

## RIGHT-WING SENTIMENT AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

by

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The purpose of this paper is to explore the "anti-Europe" potential of the far right in five countries of Western Europe: Denmark, Germany, France, Belgium, and Italy.<sup>1</sup> The conceptualization of the far right<sup>2</sup> employed in this paper has two components: one focused on voting behavior and one on ideology (i.e, values and beliefs). It is important to keep both analytically distinct. Voting (behavior), in general, is critical because it determines the distribution of power in a democratic political system. The degree of success of radical parties therefore affects (and is effected by) the dynamics of competition in a political system, and it may also suggest something about the state of the democracy in it. But people often vote for a radical or extremist party even though they do not agree with its platform. Rather, they seek to "send a message" to the established elites (a phenomenon generally labeled "protest voting").<sup>3</sup>

If one wants to know more about individual citizens' attitudes and motivations, one must study these more directly. This approach, which most often employs survey research, may also tell us much more about the underlying stability of a democracy, although this point often seems to be lost among students of extremism.<sup>4</sup>

One question remains unanswered to this point: why would anyone be interested in far right ideology (and voting) in the context of European politics and, more specifically, in the context of European social, economic, and political integration? There are two basic answers to this question. First, one may wonder whether or not popular attitudes about the process of European integration are at all driven by ideology. For example, since integration, especially its political variety, necessarily involves some surrendering of national sovereignty, and since the right has traditionally emphasized the prerogatives and importance of the nation state, one might expect adherents of the far right, and even many conservatives, to be more reluctant to support this process. By contrast, economic integration may have many supporters among conservatives and liberals alike, but may run into opposition not only from the extremes of the political spectrum, but from the moderate left as well.

Second, to the extent that parties located on the far right of the political spectrum often attempt to make political hay out of their, more or less, professed opposition to the "Project Europe," one may be curious about the extent to which these parties are able to attract the "anti-Europe" vote.<sup>5</sup> And, by extension, one may also want to speculate about the circumstances under which these parties may be able to do so even more effectively in the future. It is these questions that this paper will address in the following pages.

Tables 1 through 4 provide some evidence of the relationship between ideology and support for various aspects of European integration. Ideology here was measured by creating an additive index consisting of four, equally weighted components:<sup>6</sup> left-right self-placement; xenophobia; preference for dictatorship over democracy; and far-right voting.<sup>7</sup> Based on the median and standard deviation of this index, four categories were created: left & center (lowest value - median); center & Right (median + 1 std. deviation); right (+ 2 std. deviations); extreme right (+ 3 std. deviations). Several things are readily apparent from these four tables. First, strong majorities of citizens in the five countries are in

favor of a more unified Europe. About 70% support the principle of "European Unification" (Table 1), almost as many support their country's membership in the European Community/Union (Table 2),<sup>8</sup> and a clear majority "feel European" at least some of the time (Table 3). While those who think that the Single Market is a "good thing" are not in a majority, only a relatively small minority of respondents feel that it is a "bad thing" (the rest are undecided).

The second outstanding finding of the first four tables is that there are clear differences with respect to ideology. In every one of the tables the proportion of "supporters" drops as one moves from the center/left to the far right. For example, only 18.8% of the most extremist respondents were very much for efforts to unify Western Europe (v. 33% of center-leftists), while slightly more (19.2%) were strongly opposed to these efforts (v. 4.2%). Roughly speaking, one could say that support for the various pro-European items is only about half as strong on the extreme right, while opposition is about three times as high. Clearly, our initial hypothesis, that support for Europe varies by ideology, is borne out by the data.

However, two caveats are just as apparent when looking at the first four tables. First, there are relatively few respondents who qualify for the label "right" or even "far right." Less than ten percent of all respondents in the sample fall into the former category, and only slightly more than five percent fall into the latter.<sup>9</sup> Second, even among these respondents there is still substantial support for "Europe;" in fact in three of the four cases (European citizenship being the exception) support outweighs opposition, if by only a slight margin. Nevertheless, taken together, these last two factors suggest that, under present circumstances, the far right by itself does not amount to, or seems unlikely to be mobilized into, a substantial opposition force to the unification process.

The questions to be asked, therefore, would seem to be: (1) under what conditions might such an opposition arise, and (2) will the parties of the far right be able to take advantage of it. It is to these questions that we will now turn our attention. We begin with the second one of these two questions.

According to Hans-Georg Betz (1994) and several others who have done work in this area,<sup>10</sup> the new radical right-wing parties that have sprung up in several West European countries, such as France, Germany, Denmark, Belgium, and Austria, should primarily be seen as a response to the increasing sense of frustration, alienation, and resentment among a growing segment of the population of these countries. These symptoms, in turn, are the result of the profound economic, social, and cultural changes that have taken place in Western Europe during the past two decades and that have left many of its citizens with feelings of insecurity, isolation, and bewilderment. If this line of reasoning is generally accurate, we would expect to find evidence of it in survey data collected in recent years in the above mentioned countries.

Table 5 indeed provides evidence that this is so.<sup>11</sup> For ease of interpretation, I have grouped the various independent variables into three categories: cognitive orientations; political issues; and social-background variables. Overall, cognitive variables appear to be dominant, especially the left-right orientation. However, issue variables play an important role in explaining the far right vote as well. In particular, the radical right parties seem to have struck a responsive chord in their respective societies by their more or less overt (especially in the case of the Front National) appeals to xenophobia. If one is willing to follow Betz (1994: 103), who maintains that this represents not so much the revival of racism per se, but rather an expression of fear and hopelessness among the citizens of Western Europe, then a number of important issues are actually wrapped up in this xenophobic response, including persistent unemployment; the housing shortage; welfare state issues; budget deficits, etc. In all cases foreigners (asylum seekers, immigrants, guest workers, etc.) are seen as competitors for scarce resources - to be resented, shunned, and, ultimately, excluded.

Additional issue variables that are significantly related to far right voting are a dissatisfaction with the workings of democracy (i.e., an expression of the disenchantment with the established political elites), and, most relevant for present purposes, opposition to the process of European unification. This last finding establishes the basis for asking our second question, namely whether or not the new parties of the radical right may one day be able to mobilize disillusionment with, and resentment of, the European Union for their own political purposes.

Before proceeding to answer that question, two further notes about Table 5 are appropriate. First, social background variables, especially class and education, but also gender and age, are either irrelevant or of only marginal importance in explaining far right voting. This is interesting particularly in light of classic fascism theory, which often attributed that movement specifically to the middle class (see Lipset, 1981). The finding of the slightly greater attractiveness of these parties to younger voters,

however, is nothing new and has been reported by others in recent years (see: Schain, 1988; Castner & Castner, 1989; Betz, 1994).<sup>12</sup> Second, the variables postmaterialism and cognitive mobilization are positively related to a willingness to vote for the far right, contrary to what one might expect. This finding suggests that these voters do not necessarily conform to the stereotypical description far right voters as deprived, powerless, and parochial; instead they appear to be informed, motivated, and, possibly, quite efficacious.

A few years ago, the process of European integration seemed to be on a fast track, leading, in the minds of many, inexorably towards eventual economic, social, and political unification of the EC member states. But, as it turned out, politicians and pundits alike had mistaken the breadth of public support of integration for depth and commitment. Before too long, "Euro-phoria" had been replaced by "Euro-skepticism." What were the reasons for this seemingly sudden disillusionment? While a thorough discussion of these goes beyond the scope of this paper, it is clear that the aftermath of the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe (including the war in the former Yugoslavia and the EC's feeble response to it), the unification of Germany, and, in particular, the intense referendum debate over the Maastricht Treaty in Denmark focused public attention like never before on the Community, its institutions, and, most importantly, on the benefits it was supposed to provide for its members and citizens. In particular, people were concerned with the "democracy deficit" and with the costs of certain new proposals, such as the currency union, that promised remote or uncertain benefits in the far too distant future.

Recent scholarship has shown that the increased attention by the public is not necessarily just the consequence of specific, highly publicized events, such as the Maastricht Treaty, but rather is related to the increasing shift from "negative" integration,<sup>13</sup> which requires little more than a "permissive consensus" (Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970) to "positive" integration,<sup>14</sup> which is more likely to raise questions about the costs and benefits of specific steps in this process (see Dalton & Eichenberg, 1993). A number of studies over the years have confirmed the importance of these cost/benefit calculations in the public's evaluation of the integration process (Inglehart, 1977a; Handley, 1981; Patterson & Sobisch, 1993; Dalton & Eichenberg, 1994).

Table 6 demonstrates this connection as well. "Evaluative" (cost/benefit) variables<sup>15</sup> are by a wide margin the most important predictors of the level of support for the European integration process. By contrast, cognitive as well as social background variables are of relatively minor importance. Interestingly, Table 6 also shows the impact of two factors closely associated with the far right, namely xenophobia and the democracy-dictatorship preference, with respondents on the anti-democratic end of both value scales less likely to support integration.

Finally, Table 6 also shows the importance of cross-national differences relative to individual level characteristics. With Italy serving as the "suppressed category," only for Denmark do we find a strong nation-specific effect with respect to support for integration. While the French and the Belgians are slightly less enthusiastic about the process than the Italians and Germans (at least at the time of survey, in 1992), the magnitude of the standardized coefficients is dwarfed by those of the evaluative factors. The Danes, of course, have long been known as Euro-skeptics.

The implication from Table 6 is clear: (continued) support for integration is highly sensitive to citizens' calculations of benefit of this process to their country and to themselves, and in that sense it is held hostage by the continued (perceived) performance of EU institutions and policies. Stated differently, if there were a significant reversal of these perceptions, a substantial decline of public approval for the integration process could be expected.

It is at this point that our analysis of the far right picks up again. Having shown in Table 5 that far right parties are, at least in principle, able to capitalize on anti-European sentiments, the question becomes whether such a downturn of the fortunes of the EU would disproportionately help to advance their cause. It goes without saying that the answer to this question ultimately depends on a variety of factors, among them unquestionably also the behavior of the other parties in the respective party systems.<sup>16</sup> However, since we are primarily interested at this point in generating some tentative evidence, a more complex analysis will have to be left to the future (assuming that the present study turns up anything worth pursuing further).

Table 5 had shown, among other things, that far right voting was to a considerable extent helped by a certain ideological predisposition. In fact, ideology had been the strongest variable in the model. The farther on the right of the ideological scale a respondent placed him or herself, the more likely that person was to express a willingness to vote for the far right. The question one might therefore ask is

whether or not there exists an interactive effect between ideology and the impact of cost/benefit evaluations on support for European integration. Put differently, does the magnitude of the coefficients (in Table 6) vary by ideological position along the left-right scale? If this is indeed the case, that is to say, if for persons on the right of political spectrum an increase in their negative evaluations of the benefits of the EU translates into a disproportional decline in support for the EU's integration process (compared to non-rightist), then the implication would be that the parties of the far right may also gather a significant electoral bonus should the integration process falter.

Table 7 provides evidence to the effect that this may indeed be the case. The table presents the non-standardized regression coefficients for five subsets of Eurobarometer 37. Each of the five subsets represents respondents who fall within certain intervals along the left-right self-placement scale.<sup>17</sup> Comparing the magnitude of the coefficients in the table reveals that on the right of the political spectrum, on average, given increases (decreases) along the scales of the three evaluative variables produce much larger increases (decreases) in the dependent variable, the "Unified Europe Support Index." In other words, the evaluation of European integration among respondents on the right of the ideological spectrum is much more sensitive to changes in the evaluations of the costs and benefits of European integration. Since it has already been shown that these individuals are more prone to vote for the far right (Table 5), and since the parties of the far right are likely the ones who will attempt to gain political capital from any increased disaffection among the general public with the European integration process, it stands to reason that these parties will also disproportionately benefit electorally from such a shift in public opinion.

The same can be said for xenophobia, although it must be admitted that the causal link between xenophobia and opposition to European integration is not as strong,<sup>18</sup> and for that reason we will not attempt to make too much out of this connection. Table 7 also reveals another interesting finding. On the right of the political spectrum the differences between Danish respondents and those from the other countries are not nearly as strong.

## Conclusion

What are the implications of our findings? For once, the reader must be reminded of the tentative nature of these findings and of the need to refine the analysis with additional variables and at different time points. For example, it would seem sensible to try to identify more precisely what it is about the European Community /Union that those on the right side of the political spectrum are concerned about. In other words, what is the content of their "cost/benefit" calculations?

Substantively speaking, it is clear that one cannot take for granted the continued support of the European public for the integration process, and a sharp decline in support was in fact noticeable after 1991/2. This seems particularly to be the case on the right, where one might suspect, for example, a greater reluctance to relinquish certain symbols of national sovereignty (e.g., the currency, control over borders, etc.). A perceived "attack" on these symbols, along with a general sense of economic difficulties, could easily translate into a prolonged drop of support for the integration process. There are any number of issues around which a vigorous opposition could galvanize, including continued budget and transfer imbalances (e.g., Germany as "Zahlmeister" of Europe); a mishandling of the immigration/asylum problem; new foreign policy disasters; and even the simple perception that the free inter-European trade is no longer a net benefit for a country.

By the same token, it is not at all unlikely that the far right might find common ground across the European landscape and that it may find it expedient to cooperate in the name of "European civilization," as Betz had speculated so eloquently in the conclusion to his recent book. The success of this strategy will, however, depend to a large extent on their (the far right leaders') ability to convince their constituencies that this is the more prudent course of action. Given the traditions of the far right, this scenario is not at all certain.

Table 1

Support for European Unification  
by Political Ideology, 1992\*

	very much for	to some extent: for against	very much against	N		
Left & Center	:	33.0%	49.3	10.2	4.2	2,165
Center & Right	:	24.5	48.4	15.5	5.5	1,414
Right	:	21.3	48.0	15.7	7.7	375
Extr. Right	:	18.8	33.8	21.7	19.2	240
-----						4,194

\* Percentages do not add up to 100 because "don't know" category has been excluded from table

(For question wording and index construction see Appendix)

Source: Eurobarometer 37

Table 2

Support for Country's EC Membership  
by Political Ideology, 1992\*

	good thing	neither	bad thing	N		
Left & Center	:	72.2%	15.7	9.7	2,166	
Center & Right	:	62.6	20.3	13.1	1,413	
Right	:	54.1	24.3	17.6	375	
Extr. Right	:	47.5	20.4	27.5	240	
-----						4,194

\* Percentages do not add up to 100 because "don't know" category has been excluded from table

(For question wording and index construction see Appendix)

Source: Eurobarometer 37

Table 3

Feeling of European v. National Citizenship  
by Political Ideology, 1992\*

"Feel as Citizen of Europe":	often	sometimes	never	N		
Left & Center	:	18.9%	44.2	36.9	2,161	
Center & Right	:	11.6	35.4	52.9	1,409	
Right	:	13.1	32.5	54.4	375	
Extr. Right	:	9.7	29.8	60.5	238	
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\* Percentages do not add up to 100 because "don't know" category has been excluded from table

(For question wording and index construction see Appendix)

Source: Eurobarometer 37

Table 4

Opinion Concerning the Single Market  
by Political Ideology, 1992\*

	good thing	neither	bad thing	N			
Left & Center	: 49.6%		32.8	9.6		2,137	
Center & Right	: 40.9		36.9	12.9		1,400	
Right	:	40.4		33.7	16.4		371
Extr. Right	: 31.0		30.5	30.1		239	
							4,147

\* Percentages do not add up to 100 because "don't know" category has been excluded from table

(For question wording and index construction see Appendix)

Source: Eurobarometer 37

Table 5

Multivariate Analysis (OLS)

Dependent Variable = Vote for Far Right Parties\*

Variable	b	beta	p<.05		
L-R Ideology		.03	.22		.00
Democracy-Dictatorship Pref.	.16		.14	.00	
Cognitive Mobilization		.01	.06	.00	
Postmaterialism	.02		.05	.00	
Xenophobia		.16	.15	.00	
Satisfaction with Democracy	.02	.09	.00		
Support for Europ. Integr.		.02	.07	.00	
Age	.00	.05	.00		
Education				.10	
Gender	.02	.05	.00		
Class				.06	

\* For details on questions and indices, see Appendix

R2: .14  
N=4,159

Table 6

Multivariate Analysis (OLS)

Dependent Variable = Support for Unified Europe (Index)\*

Variable	b	beta	p<.05		
EC benefits country			.28	.30	.00
SM benefits country			.29	.28	.00
SM benefits respondent			.20	.15	.00
Xenophobia	.28	.08		.00	
Democracy-Dictatorship Pref.			.30	.08	.00
Cognitive Mobilization			.01	.06	.00
Postmaterialism					.56
Age		.00	.05	.00	
Education			.01	.03	.00
Gender				.66	
Denmark	.54	.27		.00	
France	.19	.09		.00	
Belgium	.13	.06		.00	
Germany					.07
R2: .47					
N=4,627					

Table 7

Multivariate Analysis (OLS)

Dependent Variable = Support for Unified Europe (Index)  
by L-R Ideological Position\*

Variable	Ideological Position					
	1-3	1-5	4-7	6-10	8-10	
EC benefits country		.31		.26	.26	.32
	.33					

SM benefits country	.21		.25		.29		.33
.35							
SM benefits respondent		.18		.17		.16	.19
.22							
Xenophobia	.11		.28		.35		.35
Denmark	.89		.74		.74		.36
France	.19		.22		.22		.16
Belgium			.12		.12		
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R2	.52		.47		.45		.49
N	711	2,216	2,487	1,632		633	

\* For details on questions and indices, see Appendix  
APPENDIX

#### 1. Question wording in Tables 1 through 4:

- (1) "In general, are you for or against effort being made to unify Western Europe?"
- (2) "Generally speaking, do you think that your country's membership of the Common Market is a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad?"
- (3) "Does the thought ever occur to you that you are not only (Nationality of respondent) but also a European? Does this happen often, sometimes, or never?"
- (4) "Personally, would you say that the Single European Market is a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad?"

#### 2. Support for Europe Index (simple additive):

- (1) See question 1. above
- (2) "If you were told tomorrow that the European Community had been scrapped, would you be very sorry about it, indifferent, or very relieved?"

#### 3. Ideology scale (additive index divided by median and standard deviation)

- (1) Left-right self placement along 10-point scale
- (2) Far right voting (based on three questions a. vote in last election, b. vote if election held tomorrow, c. party identification; any respondent naming far right party (see note 1.) in any one of three question is coded a potential far right voter
- (3) Democracy-dictatorship preference ("Here are some opinions about political systems. Which one comes closest to your own way of thinking: a. democracy is the best political system in all circumstances, b. in certain circumstances a dictatorship could be a good thing, c. whether we live in a democracy or under a dictatorship makes no difference to people like me")
- (4) Xenophobia (an additive index consisting of 8 questions about immigrants from south of the Mediterranean, Eastern Europe, and those seeking asylum; preference regarding the rights and quantity of foreign population in country; and feeling towards people of other nations, religions, and races)

#### 4. Cost/Benefit Indicators:



- (1) "Taking everything into consideration, would you say that our country has on balance benefitted or not from being a member of the European Community?"
- (2) "Do you think that the Single European Market will have a positive effect, a negative effect, or no effect at all on a. your personal life, b. our country?"

5. Postmaterialism and Cognitive Mobilization: see Inglehart, 1977b.

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