SOM-undersökningen 2011–2019, European Social Survey (ESS), och den svenska levnadsnivåundersökningen (LNU) 2000, 2010, och 2021. Resultaten visar att stödet för den

radikala högern varierar betydligt mellan utbildningsinriktningar, där utexaminerade från sociokulturella utbildningar uppvisar betydligt lägre stöd än de från tekniska eller jordbruksinriktade utbildningar. Analyser med paneldata och jämförelser av elever som tillbringat olika antal år inom sina respektive program i gymnasieskolan tyder vidare på att sociokulturell utbildning har en mer liberaliserande effekt än andra utbildningsinriktningar. Dessa skillnader förklaras delvis av senare horisontell, men inte vertikal, arbetsmarknadsallokering. Teoretiskt sett föreslår studien att dessa mönster delvis kan förklaras av en starkare politisk socialisering till att anamma liberaldemokratiska värderingar inom sociokulturell utbildning.

I studie III undersöks kopplingen mellan horisontella aspekter av yrken och politiska åsikter. Studien utvärderar de teoretiska grunderna för Oeschs klassschema, som kategoriserar yrkesklasser baserat på vertikala aspekter (yrkets kompetenskrav) och horisontellt särskiljande arbetslogiker. Studien använder sig av tvärsnitts- och paneldata från den svenska levnadsnivåundersökningen (LNU) 2010 och 2021. I enlighet med Oeschs teori visar resultaten att tekniska objektorienterade uppgifter är kopplade till kulturellt auktoritära värderingar, vilket delvis förklarar de kulturellt auktoritära attityder arbetare inom produktionsverksamhet tenderar att ha. Andra nyckelaspekter av klasschemats koppling till politiska attityder kräver dock teoretisk omprövning eftersom interpersonella arbetsuppgifter inte är kopplade till kulturell libertarianism, och ökade ledningsuppgifter är kopplade till ökad vänsterorientering i ekonomiska frågor. Studien föreslår att den horisontella klassificeringen av yrkesgrupper ska revideras och baseras på vilken utbildningsinriktning som krävs för yrket istället för den nuvarande grunden som utgörs av subjektiva bedömningar av arbetslogik. I synnerhet föreslår studien att hälso- och sjukvårdsprofessioner bör separeras från sociokulturella professioner eftersom de inte delar utbildningsbakgrund och då de som jobbar inom de sociokulturella professionerna är betydligt mer kulturellt liberala och ekonomiskt vänsterorienterade än de som jobbar inom hälsoprofessionerna.

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Introduction

Since the 1980s, Europe has seen a surge of populist radical right parties, especially during the 2010s (Scheiring et al., 2024). Likewise, in Sweden, the Sweden Democrats gained entrance to the parliament in 2010 and obtained as many as 20,5% of the votes in the 2022 election. The rise of authoritarian and populist leaders, parties, and movements also occurred outside Europe, with, for instance, the election of US President Trump in 2016. These trends have likely undermined democratic institutions and democratic norms since, for instance, checks and balances and press and electoral freedoms tend to decline when populist leaders rule (Funke et al., 2023). The undermining of democratic institutions and democratic norms and the implementation of nationalist economic protectionist policies, such as trade restrictions, also negatively affect economic growth (Acemoglu et al., 2005, 2013, 2019; Born et al., 2019; Funke et al., 2023).

This dissertation investigates the demand side of the rising radical right support, aiming to shed light on who supports the radical right and potential explanations as to why. While researchers debate whether, in particular, the rise in demand for the radical right has mainly economic or sociocultural causes, many researchers agree that it can be interpreted as a counter-reaction to social changes that have followed from the increasing movement of capital and people (Harteveld et al., 2022, pp. 440-1). These social changes have likely impacted different social groups in various ways, as different positions in the social structure are associated with disparate access to economic, social, and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). This can affect how equipped individuals are to handle changes and whether they are positively or negatively affected by these changes. For instance, highly educated, professional occupational groups, women, and urban dwellers are generally theorized to be winners of globalization and modernization. In contrast, men, rural dwellers, low-educated, and manual workers are generally theorized to have lost out on modernization and globalization both in economic and sociocultural aspects (e.g., Betz, 1994). The latter groups are also often found to have a comparatively high probability of supporting the radical right (e.g., Damhuis, 2020; Demker, 2014; Gidron & Hall, 2017).

While multiple studies have investigated the average associations between sociodemographic attributes and support for the radical right, few have investigated how these attributes may interact in shaping such support. Study I investigates interactions between sociodemographic attributes in terms of gender, class, education, rural/urban area, age, native/non-native background, and income using 56,311 observations from the Swedish Society-Opinion-Media (SOM) Survey (2015-2021). This investigation is warranted as unique combinations of positions in the social structure can be more than just the sum of its parts and form unique living experiences, institutional contexts, and access to resources, which can affect an individual's worldview, political attitudes, and party sympathies (Bourdieu, 1984; Gidron & Hall, 2017; McCall, 2005). The results show that age is the most influential moderating factor, with educational and rural-urban political divides having grown strongly over generations. There is a stronger link between position in the social structure and support for the radical right among younger age groups than among older age groups.

As the position in the social structure may affect what kind of concerns the individual might have with globalization and modernization (e.g., Bourdieu, 1984; Damhuis, 2020), Study I also embraces heterogeneity by investigating whether there are differing pathways grievances linked to welfare, unemployment, crime, and cultural concerns with immigration toward support for the radical right across different sociodemographic groups. The results reveal that a perceived cultural threat from immigration can explain the bulk of the high support among the low educated and that crime concerns are a stronger driving force toward support of the radical right among the older in comparison to younger people.

One caveat in previous research of socio-structural explanations of radical right support is that the positions in the social structure, such as education and occupation, are often regarded in terms of levels, with clear vertical distinctions, while the horizontal distinctions are regularly overlooked. This view probably stems from data scarcity but also a tendency in the field to theoretically view these positions in terms of economic resources in the labor market where higher education and high-skilled occupations are theorized to make the individual less vulnerable to globalization and competition with immigrants, rendering lower probability to support the radical right (e.g., Dehdari, 2022), overlooking their roles as social arenas for political socialization. Studies II and III of this dissertation contribute to the literature by

continuing and complementing the work initiated by other researchers (e.g., Hooghe et al., 2024; Kitschelt 1994, 1995; Kriesi, 1989; Oesch, 2006a, 2006b, 2008a, 2008b, 2012) in distinguishing the links between horizontal aspects of education and occupation and political opinions and support for the radical right; acknowledging that the institutional experiences, social networks, peer effects, types of required skills, etcetera can vary across e.g., fields of study, occupational sectors, and work logics, potentially rendering different worldviews.

Among the sociodemographic attributes, educational level is often found to be one of the strongest, if not the strongest, predictors of radical right support (e.g., Cavaille & Marshall, 2019; Jung & Gil, 2019; Velásquez & Eger, 2022). In previous research, education is most often distinguished in vertical aspects only, even though the content and context of education are likely to vary across (horizontally distinguished) fields of study. Study II uses three different surveys, the Swedish SOM survey, the European Social Survey (ESS), and the Swedish Level of Living Survey (LNU), to investigate the links between the field of study, political opinions, and radical right support. The results reveal that education in sociocultural fields stands out as more liberalizing and that they are associated with lower radical right support than for other fields, in particular, in comparison to technical fields.

While horizontal aspects of education are seldom distinguished in previous research on political opinions and radical right support, empirical research occasionally distinguishes occupations horizontally with the use of the influential Oesch class Schema (see Oesch, 2006a, 2006b, 2008a, 2008b, 2012). While the empirical patterns of the schema are repeatedly shown to be consistent, there is a lack of studies scrutinizing the schema's theoretical bases, which Study III does with the use of both cross-sectional and panel data models from the Swedish Level of Living Survey (LNU). Parts of the theory are confirmed: technical object-oriented work tasks are associated with more culturally authoritarian values and could largely explain the authoritarian leaning among production workers. However, several parts of the theory warrant reconsideration: interpersonal tasks are not linked to cultural libertarian views and cannot explain the culturally libertarian inclination among sociocultural professionals; and management tasks are not consistently linked to economic rightist views and cannot explain the economic right-leaning among managers and administrative professionals. Since several theoretical key aspects of the Oesch schema lack support, this study proposes that its horizontal division should be based on educational field requirements rather than subjective

assessments of work logic. The most important adjustment is separating health professionals from sociocultural professionals, which enhances the predictive accuracy of political attitudes and also other life outcomes like health and income.

This dissertation aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How do the sociodemographic attributes of gender, class, education, rural/urban area, age, native/non-native background, and income interact to shape radical right support? (Study I)
2. What are the mediating roles of grievances related to unemployment, welfare, crime, and cultural concern of immigration, to explain the links between the sociodemographic attributes gender, class, education, rural/urban area, age, native/non-native background, and income, and radical right support? (Study I)
3. What roles do horizontal aspects of education play: what are the links between the field of study, political opinions, and support for the radical right? Moreover, what roles do vertical and horizontal labor market allocation play in explaining these links? (Study II)
4. What roles do horizontal aspects of occupation play: what are the links between vertical (hierarchical) class positions, horizontally distinguished work tasks (interpersonal, technical object-oriented, and organizational/managerial), and economic and cultural-political opinions? How well do these tasks explain the links between the Oesch class schema and political opinions? (Study III)

This introductory overview of the dissertation is organized as follows: First comes a presentation of the populist radical right party family and a conceptualization of its main ideological characteristics: ethnonationalism, authoritarianism, and populism, followed by a presentation of Sweden as a case study. Next, I present the most common supply and demand theoretical explanations for the rise of the radical right. After that, I will present the theory and previous empirical patterns of how specific positions in the social structure, such as

gender, class, and education, are related to political opinions and radical right support and the role played by horizontally distinguished educational and occupational trajectories. Next comes a presentation of the methods, data, and ethical considerations used in the dissertation. After that comes a presentation of empirical patterns from the Swedish SOM data of attitudes and grievances from 1986-2021 and its relation to support for the Swedish radical right. Lastly comes summaries of the main findings from the three studies in this dissertation, followed by a concluding discussion with suggestions for future research.

Background and Theory

The populist radical right party family and the Sweden Democrats

The main ideology and goals of European radical right parties focus on ethno-nationalism (Rydgren, 2005), and they are also often authoritarian and populist (Mudde, 2007). The main goals for these parties are often to limit immigration, especially from non-European Muslim countries, and oppose multiculturalism. These parties also often argue for tougher law and order policies and for limiting European integration and globalization. They also tend to take social-conservative views on, for instance, gender roles and the nuclear family. These parties are often viewed as not being copies of old fascist or Nazi parties but rather a new party family (Mudde, 2007). In contrast to the extreme-right parties at the beginning of the 20th-mid-20th century, the new populist radical right parties do not oppose parliamentary democracy per se, although they sometimes oppose *liberal* democracy and some of its main principles such as pluralism, universalism, and individualism (Minkenberg, 2018).

These parties are sometimes instead called Traditionalist-Authoritarian-Nationalist (TAN) parties and stand in stark contrast to new leftist and green parties, which are sometimes called Green-Alternative-Libertarian (GAL) parties (Marks et al., 2006). GAL and TAN parties mostly mobilized around cultural value issues, where they take contrasting opinions, such as regarding immigration, multiculturalism, feminism, and environmentalism. This is in contrast to more classical mainstream left and mainstream right parties, which historically, and to a large extent also today, have had their main focus on economic issues. Below, I discuss the main traits of the modern radical right parties - ethnonationalism (alternatively, nativism), authoritarianism, and populism.

Ethno-nationalism

Ethno-nationalism is at the epicenter of the radical right's ideology (Rydgren, 2005). Radical right parties often argue that besides the family, the nation is the most important base for group cohesion, identity, and solidarity (Sverigedemokraterna, 2019, p. 8). The radical right's nationalism is more exclusionary than the mainstream right's more civic nationalism as it is based more on ethnic group-belonging, so-called ethno-nationalism (Bar-On, 2018).

Ethnonationalism is based on ethnopluralist ideas, arguing that ethnic groups have a right to difference and should be kept separated geographically so the unique cultures are preserved (Rydgren, 2005). Consequently, it is argued that foreigners should assimilate, rather than integrate, into the majority group's culture and that there should be homogenous cultures rather than multiculturalism within countries, which is also evident in the principal program of the Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna, 2019, p. 9). European radical right parties often argue that European nations and cultures and Christianity need to be protected from foreign cultural influences and, in particular, from Islam (Brubaker, 2017; Kallis, 2018). It is often argued that non-European immigrants, particularly those from Muslim cultures, have a more violent culture and thus are a security threat (Mudde, 2007).

In contrast to older far-right parties that generally adopted a biological definition of ethnicity, the modern radical right parties tend to focus on culture, which probably appeals to a broader range of voters as it is more moderate than biological definitions (Rydgren, 2005). For instance, the Sweden democrats aimed to distance themselves from essentialist views on the link between culture and ethnicity and deleted formulations about "inherited essence" that they previously argued drove different groups to different behavior (see Sverigedemokraterna, 2011, p. 8), although the message remained in the principal party program but in a more covert form (see Sverigedemokraterna, 2019, p. 5). Also, the ethnopluralist ideas of "equal but different" has probably contributed to their success as it is less overtly hierarchical than the old far-right parties and appeal more to the public (Rydgren, 2005), who has often been socialized with norms of equality and anti-prejudice and stigmatization of world-war fascism and Nazism. However, others have argued that the cultural turn and embracement of "separate but equal" ideology is mostly a turn in rhetoric as a strategic attempt to appeal more to the public and that the ethno-nationalism of the radical right tends to be hierarchical in practice as it often is argued that, e.g., Muslim cultures are less cultivated than western Christian countries (e.g., Elgenius & Rydgren, 2019; Rueda, 2021).

Authoritarianism

The conceptualization of authoritarianism varies across disciplines. In the field of the radical right, Mudde (2007, pp. 22-23) suggests that it should be operationalized with "the authoritarian personality" from social psychology and the Frankfurter school in mind that dates back to the work of Adorno and his colleagues (Adorno et al., 1969). Authoritarianism

is a personality disposition people have to different degrees, which tends to become more activated under threats, which in turn can make the individual more anti-democratic as well as attracted to especially far-right ideology and the appeal of such leaders.

Right-wing authoritarians tend to embrace conformity in terms of beliefs that established authority and conventional norms should be respected; rigidity in terms of intolerance towards complexity and uncertainty and instead preferring clear rules and hierarchies; being superstitious; tendency towards stereotyping; high degree of moralistic thinking in terms of seeing the world in black and white with a strict division between right and wrong; cynicism and destructiveness in terms of general negative views of the human nature; aggression towards those who violate conventional norms; hierarchical worldviews with clear powered structures and toughness and strong leaders that should be obeyed; and embracement of traditional values and resistance to social change (Adorno et al., 1969).

Later, Altemeyer (1981, pp. 147–8) continued on the lines of Adorno et al. (1969) but highlighted that some traits were more distinctive of authoritarianism than others, namely submission to established authorities, aggression towards those perceived as violating these authorities, and conformism. For right-wing authoritarians, it is established authorities, norms, hierarchies, and traditions that should be adhered to, which has a clear link to the traditionalism radical right parties tend to embrace (Altemeyer, 1981). For instance, radical right parties tend to have conservative views on gender, desiring traditional gender hierarchies (Akkerman, 2015; Kantola & Lombardo, 2020). Authoritarians generally tend to desire strictly ordered societies and that deviant behavior is met with punishment (Altemeyer, 1981).

Today, Norris and Inglehart (2019) argue that Right-wing authoritarianism emphasizes security and embraces a relatively high tolerance of aggression to protect moral values that lower-status “outsiders” are seen as threatening, and there is a desire for strong leaders to protect these moral values. In more concrete terms, authoritarian traits of radical right parties are, for instance, that they tend to appeal to people’s fears by highlighting security threats, advocating for more surveillance and tougher punishments for crimes (Mudde, 2019; Sverigedemokraterna, 2011, 2019).

Empirical research has found that typical psychological traits of authoritarianism, such as conventionalism, obedience to authority, and cynicism, are linked to ethnic and moral intolerance (Napier & Jost, 2008). Also, uncertainty avoidance (intolerance of ambiguity, lack of openness to experience, need for order) is linked to political conservatism (Jost et al., 2007). Experimental and longitudinal studies have found that authoritarianism and the support for “strong” leaders and right-wing leaders and opinions increase during periods of increased threats, such as terror threats (Doty et al., 1991; McCann, 1997; Jost et al., 2003a, 2003b; Willer, 2004). Also, experiments show that inducing death anxiety triggers right-wing leaning (Cohen et al., 2004, 2005; Jost et al., 2007; Landau et al., 2004).

Populism

Populism is generally about politically pitying the morally righteous “people” against corrupt “elites” and appeals to anti-political and anti-establishment sentiments (Mudde, 2007). Populist parties often criticize established parties and argue that the people must be defended against cultural, economic, and/or political elites (Mudde, 2007). It is often argued that power should be closer to the people, and elements of representative democracy are sometimes criticized; thus, populist parties are often more in favor of, for instance, referendums than other parties. Simple solutions based on “common sense” are often suggested as solutions to complex social problems (Mudde, 2007). Both left and right parties can be populist, and populism is often combined with another ideology to form political stances, implying that its content varies depending on what other ideology it is combined with.

What characterizes the radical right is that they combine populism with ethnonationalism, generally pitying the native majority “people” against outgroups such as immigrants, as well as against urban leftist elites who are viewed as not accurately representing and listening to the majority people and benefitting outgroups at the expense of native hard-working families (Mols & Jetten, 2017). These accounts are often spread as conspiracy theories (Brubaker, 2017). The populist radical right also argues that the opinion of the majority people should guide policies and that this goes before the protection of minority rights or human rights (Mudde, 2007, p. 23). Populists also often distrust democratically important mediating institutions, such as public media and courts (Brubaker, 2017).

Sweden as a case study

No far-right party succeeded in entering parliament in Sweden in the 20th century. This is in contrast to many other West European countries that have had far right-wing parties present in parliaments since around the 1980s and had even more extreme right parties earlier in the century. One potential exception is the populist right party “New Democracy,” which was in parliament for one mandate period with 6.7 % of the votes from 1991-1994 (Rydgren, 2006). However, while considered populist right, most experts do not classify New Democracy as far right (see Rooduijn et al., 2023).

Sweden has a history of strong class voting and a high salience of economic conflicts (Oskarson & Demker, 2012). The social democrats held power for a large part of the 20th century, and they led the government between 1936 and 1976. The context prevented the success of radical right parties as cultural issues such as immigration were not so politicized due to the high salience of economic issues, and as voters that the radical right otherwise tended to appeal to, such as the working class, were tied to the influential social democrats (Oskarson & Demker, 2012; Rydgren, 2006). The labor immigration to Sweden from other European countries was relatively high in the post-war period but did not result in any rise of a far-right party, potentially partially because class-based economic issues overshadowed such political questions.

However, in 2010, the populist far-right party, the Sweden Democrats, entered the parliament (see classification by experts in Rooduijn et al., 2023). The party was initially founded in 1988 as a successor to the extreme-right nationalist party “Sweden Party,” which in turn was formed from a merger of the campaign organization Keep Sweden Swedish (BBS) and the Swedish Progress Party (Rydgren, 2006). Thus, several of the Sweden Democrats’ founders had been active in neo-Nazi and white nationalist organizations and parties (Rydgren, 2006). In the 1990s, the party initiated a process of moderation and improvement of the façade, and with the entrance of the current party leader in 2005, this process heightened, and the party successively reformed its program and expelled openly racist members (Rydgren, 2006).

The party soared in election polls around 2015 when many refugees arrived in Sweden. In

recent decades, immigration into Europe has increased. Sweden has had an unusually rapid increase in non-European immigration in the recent two decades; simultaneously, the radical right party, the Sweden Democrats, has grown at high speed (Rydgren & Tyrberg, 2020). In 2022, 14.9% of the Swedish inhabitants were born outside Europe, which is the highest in the EU after Luxembourg and Malta (Eurostat, 2023). The party succeeded in growing fast to 20,5% in 2022 and became the second largest party after the Social Democrats. It became a confidence and supply party to the center-right governmental parties.

Immigration, multiculturalism, and nationalism are the most prioritized questions for the Sweden Democrats, according to experts in the Chapel Hill survey (Bakker et al., 2015, 2020; Jolly et al., 2022). The Sweden Democrats party advocates for more restricted immigration and, in some cases, also repatriation. The party argues that immigrants should assimilate (rather than integrate) into the Swedish majority culture, that a common cultural and national identity is essential for social cohesion, and that multiculturalism should be counteracted. The unusually large increase in non-European immigrants compared to other European countries and the strong focus the party has on immigration-related issues might imply that immigration is a stronger motivator for radical right support in Sweden than in other countries.

Another prioritized question is law and order, and the party links crime to immigration. They desire harsher sentences for crimes and an expanded police force. The party also takes critical stances toward further European integration.

The party takes the most Traditionalist-Authoritarian-Nationalist (TAN) views in the Swedish parliament and scores about similarly on the GAL-TAN scale as other West-European radical right parties (Bakker et al., 2015, 2020; Jolly et al., 2022). However, their traditional stances are relatively moderate from an international perspective. For instance, while they advocate for raising children in traditional nuclear families, they support same-sex marriage and gender-affirming surgery. Sweden is famous for being a comparatively progressive country, for example, regarding gender equality (Bergqvist, 2015; European Institute for Gender Equality, 2024; Off, 2023), and as progressive values in some moral questions, such as gender equality, are so widespread, even the radical right has probably been forced to moderate its

stances on these questions to gain more widespread support.

Immigration has been uneven across municipalities and neighborhoods (Rydgren & Tyrberg, 2020). The Sweden Democrats are more popular in southern Sweden than in northern Sweden (Rydgren & Tyrberg, 2020). In 2022, the Sweden Democrats became the largest party in 19 municipalities in southern Sweden. However, in the last election, the party became very popular also in many other regions of Sweden, especially industrial and rural regions.

Although the governmental power has shifted between center-right and center-left coalitions in recent decades, Sweden is, from an international perspective, regarded as a social democratic welfare state (Oskarson & Demker, 2012). Walter (2021) suggests that the countries with stronger welfare states, such as Sweden, may have less backlash against economic globalization as people are generally more economically secure, while the backlash against political and sociocultural globalization is likely to be present. Moreover, immigration in the 21st century has, to a large extent, been refugee immigration following global conflicts, and the Sweden Democrats generally argue that this is a greater cultural threat than was the case with European labor immigration in the post-war period.

The results from Sweden are theoretically expected to be more generalizable to other West-European countries than to East-European countries, as West-European countries are culturally more similar to Sweden and share a longer democratic tradition than East-European countries (Doerschler & Jackson, 2018; Jackson & Doerschler, 2024; Stefanovic & Evans, 2019). Also, the Sweden Democrats share more traits with West-European radical right parties. For instance, while the West European radical right parties are populist and criticize parts of the liberal democratic principles (such as pluralism), some East European radical right parties are more anti-democratic and also more authoritarian (Doerschler & Jackson, 2018; Jackson & Doerschler, 2024; Stefanovic & Evans, 2019). Also, in the East, it is relatively more common that these parties mobilize antisemitic voters and discontent with minority European groups residing in the country, while radical right parties in the West focus more on criticizing non-European immigration from Muslim countries (Doerschler & Jackson, 2018; Jackson & Doerschler, 2024; Stefanovic & Evans, 2019).

For instance, some studies have found that the liberalizing effect of education has been found to be contingent on it occurring in countries with long liberal-democratic traditions, which is probably because it is the dominating values in the official culture that is passed on to young persons in public institutions such as education (e.g., Carnevale et al., 2020; Dražanová, 2017; Selznick & Steinberg, 1969; Thomsen & Olsen, 2017). Thus, the associations between the sociodemographic attributes and positions in the social structure and political alignments are likely contingent on the country's context. When possible, the studies in this dissertation replicate the analyses with the European Social Survey (ESS) for other European countries and distinguish between East and Western European countries.

The next sections present explanations for the rise of the radical right, which can generally be divided into supply and demand side explanations. However, these explanations are also likely to interact as radical right parties are likely to adapt to and shape voters' attitudes (Golder, 2016; Mols & Jetten, 2020). For instance, while some of the support for the radical right probably stems from underlying cultivated grievances, radical right parties may also trigger grievances by using alarmist narratives (Mols & Jetten, 2020; Wodak, 2019). While this dissertation is focused on the demand side for radical right parties, supply-side explanations are also key to capturing the whole picture of the rise of the radical right.

Supply-side explanations for the rise of the radical right

Supply-side explanations of the rise in radical right support generally focus on how radical right parties and their party leaders position themselves to gain support from voters. It also focuses on the opportunity structures in the political system and acts of other agents that may constrain or enable the success of radical right parties. This section presents some of the most common supply-side explanations for the rise of the radical right.

Electoral system and political competition

The electoral system impacts how easy it is for upcoming parties to gain success. It is easier for new parties to enter proportional representation (PR) systems with low barriers to entry. Amengay and Stockemer (2019) found in their review that more permissive and more proportional electoral systems, such as a higher effective number of parties, higher district

magnitude, and proportional representation (PR), were beneficial for the radical right.

Also, the actions and policy positions of mainstream parties also matter. According to the “Median Voter Theorem” (MVT), mainstream right- and left parties tend to move to the center when the election is coming up to win over the voters with middle-position opinions while still retaining the voters on their respective side (Downs, 1957). If mainstream parties converge ideologically, radical right parties gain the opportunity to move into vacant electoral space and, position themselves as a unique alternative and attract voters who disagree with the established parties’ positions (Arzheimer & Carter, 2006; Berman & Kundnani, 2021; Kitschelt, 1995; Mols & Jetten, 2020). For instance, in Sweden in 2014, both the leading mainstream left party, the Social Democrats, and the leading mainstream right party, the Moderate Party, took progressive views on refugee intake. As there was a rather great proportion already favoring less refugee intake, the convergence of the mainstream left and right on immigration intake left room for the radical right party, the Sweden Democrats, to gain votes from those skeptical toward immigration.

Also, mainstream right and mainstream left parties have converged in economic questions, especially center-left parties have moved to the center (Mudde, 2019). This has led to the depoliticization of economic issues (Mudde, 2019). Depoliticization of economic issues renders room for politicizing cultural issues, which tend to benefit parties that mobilize primarily along these lines – namely radical right parties on the culturally authoritarian pole and progressive left and Green parties on the culturally libertarian pole (Mudde, 2019). As the left moves to the economic center, radical right parties and leaders tend to become more successful in mobilizing those who have lost out on economic globalization (Bagashka et al., 2022; Fervers, 2019; Snegovaya, 2024).

Shift in salience from economic to cultural issues

The socioeconomic dimensions, which center around conflict about the distribution of resources, have become less salient in politics (Mudde, 2007, 2019; Rydgren, 2005). When economic issues are high in salience, the mainstream left and right parties, who mobilize around these issues, generally benefit. Instead, in recent decades, cultural issues have grown in salience, which probably stems from the depoliticization of economic issues by mainstream parties (as discussed above) but also from decreasing acute material needs and globalization

that result in the movement of people and capital. This shift in salience generally benefits parties mobilizing around cultural issues: radical right parties on the cultural rightist side and green and new left parties on the culturally leftist side (Arzheimer, 2009; Minkenberg, 2018). These parties take a distinct position on cultural issues and are regarded by many voters as having a reputation of competence on such issues (Bélanger & Meguid, 2008). Especially the rising salience of immigration, partially stemming from increased immigration, has likely benefited the radical right (e.g., Dennison & Geddes, 2019; Dennison, 2020).

The role of the media

Both favorable and critical media coverage may benefit the radical right, as it promotes their visibility and relevance and may also normalize their narratives (Ellinas, 2010). The high salience of cultural issues in the media and party programs probably also benefitted the radical right by activating latent negative attitudes towards immigrants (Bonikowski, 2017). Traditional media have also played a significant role in public opinion formation in many countries, and how they present the radical right is likely to play a role in the radical right's success. The media may be cautious against being critical of the radical right as they may then be accused of being politically partial, resulting in the media presenting the radical right in a way that normalizes radical right parties and contributes to their success (Krämer, 2014). Also, time series analyses have shown that the increased media coverage of crime and immigrant topics is associated with the rising growth of radical right parties (e.g., Walgrave & de Swert, 2004).

The shift in type of media consumption may also have benefitted the radical right. Traditional media consumption in Sweden and globally, including newspapers, radio, and linear TV, has declined in recent years, while news consumption from social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok has risen (Internetstiftelsen, 2023; Pew Research Center, 2021). While traditional media often use gatekeepers, who often are educated journalists, to scrutinize what is true and to be critical toward forwarding extreme messages, media on modern social platforms have less editorial oversight, allowing disinformation, conspiracy theories, and narratives by radical users to be spread without securitization (Mudde, 2007). News in social media is targeted to satisfy the users through algorithms such that the user continues to use the platform, and the company benefits economically (Pariser, 2011; Reed et al., 2021). The increased filtering leads to people being exposed to issues they are interested in and the

ideology they already identify with, which amplifies their preexisting views and leads to more radical views (Pariser, 2011; Reed et al., 2021). Modern media also publish stories that are predicted to wake feelings and give clicks to earn money, and consequently, by using an alarmist narrative, the radical right also gets disproportionately high media coverage, which is likely to benefit them (Mols & Jetten, 2020).

Efficiency and responsiveness of democratic institutions and mainstream political parties

Another supply-side explanation for the rise of populism and anti-establishment parties is that political parties and democratic institutions may not have responded sufficiently to a large proportion of citizens and their needs, leaving room for radical right parties that can mobilize the political discontent that follows from social and economic changes (Berman, 2021; Huntington, 1968). For instance, in Sweden, politicians in the parliament have been much more positive towards refugee intake than the voters for at least a couple of decades, which has probably rendered dissatisfaction and left room for the Sweden Democrats to mobilize these voters (Johansson et al., 2022). In economic questions, politicians are more to the right than voters (Johansson et al., 2022), which may further cause discontent. However, it is unclear if this would benefit the Swedish Democrats.

Moderation and normalization of the radical right

The degree of stigma attached to radical right parties probably plays a great role in whether they succeed (Valentim, 2024). People tend to be sensitive to social norms, and the mere thought of significant others disapproving of one's behavior may make one think twice about them (Bursztyn et al., 2017; Valentim, 2024). Overall, Valentim (2024) argues that the increased willingness to act upon anti-immigrant preferences partially can explain rising support for the radical right, which in turn is driven by decreased social stigma attached to these parties. Also, the entrance of the radical right into parliament probably also had a normalizing effect. This normalizing effect may lead supporters to express their views in public, which may imply further normalization of the party and decreased barriers for others to support the radical right in a cumulative way (Valentim, 2024).

Many radical right parties have worked on improving their façade, including the Sweden Democrats. The Sweden Democrats have transitioned from biological to cultural definitions of national belonging and have expelled representatives and members regarded as too

extreme, which has probably benefited their reputation among the electorate and reduced the stigma.

Also, when support for the radical right grows, other parties, particularly mainstream right parties, tend to imitate the radical right's narrative and come closer to their policy positions to retain and win back voters (Meguid, 2008; Wagner & Meyer, 2017). While the mainstream parties may win back some voters, the radical right may also benefit since their narrative and stances become normalized (Abou-Chadi & Krause, 2018; Meijers, 2017; Mudde, 2019; Walter, 2021). Also, the radical right is often seen as owning the question of immigration and multiculturalism among voters who are conservative in these aspects. Consequently, these voters may not change back to the mainstream right.

Also, as the radical right party grows, the cost of not inviting them to cooperate increases. In Sweden, the Sweden Democrats became a confidence and supply party to mainstream right parties after their successful election results in 2022, which has probably contributed further to reducing the stigma attached to the party.

Organizational resources

Organizational resources, such as the skills of the politicians within parties, also play a role in whether radical right parties succeed. For instance, although some studies indicate no association between the charisma of the leader and party success (e.g., Van der Brug & Mughan, 2007), others argue that a skilled and charismatic party leader may activate underlying preferences for the radical right in the population (Valentim, 2024; Weyland, 2017, p. 68). Radical right parties tend to have more top-down than bottom-up organizations than mainstream parties, so the leader becomes more crucial for the support (Weyland, 2017). For instance, in Sweden, the Sweden Democrats started to grow with the election of the current party leader in 2005.

International networks and cross-national influence

Upcoming radical right parties tend to study and mimic the “winning formulas” of successful radical right parties in other countries (Kitschelt, 1995; Mols & Jetten, 2020). For instance, avoiding explicitly racist rhetoric and instead mimicking the ethnopluralist rhetoric of more

successful radical right parties, moving from neoliberal toward the economic center and welfare chauvinist positions (Kitschelt, 2004), overpromising (Papadopoulos, 2000), and position blurring by e.g. promising both lower taxes and more sending to attract broad support across voters with different policy preferences (Rovny, 2013), has proven to be a successful strategy adopted by many radical right parties (see also Mols & Jetten, 2020).

These different supply explanations interact and form opportunities for the radical right to succeed. For instance, in Sweden, the radical right was characterized by weak leadership, extremism, strong norms against radical right parties, and weak electoral support around the millennium shift. In contrast, around the time the influential current leader was elected in 2005, the party underwent a moderation process, and the stigma continuously weakened. As the electoral support grew and the party was invited to cooperate with the mainstream right, the stigma attached to the party further weakened.

Demand-side explanations for the rise of the radical right

Demand-side explanations for the radical right's success focus on why the public supports it. These explanations focus on the supporters' characteristics, what grievances drive people to support the radical right, and its link to changing economic and social conditions and changes that may favor the radical right. The explanations are generally divided into economic versus sociocultural explanations.

Economic Grievances

The economic anxiety perspective generally argues that conflicts over scarce resources drive support for the radical right, especially among the economically deprived, such as low-skilled workers and the unemployed. It is often argued that in OECD countries, changes such as heightened economic globalization, technological change, and neoliberalism have benefitted the already privileged, such as the highly-educated urban citizens, while making life more economically insecure for the low-educated and rural dwellers, leading to increased discontent and polarization between the winners and losers of economic globalization (Iversen & Soskice, 2019; Judis, 2016; Rodrik, 2021). It is often argued that financial crises trigger the success of the radical right and that the 2010 surge in radical right support is a consequence of the financial crisis of 2008 rather than the increasing immigration patterns to Europe (Funke

& Trebesch, 2017; Milner, 2021). This claim is further substantiated by the fact that extreme-right parties grew following other historical financial crises, such as in the 1920s/1930 (Funke & Trebesch, 2017; Milner, 2021).

Results regarding the economic anxiety perspective are mixed. Recently, a meta-analysis by Scheiring et al. (2024) that reviewed 36 studies indicated that all studies found a significant causal association between economic shocks on the macro level (such as increases in unemployment, increased import exposure, austerity policies, etc.) and populism (although both left- and right-wing populism). For instance, increasing automation (Anelli et al., 2021; Milner, 2021), import competition (Colantone & Stanig, 2018a, 2018b; Milner, 2021), increased housing prices (Adler & Ansell, 2020), and austerity policies (Baccini & Sattler, 2024; Vlandas & Halikiopoulou, 2019, 2021) have been found to be linked to higher support for radical right parties. Studies that consider heterogeneity tend to find that the effect of economic shocks on radical right support is stronger in already economically vulnerable areas (Baccini & Sattler, 2024). In contrast, Amengay and Stockemer (2019) found scarce support for the economic hardships associated with right-wing populism in their review. Others, e.g., Berman (2021) and Walter (2021), reached more mixed conclusions about the role of economic hardship in their review of existing literature and noted that economic grievance-based explanation holds better on the contextual than the individual level. Others (e.g., Algan et al., 2017; Fervers, 2019) have found that worsened economic conditions indeed render populism, but more so for left-wing populism, which is probably because they mobilize discontent in combination with advocating for more redistribution and welfare policies.

However, on the individual micro-level, studies often fail to find substantive links between clear economic indicators such as employment status, income, and wealth and economic grievances such as fear of becoming unemployed and support for radical right parties (e.g., Bornschier & Kriesi, 2012; Coffé, 2012). For instance, Gidron & Mijs (2019) followed 8,000 Dutch citizens each year from 2008 to 2015 and found evidence that people personally affected by the financial crisis had an increased probability of turning to the radical left but not to the radical right. This may be because immigration is often found to have a modest impact on the labor market (e.g., natives' wages) (e.g., Card et al., 2012; Ottaviano & Peri, 2012).

There are two prevalent theories of how economic grievances drive voters to the radical right: the theory that it is competition over jobs and wages on the labor market and the theory that it is competition over scarce welfare resources that drive support. Although it is theoretically possible for both theoretical mechanisms to drive a voter to the radical right simultaneously, these theories are in some aspects diametrically opposed as the labor market competition implies that supporters are concerned that immigrants steal jobs from natives, while the competition over public resources and welfare perspective implies that supporters are driven by concerns with that immigrants consume many welfare services and do not work and contribute to welfare to the same extent as natives.

Labor market competition theory

The labor market competition theory is based on rational choice theory and posits that economic self-interest drives those who are vulnerable on the labor market to oppose immigration and potentially also support the radical right in order to reduce competition over employment and/or wages (Dehdari, 2022). This competition heightens during economic downturns (Dehdari, 2022). It is also argued that as the economy has transitioned from industrial to post-industrial with a decline in low-medium skilled manual labor and an increase in professional and service jobs, the typical male manual laborer has seen decreasing demand for their work, and turned to the radical right out of frustration and/or to restrict further competition for these scarce jobs from immigration, and to limit international competition through for instance tariffs sometimes suggested by the radical right (e.g., Betz, 1994).

Potentially pointing in favor of this theory, it is often found that areas in economic stagnation with increasing unemployment rates tend to have higher radical right support (Dehdari, 2022). However, other researchers have found contrasting results on the macro level, such as Haugsgjerd and Bergh (2024), who used monthly time-series data from 30 years in Norway and found that the radical right was most benefited during times of rising immigration and a booming economy (see also Mols & Jetten, 2017; Tabellini, 2020). Also, contrasting with the predictions of this theory, Schöll and Kurer (2024) found that areas that experienced a decline in classical routine and manufacturing jobs due to information and communication technology (ICT) experienced growth in cognitive non-routine occupations and the service sector. As incumbents of the latter jobs tend to hold more progressive values, regions experiencing

technology adoption shifted towards the progressive left (Schöll & Kurer, 2024).

Competition over public resources and welfare

Immigration can also be perceived as a threat to public resources such as welfare services and affordable housing (Dal Bo' et al., 2023). This theory is also more consistent with the supply side, as the radical right often portrays immigrants as not working and living on tax-payers money, thus as primarily an economic threat to welfare rather than for employment for natives (Sverigedemokraterna, 2011, 2019). Also, the radical right has promoted “welfare chauvinism” in recent years, advocating for directing welfare benefits to natives and less to immigrants, which has probably been a winning formula. Potentially speaking in favor of this theory, implementation of austerity, such as cuts in welfare that imply increased scarcity and thus higher competition, tends to be associated with increased support for radical right parties (Baccini & Sattler, 2024; see also Galofré-Vilà et al., 2021). Increased public housing competition that followed the implementation of public housing benefits to non-EU residents was associated with increased support for the radical right, which probably operates through natives perceiving heightened competition over welfare resources from immigrants (Cavaille & Ferwerda, 2023).

Rising economic inequality

As it is not only the economically disadvantaged who support the radical right but also an unexpectedly high share of the economically well-off middle class (Mols & Jetten, 2017), it has been suggested that it is rising inequality, which also affects or risk affects parts of the middle class negatively, that contributes to radical right support (Häusermann et al., 2020). According to this explanation, parts of the middle class have experienced increased job insecurity and decreased living standards following, e.g., the financial crisis of 2008, neoliberal policies, automation, and the recent surge in prices, which has rendered status anxiety and frustration and also made the middle class susceptible to the radical right that scapegoats immigrants and globalization and aims to restore the old ways (Antonucci et al., 2017; Häusermann et al., 2020; Kurer & Palier, 2019). Speaking in favor of this theory, several studies have found that dampening economic insecurity through redistribution is associated with decreased support for populist parties (Albanese et al., 2022).

Sociocultural grievances

Instead of focusing on economic trends, sociocultural explanations for the radical right argue that rising immigration fuels demand for the radical right and that declines in traditional values challenge gender and ethnic hierarchies and fuel a counterreaction among groups who feel threatened by these trends (Berman, 2021; Inglehart & Norris, 2016). In this view, the emergence of the radical right in the 1980s is also seen as a counterreaction to the rise of green and progressive left parties a decade earlier and dissatisfaction with mainstream left social democratic parties mobilized around progressive cultural issues, where the collective identity among those skeptical of the universalist trends are mobilized by the radical right (Bornschieer & Kriesi, 2012; Ignazi, 1992; Kriesi et al., 2006; Oesch, 2012). Social liberal values tend to flourish among the highly educated and in urban areas, and thus, social changes such as increasing urbanization and educational expansion have led to an increase in the share of those who hold liberal values. Social liberal values then started to dominate public culture and become mainstream values, which has caused counterreaction among those who still hold traditionalist, authoritarian, and nationalist values (Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

Immigration is often portrayed as threatening the majority group's ways of life, social cohesion, identity, and norms (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Thus, voters turn to the radical right as these parties are perceived to understand and aim to counteract the increased cultural alienation and loss of cultural status some voters have experienced over time (Gest, 2016; Margalit, 2019; Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Sides et al., 2018). According to this theory, particularly low-educated individuals have not received political socialization to embrace modern and multicultural ideals of society, and they are thus less likely to view immigration and multiculturalism positively (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Also, the radical right often appeals to white men feeling like strangers in their own countries to defend their interests against these trends (Berman, 2021; Hochschild, 2018).

More specifically, radical right parties and ideologists often argue that Europe is under threat from mass non-European immigration and Islam and that its Christian culture and identity will eventually erode as a consequence (Mudde, 2007). Speaking in favor of this theory, on the individual level, attitudes regarding multiculturalism and ethnic minorities are often found to be the strongest attitudinal predictors of supporting the radical right (Sides et al., 2018). Moreover, sociodemographic attributes that are more linked to identity, such as gender and

educational level, show stronger links to radical right support than proxies for economic positions, such as unemployment and income (Mols & Jetten, 2017; Mudde, 2019; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Craig and Richeson (2014) found in experiments that making White Americans aware that the US Census Bureau in 2008 projected that racial minority groups would be in the majority of the US population in 2042 triggered conservative policy desires (see also Outten et al., 2012). People who perceive that immigrants and minorities gain political power and social centrality are more likely to support Trump (US) and the radical right in the UK (Gest, 2016, pp. 185-6).

Immigration is often found to be positively linked to increased radical right support (Amengay & Stockemer, 2019; Halla et al., 2017; Rydgren & Tyrberg, 2020), although some studies do not report a statistically significant effect (Amengay & Stockemer, 2019; Cools et al., 2021). Attitudes toward different groups of immigrants vary a lot, and in Western Europe, European immigration tends to be preferred over non-European immigration, and white immigration over non-white (Coffé et al., 2007; Ford, 2011). Thus, stronger associations between non-European immigration, such as Muslim immigrants, and radical right support are often found (Ford & Goodwin, 2010). This also points in favor of the cultural backlash hypothesis as it is increases of “culturally” distant others rather than labor immigration from other European countries that appears to drive radical right support mostly.

Radical right parties often argue that immigrants, particularly those from Muslim countries, home cultures are inferior, more violent, and more inclined to crime. High crime rates also tend to be associated with higher radical right support (Amengay & Stockemer, 2019), speaking in favor of the sociocultural grievances theory. Voters who are skeptical towards immigration and experience high local crime rates are more likely than others to turn to the radical right, implying that perceiving a link between these two issues is likely to be a strong driver of radical right support (Dinas & van Spanje, 2011).

One issue in previous research is substantial publication bias in favor of studies that find a statistically significant association between both economic causes and radical right support (e.g., Scheiring et al., 2024) and increased immigration and radical right support (e.g., Cools et al., 2021). Studies that simultaneously assess both causes tend to find stronger evidence that increased immigration and related concerns, rather than economic downturns and related

concerns, cause rising radical right support (e.g., Card et al., 2012; Lin & Xi, 2022; Rydgren & Tyrberg, 2020), which suggest that cultural grievances are a stronger driving force than economic grievances, although both appear to have some relevance.

Proponents of the sociocultural explanations for the rise of the radical right debate to what extent the increase in radical right support is not only a counterreaction to immigration and multiculturalism but also to other progressive social changes such as increased gender equality focus on the environment and LGBTQ+ rights, and affirmative action (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Some studies have found that the salience of gender liberalism and increased LGBTQI + rights has triggered a backlash and rendered support for radical right parties (Kováts, 2017; Off, 2023). However, others put doubt into this theory as a substantial proportion of the supporters in Western Europe do not take traditionalist views on issues such as sexuality, gender, and morality and are instead motivated by nationalist and immigration issues (e.g., Lancaster, 2019; Spierings et al., 2017).

Interactions of economic and sociocultural causes

Multiple scholars have acknowledged that economic and sociocultural factors may simultaneously motivate people to support the radical right and that these factors may interact (Doerr et al., 2022; Gest, 2016; Rhodes-Purdy et al., 2021; Walter, 2021). It is also possible that some voters are more motivated by economic concerns, while others are more motivated by cultural concerns (Walter, 2021). Also, proponents of the cultural grievances perspective note that while sociocultural grievances appear to be the most proximate cause of support for the radical right, besides triggering dissatisfaction with democracy and societal institutions (Armingeon & Guthmann, 2014; Baccini & Sattler, 2024), changing economic conditions in terms of scarcity and/or economic anxiety may trigger authoritarianism (Ballard-Rosa et al., 2021), cultural traditionalism and discontent (Carreras et al., 2019; Rhodes-Purdy et al., 2021), and xenophobia (Ferrara, 2022; Hays et al., 2019).

Some studies suggest that the between negative economic conditions and support for radical right parties and ideologies is mediated by distress and/or status anxiety (Ballard-Rosa et al., 2021; Rhodes-Purdy et al., 2021; Stenner, 2005). Status anxiety can be seen as an explanation for radical right support that combines economic and cultural causes. Changing economic

conditions may generate status anxieties among those who have lost out on globalization, such as blue-collar workers. As the economic risks have increased for this group, while they see the urban middle-class groups becoming increasingly well-off, they may perceive that their relative social status has decreased or are at risk of declining. They may blame urban and professional elites and ethnic minorities for their status decline and be attracted by parties that emotionally and morally portray these groups as a collective status threat (Bonikowski, 2017; Gidron & Hall, 2019; Kurer, 2020; Mutz, 2018). Indeed, people who feel more socially marginal are more likely to support the radical right (Gidron & Hall, 2019).

Social disintegration theory

A fourth explanation for the rising demand for the radical right is found in social disintegration theory. Fragmentation of previously vibrant communities, the decline of intermediary organizations in civil society, and following social isolation may also have contributed to the rise of the radical right according to qualitative research (Gest, 2016). If, for instance, intermediary organizations in civil society decline, there is less room for political influence, and people may feel that they lose political power, which may trigger political alienation and populist reactions (Gest, 2016). There has been a decrease in civil society participation in Sweden in recent years (V-Dem, 2025).

It is a long-standing idea in social science that civil society engagement fosters social cohesion and has positive outcomes in multiple aspects, such as learning how democracy works and how to participate as well as cooperate (Tocqueville, 2003[1838]). It has also been argued that its contrast, social disintegration, may lead to anomie and deviant behavior (Durkheim, 1952[1897]). These ideas are developed in two overlapping theories: the *social capital theory* and the *mass society theory* (see Rydgren, 2009).

According to the social capital theory, as conceptualized in political science, social capital is characteristics of social organizations, such as norms, trust, and networks, that facilitate coordinated actions and thus help improve the efficiency of society (Putnam, 1993, p. 167). Through active participation in voluntary organizations, people tend to develop mutual trust and civic values, habits of solidarity and cooperation, and skills of cooperating and taking responsibility for collective interests and public goods (Putnam, 1993; see also Tocqueville, 2003[1838]). As radical right parties are characterized by intolerance and distrust of out-

groups and institutions, the social capital theory would predict that individuals who are non-members of voluntary organizations and who are socially distrustful would be more likely to support the radical right.

According to the mass society theory, modern societies are characterized by many alienated and isolated people and led by large institutions that are detached from people overall, which leads people to desire new ideologies that satisfy their desire for community (Arendt, 1973; Fennema & Tillie, 1998; Kornhauser, 1959). As the radical right uses nostalgic claims of a greater past with more social cohesion and solidarity based on national and ethnic belonging, they may appeal to socially isolated people. While some studies have found a correlation between social isolation and radical right support (Mayer & Moreau, 1995; Mayer & Perrineau, 1992), others find no such correlation (e.g., Rydgren, 2009).

The links between social stratification, political opinions, and radical right support

The following section presents how the key positions in the social stratification, namely geographical area, class, education, gender, and native versus non-native background, are linked to political opinions and support for the radical right. These attributes are often highlighted as key parts of stratification in the social stratification literature (e.g., Grusky, 2014) and as clearly linked to support for the radical right in previous literature (Rydgren, 2012). Other attributes that are sometimes seen as vital for social stratification but show zero or minimal average associations with radical right support in previous research (such as income or age) are not presented in this review of previous literature (but see Study I, where I discover that although age has a zero average association with radical right support, it is highly important as a moderating variable).

The concept of cleavage implies that people's position in the social structure provides them with a shared normative element consisting of a common set of values, which are converted into voting (Bartolini & Mair, 1990; Oesch, 2012). Thus, this theoretical section will also highlight the theoretically suggested attitudinal trajectories from social position to party support.

Geographical area

The popularity of the radical right varies a lot across regions, neighborhoods, and

municipalities within countries (Rydgren & Tyrberg, 2020). These parties tend to be more popular in small suburban towns, rural areas, and disadvantaged neighborhoods in large cities (Arzheimer et al., 2024). However, this is not always the case and might depend on factors such as the presence of immigrants and/or economic decline.

Immigration is often theorized to be one of the main aspects that breed nativism and, consequently, radical right support in the geographical area. There are probably countervailing mechanisms of immigration, however (Schlueter & Scheepers, 2010). On the one hand, according to the ethnic threat theory, higher immigration is likely to increase competition over scarce resources as well as what norms and culture should prevail in the area (Blalock, 1967; Schlueter & Scheepers, 2010). On the other hand, according to the contact theory, higher immigration presence increases interactions between ethnic groups, which can reduce prejudice and enhance tolerance and trust if the interactions render positive or varied experiences of the other group, especially so if it turns into friendship (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Rydgren et al., 2013; Schlueter & Scheepers, 2010).

Arzheimer et al. (2024) conclude that studies with strong causal inferential design tend to find that increases in immigration and ethnic minorities are associated with more anti-immigrant attitudes and/or higher radical right support (see Dinas et al. 2019; Dustmann et al., 2019; Hangartner et al., 2019), a result confirmed in their study. Similarly, for Sweden, Rydgren and Tyrberg (2020) found that support for the Sweden Democrats 2014 was higher in areas where the foreign-born population had increased and, to some extent, also in ethnically diverse areas. Thus, the ethnic threat appears to dominate increased contact when immigration is high.

Although results are mixed, most studies tend to find that areas with worse economic conditions, such as high unemployment, tend to have higher support for the radical right. Conflicts between in and outgroups are theoretically expected to heighten when resources are scarce (Blalock, 1967). Hartevelde et al. (2022) found that local social marginalization is an important explanation for why some rural areas have high radical right support, while immigration was a stronger explanation for high radical right support in cities. In the Swedish case, Rydgren and Tyrberg (2020) found partial support for that radical right support was higher in socioeconomically marginalized areas, although immigration intake was a stronger predictor. Also, disappearing services, which is especially a trend in rural areas following

economic decline, is likely to erode community life, lead to social isolation, and signal the decline of previously flourishing communities, and has been found to be associated with higher radical right support (Bolet, 2021; Rickardsson, 2021).

Areas experiencing demographic decline, which often are rural areas, in terms of, e.g., population decline with young and highly educated leaving, also seem to be associated with higher radical right support, probably through political discontent following perceptions that the community stagnates (Cramer, 2016; Hartevelde et al., 2022; Rickardsson, 2021).

Economic and demographic decline in urban areas may lead to discontent towards urban elites as economic and political power becomes increasingly concentrated in urban areas (Cramer, 2016). However, Arzheimer et al. (2024) found that while adverse economic conditions in terms of high unemployment in the area increase perceptions that the local area is worse off than before, this was not the case for a demographic decline in terms of the share of young people in the neighborhood. The perceived local decline was, in turn, linked to populist and nativist attitudes, which in turn was linked to higher radical right support.

The composition of individuals with differing sociodemographic characteristics in an area also matters. For instance, the highly educated generally have lower support for radical right parties (Rickardsson, 2021). However, the composition of individuals may also have external effects through, for instance, networks. Radical right support is lower in areas populated by highly educated individuals. Also, in areas with large shares of highly educated individuals, radical right support tends to be low even if economic conditions are unfavorable and many immigrants reside there (Arzheimer et al., 2024). Thus, metropolitan areas, such as Paris and London, with many highly educated people, are often found to be places where people hold positive views on immigration (Alba & Foner, 2017).

Berning (2016) found that not only was the individual's own perceived group threat (measured as perceptions of Muslims and consequences of immigration on economy, culture, and violence) strongly associated with a higher probability of supporting the radical right, but the perceived group threat on the local level also had an independent effect on the individual's probability of supporting the radical right. Thus, the local culture regarding sentiments and attitudes of those around the individual also appears to affect radical right support.

Gender

Studies consistently find that men are overrepresented in the radical right's electorate (Calvo & Ferrín, 2023; Coffé, 2012; Donovan, 2022; Givens, 2004; Hartevelt et al., 2015; Spierings & Zaslove, 2015), although the size of this gap varies across countries (Immerzeel et al., 2015). In Sweden, men are approximately twice as likely as women to support the Sweden Democrats (Statistics Sweden, 2024, pp. 24-25).

Women are generally more progressive than men across different types of political questions (Langsæther & Knutsen, 2024). Some studies also find that women are less likely to “translate” immigration skepticism into radical right support, which has been explained by the fact that men and women have different issue priorities when casting their votes (Crowder-Meyer, 2022). Men and women are socialized into different societal roles, where women are seen as being more responsible than men for the domestic sphere, i.e., caring for children and the household. These roles imply different issue positions as well as different priorities (Elder & Greene, 2012). Also, women are generally socialized into pro-social values, such as treating people equally and helping and caring for others, which direct their policy position and party choice towards the left (Lizotte, 2020, pp. 33-34). Women are more likely to prioritize issues tied to gender equality, equal rights, and social and family welfare (e.g., Calvo & Ferrín, 2023; Crowder-Meyer, 2022; Lizotte, 2020; Yildirim, 2022). Prioritizing these issues is linked to lower radical right support, also when individual characteristics and general left-right ideological inclination are held constant (Calvo & Ferrín, 2023).

Women tend to have more economic leftist political opinions (Ivarsflaten & Stubager, 2012). As the public generally regards the left as owning welfare questions, women may become attracted to the left (Seeberg, 2016). Also, they may be less attracted by the radical right's center-right economic-political views. The left inclination is often explained by rational choice theory, which states women support left policies out of self-interest as they are in a more precarious economic situation and more dependent on the welfare state for childcare and jobs in the public sector. However, others find that economic circumstances have minimal explanatory value for the gender gap in opinion, instead indicating that the gender gap probably stems from women's socialization into pro-social values (e.g., Lizotte, 2020).

The labor market is substantially segregated by gender, and women tend to work in sectors that are traditionally left-oriented, such as the health, social, and educational sectors, and in the public rather than private sector, which has also been shown to negatively affect the probability of voting for the radical right (Coffé, 2012). Men are overrepresented in workplaces where radical right support is high, such as in manual working-class jobs (Givens, 2004; Hartevelde et al., 2015).

Men have, in multiple aspects, lost their previously privileged role in societies and may thus become attracted to the social-conservative rhetoric of the radical right that aims to maintain old gender and ethnicity-based status hierarchies (Donovan, 2022; Off, 2023). For instance, women are today freer to choose abortion and divorce, which especially the progressive left has driven. Contexts of salient Feminist movements tend to trigger a sexist backlash, which is predictive of increasing the probability of supporting the radical right support (Anduiza & Rico, 2022; Coffé et al., 2023; Donovan, 2022).

Also, the share of men who are involuntarily childless has increased in recent decades (Boschini & Sundström, 2018). Especially men from weak socioeconomic groups have become increasingly rejected by women (Boschini & Sundström, 2018). In the labor market, the expansion of female employment and the service sector that women often work in, and the contraction of male-dominated manual sectors (Tåhlin, 2007a) implies that men have lost out on economic globalization in relative terms (Oesch, 2012). Also, men today have lower education than women in Western Europe (OECD, 2021) and may thus struggle more to find jobs in the skill-upgraded service-dominated labor market (Tåhlin, 2007a). These multiple losses may have led to a troubled male identity, especially for men with less socioeconomic resources, which may have led to a backlash against modernity and globalization and increased support for the radical right (Betz, 1994; Bornschieer & Kriesi, 2012; Givens, 2004).

Men might have stronger tendencies towards authoritarianism. For instance, men tend to hold more strict views on law and order than women, and they are more positive towards the use of force (Gilens, 1988; Lizotte, 2020), which has been found to explain parts of the gender gap in radical right support (Gidengil et al., 2005). Moreover, women are likely to be socialized into more caring and nurturing roles, such as the motherhood role, and may thus become more hesitant to support “tough” policies and politics that exclude groups (Gilens, 1988; Immerzeel

et al., 2015). However, some doubt exists about this theory since some studies find that self-reported authoritarian values do not seem to differ between men and women (Harteveld et al., 2015).

Moreover, the radical right tends to take more traditionalist and essentialist views on sex and women's roles (Campbell & Erzeel, 2018; Christley, 2022; Kantola & Lombardo, 2020; Mudde, 2007) and has a general tendency to justify inequalities and see them as natural rather than as something politicians should actively counteract (Mudde, 2019). As women are generally more gender egalitarian, women may be deterred by the traditionalist views of the radical right (Campbell & Erzeel, 2018). With rising female education and the spread of feminist ideas and movements, women have become more aware of gender inequalities and supportive of feminist ideas, which align more with the left (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). However, there are also counterarguments to this theory, as the radical right in recent years has been proclaimed to be the number one defender of Western values and women's rights against the influence of Islam and traditionalist foreign cultures (de Lange & Mügge, 2015; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2015).

Education

Education is often found to be one of the strongest, if not the strongest, predictor of radical right support and GAL-TAN values among the sociodemographic attributes, and also more causally designed studies indicate that pursuing more education is culturally liberalizing (e.g., Cavaille & Marshall, 2019; Jung & Gil, 2019; Velásquez & Eger, 2022). In Sweden, individuals with only upper-secondary education are approximately three times as likely to support the Sweden Democrats than tertiary-educated individuals (Statistics Sweden, 2024, p. 47).

Education and other types of cultural capital have become more vital for life chances due to globalization and the transition in the postindustrial knowledge society characterized by, e.g., multiculturalism, increased educational requirements, and service sector expansion (e.g., Rydgren, 2012). For instance, the language skills and knowledge of other cultures and human diversity acquired in education may contribute to understanding and facilitate interactions with people from different cultures and may facilitate navigation in a multicultural society (Kriesi et al., 2008). Those who lack formal education and cultural capital may thus feel left

behind, resentful, and frustrated. Relatedly, education has likely become increasingly important for social status due to educational expansion and increased emphasis on meritocracy (Attewell, 2022).

Stubager (2009) shows that educational groups also share group consciousness and identity tied to value conflicts in a way that resembles the way social class has been theorized to form group consciousness. Due to educational expansion, an increasingly large share of the population holds a tertiary degree, and the highly educated are often overrepresented in the media and within the economic and political elite. With increased meritocracy, education has become increasingly important for obtaining higher positions. Those who lack such education may feel increasingly excluded and disassociated with the political and cultural elite (Oesch, 2012). Stubager (2009) also shows that low-educated individuals tend to have a negative view of high-educated individuals and their progressive cultural values; a conflictual response that highlights cleavages and tends to occur when a group feels relatively suppressed in the status hierarchy (Dahrendorf, 1959; Stubager, 2009).

Education is strongly linked to the cultural libertarian-authoritarian dimension and just weakly to (rightist) economic attitudes (Ivarsflaten & Stubager, 2012). The link between higher education, lower radical right support, and higher support for the new left appears to go through libertarian cultural views rather than economic preferences (Oesch, 2012). Higher-educated people are particularly less likely to view immigration as negative for society, and this association is stronger than for social class (Ivarsflaten & Stubager, 2012).

During education, individuals tend to develop their cognitive skills, which can increase cognitive tolerance for nonconformity, and individuals become less likely to make simplistic and erroneous conclusions about the causes of negative societal outcomes such as unemployment, which in turn can lead to less scapegoating of outgroups (e.g., Lipset, 1959, 1960; Nunn et al., 1978). For instance, highly educated individuals may be less likely to see society as a zero-sum game and more likely to see that immigrants not only “take,” e.g., jobs but also contribute to creating new jobs by increasing aggregate demand.

Educational institutions are often one of the first formal institutions the individual encounters at an age when individuals are more open to political socialization, and education in countries with long liberal-democratic traditions is also theorized to socialize individuals into liberal-democratic values (McDonnell et al., 2000; Resh & Sabbagh, 2014; Selznick & Steinberg, 1969). Thus, higher educational institutions in liberal-democratic countries like Sweden tend to be permeated by culturally libertarian social norms and beliefs (Bromley, 2009). These values and norms are transferred to students through informational influence (knowledge that shapes attitudes, for instance, through textbooks) and through normative influence (for instance, through interactions with teachers who tend to be culturally progressive and take on roles as influential servants of the public and adheres to the principles of the official culture) (e.g., Dražanová, 2017; Hastie, 2007; Jacobsen, 2001).

However, part of the association between education and political alignments has been found to go through self-selection (Kuhn et al., 2021; Lancee & Serrasin, 2015). Political socialization is strongest early in life by the local community and family and occurs partly simultaneously as educational preferences are formed (Jennings et al., 2009; Langsæther et al., 2022). Moreover, education can also be seen as an economic resource in terms of human capital and is thus a means towards material security and well-being (Inglehart, 1977), which may make the individual less susceptible to populist, welfare chauvinism and economic protectionist claims by the radical right.

Class

The working class, especially manual workers, is overrepresented among supporters of the radical right in Sweden and other countries (Oskarson & Demker, 2012). Blue-collar workers have almost twice as high support for the Sweden Democrats as white-collar workers (Statistics Sweden, 2024, p. 60). While unskilled and skilled blue-collar workers have rather similar levels of support, lower-ranked white-collar workers clearly have higher support than higher-ranked white-collar workers (Statistics Sweden, 2024, p. 60). Support among self-employed (including farmers) is mid-way between that of blue and white-collar workers (Statistics Sweden, 2024, p. 60). Their lower education explains part of the cultural authoritarian leaning among workers, but a significant association with authoritarian values and radical right support also remains when education is statistically controlled for (e.g.,

Bornschieer & Kriesi, 2012; Oskarson & Demker, 2012).

Globalization and post-industrialization have led to lower demand for low-intermediate skilled work and jobs in the manual sector, particularly in developed countries. Those who have lost out in this process and lack resources may become dissatisfied with globalization and, according to the ethnic competition theory, may be more likely to see immigrants as competitors for scarce resources and open borders and free trade as a threat to jobs (Betz, 1994). However, results from studies point doubt into economic explanations of the class pattern in radical right voting, as cultural anxieties better explain the working class vote for the radical right than economic anxieties (e.g., Oesch, 2008a, 2008b). On the other hand, the mechanisms may go through perceived status decline rather than direct economic concerns. Those who experience that they and their group are in social status decline, as may be the case for manual workers, may become more oriented towards the past and social pessimism (Bourdieu, 1984; Rydgren, 2012), which the radical right appeals to by nostalgic claims about the past and wanting to restore the old social hierarchies and traditions. The radical right's emphasis on ethnicity as an alternative stratification order, as argued in their welfare chauvinist rhetoric, may also appeal to the self-esteem of groups that perceive a social decline in current stratification orders based on social class (Rydgren, 2012). In contrast, high-skilled jobs occupied by the middle class often complement the new technology and may benefit from trade and open borders. These classes are likely more oriented toward the future and socially optimistic (Bourdieu, 1984; Rydgren, 2012).

Another strand of literature argues that the working class generally has harsh living and working conditions and faces economic insecurity, which may trigger sociopsychological responses to stress and make the individual more prone to authoritarianism (Adorno et al., 1969; Jost et al., 2003a, 2003b; Lipset, 1960; Stenner, 2005). The socioeconomically disadvantaged may support right-wing leaders and policies to reduce the threat and uncertainty associated with their more precarious societal positions (e.g., Jost et al., 2003a, 2003b). Napier and Jost (2008) found that the authoritarian personality traits cynicism, obedience to authority, and low trust in others were more prevalent among those with lower socioeconomic status, which are, in turn, linked to ethnic and moral intolerance.

Moreover, the working class also tends to have lower cultural capital, not only following lower education but also, for instance, continuous lower quality news consumption, life experiences such as travel, fewer possibilities for new experiences and learning on the job, which may make the individual more likely to perceive the multicultural society as threatening to their way of life (Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007). Indeed, Oesch (2008a, 2008b) found that cultural anxieties, such as beliefs that immigrants undermine the country's culture, explained much more of the class gap in radical right support than economic anxieties.

The working class tends to have policy preferences that are economically leftist but sociocultural authoritarian, and it appears to be their sociocultural authoritarian opinions, especially the desire for stricter immigration, that drive them toward the radical right (Bornschieer & Kriesi, 2012; Oesch, 2008a, 2008b). Since sociocultural issues have grown in salience at the expense of economic issues, and as there has been a weakened political polarization between mainstream left and right parties over time, workers may have found the sociocultural authoritarian radical right parties increasingly relevant and the socioeconomic left social democratic parties increasingly irrelevant (Oskarson & Demker, 2012; Rydgren, 2012). Also, that the mainstream left parties have incorporated libertarian cultural values into their party programs in order to win over voters from the growing middle class has probably alienated part of the culturally authoritarian working class (Berman, 2021; Bonikowski, 2017; De Vries & Hobolt, 2020; Oskarson & Demker, 2012).

Small business owners have also been theorized to be receptive to the radical right. They often have low education and thus are more likely to have culturally authoritarian inclinations. This, combined with medium-high income and economically rightist opinions, implies that they face no trade-off between economic and cultural preferences, which may make the threshold to support the radical right low (Bornschieer & Kriesi, 2012).

In Sweden, according to Folke and Rickne (2024), the working class (which corresponds to 50% of the Swedish population with the class conceptualization they use) only constitutes 13% of the government incumbents. Such underrepresentation is also found in other countries (e.g., Bartels, 2017; Carnes, 2013). This underrepresentation distorts, for instance, economic policy as the working class is generally more pro-redistribution than the middle and upper

class (Carnes, 2013). Likewise, the declining link between political parties and civil society and the declining membership in political parties have probably made the average citizen more disconnected from the parties, which may foster populism (Mair, 2013). Especially so for the declining links between social democratic parties, unions, and disadvantaged groups, which leaves disadvantaged and unrepresented groups more open for populism (Berman & Snegovaya, 2019). In the 20th century, there was a strong alignment between the working class and the left, which weakened over time (Oskarson & Demker, 2012). Organizations like unions that previously tied the working class to mainstream left politics have become weaker over time. Trade union density and engagement have declined in most European countries, including Sweden (e.g., Kjellberg, 2011). Before, unions and related organizations played a role in socializing workers into support for social democratic parties and forming working-class collective identities, while this has probably eroded today, which has left room for the radical right to mobilize around the national identity (e.g., Andersen & Bjørklund, 1990; Bornschier, 2010; Bornschier & Kriesi, 2012).

Horizontal Aspects of Education and Occupation

Previous research often acknowledges that vertical dimensions such as higher education and better labor market positions are associated with more culturally libertarian views and less likelihood to support the radical right. However, the horizontal dimensions of education and occupation are less often acknowledged in previous research, although there are theoretical reasons to expect that horizontal aspects are important since the content, social environment, logic, normative context, and specialization of skills are likely to vary across horizontal dimensions of education and occupation, which can lead to different value systems (Evans & Opacic, 2022; Gutmann, 1999; Hooghe et al., 2024; Oesch, 2008a, 2008b; Stubager, 2008; Willeck & Mendelberg, 2022).

The horizontal distinctions in social stratification are likely to have increased over time due to transition from industrial to post-industrial societies with growing female labor force participation, service sector growth, more differentiation in consumer demand and thus in production, and occupational upgrading, implying larger heterogeneity within both the working and middle class (e.g., Esping-Andersen 1993; Evans, 2000; Gallie et al., 1998; Kriesi, 1989; Müller, 1999; Oesch, 2008b). Furthermore, while vertical aspects of social stratification are more likely to be relevant for the formation of economic preferences based

on self-interest, horizontal sociocultural contexts of life and work are theorized to be more linked to the formation of views on identity and communitarian cultural issues (Kriesi et al., 2006; Lipset, 1960; Oesch, 2008b). As cultural issues have increased in salience and economic issues have decreased in salience in Western countries due to social changes such as decreased acute material need and increased globalization with increased immigration and multiculturalism (Inglehart, 1990; Kriesi et al., 2006), horizontal aspects of social stratification are likely to have increased in importance for political alignments.

While researchers regularly use the Oesch class schema to acknowledge horizontal dimensions of occupation, the horizontal dimensions of education are less regularly considered in empirical research, probably because few data sets include the field of study. Moreover, the theoretical mechanisms connecting horizontal aspects to political alignments are under-investigated. Higher education in sociocultural fields, such as social sciences, humanities, and pedagogics, are generally linked to more cultural libertarian views than other fields, such as economics, natural sciences, and technical fields (Bročić & Miles, 2021; Carnevale et al., 2020; Eger et al., 2024; Gambetta & Hertog, 2016; McGregor & Pruyers, 2022; Paterson, 2009; Stubager, 2008; Surrige, 2016; Thomsen & Olsen, 2017; van de Werfhorst & de Graaf, 2004). This may be because studies of human experience, such as history, literature, arts, or social science, foster more tolerance of ethnic diversity (Eger et al., 2024). Hooghe et al. (2024) explain this pattern by that these fields focus more on communicative and cultural skills. However, it remains unclear which one of these skills would be most important.

Others argue that socialization into culturally liberal values is likely to be stronger in sociocultural fields. While technical fields emphasize equipping individuals with practical skills for the labor market, sociocultural fields particularly emphasize cultivating knowledgeable and democratic citizens (e.g., Mayhew et al., 2016; McDonnell et al., 2000). Relatedly, there is more room for socialization into the dominant values of the official culture (which tends to be liberal-democratic in countries with long liberal-democratic traditions) in sociocultural fields as these fields discuss society and politics more often (e.g., Stubager, 2008). The teachers in sociocultural education have also been found to be more culturally liberal (Berggren et al., 2009; Hjerm et al., 2018a, 2018b), and this inclination may be

reproduced in new students entering these fields.

Also, researchers have argued that the ideology reflected in the curricula varies across fields, with sociocultural fields applying more of a “system-blame” ideology and business and economic fields applying more of a “person-blame ideology” (Guimond et al., 1989; Kahneman, 2003; Ladd & Lipset, 1975). The “system-blame” ideology generally views social destinies, such as being unemployed or needing to migrate, as structural consequences of inequalities in terms of discrimination, imperialism, etcetera, which aligns more with left ideology. The “person-blame ideology” tends to stress that individuals are rational agents responsible for their own destinies, aligning more with right-wing ideologies. While the theory of “system-blame” versus “person-blame ideology” was developed for educational fields (Guimond et al., 1989), it is likely that individuals bring these acquired ideologies to their subsequent occupation and that the different occupations come to be dominated by one of these ideologies as the composition of individuals educated in different fields differs substantially across occupations (Mayhew et al., 2016).

After education, an individual’s occupational trajectories continue forming political attitudes (Ares & van Ditmars, 2024). One horizontal aspect of the occupation is the employment sector. As already noted for educational institutions, public institutions tend to be permeated by the dominating official ideology, which in liberal-democratic countries tends to be progressive values (Dražanová, 2017; Selznick & Steinberg, 1969). For instance, the Swedish Agency for Public Management (2022) states in their basic values of central government authorities that all employees need to respect the equal value of all people regardless of, e.g., ethnic background and that employees should promote democratic principles in their missions. Although most private businesses probably also stand behind these principles, they may be less institutionalized. Public sector employees have also been found to be more economically leftist and tied to center-left parties and may thus be less inclined to support the radical right (e.g., Abou-Chadi & Hix, 2021; Knutsen, 2005). This may be both because they probably have a self-interest in maintaining or expanding the public sector, which the left tends to be more positive toward, and because they may be socialized into viewing the public sector positively (e.g., Abou-Chadi & Hix, 2021; Knutsen, 2005). Political opinions also vary across types of industries within the public sector. Employees in public health and education have been found to be the most tied to the mainstream left and positive of increased state

intervention, while this was not the case to the same extent among public administrators (e.g., Tepe, 2012).

Scholars have noted for more than 60 years that employees in the social and cultural professions tend to be more culturally liberal than others (e.g., Kriesi, 1989; Lipset, 1960), but there is still no definite answer as to why. Today, the most common way to capture horizontal aspects of occupational class is by applying the Oesch class schema. The Oesch class schema aims to capture both vertical and horizontal dimensions of class in contrast to older class schemas that mainly focus on vertical dimensions of class. According to Oesch (2006a, 2006b, 2008a, 2008b), the horizontal dimensions of class, captured by work logic, are theorized to be more linked to the cultural conflicts over identity and community, where individuals are theorized to imitate the problem-solving logic at work to problem-solving in society and politics. In contrast, the vertical dimensions of class are theorized to be more linked to the economic conflict over the distribution of resources based on self-interest.

The Oesch class schema distinguishes between sociocultural professionals (and semi-professionals), technical professionals (and semi-professionals), and managers and administrative professionals (and semi-professionals) within the middle class (Oesch, 2006a, 2006b, 2008a, 2008b, 2012). Production, service, and clerical workers are distinguished within the working class. Small employers and self-employed form their own categories. Sociocultural professionals are repeatedly found to be the most culturally libertarian and also leftist on economic questions; managers to be relatively culturally libertarian but the most rightist in economic questions; production workers to be the most culturally authoritarian; small business owners to be economic rightist and culturally authoritarian; and the working class to have more economic leftist views than the middle-class categories of managers and administrative professionals and technical professionals (e.g., Ares 2020; Kitschelt & Rehm, 2014; Langsæther & Evans, 2020). Likewise, sociocultural professionals are found to be the most likely to support the progressive left and the least likely to support the radical right, while production workers, and sometimes also small business owners, are found to be the most likely to support the radical right (Abou-Chadi & Hix, 2021; Oskarson & Demker, 2012; Statistics Sweden, 2024, p. 72).

The classes in the Oesch schema are divided vertically into working versus middle class based on occupational skill content. Oesch's class schema includes a vertical dimension linked to market power and is expected to influence individuals' opinions on the economic left-right scale. According to rational choice theory, groups with high market power, such as employers and managers who control capital, are theorized to be the most economically right-leaning to protect their money from redistribution, while the opposite holds for the working class. The classes are divided horizontally based on subjective assessments of work logic. The economic right-leaning of managers and administrative professionals is explained by their organizational work logic, as it focuses on instrumentally optimizing other personnel in unequal hierarchies and developing loyalty to the employer organization's goals of profit maximization (e.g., Kitschelt, 1995; Kohn & Schooler, 1982; Oesch, 2006b, 2008b; Pfeffer, 1981). The culturally libertarian-leaning among sociocultural professionals is explained by that their jobs deal with human individuality and that interpersonal contacts with people from varied backgrounds are likely to strengthen intergroup relations and reduce prejudice, as well as that their jobs are designed to take the client's perspective and thus develop loyalty with people needing services rather than with the employer organization (Allport, 1954; Lubbers & Güveli, 2007; Oesch, 2006b; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Velotti & Cigna, 2024). The cultural authoritarian leaning among production workers is explained by their technical object-oriented work logic, which tends to be more hierarchical and structured and requires the worker to respect authority, maintain discipline, and conform to established routines and not often consider humanist aspects (Gambetta & Hertog, 2016; Kohn & Schooler, 1982; Oesch, 2006b).

As the Oesch class schema has been shown to hold empirically across many countries, the horizontal divisions in political attitudes we see across classes are often theoretically explained by the organizational, interpersonal, and technical object-oriented work logic proposed by Oesch. Other aspects of work are less often acknowledged as alternative explanations to the class differences in political opinions and party sympathies. For instance, since women are more progressive than men on average (Langsæther & Knutsen, 2024; Norris & Inglehart, 2019), and the political opinions of others in one's social network have been shown to influence the individual's opinions (e.g., Lindh et al., 2021; Rauf, 2021), it is reasonable to hypothesize that the gender composition of colleagues in class and on work influence values in addition to the effect of the individual's own gender. Relatedly, different

work cultures may emerge depending on the gender composition, where male-dominated environments are theorized to foster more discriminatory and competitive cultures (Berdahl et al., 2018; Connell, 1987; Simon et al., 2017). Women are overrepresented in service work and in sociocultural educational fields and occupations, and men in production work and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) educational fields and occupations (Almstedt Valldor & Halldén, 2023; Charles & Grusky, 2004; Mayhew et al., 2016), which could potentially explain part of the political divide across horizontally distinguished educational fields and occupations.

Data

The Swedish Level of Living Survey (LNU)

The Swedish Level of Living Survey (LNU) started in 1968 and has since then been conducted in 1974, 1981, 1991, 2000, 2010, and 2021 (Swedish Institute for Social Research, 2015). In the latest wave, some respondents answered in 2020 and some in 2022, but I chose to call the wave LNU 2021 as a clear majority answered this year. It is administered by the Swedish Institute for Social Research (SOFI) at Stockholm University.

The respondents are interviewed about their living conditions in several areas: health, family, societal participation, financial situation, education, employment and work conditions, leisure, housing, and social relations. The LNU data used in this dissertation are from 2000, 2010, and 2021, and questions about political opinions were added during these years. The questionnaire has many similar questions over time, making longitudinal analyses possible.

LNU 2000, 2010, and 2021 were sent out to a nationally representative sample of individuals aged 18-75 (Swedish Institute for Social Research, 2015). The collection method used is simple random sampling. The response rates were 76,6% in 2000, 60,9% in 2010, and are currently estimated as 39% for the main sample in 2021.

In 2000 and 2010, interviews were conducted either face-to-face or by telephone. One advantage of having an interviewer is that the data quality may improve as the interviewer can explain difficult questions, avoid misunderstandings, and see that the correct person answers the questions. One disadvantage is that there can be adverse interviewer effects, such as social desirability bias, that interviewers may ask questions in different ways, that respondents with some characteristics may be more difficult to reach than if they are allowed to fill in the questionnaire themselves, etcetera. (Bryman, 2016). In 2021, self-administrated paper and web questionnaires were added as collection methods, and most people answered in a self-administrated mode.

In 2010, respondents were given two scratch lottery cards (corresponding to SEK 60) if they participated. In 2021, an experiment was conducted where respondents received 100, 300,

500, or 700 SEK as a gift card for their response to increase the participation rate. The participation rate increased with higher incentives, and the differences were the largest between 100 and 300.

One advantage of the LNU data is that they are linked to Swedish register data, which tends to provide more reliable information for some types of living conditions (Connelly et al., 2016). Therefore, the studies in this dissertation that use LNU data use register data when appropriate, such as for education in study II. The register data also consisted of fewer missing values on, for instance, education than self-reported data, which contributed to a higher number of observations in the analyses.

Another advantage of LNU is that part of the sample is a panel repeatedly invited to participate in the survey. Thus, conducting fixed effects regression with LNU is possible, which implies coming closer to causal inference.

For a technical report about the conduction and methods of LNU 2010, see Statistics Sweden (2012). This report shows, for instance, that foreign-born people are underrepresented among those answering the survey. A technical report on LNU 2021 will be published in the coming years. Weights based on multiple attributes that affect the probability of an answer have been constructed for the LNU data to adjust for selective response. However, Appendix F in Study III shows that the association between class and political opinions is so similar in an unweighted and weighted regression that no conclusions are altered.

The Swedish Society-Opinion-Media Survey (SOM)

The Society-Opinion-Media (SOM) survey of the Swedish population started in 1986 and has been collected yearly since. This dissertation uses SOM data from 1986 until 2021. The SOM Institute at the University of Gothenburg administers the SOM survey. Most of the questions focus on society, opinions, and media. It consists of multiple parallel surveys every year. Some questions are asked to all respondents, while some are sent out to subsamples of respondents. The survey also has some recurring questions, such as party support, which allows for analyzing trends over time. There is an explicit aim of comparability over time, and thus, questions and collection methods are designed to be as identical as possible. The survey also has multiple questions about the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents,

which allows for analyses of the links between position in the social structure, political opinions, and support for the radical right.

Since its start, the collection method is simple random sampling (Falk et al., 2022; Holmberg & Weibull, 1987). Every year, a random sample of people 16 years old and older residing in Sweden is drawn from the Swedish Tax Agency's register. One source of error is population registration error, such as an incorrect address, which is estimated to be 2,1 percent (Skatteverket, 2022). The survey started as a self-administrative anonymous postal survey, with respondents answering on paper (Holmberg & Weibull, 1987). Since 2012, the survey has used mixed mode to collect that data. The respondents receive a letter stating that they have been selected for the survey and can answer on paper or digitally on the phone, computer, or tablet. Multiple reminders are sent to those who do not answer. The answer rate has declined over time, from 64% in 1986 (Holmberg & Weibull, 1987, p. 3) to around 48% in 2021 (Falk et al., 2022). However, the questionnaire is sent out to an increasing number of individuals over time. 1,542 respondents answered in 1968, and 11,423 respondents answered in 2021 (Falk et al., 2022).

An advantage of the SOM survey is that the data collection has been self-administered since the start, leading to lower social desirability bias (Krumpal, 2013).

Since 2017, the SOM Institute has sent out a lottery scratch card worth SEK 30 to encourage survey responses, increasing the response rate. In recent years, slightly higher incentives have also been given to subsamples to increase their response rate (Falk et al., 2022).

As in other surveys nowadays, younger persons, men, foreign-born, those who do not speak Swedish, and those who live in economically disadvantaged areas answer to a lower degree. Those with lower confidence in societal institutions and those who support the Sweden democrats are slightly less likely to answer. Among those who did not answer, some respondents were asked why and answered. Language difficulties, health issues, and lack of time have been common answers to why one does not respond to the survey. Thus, to some extent, the SOM survey can be viewed as best reflecting the Swedish-speaking population without serious health issues. However, comparisons between the demographic composition of the respondents and the population show that the respondents of the SOM surveys overall

reflect the Swedish population well in most aspects (Falk et al., 2022). Also, the accuracy of political attitude questions has been shown to be relatively good despite the high non-response rate (Markstedt, 2014). Weights were not used as weighted results have been found to reflect national election results less accurately than unweighted results (Markstedt, 2014).

The European Social Survey (ESS)

The European Social Survey (ESS) is an academically driven cross-national survey that started in 2001 and has since then been repeated approximately every second year. Between 2001 and 2023, a total of 40 countries were included. It measures beliefs, attitudes, behavior patterns, and living conditions (European Social Survey European Research Infrastructure, ESS ERIC, 2024). It has different themes in each wave, but with many repeated questions, such as party sympathy.

In 2014, the ESS was legally established as a European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC). Each respective country covers the costs of national coordination and fieldwork, while central costs are covered through ESS ERIC membership fees. The data distributor is Sikt—the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research.

The survey uses random probability sampling among all persons aged 15 or older who reside in the country regardless of nationality, citizenship, or legal status. The collection method used is face-to-face interviews, although adaptations were made in response to COVID-19 in some countries. The questionnaires are in the respective languages of each country, and the interview takes about one hour. The response rate has declined over the years and varies widely across countries. In 2008, the response rate varied from 45.7% (Croatia) to 78.7% (Cyprus), with answer rates ranging between 50% and 65% for most countries. In 2023, the response rate varied from 23,7% (Sweden) to 52,8% (Ireland), with the response rate typically ranging between 30% and 45% for most countries. The number of respondents varies across countries, with small countries generally having fewer respondents. In 2023, the number of interviews completed ranged from 1,000 to 2,500 for most countries.

One strength of ESS is that it makes cross-country comparisons easier. It also makes it possible to see average patterns in Europe, increasing the external validity of the conclusions.

However, the ESS has some caveats. Some countries have small sample sizes (below 1000 individuals answering the survey). Also, the face-to-face mode the ESS has had until now is likely to increase social desirability bias relative to self-completion modes (Krumpal, 2013). Some variables are not on an equivalent scale across countries, such as educational level, which may be difficult to harmonize across countries as the educational systems and educational quality differ (Schneider, 2010).

Ethical Considerations

This dissertation is based on three datasets: the Swedish Level of Living Survey (LNU), the Society Opinions and Media (SOM) survey, and the European Social Survey (ESS). This ethical section refers to the use of secondary rather than primary data.

For the research questions and research procedures of the dissertation and the secondary use of ESS and SOM data, an ethics application titled “Social class, length of education and subject, gender, age, income, geography, and radical right support” (Dnr, 2023-05828-01) was submitted to the Swedish Ethical Review Authority. The ethics review authority decided that they did not take up the “reject the application, that is, does not take the application for consideration.” The reason for the decision was “In the current project, no intervention will be made on a research person or other intervention in the manner specified in Section 4 of the Ethics Review Act. There will be no processing of personal data in the manner specified in Section 3 of the Ethics Review Act. Against background hereof this study does not concern the provisions in §§ 3-4 of the Ethics Review Act and therefore shall not ethically tested.” The advisory utterance was: “The ethics review authority has no ethical objections to the research project.”

My use of LNU data and the research questions tied to it are covered by ethics approval (Dnr, 2019–06530). The Swedish Ethical Review Authority's decisions and utterances regarding the two ethics applications can be accessed by contacting the author (me).

The ESS is publicly available online and de-identified. Only the survey company had access to identity details for both surveys, and that key was thrown away when the material was sent to the researchers. At the time of writing, the risk of backward identification is considered unlikely (2024-10-24) (see European Social Survey, 2024). The Swedish Ethical Review Authority assessed that the use of ESS did not involve processing personal data in the manner specified in Section 3 of the Ethics Review Act.

The SOM datasets used in this dissertation (see University of Gothenburg, SOM Institute, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017 2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2021, 2022) were not classified as containing personal data at the time of writing (2024-10-24). The SOM data can be accessed

through the Swedish National Data Service (SND) after an application. All SOM surveys have been approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority to be distributed to researchers and students through SND (Göteborg - Dnr 130-15). The University of Gothenburg is the data controller and is responsible for ensuring that your responses are handled in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The data have been de-identified, and as they are not panel data studies but instead repeated cross-sections, no key is saved. Falk et al. (2021) write in the method report for SOM, “At the end of the data validation process, the questionnaires were de-identified, and all contact information was deleted. The physical questionnaires that were received were destroyed in accordance with regulations on confidentiality waste.” The Swedish Ethical Review Authority assessed that this use of SOM data did not involve processing personal data in the manner specified in Section 3 of the Ethics Review Act.

LNU data is classified as personal data, and my use of it, along with the associated research questions and procedures, is covered by ethics approval (Dnr, 2019–06530).

In the research reports, I refer to the fact that those wishing to replicate the results can apply data to SND for SOM data, SOFI for LNU data, or create an account on the ESS website to access ESS data. That is, no data is distributed to others or made public. The “do” files with general codes for creating the statistical models are available upon request. To protect privacy, I do not share any data cleaning.

An important ethical principle is voluntariness (Vetenskapsrådet, 2011). The invitations to all three surveys clearly stated that participation was voluntary, and many potential respondents also exercised their right not to respond.

The presentation of the results is also an important ethical aspect (Vetenskapsrådet, 2011). The results have been interpreted and presented with accuracy, caution, and with respect for those who participated in the surveys. All results are presented at the aggregate level as average correlations. There are risks with generalizing too much, for example, by being too categorical about who has a higher tendency to sympathize with different parties. Therefore, I have stressed in the reports that it is tendencies that are discussed, and I have also presented

standard errors to show that there are uncertainties related to the predictions. No unique observations have been presented. Only categories of answers with many observations were included in the study. If there are few observations in a category, the category is merged with the closest other category. This is to protect anonymity and to achieve statistically reliable results.

An ethical risk could be if others misinterpret and misuse the results of the thesis and/or if people who participated in the surveys feel that the results are interpreted offensively in the media or in publications. Therefore, I have done my best to present the results in neutral language and avoid exaggerations and too far-reaching generalizations (see Vetenskapsrådet, 2011, p. 41). If the media misinterpret or overinterpret the results, my supervisors and I are prepared to comment that it is an overinterpretation (see Vetenskapsrådet, 2011, p. 41).

Another potential ethical issue is if there are economic interests related to the research. The project that I am part of - the all-inclusive project - is financed by the Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare (Forte), [grant number. 2019-01352]. The principal investigator and principal researcher have no financial interests of their own in the project. Forte is a government agency with no commercial interest in the research, and the research is independent in the sense that Forte is not involved in collecting or interpreting the results.

Methods

In this dissertation, multiple methods are used. Linear models are used for outcomes consisting of scales of political opinions. Logit models are used for binary outcomes, such as whether the individual supports the radical right (1=yes, 0=no). Robust standard errors were used in all models to account for potential heteroskedasticity.

Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) model

OLS models were used for cross-sectional data with non-binary outcomes. For instance, Study III constructed one index for cultural values and one index for economic values and used OLS models. The OLS model population-level equation can be written as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_k X_k + \varepsilon$$

Where Y is the dependent variable; X_1, X_2, \dots, X_k are the independent variables (including control variables); β_0 is the intercept that corresponds to the value on Y when all X-variables are 0; $\beta_1, \beta_2, \dots, \beta_k$ are the regression coefficients that estimates the partial associations between each respective independent variables and the dependent variable Y when the effect of the other independent variables are held constant; and ε is the error term that represents unobserved variables and random factors.

If an independent variable is correlated with the error terms (endogeneity), it leads to biased estimates. This can occur if an important independent variable is not included in the regression or if there is reversed causality. Solutions to this can include using more experimental methods or panel data methods to control for unmeasurable factors (see section “Panel Data Fixed Effects Models” below).

Logit Models

In studies I and II, logistic regression was used to analyze the binary outcome of radical right support. It assumes that the association between the independent variable and the probability of the dependent variable is logistic, i.e., the probability of the outcome is in log odds, which means that it assumes a nonlinear s-shaped relationship between X and Y rather than linear associations. The logit model can be expressed as:

$$p = P(y=1|x) = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-(\beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_k X_k)}}$$

This model expresses the probability that y takes the value 1 at different values of the x -variables.

By taking the odds and applying the natural logarithm, we get the simpler logit function:

$$\log\left(\frac{p}{1-p}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_k X_k$$

This transformation makes sure that the predicted probabilities are within the interval (0, 1).

$\left(\frac{p}{1-p}\right)$ denotes the odds, which is the probability that the dependent variable takes the value 1 (p) divided by the probability that the dependent variable takes the value 0 ($1 - p$). The regression coefficients $\beta_0, \beta_1, \beta_2, \dots, \beta_k$ are estimated using maximum likelihood estimation (mle), which finds the values that maximize the likelihood of observing the given data. For further information about the logit model, see Hosmer et al. (2013).

However, log odds are complex and unintuitive to interpret. Sometimes, odds ratios are estimated instead, but as the scaling is complex, there is a risk that they do not communicate the effect size and sociological significance of findings very well either (Long & Mustillo, 2021; Mize, 2019). Therefore, the studies in this dissertation estimated the average marginal effects (AME), which measure the average change in the predicted probability that $y = 1$ for a one-unit increase in x , averaged over all observations in the sample.

Lasso Regression

Multicollinearity and overfitting are relatively common sources of error in OLS and logit models. Multicollinearity occurs when two or more independent variables are highly correlated, making it difficult to estimate and interpret the independent effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable. As a relatively extreme example, including income before and after tax is not suitable as they are highly correlated. Overfitting occurs when the number of independent variables included is large relative to the number of observations, leading to a loss of predictive accuracy and large variance in the estimates.

In study 1, I take a rather explorative approach when I study the associations between interactions of sociodemographic attributes and radical right support. Thus, two-way interactions between all categories of the seven independent variables were constructed to avoid relying too much on preconceptions, resulting in 39 interactions. As including that many interactions in a model can lead to multicollinearity and overfitting even though many observations (56,311) are included in study I, I used Lasso regression to select only the interactions that were deemed relevant in predicting the outcome radical right support and that were not considered too correlated with other better fitting interactions (see Tibshirani, 1996). Lasso regression can be estimated as both linear and logit regression.

The linear Lasso regression can be formulated as follows (but for a comprehensive mathematical derivation and explanation, see Tibshirani, 1996):

$$\hat{\beta} = \arg \min_{\beta} (\sum_{i=1}^n (y_i - \mathbf{x}_i \beta)^2 + \lambda \sum_{j=1}^p (|\beta_j|)$$

y_i is the observed value of the dependent variable for individual i , $\hat{\beta}$ are the estimated regression coefficients, \mathbf{x}_i is a vector of all the independent variables for individual i , λ is a regularization parameter that controls for the amount of shrinkage applied to the regression coefficients (shrinkage implies reducing magnitudes of coefficients to avoid overfitting and to facilitate interpretation of the model), p is the number of predictors, and $|\beta_j|$ denotes the absolute value of the coefficients of all included predictors.

In this equation, the sum of squared residuals is minimized in the first term as in an ordinary OLS regression. However, Lasso differs from OLS regression as regards the second term: it is a penalty term that encourages sparsity in the number of coefficients in the model selection by shrinking some coefficients to zero, resulting in irrelevant independent variables being excluded from the model (Tibshirani, 1996).

In a Lasso regression, it is possible to specify that some independent variables should be included in the final model while specifying that for other variables, it is up to Lasso to decide whether they should be included or not. For instance, in models with interactions, all main effects that constitute the building parts of the interactions need to be included in the final

model. At the same time, it is preferred that only interactions considered relevant in predicting the outcomes and not too closely correlated with better-fitting interactions should be included in the final model.

In STATA, I used the following commands for lasso logit regression:

```
lasso logit y (x1, ..., x7) x1*x2, ..., x6*x7
```

```
lassocoeff
```

“lasso” denotes that I ask Stata to perform a lasso regression. “logit” denotes that it is a logit regression instead of a linear regression. “y” denotes the binary dependent variable radical right support. “(x1, ..., x7)” denotes the main effects of the independent variables gender, education, income, etcetera and are in parentheses right after the dependent variable to inform Stata that they should be included in the final version of the model. After the parentheses, “x1*x2, ..., x6*x7” denotes all interactions between the seven independent variables (39 interactions in total), telling Stata that the Lasso should choose which ones of them to select for the final version of the model. The command “lassocoeff” displays which variables Lasso then has selected. The associations between the main effects, the selected interactions, and the outcome variable radical right support were then estimated in an ordinary logit regression.

Karlson-Holm-Breen (KHB) Mediation Analysis

In all three studies in this dissertation, mediation analysis using the Karlson-Holm-Breen (KHB) method is used at some point (see Karlson et al., 2012). For instance, in study I, the KHB method is used to analyze whether associations between sociodemographic attributes such as educational level, gender, income, and radical right support can be explained/are mediated by grievances such as concerns about welfare, crime, multiculturalism, etcetera.

For instance, if the association between being male and having a higher probability of supporting the radical right becomes weaker when adding concern about multiculturalism, it might imply that part of the reason men are more likely to support the radical right is that they worry more than women about multiculturalism and that this drives them to vote for the radical right. However, a formal test is needed to assess whether this conclusion can be drawn with statistical certainty. Therefore, I use the KHB method to decompose and compare coefficients in nested regression models. The KHB method assesses how adding a mediator

variable, Z, changes the association between an independent variable, X, and the dependent variable, Y.

The KHB method has been specially designed to analyze mediation effects in nonlinear models, but it can also be used for linear models (which I do in Study III). The KHB model is especially crucial to use in nonlinear models, such as logistic regression, because adding a mediator to a model changes the scale of the coefficients due to differences in error variance between the full and the reduced model, making direct comparisons of coefficients erroneous. To correct for this rescaling issue, the KHB method decomposes effects into a *direct effect* of the independent variable X on the dependent variable Y, holding the mediating variable Z constant, an *indirect effect* that corresponds to the independent variable X's effect on the dependent variable Y that operates through the mediating variable Z, and a *total effect* that corresponds to the sum of the direct and indirect effects.

The KHB method compares the associations between X and Y in a reduced model (excluding the mediating variable Z) with a full model (including the mediating variable Z). Both models need to be nested, meaning that they are identical in terms of observations and other variables and that the only difference is the addition of the mediating variable Z.

The total effect model (or reduced model) can be expressed as

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta X + \epsilon$$

The mediated model (or full model) adds the mediator variable Z and can be expressed as:

$$Y = \beta_0' + \beta' X + \gamma Z + \epsilon'$$

β is the total effect of X on Y, while β' is the direct effect of X on Y, holding Z constant. The indirect effect (or the mediating effect) then corresponds to the difference between the total effect (β) and the direct effect (β').

The KHB method calculates whether the mediation effect ($\beta - \beta'$) is statistically significant. The proportion of the effect that is mediated can be calculated to assess whether the mediation is meaningful:

$$\frac{(\beta - \beta')}{\beta}$$

For instance, assume that the gender gap in radical right support between men and women declines from 0.15 to 0.10 when adding concern about multiculturalism to the model. It might indicate that part of the gender gap can be explained by men having more concerns about multiculturalism. However, the KHB method can be used to obtain the probability that the difference in the coefficient size of 0.05 (0.15 - 0.10) was statistically distinct from 0. If the mediation is statistically significant, one can also calculate the proportion of the mediated effect, which in this case would have been $(0.15 - 0.10) / (0.15) \approx 0.33$. In this fictitious case, the coefficient decreased by 33 percent, and there was evidence of partial mediation.

Panel Data Fixed Effects Models

Fixed effects models using panel data with both entity (individual) and time-fixed effects (controls for the years) were used in Study II and Study III to analyze how changes in the number of educational years in different fields of study (Study II) and how work characteristics (Study III) within individuals over time are associated with changes in political attitudes. These models come closer to causal estimates as they control for unobserved heterogeneity (e.g., parental background and gender) that is constant over time within individuals. The model can be written as (see Baltagi, 2008):

$$Y_{it} = \alpha_i + \beta X_{it} + \gamma Z_{it} + \delta_t + \epsilon_{it} \quad (\text{eq. 1})$$

Y_{it} is the dependent variable for individual i at time t . For instance, in Study III Y_{it} are political attitudes. α_i is the individual-specific intercept (fixed effect) of factors that are constant over time (e.g., parental background), capturing unobserved heterogeneity. X_{it} is a vector of time-varying independent variables for individual i at time t . For instance, in Study III, X_{it} are the job characteristics. β is a vector of coefficients for X_{it} . Z_{it} is a vector of time-variant control variables for individual i at time t . γ is a vector of coefficients for Z_{it} . δ_t is time-specific effects in terms of common time shocks affecting all individuals in the same period. ϵ_{it} is an error term for individual i at time t .

For instance, study III estimates the changes in attitudes between 2010 and 2021; the model can be written as follows:

$$Y_{i,2021} - Y_{i,2010} = (\alpha_i + \beta X_{i,2021} + \gamma Z_{i,2021} + \delta_{2021} + \epsilon_{i,2021}) - (\alpha_i + \beta X_{i,2010} + \gamma Z_{i,2010} + \delta_{2010} + \epsilon_{i,2010})$$

(eq. 2)

$$\rightarrow Y_{i,2021} - Y_{i,2010} = \beta(X_{i,2021} - X_{i,2010}) + \gamma(Z_{i,2021} - Z_{i,2010}) + (\delta_{2021} - \delta_{2010}) + (\epsilon_{i,2021} - \epsilon_{i,2010})$$

(eq. 3)

As can be seen, the individual-specific intercept (i.e., unobserved heterogeneity) is differenced away in the fixed effects regression, which is why panel data fixed effects regression mitigates omitted variable bias (OVB). The model also includes time effects, thus controlling for that the mean value of the dependent variable political attitudes on average can have changed over time due to aspects not captured by the model ($\delta_{2021} - \delta_{2010}$). In the center of the analysis is how changes in the independent variables (X) between 2010 and 2021 are associated with changes in the outcome variable Y between 2010 and 2021, estimated as the coefficient β . A potential threat to identification in the model is if unobserved time-varying factors (e.g., personal health shocks) that affect the independent and dependent variable that is not controlled for in the model have changed for the individual between 2010 and 2021, such that $(\epsilon_{i,2021} - \epsilon_{i,2010}) \neq 0$. Therefore, the models included controls for time-variant factors within individuals, such as age group. However, the model is preferred to cross-sectional data as it holds constant confounders settled before 2010, such as sex at birth and parental background, as $(\alpha_i - \alpha_i) = 0$.

The model was estimated using the command `xtreg` in STATA 18. Fixed effects (fe) were applied. Standard errors were clustered on the individual. The command used in Stata is:

```
xtreg Y X Z i.year, fe vce(cluster id)
```

Note that STATA does not use first-differencing explicitly when estimating fixed effects. Instead, STATA demeanes the variables by removing individual-specific means:

$$(y_{it} - \bar{y}_i) = \beta(X_{it} - \bar{X}_i) + \gamma(Z_{it} - \bar{Z}_i) + (\delta_{it} - \bar{\delta}) + (\epsilon_{it} - \bar{\epsilon})$$

(eq. 4)

Both methods eliminate α_i , as it is constant over time, but STATA does it through within-transformation rather than explicit differencing.

General empirical patterns from the Swedish SOM survey

Populism, authoritarianism, ethnonationalism, traditionalism, and salience of the immigration issue in Sweden today and over time, and their links to radical right support

Table 1 shows how different attitudes linked to nationalism, authoritarianism, populism, and traditionalism evolved in Sweden between 1986 and 2021, using the Swedish SOM survey. It also shows how the attitudes are associated with support for the radical right party, the Sweden Democrats, in 2010-2021. Consistent with that ethno-nationalism is at the core of the radical right's ideology (Rydgren, 2005), ethno-nationalist attitudes are strongly linked to radical right support, and to agreeing with the suggestion to accept fewer refugees into Sweden is the strongest predictor of radical right support among the attitudes. Being against immigrants being able to practice their religions here was the strongest predictor of radical right support after the desire to accept fewer refugees (see Table 1). Consistent with that radical right parties often mobilize populism and take authoritarian stances (Mudde, 2007); authoritarianism (such as favoring the death penalty for murder and favoring more surveillance, censoring, etc., to combat security threats) was also strongly linked to radical right support. Indications of populism, such as desiring more national referendums, low trust in Swedish authorities, low trust in international organizations, and dissatisfaction with democracy in Sweden, were also strongly linked to radical right support. Traditionalist views (not favoring greater equality between women and wanting to limit the right to abortion) showed a more moderate association with radical right support.

However, running counter to common claims that nationalist, authoritarian, and populist sentiments are on the rise worldwide (e.g., Carnevale et al., 2020), most ethnonationalist views, such as being against immigrants should be able to practice their religion here, have declined over the years. The policy preference of accepting fewer refugees has been rather constant since the 1980s, with the mean respondent being neutral to or rather positive towards accepting fewer refugees. Also, traditionalist views, such as not favoring greater gender equality and abortion rights, have declined over time. Indications of populism (favoring more national referendums, mistrusting Swedish authorities and international organs, and being unsatisfied with democracy) declined over time. There were fewer recurring items capturing

authoritarianism, but the existing ones, starting in the early 2000s, namely, to favor the death penalty for murder and desiring more surveillance, censoring, and taking strong measures to combat security threats, indicated stability. Thus, radical right parties appear to have mobilized underlying pre-existing sentiments in the population; there are no indications that these attitudes have become more right-leaning with the growth of the radical right, which has also been found by, e.g., Oskarson and Demker (2012).

What instead has increased since the late 1980s is the share stating immigration or integration as the most important societal issue, especially around the years of the refugee crisis 2014-2015, as the share jumped from 9% to 25%. The increased salience probably stems mainly from increased immigration but also from, for instance, increased news coverage. Those who stated immigration or integration as the most central issue were 17.4 percentage points more likely to support the radical right.

Table 1. Mean variable value for different year spans, and associations with radical right support, AMEs from a logit regression. All variables are coded such that higher values indicate more TAN, populist, and rightist values

	Mean year 1986- 1993	Mean year 1994- 2000	Mean year 2001- 2007	Mean year 2008- 2014	Mean year 2015- 2021	Associat ion with radical right support 2010-21
Ethno-nationalism						
Some ethnic groups are more intelligent than others (1-4)	1.38	1.30	1.26	1.25	-	.040*** (.002)
I would not appreciate having an immigrant marry into the family (1-4)	1.88	1.64	1.55	1.47	-	-
Against that immigrants should be able to practice their religions here (1-4)	2.67	2.66	2.69	2.35	2.29	.089*** (.004)
Immigration policies should adjust refugees/immigrants to Swedish culture (1-5)	-	3.77	4.09	4.19	4.22	.060*** (.009)
Accept fewer refugees into Sweden (1-5)	3.71	3.43	3.37	3.23	3.53	.134*** (.002)
Negative Opinion about Islam (0-10)	-	-	5.55	5.76	5.59	.011*** (.002)
Negative Opinion about Judaism (0-10)	-	-	5.62	5.90	5.52	.012*** (.002)
Authoritarianism						
Favors death penalty for murder (1-5)	-	-	2.09	2.05	2.03	.059*** (.002)
More surveillance, censoring, etc. to combat security threats (Index 1-3)	-	-	1.95	1.88	2.04	.103*** (.014)
Populism						
Have more national referendums (1-5)	-	3.15	3.12	-	2.93	.092*** (.008)
Low trust in Swedish authorities (index 1-5)	2.79	2.84	2.89	2.83	2.72	.120*** (.002)
Low trust in international organs (EU Commission and parliament and UN) (1-5)	-	3.64	3.26	3.14	3.04	.075*** (.002)
Unsatisfied with democracy in Sweden (1-4)	-	2.42	2.22	2.11	2.17	.102*** (.002)
Traditionalist						
Don't favor greater equality between women (1-5)	1.92	1.80	1.72	1.71	1.60	.040*** (.002)
Limit the right to abortion (1-5)	-	-	2.02	1.78	1.58	.030*** (.002)

Economic opinions						
Against redistribution of income (1-5)	2.24	-	-	2.14	2.17	.028*** (.002)
Salience						
Integration/immigration is the most important issue (0-1)	0.05	0.04	0.07	0.09	0.25	.174*** (.003)

Note: Year is controlled in the regression in the last column. “-” indicates missing value for the year span.

Table 2 shows that the importance put on the immigration issue was strongly linked to whether the individual supported the radical right or not. In fact, 56,2% of those who were clearly in favor of accepting fewer refugees in combination with perceiving immigration as the most important political issue supported the radical right, which was about double as high as for those with similar attitudes but who put less priority to the question. Thus, it appears that the increased salience or importance put on the immigration/integration issue drives increased support for the radical right rather than that underlying ethno-nationalist attitudes have grown in the population.

Table 2. Radical right support at intersections of refugee intake attitude and salience of issue, 2015-2021

	Immigration or integration is not the most important issue	Immigration or integration is the most important issue
Very bad, bad or neutral toward proposal to accept fewer refugees	0.9	2.4
Good proposal to accept fewer refugees	6.32	12.4
Very good proposal to accept fewer refugees	30.9	56.2

The links between grievances and support for the left block, mainstream right, and radical right

One issue in previous research is that associations between, for instance, objective socio-economic conditions and radical right support have limitations in telling us what mechanisms are at play, i.e., we do not know the motivations as to why individuals with some characteristics are more likely to support the radical right. This is problematic as the theories used to explain these associations largely center on the subjective motivations of why. To study the mechanisms at play, I argue that grievances at the individual level should be

analyzed more.

Table 3 shows results from Multinomial logit models of the link between grievances and party support from the SOM survey, presented as average marginal effects. The dependent variable is divided into 1) support for the left block, 2) the mainstream right block, and 3) the radical right. The individuals were asked how anxious they were about some events. Some questions were of more socio-tropic character, and some other questions were of more egoistic character.

Speaking in favor of the cultural anxiety theory (see e.g., Norris & Inglehart, 2019), anxiety about the prospect of increased numbers of refugees had the strongest linkage to radical right support among all grievances surveyed (see Table 3). Being concerned about religious antagonism was rather strongly associated with radical right support (see Table 3). Also, perceiving security threats, such as terrorism, organized crime, and fear of becoming a victim of crime, were linked to a higher probability of supporting the radical right, which is consistent with the fact that radical right parties portray immigrants as a security threat, arguing that they are from more violent cultures. Also, rejecting concerns common in the Green-Alternative-Libertarian ideology, such as not worrying about the change in the Earth's climate and rejecting ideas that increasing xenophobia is a societal concern was also associated with higher radical right support, supporting the idea of that radical right support is also linked to a backlash against post-material progressive values (Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

Anxiety about one's private economy was strongly linked to supporting the left in all the dimensions included in the survey, namely, lacking money for an unexpected expense, not receiving a sufficiently large pension, and becoming unemployed. The mainstream right received the least support from those experiencing personal economic grievances, with the radical right in between. Also, fearing economic crisis was associated with higher left support. This speaks against the theories that economic concerns are primary drivers of radical right support at the individual level and are in line with findings by for instance Gidron & Mijs (2019).

Table 3. Multinomial logit models of the link between grievances and party support are presented as AMEs.

	Left block	Mainstream right block	Radical right	n
Societal concerns (1-4)				
Terrorism	-.046*** (.004)	.015*** (.004)	.031*** (.002)	25,760
Change in the Earth's climate	.116*** (.004)	-.049*** (.004)	-.067*** (.002)	31,755
Economic crisis	.027*** (.006)	-.029*** (.006)	.003 (.003)	12,591
The situation in Russia	-.004 (.006)	.035*** (.006)	-.031*** (.004)	8,514
Increased number of refugees	-.140*** (.003)	-.029*** (.004)	.169*** (.004)	18,584
High unemployment	.082*** (.004)	-.099*** (.004)	.017*** (.003)	24,321
Organized crime	-.044*** (.004)	-.009* (.004)	.053*** (.003)	21,577
Religious antagonism	-.053*** (.006)	.004 (.006)	.048*** (.004)	9,834
Increased alcohol consumption	.074*** (.005)	-.056*** (.005)	-.018*** (.003)	12,668
Military conflicts	.032*** (.005)	-.015** (.005)	-.018*** (.003)	17,119
Global epidemics	.034*** (.004)	-.028*** (.004)	-.006* (.003)	20,057
Weakened democracy	.068*** (.004)	-.080*** (.004)	.012*** (.003)	17,089
Increased social inequality	.207*** (.003)	-.188*** (.003)	-.018*** (.002)	25,563
Widespread corruption	.035*** (.006)	-.065*** (.006)	.030*** (.004)	8,135
Political extremism	.062*** (.005)	-.010* (.005)	-.052*** (.003)	15,544
Increased xenophobia	.138*** (.005)	-.041*** (.005)	-.103*** (.003)	12,923
Restrictions on freedom of expression	.028*** (.006)	-.040*** (.006)	.013** (.004)	7,349
Increased usage of narcotics	-.020** (.007)	-.013* (.007)	.033*** (.005)	7,423
Housing shortage	.064*** (.006)	-.081*** (.006)	.017*** (.004)	10,151

Increased antibiotic resistance	.010 (.007)	.009 (.007)	-.019*** (.005)	8,700
Worsened welfare	.059*** (.005)	-.122*** (.005)	.064*** (.004)	12,804
Anxiety about your own situation (1-4)				
Lacking money for an unexpected expense	.078*** (.006)	-.093*** (.006)	.015*** (.003)	7,073
Not receiving a sufficiently large pension	.087*** (.006)	-.105*** (.006)	.018*** (.003)	7,058
Becoming unemployed	.058*** (.006)	-.068*** (.006)	.010*** (.003)	6,702
Becoming a victim of crime	.006 (.007)	-.022** (.007)	.015*** (.003)	7,086

Note: 2011-2021 only are included. The year is controlled.

The links between social integration (or social capital) and radical right support

According to Table 4, all measures of social integration (or social capital) identified in the SOM data set were linked to less likelihood to support the radical right when holding constant gender, educational level, urban-rural residence, county, age, occupational class conceptualized according to the European Socio-economic Classification (ESeC), and subjective class background. There was a moderately strong negative link between civil society engagement, measured as how often one has gone to a meeting or in other ways been active in (unspecified) organizations last year, and radical right support. There was also a negative link between having personal networks, such as not living alone and often socializing with friends and neighbors, and radical right support. However, civil society engagement played a greater role according to the effect sizes (note that some of the independent variables in Table 4 are dummy variables while other variables are on a scale of 1-7). Although self-selection probably plays a role here, these results provide suggestive evidence in favor of the seldom acknowledged social disintegration theory, at least in a descriptive cross-sectional sense.

Table 4. Association between measurements of social integration and radical right support.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	n
Do not live alone (0 = yes, 1 = no)	-.020*** (.003)				53,473
Past 12 months: Socialized with friends (1 never-7. several times a week)		-.004** (.001)			54,000
Past 12 months: Socialized with neighbors (1 never-7. several times a week)			-.003* (.001)		12,203
Gone to a meeting/been active in an organization last year (1 never-7. several times a week)				-.009** (.003)	2,331

Note: Gender, educational level, urban-rural residence, county, age, ESeC class, subjective class background. Year = 2011-2019.

Results from the studies in this dissertation

This dissertation investigates the demand side of radical right support and economic and cultural political opinions. The studies are complementary in the sense that Study I deals more broadly with how positions in the social structure and interactions thereof are related to radical right support, as well as the role played by grievances, while Studies II and III investigate the role played by horizontal aspects of position in the social structure in shaping political opinions and radical right support (horizontal aspects of education in Study II and horizontal aspects of occupation in Study III). The next section presents descriptive accounts of all the studies, followed by a concluding discussion of the studies that also synthesizes the theoretical implications of the studies.

Study I: Radical right support and the deepened rural-urban and educational divides among younger generations

While there is indeed no scarcity of studies of average links between positions in the social structure and radical right support, there is a lack of studies investigating how such positions may interact in shaping support for the radical right. This study takes an abductive approach and investigates how two-way interactions between the sociodemographic factors gender, rural/urban residence, class, native/non-native background, age, education, and income shape radical right support. I argue that this investigation is warranted since the social world is complex, and average associations tend to obscure underlying heterogeneity, leading to erroneous conclusions (e.g., Elwert & Winship, 2010; McCall, 2005). Also, as the typical radical right supporter is often described as someone who has lost out on modernization and globalization in multiple interrelated aspects (Betz, 1994; McVeigh & Estep, 2019), studying interactions is a way to acknowledge that the whole can be more than the sum of its parts.

The study uses the machine-learning “least absolute shrinkage and selection operator” (Lasso) regression (Tibshirani, 1996) on 56,311 observations from the Swedish SOM Survey from 2015 to 2021. Lasso regression selects interactions that predict radical right support and that are not closely correlated with other better-fitting interactions, thus avoiding overfitting and collinearity. This analysis is also replicated with the European Social Survey (ESS) 2018-2023 to assess replicability and generalizability.

The results confirm the patterns found in previous research of average associations between positions in the social structure and radical right support: Being male, low-educated, in the working class, or a small business owner is strongly linked to higher radical right support. Rural area residents showed moderately higher radical right support than urban area residents. Being native and having a low family income showed only small to moderate associations with radical right support, while age showed no statistically significant link to radical right support.

The results indicate that age is the most influential moderating factor in shaping radical right support despite its zero average association with radical right support.

The modeling with interactions enhances and contextualizes predictions of who supports the radical right. While previous research and the average associations found in this study show that age is not associated with radical right support, this study shows that it depends on context. Clearly, the most likely supporters are those who combine the attributes of being young, low-educated men in rural areas, a pattern that average associations do not correctly capture. In contrast, young, highly educated females in urban areas show lower radical right support and higher support for green-alternative-libertarian (GAL) parties than expected by average associations. Thus, the study sheds light on emerging political GAL-TAN conflicts between social groups within the younger generation. It shows there are large political divides between groups within the younger generation rather than between generations.

As also found in some previous research (e.g., Gethin et al., 2022; Steiner, 2023), the educational cleavage in radical right support is approximately twice as strong among younger age groups than among the older. Moreover, the rural-urban divide is nearly non-existent among the oldest age group. At the same time, rural residents have approximately double the support of urban residents in the youngest age group, holding other sociodemographic characteristics constant, which mirrors findings by Haffert and Mitteregger (2023). These results are generalizable to the West European average. As previous studies have often focused on one cleavage at a time, one contribution the study makes is to show that multiple cleavages have grown simultaneously over generations. Overall, the link between positions in the social structure and radical right support has grown over generations.

Moreover, the study also embraces heterogeneity by analyzing whether different social groups follow distinct grievance pathways toward support for the radical right. The grievances investigated are concerns about welfare, unemployment, organized crime, and perceptions that immigration threatens Swedish culture and values. This is done using mediation analysis with the Karlson-Holm-Breen (KHB method) (Karlson et al., 2012). As individuals may have different concerns about globalization, immigration, and modernization based on their place in the social structure, I argue that the investigation is warranted. For instance, those with economically precarious positions (in this study: the working class and those with low incomes) may be more motivated by economic concerns as they may perceive more scarcity in terms of employment possibilities, housing, and welfare resources, theoretically being more likely to perceive immigrants as economic competitors (e.g., Dehdari, 2022).

The results show that while welfare concern is medium-strongly associated with support for the radical right, it was a rather evenly distributed concern across social groups. Unemployment concerns showed a very weak positive link to radical right support. Neither of the economic concerns mediated support among the economically disadvantaged, which put some doubt into the common economic competition theoretical explanation for the comparatively high support among disadvantaged groups. The bulk (approximately 3/4) of the strong negative association between educational level and radical right support was mediated by heightened perceived cultural threat among the less educated. Parts of the gender gap (although less than half) could also be explained by men perceiving a higher cultural threat than women. Concern with crime was more prevalent among older people and mediated support among older people. In sum, the results also illustrate that the groups with high radical right support, particularly low-educated men, in some sense the core electorate, appeared most motivated by the key ideology of the radical right - ethnonationalism with cultural conservatism, while more peripheral electorates characterized by average support, such as older people, found motivations in other issues such as concerns with crime.

Study II: Field of study, political attitudes, and support for the radical right in Sweden and Europe

This study investigates how horizontal aspects of education, namely fields of study, are associated with political opinions and support for the radical right. In previous research, education is repeatedly found to be one of the strongest, if not the strongest, predictors of

support for radical right parties among the commonly studied socio-structural positions (e.g., Cavaille & Marshall, 2019; Jung & Gil, 2019; Velásquez & Eger, 2022), but few studies have assessed the link between field of study and radical right support. One exception is Hooghe et al. (2024), who found robust evidence that pursuing education with cultural-communicative content was associated with developing higher support for GAL parties and suggestive evidence (since this analysis included only 443 individuals) of development of lower support for TAN parties.

The study uses three different datasets: the Swedish SOM survey (2011–2019), the European Social Survey (ESS), and the Swedish Level of Living Survey (LNU), and conducts several types of empirical analyses, aiming for a triangulation design for robustness purposes. The results from the SOM survey (n = 41,770) reveal that, although educational level is an even stronger predictor of radical right support, the field of study also strongly predicts radical right support and improves the predictive accuracy of such support when included in the model. Graduates from technical fields show more than twice as high a probability of supporting radical rights as graduates from sociocultural fields, holding other covariates such as gender and class background constant. Similar patterns are observed in Western, but not Eastern, Europe with data from the ESS.

An analysis with a sub-sample of 16–18-year-old students in upper secondary school from the SOM survey (2089 individuals) reveals that there is a negative interaction effect between years spent in sociocultural fields and support for the radical right, suggesting that sociocultural education is more liberalizing than other educational fields. Similar patterns are observed with immigration skepticism as the dependent variable. Panel data regressions with LNU (1786 individuals) show that only for the sociocultural field is a statistically significant and substantive association between pursuing additional years of education and the development of gender egalitarian and economic egalitarian attitudes.

The study also uses the KHB method to investigate the role of both vertical labor market allocation (occupational class, household income, and employment status) and horizontal labor market allocation (public versus private sector, 44 occupation dummies, >65% male in 3-digit SSSYK occupation) in explaining the disparities in radical right support we see across the fields of study. Vertical labor market allocation cannot explain the disparities in support

across fields. On the contrary, the fields with good labor market outcomes, such as the technical field, showed high support for radical right parties. The allocation of agricultural, technical, and natural science students into horizontally distinguished male-dominated occupations with high support could explain a modest extent (about 25%) of the medium-high to high support in these fields. However, most of the association between fields of education and radical right support appears independent from subsequent labor market allocation.

Study III: An Empirical Evaluation of the Theoretical Links Between the Oesch Class Schema and Political Attitudes

In political sociology and political science, the Oesch class schema is generally considered the leading framework for studying the links between occupational class and political alignments. While multiple studies have confirmed that the schema is empirically valuable in predicting political opinions, there is a lack of studies investigating the underlying theory of the schema, which is the aim of this study. The theoretical bases are rooted in long-standing theoretical traditions in social science, meaning that the conclusions from the study bear broad implications.

This study used cross-sectional individual-level data from the Swedish Level of Living Survey (LNU) 2021 to analyze how vertical and horizontal job characteristics that build the theoretical bases of the Oesch class schema are linked to political opinions. It uses the Karlson-Holm-Breen (KHB) method to analyze how these job characteristics mediate the class differences in political opinions. The study also used panel data from LNU 2010 and 2021 as a robustness check to see whether changes in job tasks and vertical position were associated with changing political attitudes in the way Oesch's theory predicts.

The study confirmed many of Oesch's previously found empirical patterns. Production workers had the most culturally authoritarian values, while sociocultural professionals had the most culturally libertarian values. Managers and administrative professionals had the most economically rightist values. The middle-class categories of technical professionals, managers, and administrative professionals were more economically right-wing than the working classes.

As suggested by Oesch, the vertical dimension was operationalized as the number of educational years required to perform the job (occupational skill content). Cross-sectional analyses showed that higher educational requirements were linked to more economic right-wing opinions. This link was much weaker and statistically insignificant when analyzed with panel data. Thus, the study supports the notion that differences in occupational skill content are the underlying drivers of differences in economic opinions across classes.

The Oesch class schema also consists of a horizontal dimension that classifies occupations based on three different work logics: technical object-oriented, interpersonal, and organizational work logic. As explained above in the section “Horizontal Aspects of Education and Occupation” under theory and previous research, organizational work logic is expected to lead to more economically rightist opinions and to explain the right-leaning views among managers and administrative professionals. Cross-sectional data indicated that management tasks were associated with more economically rightist opinions. However, panel-data regression pointed in the opposite direction, implying that being assigned more management tasks is associated with becoming more economically egalitarian. Management tasks could not explain the right-leaning of managers and administrators. Thus, the study found no consistent evidence favoring this part of the theory.

Interpersonal work logic is expected to lead to more culturally libertarian views and explain the culturally libertarian leaning among sociocultural professionals. Neither cross-sectional nor panel data regression supported this part of the theory, and there were even some indications that interpersonal tasks were associated with more authoritarian views. Thus, the strong cultural libertarian leaning among sociocultural professionals is most likely driven by other characteristics of these occupations or livelihoods than the interpersonal tasks *per se*.

In the Oesch class schema, object-oriented work logic is expected to lead to more culturally authoritarian views and to explain the culturally authoritarian-leaning among production workers. This study found support for this part of the theory in both cross-sectional and panel data analyses, and their object-oriented tasks could thus partially explain the strong authoritarian-leaning among production workers. However, most of their authoritarian leaning remained unexplained, and future research should investigate other complementary explanations.

Since a large part of the theoretical grounds in the Oesch class schema was questioned by the empirical results of this study, empirical and theoretical revisions of the Oesch class schema are suggested. Similarly, as it is standard to classify occupations vertically based on educational level requirements, a more suitable horizontal division of occupations is based on educational field requirements rather than a subjective assessment of work logic. In particular, this study suggests that as sociocultural fields and health fields are disparate fields of study, health professions should be separated from sociocultural professionals. This separation proves valuable for understanding class politics as health professionals have middle-range values regarding both economic and cultural questions. Sociocultural professionals turn out to be more strongly left-leaning and libertarian-leaning than depicted in previous research. This implies that overall class differences in political opinions have been underestimated in previous research. Also, the prediction of other outcomes, such as income and health, improves with these revisions of the class schema.

Concluding discussion and suggestions for future research

Several researchers (e.g., Dalton, 1996, p. 332; Kingston, 2000) predicted that the rise of identity politics and declining salience of economic issues that appeal to the material interests of groups would lead to political preferences being de-coupled from the social structure and especially from social class. It was assumed that voters would become more individualistic when choosing parties and thus that party support would be distributed more randomly across the electorate, where the role of leaders and specific policy issues would increase. Several results of this dissertation point in the opposite direction.

Study I shows that the social structure has increased in accuracy in predicting radical right support over generations, with the educational and rural-urban political divides having strongly grown over generations. As there often is an overlap between cultural identity and position in the social structure (Lamont, 2018; McVeigh and Estep, 2019), I argue that it is not surprising that the younger generations, who have been politically socialized during a period of heightened inequalities, express stronger links between their position in the social structure and support for the radical right (Lamont, 2018; McVeigh & Estep, 2019; Piketty, 2014). Also, the high use of social media in the younger generation (see Internetstiftelsen, 2023; Pew Research Center, 2021) probably plays a role in increasing political polarization between social groups within this generation, as far-right ideology and propaganda are circulated and normalized, and individuals receive algorithmically tailored media content based on their sociodemographic attributes and pre-existing values (Bakshy et al., 2015; Åkerlund, 2020).

Moreover, Study I sheds light on which social positions have become more decisive for political opinions over generations. It shows that the link between being low-educated, living in a rural area, and radical right support is stronger among the younger age groups. As quantitative studies often face limitations in finding definite answers to the theoretical mechanisms behind associations, future research should further investigate the theoretical explanations for these patterns. However, tentative explanations include that rural-urban inequalities have increased over time and that rural-urban political conflicts have been more salient at the time younger generations were socialized (Eurofound, 2023; Haffert & Mitteregger, 2023). Regarding education, qualitative research shows that its content has become more progressive over time, such that the liberalizing socialization effect probably

has been stronger at the time younger generations were educated (Bromley, 2009). Also, the role of education has probably become more vital as an economic, social, and cultural resource in the increasingly skill-upgraded, meritocratic, multicultural, and knowledge-based society where the younger generations are in the process of establishing themselves, for instance, by seeking employment, partners, friends, and social status (see also, e.g., Binder & Bound, 2019; Ford & Jennings, 2020).

Horizontal content and context of work and life are theorized to form views on cultural issues linked to identity and community (e.g., Inglehart, 1990; Kriesi et al., 2006; Oesch, 2008b). As cultural issues have become more salient over time following, for instance, heightened globalization and immigration, and as there has been more differentiation horizontally following, for example, service sector expansion, increased female labor force participation, and more differentiation in consumption and production, horizontal aspects of social stratification have been theorized to have become more important for political alignment (e.g., Inglehart, 1990; Kriesi et al., 2006; Müller, 1999; Oesch, 2008b). Studies I and II investigate horizontal aspects of education and occupation and confirm that horizontal positions are highly relevant for understanding contemporary political alignments. For instance, Study I showed that former students of technical fields were as much as twice as likely to support the radical right compared to former students of sociocultural fields when educational level and other covariates were held constant. Study II further showed that the divide in cultural opinions between the most libertarian class (sociocultural professionals) and the most authoritarian class (production workers) is twice as large as the gender gap in such values and corresponds to the gap between low- and high-educated individuals. Thus, this dissertation encourages future studies to consider horizontal aspects of social stratification, as they otherwise are likely to underestimate the link between social stratification and political attitudes. To enable such studies, designers of surveys centered on politics, such as the European Social Survey (ESS), are encouraged to include horizontal aspects to a larger extent. For instance, ESS stopped collecting data on educational fields of study in 2008, which is unfortunate as it is highly predictive of political attitudes.

Study II adds to an existing body of literature showing that sociocultural (or human-centered) educational fields such as history, arts, social science, and humanities are more liberalizing than other fields (Bročić & Miles, 2021; Carnevale et al., 2020; Eger et al., 2024; Gambetta &

Hertog, 2016; McGregor & Pruysers, 2022; Paterson, 2009; Stubager, 2008; Surridge, 2016; Thomsen & Olsen, 2017; van de Werfhorst & de Graaf, 2004). The study contributes to literature by being one of few studies showing that socioculturally educated are also much less likely to support the radical right and that this also holds when using identification strategies such as years of exposure to the field (see also Hooghe et al., 2024). In contrast to previous research that often merges economic and technical fields or educational focus (e.g., Hooghe et al., 2024), this study shows that the inclination toward radical right support is considerably stronger in technical fields than in economic fields. Therefore, the study suggests that future research should be cautious about merging educational fields into overly broad categories or dimensions.

Study II also shows empirically that part of the high radical right support of former students of STEM fields could be explained by their subsequent allocation into male-dominated occupations with high such support. However, in contrast to common theoretical views of education as mainly an economic resource that protects individuals from the competition with immigrants in the labor market and, in this way, making them less likely to support the radical right (e.g., Dehdari, 2022), this study found that the fields with the most advantageous labor market outcomes had the highest support for the radical right. Moreover, Study I also shows that the link between educational level and radical right support cannot be explained by highly educated people perceiving less economic concerns. Instead, Study I shows that the high radical right support among low-educated individuals was strongly mediated by the perception that immigration is a threat to Swedish culture and values. Hence, this dissertation suggests that the link between low education and radical right support is more likely to go through mechanisms of cultural threat than through economic threat.

Further, Study II suggests that if cognitive development were the dominating mechanism, we would expect the lowest radical right support in fields that most intensively develop broad, theoretical, and cognitive skills, particularly the sciences (Ma-Kellams et al., 2014; van de Werfhorst & Kraaykamp, 2001, p. 303). In contrast, if socialization mechanisms are dominating, we would expect the sociocultural fields to have the lowest support as these fields employ system-blame rather than person-blame curricula and have more room for political socialization by the more progressive teachers and curricula in these fields as politics and society are more often discussed (e.g., Berggren et al., 2009; Guimond et al., 1989; Hjerm et

al., 2018a, 2018b; Ladd & Lipset, 1975; Strother et al., 2021). Thus, on theoretical grounds, study II argues that socialization into liberal values, rather than cognitive development or vertical labor market allocation, appears to be the dominating liberalizing mechanism of education. However, future research should tend to the mechanisms linking sociocultural education to liberalization more comprehensively, which I suggest requires either detailed survey data on educational content and contexts on the individual level, qualitative studies of curricula and textbooks, or participatory observations in class.

Study III examines the theoretical underpinnings of the Oesch class schema (see Oesch, 2006a, 2006b, 2008a, 2008b, 2012), which has become the number one framework for studying class politics. This study's empirical findings mirrored the results of Oesch and other researchers (e.g., Abou-Chadi and Hix, 2021; Kitschelt & Rehm, 2014; Oesch & Rennwald, 2018). Sociocultural professionals were the most libertarian-leaning, production workers were the most authoritarian-leaning, and managers and administrative professionals were the most economically right-leaning. The working class and the middle-class category of sociocultural professionals were more economically left-leaning than the middle-class categories of technical professionals and “managers and administrators.”

However, the study found consistent evidence favoring only one of the theoretical grounds of the Oesch class Schema – that technical object-oriented work is associated with culturally authoritarian views and partially explains the authoritarian leaning among production workers. Exactly how these mechanisms operate is for future research to investigate, but long-standing theoretical explanations in the literature imply that technical object-oriented work encourages authoritarian traits and thinking by being more hierarchical, structured, and centered around respecting authority and maintaining discipline (Gambetta & Hertog, 2016; Kohn & Schooler, 1982; Oesch, 2006b). However, most of the authoritarian leaning among production workers remained unexplained, and it remains for future research to investigate complementary explanations for these patterns.

Most theoretical explanations from the Oesch class Schema that are repeatedly used to explain the class disparities in political attitudes turned out not to hold empirically. The right-leaning of managers and administrative professionals could not be explained by their management

tasks. Furthermore, being assigned more management tasks was associated with becoming more left-wing. These findings put doubt into the prevalent theory that management tasks make people less egalitarian through the controlling and optimization of other personnel in unequal hierarchies and alignment with capitalists' profit maximization (Kitschelt, 1995; Kohn & Schooler, 1982; Oesch 2006b, 2008b; Pfeffer, 1981). As the association between management tasks and economic rightist views was positive cross-sectionally but negative when analyzed with panel data fixed effects regression, the study instead suggests that self-selection of initially economic rightist-leaning persons into management roles is likely to be a central explanation for the right-leaning of this class.

Moreover, the theory that interpersonal work logic and tasks are liberalizing was not supported. This theory was based on long-standing theories that intergroup contact can reduce prejudice (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) and that employees with these tasks are encouraged to develop loyalty to people needing societal services (Lubbers & Güveli, 2007; Velotti & Cigna, 2024). In contrast to this expectation, Study III found that interpersonal tasks were associated with more culturally authoritarian values. Consequently, interpersonal tasks could not explain the culturally libertarian inclination among sociocultural professionals.

Thus, the strong culturally liberal inclination among sociocultural professionals remains a black box. As Study II found that working in a male-dominated occupation was strongly linked to radical right support, it is possible that the female-dominated work context explains part of the culturally liberal inclination among sociocultural professionals and that the heavily male-dominated context in production work explains part of the authoritarian leaning among production workers. This is a likely alternative explanation as men are less progressive than women (Langsæther & Knutsen, 2024; Norris & Inglehart, 2019) and since individuals tend to be influenced by the political opinions of others in their network (e.g., Lindh et al., 2021; Rauf, 2021), and as male-dominated workplaces tend to have more competitive and discriminatory cultures (Berdahl et al., 2018; Connell, 1987; Simon et al., 2017). This alternative explanation for the class differences in political opinions can be investigated in future research. However, to avoid the ecological fallacy (Robinson, 1950), it should be investigated with direct measures of the gender composition in the individual's workplace rather than inferring gender composition from aggregate occupational data.

As there was scarce support for most of the theoretical foundations of the Oesch class schema, Study III suggested that a more theoretically sound division of horizontal classes would be based on educational field requirements rather than a subjective assessment of work logic. Considering horizontal occupational requirements for horizontally distinguishing classes is also more consistent with how classes and occupations have been found to be most efficiently divided vertically, namely through educational level or year requirements (International Labour Office, 2012; Tåhlin, 2007b). The study suggested that health professionals should be separated from the sociocultural professional class as they do not share educational field backgrounds. This separation proved valuable as health professionals had middle-range political values, which made the strong economic left and culturally libertarian-leaning among sociocultural professionals much more evident.

The studies in this dissertation also illustrate the value of separating Eastern and Western European countries when analyzing the links between social stratification and political alignments. Western European countries generally have longer liberal-democratic traditions, while authoritarian tendencies can still be seen in the official culture in some Eastern European countries (Doerschler & Jackson, 2018; Jackson & Doerschler, 2024; Stefanovic & Evans, 2019). Study I (see Appendix D in Study I) shows, for instance, that there is a stronger negative link between educational level and radical right support in the West (see also Dražanová, 2017) and that this link has grown in strength over generations in the West but not in the East. Study II shows that the link between sociocultural education and low radical right support existed only in Western European countries. As it is the official culture that dominates official institutions such as education and that is transmitted to students in education overall and especially in the sociocultural fields (due to more room for political socialization in society-centered fields), it is not very surprising that countries with longer liberal-democratic traditions show a stronger link between education (and especially sociocultural education) and culturally libertarian political inclination (see also Dražanová, 2017; Selznick & Steinberg, 1969). Hence, future research would benefit from considering the East versus West European contexts in their analyses.

To sum up, the studies in this dissertation provide several examples of how the role of social stratification in shaping political alignment has been underestimated in previous research,

pointing in favor of its continued relevance. Study I shows that the links between positions in the social structure and GAL-TAN political party support have grown over generations, meaning that its role is probably increasing. Study II shows that the predictive accuracy of radical right support improves when also taking horizontal aspects of education into account, meaning that studies that do not consider horizontal aspects underestimate the total role of social stratification. Study III shows that revisions of the commonly used Oesch class schema prove class cleavages to be stronger than estimated in previous research. Therefore, future researchers are highly encouraged to continue to acknowledge the role of social stratification and particularly to start recognizing its horizontal dimensions more when studying political alignments.

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