

# Sibling rivalry: Voters for radical left parties and their competitors in Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands

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#### Abstract

This article analyzes voters for Radical Left Parties (RLPs) in three countries—Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden. Belonging to the democratic socialist subtype of RLPs, parties in these countries find themselves in an intense "sibling rivalry" with social democratic and green parties for voters on the left side of the political spectrum. There is little existing scholarly analysis of the demand-side of RLPs in competition with their competitors. We fill this gap using the European Social Survey (ESS), testing various demographic and attitudinal variables to disentangle the vote on the left. We conclude that what distinguishes the RLP voter from the social democratic or green voter in these countries is not sociodemographic characteristics but rather three attitudinal variables - satisfaction with democracy, attitudes toward immigrants, and the role of government in reducing income disparities. Furthermore, we find that given these three attitudinal variables, the probability to vote for an RLP compared to a social democratic or green party increases dramatically the farther the voter places him/herself to the left.

## **Keywords**

European left parties, left-wing voters, radical left parties, voting behavior

The last two decades have witnessed a growing fragmentation of the vote in European democracies. While the challenges posed to conservative and Christian Democratic parties by parties of the populist radical right have received significant scholarly attention, social democratic parties have faced an even more daunting environment as they confront an array of competitors on both their right and left flanks (see Benedetto et al., 2020; Dalton, 2000; Kitschelt, 1994; Moschonas, 2011; Przeworki and Sprague, 1986). In particular, social democrats (or SDs) have found themselves in intense competition with left-libertarian/green parties and with parties of the radical left, (hereafter RLPs) (Beaudonnet and Vasilopoulus, 2014; Kaelberer, 1998; Patton, 2006; Schmidtke, 2016).

The competition with the latter party family is particularly noteworthy, for although RLPs have long played critical roles in the party systems of many modern democracies, the collapse of the Soviet Union threw them into a crisis, leading some scholars to think they might disappear altogether or be reduced to marginal roles in their party systems. Instead, most RLPs rebounded remarkably quickly. Indeed, while SDs across Europe have continued an inexorable slide into electoral mediocrity, and green parties have seen their electoral results ebb and flow quite dramatically, RLPs in Europe have been very electorally stable over the last three decades. As March (2016) has shown, from 1999 to 2008 RLPs across the EU-28 averaged a vote share of 7.6%, a fractional (0.4) gain over their average vote share from 1990 to 1999, while from 2008 to 2016 RLPs in the EU averaged 9.4% of the vote, an increase compared to 1999–2008. To be sure, the average

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RLP vote for this most recent period is partially skewed by the outstanding performance of several parties in national elections (Syriza in Greece; Podemos in Spain); yet the stability of vote share of the vast majority of RLPs is notable. This is especially true within that subtype of RLPs March (2016) categorizes as "democratic socialist" (see discussion on subtypes below) dominated by the German *Linke* (Left Party or LP), the Dutch Socialist Party (SP), and the "Nordic Green Left" parties in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland.

The relative electoral stability of RLPs, especially those within the Democratic Socialist subtype, is a bit puzzling. After all, ever since their organizational and programmatic transformation in the early to mid-1990s, RLPs have been in even more intense competition with party challengers on the center-left and left. In other words, a similar competitive environment on the left side of the political spectrum exists for RLPs as it does for social democratic and green parties. How then does an RLP compete with its sibling rivals? What kind of voter chooses an RLP over its social democratic and green competitors?

While scholarship on RLPs has begun to grow in the last half decade, individual-level analysis of the RLP voter still remains relatively under-researched. To be sure, important case studies have been published on individual RLPs (Bowver and Vail, 2011; Hough et al., 2007; Sperber, 2010) and several books and articles have undertaken a more global analysis of RLPs (Backes and Moreau, 2008; Chiocchetti, 2017; Damiani, 2020; Katsambekis and Kioupkiolis 2019; March, 2008; March, 2011; March and Keith, 2016; Olsen et al., 2010). In terms of RLPs' competition with social democratic and green parties, a recent article by Krause (2020) examines the link between RLPs' electoral success and their programmatic and policy positions. He theorized that such parties perform best when outbidding their leftwing rivals on non-economic/postmaterialist issues, but his analysis is from the supply side: he does not explore individual-level data of the voters of these left-wing competitors. Similarly, Visser et al. (2014) examines popular support for "radical left ideologies". However, they do not disentangle respondents' ideological self-positioning from electoral support for specific party families, a crucial step in understanding the RLP, social democratic, and green voter. With a few partial exceptions (Ramiro, 2016; Gomez et al., 2016-see discussion below) demand-side analyses of the RLP vote in competition with their rivals have not been systematically undertaken and is therefore a gap in the literature we seek to fill.

Our main research questions in this article are thus straightforward. First, what demographic differences, if any, exist to distinguish democratic socialist RLPs, green, and social democratic voters where these parties are in direct competition? Do gender, education, class-status, income, or other demographic markers set the RLP voter apart from the social democratic or green voter? Second, what political attitudes might lead one voter to opt for a RLP, another for a green party, and a third for the social democrats? Which political attitudes might be the most important in determining vote choice between these types of parties? Do RLP voters differ from Green voters and SD voters, either demographically or attitudinally, in different ways?

In attempting to answer our question on the "sibling rivalry" of the voter on the political left, we have naturally chosen country cases where RLPs have long been in intense party competition with social democratic and green parties. Three of the most significant of these are found in Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands. We follow existing scholarship in defining RLPs as parties which share a commitment to a radical transformation of global capitalism, a prioritization of themes of social justice and economic equality, skepticism of transnational entities which bear the stamp of neo-liberalism (e.g., the EU), and a focus on the traditional working class (even while widening out the scope of their traditional clientele). RLPs advocate a thoroughgoing democratization of social, economic, and political life. Accordingly, as March (2011) and March and Keith (2016) argue, RLPs are "radical" in their commitment to a fundamental transformation of capitalism and "left" in their "identification of economic inequality as the basis of existing political and social arrangements" (March, 2011: 9). RLPs proudly place themselves to the left of social democrats and greens. Yet, the RLP party family is nevertheless quite heterogeneous: it includes unreformed, hard-core communists (both of the traditionalist as well as the "reform" communist variety) and more moderate "redgreen" democratic socialists-some of which closely resemble social democratic parties pre-1990, that is, before the advent of "third way" social democracy (March, 2011).

The democratic socialist subtype of RLPs we focus on here comprises parties that have more consistent leftlibertarian positions, combining traditional leftist themes of social equality and justice with varying degrees of support for environmentalism, alternative lifestyles, and immigrant communities and minorities. March and Keith (2016) slot the main RLPs in Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands in this subtype. Although the literature largely follows this classification, Damiani (2020) categorizes many of the same parties in March and Keith's democratic socialist subtype as "Populist Radical Left Parties" or PRLPs. Meanwhile, Gomez et al. (2016) divide the RLP party family into an "Old Left" and a "New Left," with the latter generally conforming to March and Keith's (2016) democratic socialist subtype. However, although they classify the German Linke and Sweden's Vänsterpartiet (Left Party) as "New Left" parties, they classify the Dutch SP as an "Old Left" party. Although this would seem to exclude the SP from this subtype-a conclusion which is at odds with much of the existing literature (see for example, Bouma, 2017; Chiocchetti, 2017; Lucardie and

Voerman, 2019; McGowan and Keith, 2016)-it is important to note that Gomez et al. (2016) also refer to the SP as a "borderline" case between New and Old Left. Given all of these considerations, we have chosen to follow March and Keith (2016) in seeing the Dutch SP, Swedish Left Party, and Germany's Die Linke as belonging to the democratic socialist subtype of RLPs. Moreover, these three cases are especially fitting for comparison, given the competitive party environment on the left side of the political spectrum in these three countries. Finally, we should note that the democratic socialist subtype includes the most significant RLPs in most European countries. Other subtypes—such as the "Conservative Communist" and "Reform Communist" groups-include parties (e.g., in France, the Czech Republic, and elsewhere) which have witnessed significant electoral decline in the last decade (March and Keith, 2016).

# Do we know who votes for RLPs?

The little existing research on RLPs and their voters shows some suggestive trends but also contradictory findings. March and Rommerskirchen (2015)-using "electoral success" as the dependent variable-conclude that some institutional factors (e.g., existing representation in parliament, higher multipartyism, the absence of an electoral threshold, and higher voter turnout) are key predictors of the RLP vote. Moreover, cultural factors (the legacy or absence of communist rule) and high unemployment are positively related to better electoral results from RLPs. Significantly, the authors also find that high opposition to the EU and the absence of competition from parties of the populist radical right and green parties also affect the RLP vote. That being said, these authors do not explore individual-level voter behavior and the question of why some voters would opt for RLPs rather than for SDs or Green parties.

As discussed briefly above, Gomez et al. (2016) distinguish between an "Old Left" subtype of RLPs and their voters and a "New Left" subtype distinguished primarily on the relative importance of materialist and postmaterialist issue areas. While they find that age and gender make littleto-no difference in the support given to these two different subtypes, they nevertheless also conclude that New Left RLPs are more successful with younger voters, those with higher levels of education, and the less religious. Furthermore, they find that supporters of Old Left RLPs are more hostile to the EU than New Left RLPs. Voters for both RLP subtypes identify strongly with the working class, have relatively high levels of union membership, and tend to be less wealthy (Gomez et al., 2016).

Visser et al. (2014) examined support for radical left ideologies in 32 European countries. Using data from the 2002 to 2010 European Social Surveys, they found that the unemployed, those with a lower income, and those who strongly favor reducing income differences/economic inequality are more likely to support a radical left ideology, with the latter measured by respondents' self-placement on the far left side (0-2) on a 10 point scale. However, in contrast to March and Rommerskirchen (2015) they found no relationship between a country's unemployment rate or lower level of national wealth and support for radical leftist views. Summarizing their findings, the authors state, "ideological convictions and voting behavior are not associated perfectly with regard to the radical left" (Visser et al., 2014: 555). Finally, it should be noted again, the authors did not specifically investigate voters for RLPs but rather those defined as having a radical left ideology. Since voters who classify themselves as "radical left" also do not fit perfectly with RLPs (i.e., an unspecified number could be expected to vote for green or social democratic parties instead of RLPs) this does not tell us much about the specific radical left party voter.

In the most comprehensive study of RLP voters in western Europe to date, Ramiro (2016) finds that identifying with the working class, being a union member, not belonging to any religion, having a strong left-wing ideology, and being dissatisfied with democracy all significantly increased the probability of voting for an RLP. Distinguishing between a so-called "core" RLP electorate and a "wide" RLP electorate, he also concludes that those with the highest level of educational attainment have the largest probability of voting RLP, with some differences between "core" and "wide" voters. Age, meanwhile, has no impact on the "core" electorate but in the "wide" electorate of RLPs the younger the voter, the higher the probability of voting RLP. However, Ramiro measures his dependent variable as a binary choice between RLPs and all other parties. By combining all other parties into a single group, the assumption is made that voters for all other parties differ from RLP voters in exactly the same way. This does not allow for a fruitful analysis which could distinguish between the RLP, social democratic, or green voter.

It is important to note that while existing scholarship hints at some possible differences in voters for social democrats, greens, and RLPs in a few crucial areas-both socio-demographically as well as attitudinally-there also appears to be substantial overlap between the voters for the three party types. This conclusion is borne out by analyses of electoral trends in each of these countries where the parties have traded voters over a number of election cycles (see for example Aylott and Bolin, 2019; de Lange, 2017; Mudde, 2021; Neu and Pokorny, 2017). Furthermore, socio-demographic data on RLPs and their voters (e.g., the effect of education, age, gender, etc.) in the existing literature is ambiguous and demonstrates contradictory findings, as do more macro factors, such as the overall unemployment rate in a country or levels of national wealth (March and Rommerskirchn, 2015; Ramiro, 2016; Visser et al., 2014). Indeed, Ramiro (2016) notes some very significant national variation in RLP voter demographics, such as gender and working-class identification. Beyond union membership, there appears to be no scholarly consensus on socio-demographic factors. The nexus between political attitudes and the RLP vote is also relatively sparse in the existing literature and shows some contradictory (or at least very nuanced) findings. For example, while Ramiro (2016) finds that being skeptical-to-hostile toward the EU is a significant predictor of the RLP vote, Beaudonnet and Gomez (2017) show that RLP voters are a "heterogeneous coalition" of traditional Eurosceptics and those who support the EU but were opposed to the EU's austerity politics in the wake of the European financial and debt crisis. Given that some of the findings on the RLP voter are ambiguous, in our analysis we test some commonly used sociodemographic variables and political attitudes among RLP, social democratic, and green voters when attempting to disentangle the vote on the left.

# The cases

As March and Rommerskirchen (2015) make clear, not every European democracy has an electorally relevant SD, Green party, or RLP in competition for the left-ofcenter vote. Three of the most significant countries are Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands, and we have therefore chosen these as our cases.

In Germany, the *Linke* (Left Party or LP) is the only electorally relevant RLP. It grew out of a merger between a faction on the left within the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in western Germany who broke from the party over labor-market reforms under former Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, and the ex-communist Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), chiefly concentrated in eastern Germany (Hough et al., 2007; Olsen, 2007; Patton, 2012). Since the early 1980s the SPD has been in competition for the leftwing vote with Alliance '90 /The Greens and since the early 1990s the Greens and SPD in competition with each other and with the PDS/LP. All three of these parties have similar, although certainly not identical party profiles. While the cumulative vote for all three parties has declined since 2002, this can be traced almost solely to the weakness of the SPD. Thus, even though the SPD's vote share has declined precipitously, the Greens and Linke have largely maintained their share of the vote over the last five election cycles, with each of these parties garnering between 4%and 11% of the vote with a median share during this period of 8.6%.

In Sweden, the main RLP is *Vänsterpartiet* (Left Party), also belonging to the democratic socialist subtype. The Left Party has its origins in the old Communist Party, established in 1917, but distanced itself from Moscow in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Arter, 1999, 2001). In 1990 it changed its name (and its direction) to the Left Party (Arter 2002). Although never entering into a coalition (nor a more formal "support" agreement) with the Swedish Social

Democrats (SAP), the party continuously buttressed the SAP from 1958 through 1990, and in the early 2000s had a more institutionalized support party arrangement with the SAP. The Green Party, meanwhile, was established in 1981 and won its first seats in parliament in 1988. The relationship between the Greens and the Left Party is particularly complicated, with a quite similar ideological and policy profile (Koß, 2010). As in Germany, the left bloc of parties in Sweden has seen its cumulative share of the vote decline from 2002 to 2020, primarily because of a drop in the vote for the Social Democrats. The Greens and Left Party have been relatively stable, with a median vote of just under 6% during this period.

In the Netherlands the story is a bit more complicated. Although overall the social democrats (PvdA) have seen their vote decline from 15.11% in 2002 to a disastrous 5.7% of the vote in the 2017 election, they have also scored well in several elections from 2002 to 2020-for example in 2003 when they garnered 27.26% and 2012 when they scored 24.84%. Their main RLP challenger, the SP (Socialist Party), emerged as a small Maoist party in the early 1970s before it dramatically changed course in the early 1990s. The SP had a spectacular performance in the 2006 election, where it netted 16.6% of the vote (largely siphoning off PvdA voters), before dropping back to just under 10% in the next election (Keith, 2016). It has held steady in subsequent elections since that time. Finally, the main Green/left-libertarian party, Groenlinks, is the product of a 1970s merger of four small struggling radical left parties before it moderated substantially in the 1990s, changes which represented a decisive break with its socialist and anti-establishment past (Keith, 2016). It too has had a reliable share of the vote (between around 5% and 9%) with the exception of the 2012 election, where it dipped to 2.3%. In the early 2000s, the SP mostly competed with the PvdA (and right-wing populist parties) for the traditional working-class vote. In the last several election cycles, it has also been more of a direct competitor with the Groenlinks as well as with the PvdA.

As can be seen in Figure 1, both RLPs and Green parties in all three countries have had some minor ebbs and flows but for the most part have been electorally stable, with the green parties generally fluctuating a bit more than the various RLPs. Meanwhile Social democratic parties in all three countries have seen a decline in vote share over this period, particularly in the last election cycle. The cumulative decline of left-of-center parties—a left block, if you will—from 2002 to 2020 is almost solely attributable to the poor performance of Social democratic parties.

# Methodology

#### Data

The empirical analysis uses the biennial European Social Survey (ESS) from 2002 to 2018 (ESS, 2020). The ESS is



Figure 1. Election results for social democratic, green and radical left parties in Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands, 2002–2020..

an ongoing study measuring socio-demographics and attitudes of respondents in European countries since 2002. The survey represents some of the largest collections of individual-level data related to Europeans' political attitudes currently available and includes questions specifically about national level vote choice. Further, the longitudinal dimension of the study allows for researchers to track attitudes over a large period of time. Since the ESS provides post-stratification weights (with design weights added), all statistical modeling incorporates the weights into the estimation. With the exception of Sweden in 2018, citizens are surveyed from all three countries in every wave of the survey.

# Dependent variable

The dependent variable indicates the political party that the respondent said they most recently voted for in the previous election.<sup>1</sup> In Germany and Sweden, there are eight possible political party choices and, in the Netherlands, there are nine. The variable is measured at the nominal level. For each country, the list of political parties, their abbreviations, and the party family that each of them belong to are provided in Appendix B.

Some previous studies have measured the dependent variable as a binary choice, either a respondent voted for the far-left party or they voted for any other party (Doerschler and Banaszak, 2007; Ramiro, 2016). As noted above, a serious problem here is that this measurement choice has important assumptions that do not hold empirically. To be blunt: by combining voters for all other parties into a single group there is an assumption that voters for all other parties differ from RLP voters in the exact way. This presupposes, for example, that voters for Social democratic parties differ from RLP voters in the exact same way that voters for RRPs differ from voters for RLPs. For our analysis here of the left-wing voter, measuring the dependent variable as a binary choice presupposes that voters for Green parties differ from RLP voters in the exact same way that voters for Social democratic parties differ from RLP voters. We cannot assume that this proposition holds. Combining voters into one category as a binary choice sacrifices the ability to explore critically important variations in vote choice.

## Independent variables

There are several socio-demographic variables included in the empirical analysis as predictors of vote choice so that we can test previous findings. For example, and as discussed above, Ramiro (2016) finds that education and age are predictors of RLP voting in the "wide" electorate. In addition, Hansen and Olsen (2019) find that in Germany union membership distinguishes voters for the Left party over other parties. Hence, we utilize all of the important socio-demographic variables that are commonly used for predicting vote choice (Hansen and Olsen, 2020a). In Appendix A, we provide variable coding for all independent variables. For socio-demographics, we explore how age, gender, education, income, employment status, and union membership impact vote choice in Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden.

More importantly though, there are six main attitudinal variables that we utilize as predictors of vote choice in the three countries which constitute the focus of our analysis. First, the general literature on electoral behavior points out that interest in politics has an impact on vote choice. Second, we include a measure that represents an individual's level of trust in the European Union, since studies have found that RLP voters are EU-skeptical if not EU-hostile (Gomez et al., 2016; Ramiro, 2016) while others (Beaudonnet and Gomez, 2017) have a more nuanced story to tell on RLP voters' attitudes toward the EU.<sup>2</sup> Third, we include a self-placement measure of political ideology. The RLP voting literature indicates that voters for RLPs are on the

far-left end of the political spectrum (Hansen and Olsen, 2019; Ramiro, 2016). However, the reverse proposition all far-left end voters vote for RLPs—most assuredly does not hold.

Next, a variable that seeks to measure attitudes toward immigrants is included. In particular, since immigration issues have been increasingly prevalent in determining vote choice in the three countries over the last 20 years due the refugee crisis and a rise in identity politics (Hansen and Olsen, 2020b), we include a measure that probes negative attitudes toward immigrants. In sum, we estimate using factor analysis a latent variable called anti-immigrant sentiment using five questions that asks about attitudes toward immigrants. The questions that asks about attitudes toward immigrants. The questions that asks about attitudes toward into the country from and the impact that immigrants have on the economy, culture, and country overall. The variables were highly correlated and when calculating Cronbach's Alpha, the scores were above 0.80 for all countries and years.

Similarly, anti-establishment sentiment in Europe has increased over the last 20 years. In addition, antiestablishment sentiment in the form of hostility toward, or dissatisfaction with, democracy are identifying qualities of radical parties (Hansen and Olsen, 2019; Ramiro, 2016). Therefore, we include a variable that asks respondents about their level of satisfaction with democracy.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, the analysis includes a variable that represents a traditional left-right attitudinal measure on economic inequality. Addressing economic inequality has been seen in the existing literature as one of the main attitudinal characteristics of the radical left voter (March and Rommerskirchen, 2011; March and Keith, 2016; Ramiro, 2016; Visser et al., 2014). In particular, we utilize a question regarding whether the respondent thinks it is the government's job to take an active role in reducing income disparity. The respondents provide their level of agreement with the statement.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the independent variables listed here, we include three interactions terms. There are terms in the models calculating interacting relationships between political ideology and satisfaction with democracy, political ideology and anti-immigrant sentiment, and political ideology and reducing income disparity.<sup>5</sup> The usefulness of the interaction terms is that they allow for a more in-depth analysis into RLP voters. While we know that RLPs, Greens, and Social democratic parties are going to capture some proportion of voters on the far-left of the political spectrum, and that RLP voters might be statistically more to the left on average, we know less about what distinguishes these voters at the far end. The interaction terms in the model will allow for us to calculate the actual differences between voters on the far-left that cast votes for competing parties.

As an example, consider three contrasting scenarios. In scenario one, Social democratic party voters at all positions

on the ideological spectrum are more satisfied with democracy than are their identically positioned RLP voting counterparts. In scenario two, Social democratic party voters are more satisfied with democracy than are RLP voters on average, but that finding only exists because of the large proportion of Social democratic voters in the middle of the ideological spectrum that are satisfied with democracy. However, there might not be any difference between voters on the far-left in terms of predicting vote for the RLP or Social democratic party. In scenario three, Social democratic party voters are more satisfied with democracy than are RLP voters on average, but that result only exists for voters at the far-left of the political spectrum. The interaction terms will allow us to delve into these competing empirical results. For instance, using the estimates from the interaction terms, we are able to calculate predicted probabilities for vote choice at several ideological positions, for all levels of satisfaction with democracy, and compare any differences directly.

## Statistical method

In sum, one model is estimated for each country from the time period 2002 to 2018 in order to predict vote choice. Since the dependent variable in the analysis is vote choice in the three countries, and there are more than two choices in each country, vote choice is measured as a nominal level variable. Therefore, the most appropriate statistical tool for estimating the relationship between the dependent and independent variables is multinomial logistic regression. The reference category for the dependent variable is voting for the RLP since our inquiry involves exploring how voters for the RLPs differ from voters for each of the other political party options. Therefore, each coefficient allows for the direct comparison voters for each comparison party to voters for the RLP. The models include year dummy variables in order to account for year variation.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, it is worth mentioning that as a robustness check multivariate multinomial logistic regression models were also estimated using fixed effects in order to account for the non-randomness that exists in particular survey years.<sup>7</sup> The results were substantively the same. Similarly, as a robustness check individual yearly models were estimated in order to verify the results from the full models.<sup>8</sup> The results were substantively similar. For ease of presentation and interpretation, the more frequently used multinomial logistic regression models are presented.

# Results

## Socio-demographics and vote choice

Tables 1 to 3 summarize the results from the multinomial logistic regression models predicting vote choice in Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden. Significantly, the

Table 1. Germany second vote choice (2002-2018)-ref category: PDS/The Linke.

	Green	SPD	CDU	FDP	AfD	Other
Constant	0.00* (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)
Age	-0.01* (0.00)	0.01* (0.00)	0.01* (0.00)	-0.01 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.02* (0.00)
Woman	0.55* (0.08)	0.22* (0.07)	0.61* (0.08)	0.26* (0.09)	0.33* (0.11)́	0.29* (0.10)
Education	0.12* (0.05)	-0.20* (0.04)	0.01 (0.05)	0.08 (0.05)	-0.10 (0.07)	0.02 (0.06)
Income	0.02 (0.02)	-0.04* (0.02)	0.04* (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)
Unemployed	-0.37* (0.08)	-0.30* (0.08)	-0.38* (0.08)	-0.28* (0.10)	-0.25* (0.12)	-0.10 (0.11)
Union Member	_0.91* (0.08)	-0.59* (0.07)	−1.04* (0.08)	– I.07* (0.09)	—0.97* (0.11)	-1.04* (0.11)
Political Interest	-0.04 (0.06)	-0.04 (0.05)	-0.08 (0.05)	0.14* (0.06)	-0.05 (0.07)	-0.11 (0.07)
Trust in EU	0.04 (0.02)	0.03* (0.02)	0.04* (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)
Political Ideology	-0.37* (0.07)	-0.46* (0.06)	0.42* (0.05)	0.35* (0.06)	0.45* (0.08)	0.21* (0.08)
Anti-Immigrant Sentiment	-0.23* (0.10)	0.52* (0.08)	I.53* (0.11)	I.4I* (0.I4)	0.57* (0.15)	0.17 (0.12)
Satisfaction w/ Democracy	0.29* (0.04)	0.41* (0.04)	0.17* (0.04)	0.21* (0.06)	0.16* (0.06)	0.05 (0.05)
Reduce Income Disparity	-0.58* (0.07)	-0.80* (0.06)	-0.66* (0.07)	-0.77* (0.09)	-0.11 (0.11)	-0.27* (0.10)
Ideology: Anti-Immigrant	0.00* (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Ideology: Sat w/ Democracy	0.00* (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Ideology: Disparity	0.00* (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
N						13,228
PRE						0.189
ePRE						0.085
Akaike Inf. Crit.						35,306.2

\*Indicates statistical significance at p < 0.05; standard errors in parentheses.

results indicate that there are no clear socio-demographic trends in vote choice across the three countries. In Germany, Social democratic voters are on average older, more likely to be women, at lower education levels, lower income levels, less likely to be employed, and less likely to be union members in comparison to *Linke* voters. In comparison, Green voters in Germany are on average younger, more likely to be women, more highly educated, less likely to be unemployed and less likely to be union members in comparison to Left Party voters.

In the Netherlands, there are only two sociodemographic differences between Social democratic and RLP voters. In particular, PvdA voters are at higher income levels and more likely to be members of a union when compared to SP voters. *Groenlinks* voters are more likely to be older, more highly educated, and at higher income levels in comparison to SP voters. The results in the Netherlands do not follow the same pattern as in Germany.

In Sweden, we find even fewer socio-demographic differences between voters for the parties on the left side of the political spectrum. Voters for the Greens and SAP are on average older than are voters for the Left Party. However, there are no other differences between Green and RLP voters. Meanwhile, Social democratic party voters are on average at lower education levels and more likely to be members of a union. Overall, the results from the three vote choice models highlight once again contradictory findings from the existing literature and point to a significant weakness in the predictability power of socio-demographic variables on vote choice.

# Attitudes and vote choice

For political interest, in the Netherlands and Sweden, voters for Social democratic parties are less interested in politics than are RLP voters. However, across the three countries there are no differences in political interest between Green party and RLP voters. The results provide some evidence that RLP voters view themselves as more interested in politics than do voters for the more traditional, catch-all parties.

In all three countries, social democratic party voters have a higher level of trust in the EU, a result that largely aligns with previous research. In the Netherlands and Sweden, Green party voters also have a higher level of trust in the EU. These preliminary results indicate that voters for the RLP might cast their vote for these parties out of dissatisfaction with the EU in contrast to social democratic and green voters.

# Attitudes and vote choice—Comparing far left voters

The results from the interactions between the three attitudinal variables and political ideology to predict vote choice in Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden are a bit more difficult to interpret from the coefficients in Tables 1 to 3 and do not give us a completely clear picture on what distinguishes the RLP voter from the social democratic or green voter. The interaction terms require additional investigation in order to understand the substantive impact that the interactions have on vote choice. Therefore, we plot the predicted probabilities of the three interactions terms for all three countries.<sup>9</sup> In particular, since we want to uncover

	GL	PvdA	D66	٨٧D	CDA	CU	PVV	Other
Constant	-0.00* (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)
Age	0.01* (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.02* (0.00)	0.03* (0.00)	00.0) 10.0	-0.01 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.00)
Woman	0.13 (0.09)	-0.04 (0.08)	-0.07 (0.10)	-0.06 (0.09)	-0.02 (0.10)	0.05 (0.11)	-0.10 (0.10)	0.03 (0.10)
Education	0.25* (0.06)	-0.07 (0.06)	0.18* (0.06)	0.15* (0.06)	-0.14* (0.07)	0.17* (0.07)	-0.28* (0.09)	-0.04 (0.08)
Income	0.09* (0.02)	0.07* (0.02)	0.17* (0.02)	0.35* (0.02)	0.14* (0.02)	0.12* (0.03)	0.11* (0.02)	0.07* (0.02)
Unemployed	0.13 (0.11)	0.02 (0.11)	-0.06 (0.11)	-0.05 (0.11)	-0.32* (0.12)	-0.06 (0.14)	0.00 (0.12)	-0.00 (0.12)
Union Member	-0.06 (0.10)	0.28* (0.09)	-0.12 (0.10)	-0.25* (0.09)	-0.09 (0.10)	-0.02 (0.12)	0.06 (0.11)	-0.09 (0.11)
Political Interest	0.09 (0.07)	-0.17* (0.06)	0.19* (0.07)	-0.05 (0.07)	-0.16* (0.07)	-0.02 (0.08)	-0.09 (0.07)	0.03 (0.07)
Trust in EU	0.10* (0.03)	0.16* (0.02)	0.20* (0.03)	0.10* (0.03)	0.19* (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)	0.05 (0.03)
Political Ideology	0.09 (0.08)	-0.23* (0.07)	0.25* (0.07)	0.76* (0.05)	0.51* (0.07)	0.41* (0.08)	0.49* (0.07)	0.43* (0.06)
Anti-Immigrant Sentiment	-0.34* (0.09)	0.03 (0.08)	-0.02 (0.11)	0.27* (0.11)	0.29* (0.12)	-0.03 (0.14)	0.12 (0.11)	-0.14 (0.10)
Satisfaction w/ Democracy	0.02 (0.06)	0.22* (0.05)	0.13 (0.08)	-0.28* (0.07)	-0.01 (0.09)	-0.03 (0.14)	0.12 (0.11)	-0.14 (0.10)
Reduce Income Disparity	0.08 (0.10)	-0.21* (0.08)	-0.37* (0.10)	-0.44* (0.09)	-0.57* (0.11)	-0.18 (0.13)	-0.17 (0.11)	-0.22* (0.10)
Ideology: Anti-Immigrant	-0.00* (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)
Ideology: Sat w/ Democracy	-0.00* (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)
Ideology: Disparity	-0.00* (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)
Z								10,126
PRE								0.209
ePRE								0.107
Akaike Inf. Crit.								34,954.2

\*Indicates statistical significance at p < 0.05; standard errors in parentheses.

 Table 2. Netherlands vote choice (2002–2018)—ref category: socialist party.

MP         SAP         C         L         M         CD         SD         Other           Constant         -0.00 (000)         0.00* (0.00)         -0.00* (0.00)	I anie 3. Swedell vote ciloice		regoi y. vuisterpurte	L					
$ \begin{array}{cccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccc$		ЧΡ	SAP	С	L	Σ	CD	SD	Other
Age         0.03* (0.00)         0.02* (0.00)         0.02* (0.00)         0.03* (0.0)         0.03* (0.0)         0.03* (0.0)         0.03* (0.0)         0.03* (0.0)         0.03* (0.0)         0.03* (0.0)         0.03* (0.0)         0.03* (0.0)         0.03* (0.0) <th0.03* (0.0)<="" th="">         0.03* (0.0)         0.03* (0.0)         0.03* (0.0)         0.03* (0.0)         0.03* (0.0)         0.03* (0.0)         0.03* (0.0)         0.03* (0.0)         0.03* (0.0)         0.03* (0.0)         0.03* (0.0)         0.03* (0.0)         0.03* (0.0)         0.03* (0.0)         0.03* (0.0)         0.03* (0.0)         0.03* (0.0)</th0.03*>	Constant	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)
Woman         0.20 (0.10)         -0.13 (0.03)         0.01 (0.11)         0.19 (0.10)         -0.02 (0.12)         0.02 (0.13)         0.02 (0.13)         0.02 (0.13)         0.02 (0.13)         0.02 (0.13)         0.02 (0.13)         0.01 (0.03)         0.03 (0.03)         0.01 (0.03)         <	Age	0.03* (0.00)	0.02* (0.00)	0.02* (0.00)	0.03* (0.00)	0.03* (0.00)	0.03* (0.00)	0.02* (0.00)	0.03* (0.00)
Education         0.10 (0.06)         -0.29* (0.05)         -0.12 (0.07)         0.17* (0.06)         0.03 (0.03)         0.01 (0.07)         -0.06 (0.08)         0.01 (0.03)         0.03 (0.03)         0.03 (0.03)         0.03 (0.03)         0.01 (0.03)         0.03 (0.03)         0.01 (0.03)         0.03 (0.03)         0.01 (0.03)	Woman	0.20 (0.10)	-0.13 (0.08)	0.01 (0.11)	0.19 (0.10)	-0.12 (0.10)	-0.00 (0.12)	-0.20 (0.12)	0.02 (0.12)
Income         -0.02 (0.02)         0.02 (0.02)         0.03 (0.11)         -0.03 (0.13)         0.03 (0.13)         0.03 (0.13)         0.03 (0.13)         0.03 (0.11)         -0.11 (0.13)         0.03 (0.13)         0.03 (0.13)         0.03 (0.13)         0.03 (0.13)         0.03 (0.11)         -0.11 (0.13)         0.03 (0.11)         -0.11 (0.13)         0.03 (0.11)         -0.01 (0.03)         0.01 (0.11)         -0.01 (0.03)         0.01 (0.11)         -0.01 (0.03)         0.01 (0.11)         -0.01 (0.03)         0.01 (0.11)         -0.01 (0.03)         0.01 (0.11)         -0.01 (0.03)         0.01 (0.11)         -0.01 (0.03)         0.01 (0.11)         -0.01 (0.03)         0.01 (0.11)         -0.01 (0.03)         0.01 (0.03) </td <td>Education</td> <td>0.10 (0.06)</td> <td>-0.29* (0.05)</td> <td>-0.12 (0.07)</td> <td>0.17* (0.06)</td> <td>0.03 (0.06)</td> <td>0.11 (0.07)</td> <td>-0.06 (0.08)</td> <td>-0.11 (0.08)</td>	Education	0.10 (0.06)	-0.29* (0.05)	-0.12 (0.07)	0.17* (0.06)	0.03 (0.06)	0.11 (0.07)	-0.06 (0.08)	-0.11 (0.08)
Unemployed         0.05 (0.11)         -0.06 (0.09)         -0.20 (0.13)         -0.03 (0.11)         -0.11 (0.11)         0.05 (0.13)         0.02 (0.13)         0.04 (0.13)         0.01 (0.13)         0.01 (0.13)         0.01 (0.13)         0.01 (0.13)         0.01 (0.13)         0.01 (0.13)         0.01 (0.13)         0.01 (0.13)         0.01 (0.13)         0.01 (0.13)         0.01 (0.13)         0.01 (0.13)         0.01 (0.13)         0.01 (0.13)         0.01 (0.13)         0.01 (0.03)	Income	-0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	0.08* (0.02)	0.14* (0.02)	0.02 (0.03)	0.03 (0.02)	0.03 (0.03)
Union Member         -0.14 (0.11)         0.44* (0.09)         -0.01 (0.10)         -0.07 (0.09)         -0.16* (0.7)         -0.01 (0.11)         0.01 (0.11)         -0.01 (0.03) </td <td>Unemployed</td> <td>0.05 (0.11)</td> <td>-0.06 (0.09)</td> <td>-0.20 (0.13)</td> <td>-0.03 (0.11)</td> <td>-0.11 (0.11)</td> <td>0.05 (0.13)</td> <td>0.02 (0.13)</td> <td>0.04 (0.13)</td>	Unemployed	0.05 (0.11)	-0.06 (0.09)	-0.20 (0.13)	-0.03 (0.11)	-0.11 (0.11)	0.05 (0.13)	0.02 (0.13)	0.04 (0.13)
Political Interest         -0.10 (0.07)         -0.25* (0.6)         -0.11 (0.08)         0.14* (0.07)         -0.15* (0.06)         0.06 (0.08)         -0.01 (0.08)         -0.01 (0.08)         -0.01 (0.08)         -0.01 (0.03)         0.075 (0.03)         0.007 (0.03)         0.01 (0.03)         0.0	Union Member	-0.14 (0.11)	0.44* (0.09)	-0.01 (0.10)	-0.07 (0.09)	-0.16* (0.07)	-0.05 (0.11)	0.01 (0.11)	-0.11 (0.13)
Trust in EU       0.09* (0.03)       0.14* (0.02)       0.07* (0.03)       0.07* (0.03)       0.07* (0.03)       0.00       (0.03)       0.01 (0.03)       0.01 (0.03)       0.01 (0.03)       0.01 (0.03)       0.010 (0.03)       0.02 (0.03)       0.010 (0.03)       0.011 (0.03)       0.02* (0.01)       0.05* (0.01)       0.05* (0.01)       0.05* (0.01)       0.025* (0.10)       0.05* (0.10)       0.05* (0.10)       0.05* (0.10)       0.05* (0.10)       0.05* (0.10)       0.025* (0.10)       0.025* (0.10)       0.025* (0.10)       0.025* (0.10)       0.025* (0.11)       0.05* (0.01)       0.025* (0.10)       0.026* (0.00)       0.00* (0.00)       0.00* (0.00)       0.00* (0.00)       0.00* (0.00)       0.00* (0.00)       0.00* (0.00)       0.00* (0.00)       0.00* (0.	Political Interest	-0.10 (0.07)	-0.25* (0.06)	-0.11 (0.08)	0.14* (0.07)	-0.15* (0.06)	0.05 (0.08)	-0.01 (0.08)	-0.00 (0.08)
Political Ideology         0.01 (0.10)         -0.75* (0.09)         0.41* (0.09)         0.42* (0.08)         0.75* (0.07)         0.62* (0.10)         0.36* (0.10)         0.35* (0.10)         0.25* (0.10)         0.35* (0.10)         0.35* (0.10)         0.25* (0.10)         0.35* (0.10)         0.25* (0.10)         0.35* (0.10)         0.01 (0.12)         -0.19 (0.12)         0.01 (0.12)         0.01 (0.12)         -0.19 (0.12)         0.01 (0.12)         -0.19 (0.12)         0.01 (0.12)         -0.19 (0.12)         0.01 (0.12)         -0.19 (0.12)         -0.19 (0.12)         -0.03 (0.06)         0.001 (0.14)         0.21 (0.12)         -0.015 (0.10)         0.35* (0.10)         0.02 (0.05)         0.11 (0.12)         -0.03 (0.06)         0.01 (0.14)         0.21 (0.12)         -0.017 (0.12)         -0.019 (0.12)         -0.019 (0.14)         0.02 (0.00)         0.008 (0.00)         0.01 (0.14)         0.015 (0.10)         0.016 (0.01)         0.016 (0.01)         0.016 (0.01)         0.016 (0.01)         0.016 (0.01)         0.016 (0.01)         0.016 (0.00)         0.007 (0.14)         0.016 (0.01)         0.016 (0.00)         0.016 (0.00)         0.016 (0.00)         0.016 (0.00)         0.016 (0.00)         0.016 (0.00)         0.016 (0.00)         0.008 (0.00)         0.008 (0.00)         0.008 (0.00)         0.008 (0.00)         0.008 (0.00)         0.008 (0.00)         0.008 (0.00) <td>Trust in EU</td> <td>0.09* (0.03)</td> <td>0.14* (0.02)</td> <td>0.07* (0.03)</td> <td>0.10* (0.03)</td> <td>0.07* (0.03)</td> <td>0.02 (0.03)</td> <td>0.05 (0.03)</td> <td>0.01 (0.03)</td>	Trust in EU	0.09* (0.03)	0.14* (0.02)	0.07* (0.03)	0.10* (0.03)	0.07* (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)	0.05 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)
Anti-Immigrant Sentiment       -0.17 (0.11)       0.56* (0.08)       0.03 (0.13)       0.02 (0.12)       0.07 (0.15)       0.11 (0.12)       -0.19 (0.12)         Satisfaction w/ Democracy       0.02 (0.05)       0.15* (0.04)       -0.05 (0.07)       -0.16* (0.07)       -0.07 (0.07)       -0.08 (0.06)         Reduce Income Disparity       -0.14 (0.12)       -0.57* (0.09)       -0.05 (0.07)       -0.16* (0.07)       -0.16* (0.07)       -0.16* (0.07)       -0.07 (0.07)       -0.08 (0.06)         Reduce Income Disparity       -0.14 (0.12)       -0.57* (0.09)       -0.05 (0.00)       -0.06* (0.00)       -0.07* (0.07)       -0.19 (0.15)       -0.010 (0.14)         Ideology: Anti-Immigrant       -0.00* (0.00)       0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)         Ideology: Sat w/ Democracy       0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)         N       -0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)       0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00) <td>Political Ideology</td> <td>0.01 (0.10)</td> <td>-0.75* (0.09)</td> <td>0.41* (0.09)</td> <td>0.42* (0.08)</td> <td>0.75* (0.07)</td> <td>0.62* (0.10)</td> <td>0.36* (0.10)</td> <td>0.25* (0.11)</td>	Political Ideology	0.01 (0.10)	-0.75* (0.09)	0.41* (0.09)	0.42* (0.08)	0.75* (0.07)	0.62* (0.10)	0.36* (0.10)	0.25* (0.11)
Satisfaction w/ Democracy       0.02 (0.05)       0.15* (0.04)       -0.05 (0.07)       -0.16* (0.07)       -0.15* (0.07)       -0.08 (0.06)         Reduce Income Disparity       -0.14 (0.12)       -0.57* (0.09)       -0.234 (0.14)       -0.52* (0.12)       -0.16 (0.15)       -0.00 (0.14)         Reduce Income Disparity       -0.14 (0.12)       -0.57* (0.09)       -0.026 (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)         Ideology: Anti-Immigrant       -0.014 (0.12)       -0.57* (0.09)       -0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0.00)         Ideology: Sat w/ Democracy       -0.00* (0.00)       0.00* (0.00)       0.00* (0.00)       -0.00* (0	Anti-Immigrant Sentiment	-0.17 (0.11)	0.56* (0.08)	0.03 (0.13)	0.05 (0.13)	0.21 (0.12)	0.07 (0.15)	0.11 (0.12)	-0.19 (0.12)
Reduce Income Disparity         -0.14         (0.12)         -0.57*         (0.09)         -0.23         (0.14)         -0.52*         (0.12)         -0.10         (0.15)         -0.00         (0.01)           Ideology: Anti-Immigrant         -0.014         (0.00)         -0.00*         (0.00)         -0.00	Satisfaction w/ Democracy	0.02 (0.05)	0.15* (0.04)	-0.05 (0.07)	-0.16* (0.07)	-0.27* (0.07)	-0.15 (0.10)	-0.07 (0.07)	-0.08 (0.06)
Ideology: Anti-Immigrant -0.00* (0.00) 0.00* (0.00) -0.00* (0.00) -0.00* (0.00) -0.00* (0.00) -0.00* (0.00) -0.00* (0.00) Ideology: Sat w/ Democracy -0.00* (0.00) 0.00* (0.00) -0.00* (	Reduce Income Disparity	-0.14 (0.12)	-0.57* (0.09)	-0.25 (0.15)	-0.34 (0.14)	-0.52* (0.12)	-0.24 (0.18)	-0.10 (0.15)	-0.00 (0.14)
Ideology: Sat w/ Democracy -0.00* (0.00) 0.00* (0.00) -0.00* (0.00) -0.00* (0.00) -0.00* (0.00) -0.00* (0.00) 0.00* (0.00) Ideology: Disparity -0.00* (0.00) 0.00* (0.00) -0.00* (0.00) -0.00* (0.00) -0.00* (0.00) 0.00* (0.00) N -0.00* (0.00) -0.00* (0.00) -0.00* (0.00) -0.00* (0.00) 0.286 PRE 0.286 PRE 0.129 -0.10* Combined to the context of the cont	Ideology: Anti-Immigrant	-0.00* (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00*(0.00)
Ideology: Disparity –0.00* (0.00) –0.00* (0.00) –0.00* (0.00) –0.00* (0.00) –0.00* (0.00) –0.00* (0.00) –0.00* (0.00) –0.00* (0.00) N –0.00* (0.00) –0.00* (	Ideology: Sat w/ Democracy	-0.00* (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00*(0.00)
N PRE ePRE ePRE 0.129 27,558.3	Ideology: Disparity	-0.00* (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00*(0.00)
PRE         0.286           ePRE         0.129           Akaike Inf. Crit.         27,558.3	Z								9,128
ePRE 0.129 Akaike Inf. Crit.	PRE								0.286
27,558.3 27,558.3	ePRE								0.129
	Akaike Inf. Crit.								27,558.3

which attitudes predict casting a vote for one of these parties, we isolate the RLP, green party, and social democratic party in each country and provide a direction comparison of the probability of vote choice change for voters on the far left (voters that indicate a 0 on a 0–10 scale) on the three variables and vote choice probabilities for the interactions.

In the top panel of Figure 2, we present the change in vote choice probability for voters on the far left of the ideological spectrum (voters that indicate a 0 on a 0-10 scale) when going from complete dissatisfaction with democracy to complete satisfaction with democracy. We present these voters in particular because the attitudinal variables have their greatest impact on these voters, and they are the voters with the highest probability on average of voting for left-wing parties. However, in Figures 3 to 5 we present predictions for voters at all levels of political ideology. The results from Figure 2 indicate that as a citizen moves from being dissatisfied with democracy to satisfied with democracy the probability of voting for the RLP decreases by between 0.15 and 0.6 in all three countries, with the larger being in Germany. The probability change in voting for the Green parties produces mixed results. In comparison, the probability change in voting for the Social democratic parties is an increase of 0.3 to 0.6 when moving toward complete satisfaction with democracy. Clearly, satisfaction with democracy has a large substantive impact on whether a citizen on the left of the spectrum casts a vote for the RLP or Social democratic party. The same clear picture does not hold for green parties.

In the middle panel of Figure 2, we again isolate voters on the far left of the ideological spectrum. Here, the probability change in vote choice is presented for these voters when moving from strong pro-immigrant attitudes to strong anti-immigrant attitudes. The results indicate that there is a decrease in vote choice of greater than 0.2 in Germany and 0.3 in Sweden in voting for the RLP when moving to strong anti-immigrant attitudes. In the Netherlands, the trend is the reverse and there is an increase of voting for the RLP of 0.1. In all three countries, the probability change in voting for the Green party decreases by 0.3 on average when moving toward anti-immigrant attitudes. In Germany, there is no change in vote choice probability for the Social democratic party on the variable. However, in the Netherlands and Sweden there is an increase in the probability of voting for the Social democratic parties when moving toward strong anti-immigrant attitudes by 0.1 and 0.6 respectively.

The bottom panel of Figure 2 provides undoubtedly the clearest differences between ideologically far-left voters for the three parties. Here, the change in vote choice probability is provided comparing strong disagreement with the attitude that the government should reduce inequality to strong agreement. First, for all three countries, there is an increase in vote choice for RLPs when moving toward strong agreement that the government should reduce inequality. On average, the increase in the probability of

vote choice for RLPs is around 0.25. In comparison, in all three countries there is only a slight increase in the probability of voting or the Green party of 0.08. Finally, in all three countries there is a decrease in the probability of voting for the Social democratic party when moving toward strong agreement that the government should reduce income inequality. For instance, in Sweden the change in probability is a decrease of 0.38.

In Figure 3, the probability of voting for the RLP, green, and social democratic parties in each of the three countries are displayed for the political ideology variable at different levels of satisfaction with democracy. Unlike Figure 2, Figure 3 (and Figures 4 and 5) present the predicted probability of voting for the left-wing parties for voters at all levels of political ideology. When comparing Social democratic parties and RLPs across the three countries, the same trend exists: as a citizen that identifies on the far left of the political spectrum goes from being completely dissatisfied with democracy to completely satisfied, the probability that they will vote for the RLP decreases, while the probability that they will vote for the Social democratic party increases dramatically.

For example, in Germany the probability that a citizen that identifies at a zero on the 0-10 ideological scale, and is completely dissatisfied with democracy, will vote for the Left Party is 0.6. In comparison, the same citizen has a probability that is three times smaller (0.2) of voting for the SPD. The probability of voting for the Left Party for a citizen at the same ideological position is three times smaller (0.2) for a citizen that is neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with democracy. However, the same citizen is more than two times more likely to vote for the SPD (0.45). Finally, for a voter at the same ideological position, the probability of voting for the Linke decreases to zero when completely satisfied with democracy. The probability that the same citizen votes for the SPD is around 0.8. In sum, a voter on the far-left and who is completely dissatisfied with democracy is 60% more likely to vote for the Left Party than is a citizen in the same ideological position that is completely satisfied with democracy. On the other hand, a citizen on the far-left that is completely dissatisfied with democracy is four times less likely to vote for the SPD than is a citizen in the same ideological position that is completely satisfied with democracy. Overall, the probability of voting for the Linke decreases for all citizens who place their political ideology between 0 and 6 on the scale as their satisfaction with democracy increases. The reverse trend exists for voting for the SPD. There are almost no trends when exploring the voting for the Greens.

The results for the Netherlands are equally compelling. Let us again isolate voters on the far-left of the ideological spectrum. A citizen that is completely dissatisfied with democracy has a probability of voting for the SP of between 0.3 and 0.5. In comparison, the same voter only has a probability of between 0.08 and 0.18 of voting for the



Figure 2. Probability change in vote choice for voters on the far left ideologically.



Figure 3. The interactive effect of political ideology and satisfaction w/ democracy on vote choice among left parties (2002–2018).









PvdA. For citizens that are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with democracy, the probability of voting for the SP is similar at 0.4 and increases to about 0.3 for voting for the PvdA. Finally, when exploring citizens that are completely satisfied with democracy the probability of voting for the SP decreases to 0.2 and increases to 0.6 for voting for the Social Democrats. Overall, when moving from completely dissatisfied to completely satisfied an ideologically far-left voter can expect an average decrease of about 0.2 in the probability of voting for the SP and an increase of about .42 in the probability of voting for the Social Democrats. The probability line of voting for the SP flattens across the ideological spectrum as citizens are more satisfied with democracy while the reverse trend is true for Social democratic party. Interestingly, for Groenlinks a similar trend exists. Far-left voters are more likely to vote for the Green Party if they are dissatisfied with democracy.

Sweden provides even more evidence for the trend when exploring voters on the far-left of the ideological spectrum. A citizen that is completely dissatisfied with democracy has a probability of 0.4 for voting for the Left Party and a slightly lower probability of 0.3 in voting for the SAP. On the other hand, a voter that is neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with democracy has a slightly lower probability of 0.3 of voting for *Vänsterpartiet* and is twice as likely (0.6) to vote for the Social Democrats. Finally, a voter that is completely satisfied with democracy has a probability of around 0.1 of voting for the RLP and 0.8 of voting for the SAP. To compare, a far-left citizen that is dissatisfied with democracy is slightly more likely to vote for the Left Party while a far-left citizen that is satisfied with democracy is eight times more likely to vote for the Social Democrats. There is no discernable trend on voting for the Green Party. The results provide strong evidence that citizens on the farleft's choice between voting for an RLP and Social democratic party is a consequence of their satisfaction with democracy.

A similar investigation is conducted exploring the interaction between anti-immigrant sentiment and political ideology on vote choice. In Germany, the probability that a citizen at the far-left of the ideological spectrum votes for the Left Party decreases dramatically as the person moves from holding extremely positive attitudes toward immigrants (0.3) to neutral attitudes (0.2) to extremely negative attitudes (0.0). Almost the exact same trend exists for the probability of voting for the Green Party. On the other hand, for citizens on the far-left the probability of voting for the SPD is largest when citizens hold neutral attitudes toward immigrants. As citizens move toward extremely positive or extremely negative attitudes, the probability of voting for the SPD decreases. The result indicates that the majority of left positioned SPD voters hold neutral attitudes toward immigrants.

In the Netherlands, the same trend does not exist. When accounting for the confidence bounds in Figure 4, the probability of voting for the SP or PvdA remains the same for far-left voters despite their attitudes toward immigrants. In fact, for these two parties the confidence bounds indicate there is not a large subset of their voters that are on the far-left and hold extremely negative attitudes toward immigrants. The same lack of finding does not exist for Groenlinks. A far-left voter that holds extremely positive attitudes toward immigrants has a probability of 0.4 in voting for the Greens. In contrast, a citizen holding neutral attitudes toward immigrants has a probability of 0.2 of voting for the Greens and a citizen holding extremely negative attitudes has a probability of almost 0. Interestingly, it appears as though the issue impacts voting for the Greens in the Netherlands more than it does for the other leftist parties. Perhaps, the Greens in the Netherlands have done a better job of issue ownership.

Figure 4 demonstrates that Sweden follows a similar pattern to Germany. The probability of voting for the Left Party among far-left voters decreases drastically as voters hold more negative attitudes toward immigrants. In particular, a citizen on the far-left holding extremely positive attitudes toward immigrants has a probability of 0.4 of voting for *Vänsterpartiet*. However, a far-left citizen holding extremely negative views of immigrants has a probability of 0 in voting for the Left Party. For the Greens, a similar, smaller trend exists while the opposite holds for voting for the Social Democrats. For a far-left citizen, there is an increase of 0.8 in the probability of voting for the SAP when moving from extremely positive to extremely negative attitudes toward immigrants.

The last interaction in our empirical model explores the relationship between political ideology and belief that the government should reduce income disparity on vote choice. Figure 4 plots the predicted probabilities for the interaction. For Germany, among citizens on the far-left there is an increase in the probability of voting for the Linke as agreement that government should reduce income disparity increases. In particular, a citizen on the far-left that strongly disagrees with the statement has a probability of 0 of voting for the Left Party, while a citizen on the far-left that strongly agrees with the statement has a probability of 0.4. On the other hand, a citizen on the far-left that strongly disagrees with the statement has a probability of 0.8 of voting for the SPD, while a citizen on the far-left that strongly agrees with the statement has a probability of 0.45. The results demonstrate that agreement with what could be called a traditional leftist economic issue is more salient for Left Party voters. For the Green Party, no difference exists.

The results for the Netherlands mirror those in Germany. Among voters on the far-left, there is an increase in the probability of voting for the SP and a decrease in voting for the PvdA as a citizen agrees that the government should reduce income disparity. In particular, when moving from strongly disagree to strongly agree, there is an increase of 0.2 in the probability of voting for the SP and a decrease of 0.15 in the probability of voting for the PvdA However, the confidence bounds indicate that there is not a substantially large segment of Social democratic party voters that strongly disagree with the statement. One interesting difference in the Netherlands is that the probability of voting for *Groenlinks* also increases as a citizen on the far-left agrees with the statement.

Finally, Sweden confirms the results. Among far-left voters, there is an increase in the probability of voting for *Vänsterpartiet* and a decrease in voting for the Social Democrats as a citizen agrees that the government should reduce income disparity. In particular, when moving from strongly disagree to strongly agree, there is an increase of 0.4 in the probability of voting for the Left Party and a decrease of 0.5 in the probability of voting for the SAP. The result indicates a massive shift in the probability of voting for the government should be reducing income disparity. The result in Sweden shows that traditional leftist economic issue positions are especially salient for Left Party voters.

# **Discussion and conclusion**

Our central intention in this article has been to probe the distinctiveness of voters for three party types-RLPs, social democratic parties, and green parties—occupying the left end (from center to far left) of the political spectrum, using case studies from Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands. Using RLP voters as our reference category, we asked what differentiates the RLP, SD, and left-libertarian/green voter and why one voter might opt for an RLP, another for a green party, and a third for the main SD in that country. We tested whether demographic trends of age, gender, education, income, and union membership were present given previous scholarship that had few unambiguous findings on these variables. We also sought to explore whether some important political attitudes affected the RLP vote versus the social democratic or green vote. Finally, we explored the way that political attitudes and political ideology might interact to impact the probability of voting for these parties.

Demographically, and confirming our expectations, we found that there are no clear and consistent trends among the sibling rivals. At most, country-specific factors were at work. For example, RLP voters are not consistently older (or younger) than their green and SD counterparts across the three countries. Nor do RLP voters exhibit stronger union ties than social democratic voters do; indeed, in two out of our three countries SD voters were more likely to belong to a union than RLP voters were. Similarly, although RLP voters in Germany were more educated than SD voters, they were less so in Sweden. In addition, although RLP voters in the Netherlands were at lower incomes than their SD counterparts, this was the opposite in Germany. Finally, a second pair of sibling rivals—green voters and RLP voters—were also not clearly distinguishable along some important demographic variables. To take one example, while Green voters were on average older than RLP voters in Sweden, they were younger than RLP voters in Germany. In short, the socio-demographic profiles of these three party types show us very little. Our findings here are consistent with Ramiro (2016) who found significant country-level variance in some important demographic variables. Thus, demographics decidedly do not give us the keys to understanding the distinctiveness of a voter on the left.

Instead, what is important for differentiating these three groups of voters are political attitudes toward several key issues-satisfaction with democracy, immigrants, and the role of government in the economy. To be sure, the effect of these attitudes was not entirely unambiguous. However, these attitudes *combined* with ideology were very compelling. Voters for all three party types fall very broadly on the left side of the political ideological spectrum, ranging from more center-left to far left. Yet given the political attitudes we identified, the probability to vote for an RLP compared to an SD or Green party increases dramatically as the voter moves farther to the left. Voters dissatisfied with democracy and at the far-left end of the spectrum are significantly more likely to vote for an RLP than for its sibling rivals. Voters on the far left are furthermore more likely to vote for the RLP rather than the social democratic or green party when such voters hold positive attitudes toward immigrants. Finally, the probability of a self-identifying farleft voter casting his or her ballot for an RLP increases dramatically as the voter believes more strongly that the government should take an active role in reducing income disparity.

To sum up, voters for social Democrats, RLPs, and green parties in the cases we have analyzed here are almost identical, with only a few distinguishing demographic characteristics in each of the three countries (a finding, furthermore, which vanishes once we consider the SD, RLP, and Green voter in aggregate across all three countries). What is indisputably important for a voter on the left in these countries are his/her political attitudes combined with the voter's ideological self-placement. One could say that voters for these three party types are similar to siblings who share the same basic DNA—and even a broadly similar worldview—but who have nevertheless developed distinctive political attitudes and ideological self-understandings.

Of course, the conclusions detailed here cannot be expanded to the entire RLP party family; they hold only for the countries we examined here and who fall into the democratic socialist subtype of RLPs. Future single case study research on democratic socialist RLPs could shed light on whether the same conditions apply elsewhere. More importantly, we think, future research concentrating on another RLP subtype—for example, conservative communists or reform communists—might demonstrate how or whether voters for parties of these subtypes can be distinguished from their rivals on the left. Similarly, future research could focus on studying different RLP subtypes in countries where a green party is lacking or electorally marginal. Under these conditions, the RLP and social democratic voter might exhibit different demographic or attitudinal characteristics than we have found here.

### Authors' note

All replication materials will be made available upon request.

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#### Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

#### Notes

- For Germany, we are exploring the second vote since the second vote operates under proportional representation when converting vote share to seat share. The Netherlands and Sweden operate under proportional representation systems. In the individual yearly models, the relationships between variables are stronger with a larger substantive impact when the survey was conducted right after the election. The results are weaker as the survey year moves further from actual election. Therefore, by estimating a model with the full sample (all years), although the number of observations increases greatly, the estimates are potentially more conservative than they otherwise would be.
- A previous version of this analysis explored the interaction between anti-EU sentiment and political ideology, but did not find any patterns when comparing RLP, social democratic, and green parties.
- 3. Previous iterations of the analysis also explored variables that measured the level of trust in parliament or politicians and the level of satisfaction with the government or economy as antiestablishment sentiment. The variables were either not significant or highly correlated with other, more theoretically grounded variables of interest.

- 4. Previous iterations of the analysis included a measure that asked about whether it is important that people be treated equally. The variable was not statistically significant and correlates with other, more theoretically grounded variables.
- As a robustness check, we explored an interaction between trust in the EU and political ideology. We did not find any meaningful trends.
- 6. Yearly dummy coefficients and standard errors are presented in Appendix D. The coefficients and standard errors are not included in the article in order to make presentation of the results clearer for the reader.
- 7. Fixed effects models were estimated using the "MCMCglmm" package for generalized linear mixed models in R using Markov Chain Monte Carlo Simulation. The model results do not lend themselves easily to presentation in the same way as the basic multinomial logistic regression models, and they require much more mathematical explanation and interpretation. The modeling technique also does not lend itself easily for presenting the substantive impact of independent variables. Therefore, we chose to go with the more traditional modeling technique, since the results were substantively similar.
- That being said, due to the computational difficulty and lack of robustness of estimating multinomial logistic regression models with over six categories on smaller sample sizes, we chose not to present individual country and year models.
- 9. The predicted probabilities were calculated holding all variables at their median. 95% confidence intervals are presented for all predictions, although some confidence bounds are not visible since they are incredibly small. Marginal effects were also calculated. However, they do not lend themselves to the same type of individual-level analysis when exploring the interaction terms.

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