

Radical right parties and their welfare state stances — not so blurry after all?

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Recent literature shows that radical right parties present moderate or blurry economic stances. However, in this article, we argue that this blurriness is restricted to only one of the two main conflicts of contemporary welfare politics, namely on questions centring on welfare generosity. In contrast, when it comes to the goals and principles the welfare state should meet, we expect radical right parties to take a clear stance favouring consumption policies such as old age pensions over social investment, in accordance with their voters' preferences. Our empirical analysis based on new, fine-grained coding of welfare stances in party manifestos and original data on voters' perceptions of party stances in seven European countries supports this argument. Radical right parties de-emphasise how much welfare state they want while consistently and clearly defending the traditional welfare state's consumptive focus against recalibration proposals. These findings have important implications for party competition and welfare politics.

Keywords: radical right parties; welfare state; blurring; social investment, party competition, social policy

Word count: 7648

Introduction

Radical right parties have emerged as a third pole in many West European countries' party systems (Kriesi *et al.* 2008; Oesch and Rennwald 2018). While it has been shown that they mobilise their voters primarily on non-economic socio-cultural issues such as immigration (Ivarsflaten 2005, 2008), their economic positions are less clear. Some scholars have depicted their positions as inconclusive (Rathgeb 2020), moderate (de Lange 2007; Afonso and Rennwald 2018), and with high variation across time and space (Afonso 2015). Moreover, in an influential article, Rovny (2013) argued that radical right parties deliberately blur their positions on the economic dimension of conflict. Since the radical right attracts core constituencies with diverging preferences on economic issues, they have an interest in downplaying these issues and avoiding taking clear stances that might antagonise one part or another of their electorate.

We challenge this predominant view on party competition in welfare politics that radical right parties blur all their economic positions. Recent arguments from welfare state literature have shown that prevailing conflict about the welfare state is no longer concerned only with its size but rather with its goals, operating principles, and whose needs the welfare state should cater to (Beramendi *et al.* 2015; Busemeyer and Garritzmann 2017; Bremer and Bürgisser 2018). Should the welfare state prioritise investing in human skills to improve peoples' earnings capacity or should it primarily serve as a safety net? Hence, welfare politics and the economic dimension itself have become multi-dimensional (Häusermann 2010; Van Oorschot and Meuleman 2012; Roosma *et al.* 2013). Previous research has found that this new conflict dimension over social investment vs. consumption (also termed recalibration of the welfare state) cuts across the traditional dimension of welfare state generosity, with different social and political groups occupying the poles of these dimensions. Most importantly, preferences

on the recalibration dimension are closely aligned with attitudes towards universalism vs. particularism because of their joint socio-structural determinants and the distributive effects of investment or consumption policies (Beramendi *et al.* 2015). Thus, while the constituency of radical right parties is divided when it comes to welfare state generosity, this does not hold for the newly-emerged conflict over social investment vs. consumption. The culturally conservative electorate of the radical right holds particularistic preferences and prioritises consumptive policies (see Busemeyer *et al.* 2020 in this special issue). Note that the emphasis lies on prioritisation; undoubtedly, a majority of voters, regardless of partisanship, support social policies, whether they are of consumptive or investing kind. However, in a realistically constrained scenario where expansion involves (opportunity) costs, we expect the conflict over social investment vs. consumption to intensify along the lines of universalistic and particularistic preferences. Therefore, ambiguity in radical right parties' economic positioning should be restricted to questions about welfare state size or social policy generosity. On the contrary, we expect radical right parties to take an explicit stance in favour of consumption over social investment.

Our article combines quantitative data based on election manifestos from seven West European countries, namely Austria, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, with individual-level data. We use the latter to measure the preferences of parties' electorates on both welfare politics dimensions to identify the strategic situation by which parties, particularly the radical right, view themselves as confronted with. To measure party positioning, we draw on our own coding of electoral manifestos and aggregated individual-level data from an original survey that asked respondents about their perceptions of parties' stances on the investment–consumption priorities dimension.

In line with previous research, we find that radical right parties do blur their position on the general welfare state size dimension (Rovny and Polk 2020) by de-emphasising social policy issues. However, they unambiguously indicate what kind of welfare state they prefer, if any; of all party families, the radical right most clearly prioritises consumptive social policies such as old age pensions or healthcare over social investment. Moreover, voters recognise this consumption stance. In line with evidence from electoral manifestos, voters perceive radical right parties as favouring consumption over social investment more than any other party. The public acknowledges the radical right as the main opposition to a recalibration of the traditional welfare state, thus suggesting that radical right parties' welfare state positions are not so blurry after all.

Radical right parties and the economy

Radical right parties have been doing well electorally and have become a major political force in most West European countries over the last three decades. The literature agrees that these parties have mobilised their voters and chalked up election victories mainly based on particularistic positions on socio-cultural issues, most prominently their anti-immigration stances. Twenty years ago, some commentators even went as far as characterising radical right parties as single-issue parties. While this notion has been decidedly rejected in the meantime (see e.g. Mudde 1999), radical right parties' positioning on economic issues received relatively little scholarly attention for a long time. One of the first and most influential accounts of radical right economic positioning was developed by Kitschelt and McGann (1997), who famously argued that radical right parties have adopted a 'winning formula' by combining authoritarian positions (on socio-cultural issues) with neoliberal economic stances. According to Kitschelt and McGann, this programmatic appeal has allowed radical right parties to build cross-class support by

the working class (on socio-cultural grounds) and neoliberal small business owners (mostly on economic grounds).

However, academic interest in radical right parties' economic and welfare stances has sparked in the last decade, leading to disputes regarding the 'winning formula' argument. The radical right's increasing vote share, these parties' concomitant 'normalisation', their increased relevancy for government building (de Lange 2012), their occasional participation in government (Afonso 2015), and the recent economic crisis might all be reasons behind mounting interest in the radical right's economic stances (Afonso and Rennwald 2018). This newer research has shown that against the expectations of the 'winning formula', radical right parties no longer present distinctly right-wing economic positions and argued that radical right parties have very good reasons to refrain from advocating staunchly welfare-critical stances. On the contrary, a range of studies have placed radical right parties somewhere at the centre of the economic dimension (Kitschelt 2004; de Lange 2007; Afonso and Rennwald 2018) or have at least observed them moving to the centre (Lefkofridi and Michel 2014; Rovny and Polk 2020). Consequently, when in government, they are observed to be rather reluctant to engage in welfare retrenchment (Röth *et al.* 2018). As an alternative to describing radical right parties' economic stances as moderate, Rovny (2013) especially has argued that radical right parties have an incentive to blur their economic positions, i.e. to refrain from taking and communicating a clear position.

The concept of blurring is based on the idea that in a multi-dimensional setting, 'political competition is not merely a struggle over where a party stands' (Rovny 2012: 272) but rather a competition over the issues or dimensions that shape politics (e.g. Hobolt and de Vries 2015). According to Rovny, parties are well-advised to take a more pronounced stance on issues that are usually shared unequivocally by a party's core

constituency while opting to blur their positions on issues where they face a divided electorate – as radical right parties do most prominently concerning the economy and the welfare state. Clearly, radical right parties attract voters on the basis of their particularistic stance on the socio-cultural axis of political competition. Their electorate is united when it comes to opposing immigration, integration, or globalisation. However, their electoral strongholds strongly disagree on the economic dimension (Oesch and Rennwald 2018; Ivarsflaten 2005). Unsurprisingly, Rovny (2013) and Rovny and Polk (2020) find that radical right parties engage in position-blurring by deliberately avoiding precise economic placement. They either de-emphasise economic issues altogether or present ‘vague, contradictory, or ambiguous positions’ (Rovny 2013). Furthermore, other authors have shown plenty of evidence that radical right parties hold ambiguous economic positions (Rathgeb 2020; Mudde 2007) or that radical right parties’ welfare stances change over the election cycle (Afonso 2015).

When current research acknowledges radical right parties as presenting clear social policy positions, this is with regard to a nativist, exclusionary stance towards immigrants. Many studies define this ‘welfare chauvinistic’ approach as the main distinctive feature of radical right parties’ social policy program (Ennser-Jedenastik 2018; Otjes *et al.* 2018; Schumacher and van Kersbergen 2016): radical right parties aim to limit welfare generosity to immigrants while maintaining principal support for a welfare state that caters to ‘deserving’ natives. We argue that welfare chauvinism is not the only distinctive, clear characteristic of radical right welfare stances, which the current literature otherwise describes as moderate or even blurry.

The second dimension of welfare politics

Welfare state politics, which are traditionally seen as one of the main issues of the economic dimension, have fundamentally transformed over the last decades. Structural changes have had lasting effects on both citizens' demand for social protection and elites' leeway for providing the demanded coverage. These structural changes came in the form of the rise of the service sector, educational expansion, demographic changes, and altered family structures, which, in a highly interrelated way, have affected the demand and supply sides of social policy alike. The Great Recession further intensified and accelerated these impacts. The consequences for citizens' demand for social policy are two-fold. First, general support for the welfare state has risen, especially among the middle classes. The literature has proposed several mechanisms that explain this shift, ranging from positive feedback (Svallfors 1997; Pierson 2001) and specific risks from which the middle class is not being spared (Häusermann *et al.* 2015; Jensen 2014) to the spread of egalitarian values among the new middle class (Beramendi *et al.* 2015; Kitschelt 1994). Elsewhere, it has been empirically demonstrated that a majority of voters is principally sympathetic to social policy expansion while cutbacks face tremendous opposition (Kölln and Wlezien 2016; Garritzmann *et al.* 2018b; Busemeyer and Garritzmann 2017).

Second, due to structural changes and the emergence of new social risks, needs for social policy have increased. As we argue, this means that voters need to prioritise different types of welfare provision or, in simpler terms, that voters prefer spending in some areas over spending in others. Moreover, increased financial constraints in times of 'permanent austerity' (Pierson 2001) mean that expansions come at the cost of cutbacks elsewhere, higher taxes, or public debt. Hence, trade-offs have become crucial in policy-making (Stephens *et al.* 1999; Bremer and Bürgisser 2018; Busemeyer and Garritzmann

2017; Häusermann *et al.* 2019b), and voters are aware of these hard choices (Häusermann *et al.* 2019a). Therefore, it is reasonable that people have different policy priorities and thus different preferences for the type of welfare state they support.

The most established way of thinking about the conflict concerning what the welfare state should do is the social investment paradigm (Beramendi *et al.* 2015; Hemerijck 2013; Morel *et al.* 2012; Esping-Andersen *et al.* 2002). The logic of social investment policies differs from that of ‘passive’ or ‘consumptive’ social policies in that the former aims at ‘creating, mobilising, or preserving skills’ (Garritzmann *et al.* 2017: 37) in order to support citizens’ earnings capacity. The most typical examples of social investment policies are childcare, tertiary education, and active labour market measures. Social consumption policies, in contrast, include measures such as old age pensions or unemployment benefits that primarily aim to compensate for income losses. While variables such as ideology, income, and gender may explain support for either of the two, a different set of variables hold explanatory power when investment comes at the cost of consumption (Busemeyer and Garritzmann 2017; Garritzmann *et al.* 2018a). It follows that social investment policies not only differ in logic but also in the way that the conflict around them is structured. While the new middle class has partly moved towards the working class when it comes to general support for social policy, such convergence is clearly absent when we look at investment–consumption priorities where the more highly educated and more culturally liberal middle class is more favourable to social investment (Garritzmann *et al.* 2018a; Häusermann *et al.* 2019c).

In sum, the conflict over the recalibration of the welfare state is masked if we focus only on general support for the welfare state. Conflict over the size of the welfare state is different from conflict over social investment vs. consumption priorities. Therefore, when studying welfare politics, it is reasonable to capture social policy

preferences also through actors' priorities (may it be individuals, classes, or parties) rather than only through their positions. Research has only recently begun to focus on studying voters' priorities (Busemeyer and Garritzmann 2017; Häusermann *et al.* 2019b, 2020; Bremer and Bürgisser 2018) and its consequences for party politics (Abou-Chadi and Immergut 2019; Green-Pedersen and Jensen 2019).

Radical right voters in two-dimensional welfare politics

For many decades, the working class has been the core constituency of the left while upper and middle classes have lent their support predominantly to conservative, liberal or Christian–democratic parties. However, socio-structural transformations in post-industrial societies, the emergence of new party families, and the increasing salience of issues such as immigration have led to the emergence of new ties between parties and classes. Most notably, the working class has become the backbone of support for the radical right (Rydgren 2012; Oesch 2008). In contrast, the well-educated, new middle class, especially professionals working in health, education, welfare, or the media sector – the so-called socio-cultural professionals – have become the preserve of Left parties in most West European countries (Oesch and Rennwald 2018). However, more traditional sectors of the middle class, most prominently small business owners, are a 'contested stronghold' of the centre-right due to their economic right-wing preferences; however, mostly due to their scepticism of immigration and integration, they are also attracted to the radical right. Nevertheless, the proletarianisation of the radical right (Bornschier 2010) has resulted in their largest vote potential lying within the working class.

This proletarianisation has implications for radical right parties' positioning on the economic dimension. The increasing share of working-class voters has led them to move towards the centre or towards 'blurring' their stances on economic issues and welfare

state generosity. In order to please their working-class voters' demand for protection without jeopardising their traditional middle-class voters' aversion to state-intervention, radical right parties are expected to strategically blur their position (Rovny 2013; Rovny and Polk 2020).

We argue in this paper that the situation of radical right parties is completely different for the second dimension of welfare politics. Rather than focusing on the size or generosity of the welfare state, conflict in this dimension is about how the welfare state should be recalibrated, whose needs it should cater to, and what goals it should pursue. As discussed in detail below, the literature suggests that the radical right electorate occupies a predominantly consumption-oriented position due to a) their working-class voters' material self-interest, b) a connection between consumption support and particularistic socio-cultural attitudes, and c) trust considerations.

The aforementioned proletarianisation shifts the median partisan's placement towards prioritising consumption over social investment because, for the working-class constituency, it may be much clearer whether and to what degree these benefits pay off. First, consumption policies materialise immediately whereas investments usually only pay off in the future. Second, willingness to invest in the future may depend on the economic outlook, which might be considered grimmer among working-class voters (Häusermann *et al.* 2019c). Third, it has been shown that social investment policies potentially suffer from 'Matthew effects', where the lower classes seem to have less knowledge about how to utilise investing policies such as childcare and labour market reintegration measures (Pavolini and Van Lancker 2018; Bonoli and Liechti 2018).

Moreover, even beyond self-interest, there is a link between support for the radical right and a preference for consumption over investment. Beramendi *et al.* (2015) have postulated the existence of a nexus between the second non-economic dimension of

political conflict and emphasis on investment and consumption because of an inherent logical connection between universalism and social investment, and particularism and consumption. There are good reasons why prioritising consumption over investment fits with radical right parties' and their voters' particularistic positions. First, the stabilising character of consumption-oriented social policies (e.g. pensions and contribution-based unemployment benefits) that promote rather than challenge traditional gender roles and the male breadwinner model should find an echo in culturally conservative attitudes. In contrast, many social investment policies enhance gender quality which is connotated to universalistic values (Busemeyer *et al.* 2020). Second, consumption policies are more easily targetable towards specific groups that are perceived as being the most deserving of welfare benefits. Pension systems, for example, can be arranged so that they reward 'hard-working' native men but exclude labour-market outsiders and immigrants. Meanwhile, social investment policies such as education or childcare have the explicit goal of increasing equality of opportunity. Therefore, social investment policies tend to benefit groups such as atypical workers and immigrants as well. However, these groups the radical right would like to exclude or at least reduce in terms of their presence in the pool of welfare recipients (Fenger 2018; Ennser-Jedenastik 2018).

Lastly, previous research has highlighted the importance of trust in government and political institutions as a vital factor in predicting support for social investment. Since social investment measures can be expected to pay off only in the long-term, are fraught with considerably more uncertainties than known, existing consumption policies, and depend on effective implementation, trust in political agents is essential for supporting (social) investment measures (Garritzmann *et al.* 2018b; Jacobs and Matthews 2017). Radical right parties, which usually have a strong populist component, however, frequently campaign on an anti-establishment platform that subverts citizens' trust in

politics and political elites. Concomitant with that, radical right parties are especially successful in mobilising and attracting voters that have a low level of trust in politics, politicians, and political institutions (Bélanger and Aarts 2006; Söderlund and Kestilä-Kekkonen 2009). It follows that radical right party voters are less likely to embrace social investment.

To summarise, the literature points to several mechanisms that account for a relationship between radical right support and the prioritisation of consumption over investment. This link is largely confirmed in empirical analyses (Fossati and Häusermann 2014; Häusermann *et al.* 2020; Garritzmann *et al.* 2018a, Busemeyer *et al.* 2020). Moreover, our own attempt replicates this finding (see Figure A1 in appendix): radical right voters constitute the clear, exclusive pole in favour of prioritising consumption such as pensions over policies such as childcare or education. Their preference for consumption policies is statistically distinct from the preferences of all other electorates. If radical right party voters want any social policy at all, they clearly prefer traditional, insurance policies.

Implications for radical right parties' welfare state stances

What do these electorates' positions mean for party behaviour and positioning in particular? We expect that if their electorates have heterogeneous preferences, parties have incentives to blur their stances on this issue. As previous literature has suggested radical right electorates have a centrist position concerning welfare state size (see also Figure A1). This might well be a result of their heterogeneous electorate, where the working class pulls them to the left while traditional middle-class constituents keep them on the right. Therefore, we expect radical right parties to blur their position on welfare state size. These blurry positions are expected to be the result of an avoidance strategy

(Koedam 2020) because the level of public support for the welfare state is generally high and opposition to retrenching existing benefits is even greater (although, as we show, there are differences in terms of degree). This means that even for parties that are rather opposed to generous social policies, it is not reasonable to campaign on a welfare retrenchment platform, especially since attracting attention to cutbacks is what makes retrenchment electorally dangerous (Armingeon and Giger 2008). Therefore, by de-emphasising social policy issues and thereby keeping the salience of the welfare state size dimension low, they limit the risks of alienating parts of their electorate.

Hypothesis 1: Radical right parties exhibit a blurry position on the welfare state size dimension by de-emphasising social policy.

However, we contend that in light of radical right voters' clear position on the recalibration dimension, radical right parties have no incentive to conceal their recalibration priorities. While all other party families might fear alienating substantial shares of their voters by clearly prioritising consumption over investment, a pro-consumption stance might be a unique feature of the radical right and a selling point that mobilises voters who are simultaneously concerned about preserving their pensions (among other consumption policies) but reluctant to expand social investment policies. Therefore, we expect radical right parties to not blur their stances on the recalibration dimension at all.

Hypothesis 2: Radical right parties take a clear pro-consumption stance on the recalibration dimension.

The radical right's clear stance in favour of consumption over investment is only relevant for party competition if it is recognised by the public. This cannot be taken for granted, considering, first, that radical right parties are much more associated with a clear-cut anti-immigration platform rather than straightforward welfare stances and second, that

their strategy of de-emphasising the welfare state size dimension might negatively affect the visibility of their social policy stances overall. Nevertheless, we expect the multi-dimensionality of welfare state politics to become apparent to voters during the current times of fiscal austerity. They should be able to identify which social policies parties prioritise over others. Therefore, we expect the radical right to be perceived as a clear force for preserving the welfare state's traditional, consumptive focus.

Hypothesis 3: Radical right parties' clear consumption stance resonates with the public's party perceptions.

Data and measurement

We use data from two sources to assess parties' welfare stances, citizens' perceptions of these stances, and party electorates' social policy preferences. Data for parties come from the Manifesto Research on Political Representation (MARPOR) corpus, while data for citizens and electorates are provided via an original survey. We are therefore able to combine data for 42 parties in seven countries (Austria, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom). Data on citizens were collected between October and December 2018, while the data for parties came out of the latest available national election manifestos. Therefore, the set of radical right parties includes the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), the Alternative for Germany (AFD), the League (LN), the Party for Freedom (PVV), the Progress Party (FrP), the Sweden Democrats (SD), and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP).¹ Due to this composition, case selection consists of a diverse set of radical right parties that are situated in different welfare state regimes, have economically right or centrist legacies, and differ from each other in terms

¹ See Appendix A1 for an overview.

of power or relevancy (Otjes *et al.* 2018; Afonso 2015; Nordensvard and Ketola 2015). Nonetheless, despite their differences, all these radical right parties face similar strategic considerations and, as we will show, they come to very similar decisions in terms of position-taking and (non-)blurring.

In order to identify the degree to which radical right parties blur their position or take a clear stance when it comes to welfare politics, which is our dependent variable, we refine data from MARPOR (Krause *et al.* 2019). The project provides access to parties' election manifestos, which have been split into single statements, so-called quasi-sentences. Each of these statements has been assigned to a broad policy category, such as, for instance, 'Welfare State Expansion'. Horn et al. (2017) have shown that this classification allows to meaningfully measure parties' welfare positions. However, today's welfare state politics is not only about the extent of expansion, but also about recalibration. Hence, we need a more fine-grained measure of issue emphasis that allows us to disentangle statements concerning social policy into more specific statements regarding social investment and social consumption. For this reason, we created the following coding scheme.

First, we ask whether a statement is actually about social policy. We are not interested in statements that only address revenue and not expenditures (e.g. taxation). Hence, mentioning or implying social policy and addressing the expenditure side are the two necessary conditions for a statement to receive further consideration in our coding. Second, for each statement addressing social policy, we are interested in whether a statement is a general claim for welfare expansion or whether it mentions or implies action in a clearly identifiable policy field. In the case of the latter, the third step classifies the respective statement into up to three of the following policy fields: old age pensions, unemployment benefits, social assistance, (passive) family policy, healthcare, early

childhood education and care (ECEC), tertiary education, education (neither ECEC nor tertiary, including primary, secondary, vocational, or further education), and active labour market policies (ALMP). Statements that do not refer to one of these policy fields are coded as ‘other’ (e.g. housing and disability). Dependent on these fields, all social policy statements are then classified as either social investment (including all claims directed to ECEC, education, tertiary education, or ALMP) or social consumption (including all claims directed to pension, unemployment benefits, social assistance, (passive) family policy, or healthcare²). If a statement addresses exactly one investment and one consumption field, it is assigned to the ‘ambiguous’ category. Lastly, we code whether the sentiment of the statement is positive (i.e. expanding, increasing, spending more), negative (i.e. retrenching, decreasing, spending less), or neither. This detailed coding scheme is applied to all statements originally coded in those existing categories that potentially engage with social policy.³ The total number of coded statements adds up to

² We acknowledge that healthcare may also be classified as a social investment policy (Schwander 2019), depending on both the definition of social investment and the design of specific health policies (Garritzmann *et al.* 2017:21-22). But it is also considered a traditional element of the welfare state (Bonoli 2005:445) for which the politics differ (Garritzmann *et al.* 2018a). However, the overall pattern of our results does not change once we exclude healthcare.

³ This includes *Welfare State Expansion* (per504), *Welfare State Limitation* (per505), *Education Expansion* (per506), *Education Limitation* (per507), *Centralisation: Positive* (per302), *Corporatism/Mixed Economy* (per405), *Technology and Infrastructure* (per411), *Equality: Positive* (per503), *Traditional Morality: Positive* (per603), *Traditional Morality: Negative* (per 604), and *Labour Groups: Positive* (per701).

25,413, of which 9,491 actually mention or imply policy action and could therefore be classified as statements regarding social investment or social consumption.

Using this data, we operationalise party behaviour with respect to the two dimensions of welfare politics in the following way. For the welfare state size dimension, we take a party's share of all positive social policy statements (a share of all statements) as an indicator of emphasis on welfare issues. We limit ourselves to positive sentiments, i.e. statements implying or demanding welfare state expansion, since claims to retrench the welfare state feature only very rarely in election manifestos. On average, less than 6% of all social policy statements refer to retrenchment.

For the recalibration dimension, we are interested in whether radical right parties take a clear social consumption (as expected), a clear social investment profile, or whether they are more ambiguous, with their position remaining blurry. Ambiguity would result from a situation in which a party talks as much about investment as about consumption. More specifically, we take the number of positive statements on social investment and the number of negative statements on social consumption as a share of all statements on either of the two:⁴⁵

$$\text{Recalibration Profile} = \frac{SI\ pos + CONS\ neg}{SI\ pos + SI\ neg + CONS\ pos + CONS\ neg}$$

A different set of data has been used to measure parties' recalibration profile through citizens' perceptions as well as the positioning of party electorates. We use

⁴ The findings do not change when calculating the recalibration profile with positive statements only.

⁵ Note that the number of social policy statements is only marginally correlated ($r = -0.14$) with the recalibration score's absolute difference from 50%, meaning that the measure is not affected by how much a party says.

original data from an online survey that involved 12,500 respondents and was conducted between October and December 2018 in eight Western European countries (we also have manifesto data for five of these countries, namely Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom; the other countries are Denmark, Ireland, and Spain).

Beyond a wide range of items capturing social policy priorities, the survey includes questions that ask respondents to evaluate parties' welfare state recalibration profile. More specifically, respondents were asked how they think a given party X would prioritise social policy spending in different policy fields. To answer this question, they were given 100 points to distribute across six social policy fields in the way they would expect party X to prioritise these expenditures.⁶ We then compute a recalibration score that is simply the number of points given to social investment fields as a share of the points given to all the five relevant fields that were included. For each party, we then

⁶ In which of the following areas do you think the [party X] would prioritise improvements of social benefits? You can allocate 100 points. Give more points to those areas in which you think the [party X] would prioritise improvements and fewer points to those areas where you think the [party X] would deem improvements less important: A) Old age pensions, B) Childcare, C) University education, D) Unemployment benefits, E) Labour market reintegration services, F) Services for the social and labour market integration of immigrants. F) was omitted for the analyses.

Voters evaluated their own party as well as another randomly selected party.

aggregate (by taking a weighted⁷ mean) the answers the respondents gave.⁸ Parties with a higher mean are perceived as being pro-social investment, while parties with a lower mean are perceived as being pro-social consumption.

Results

Figures 1 and 2 show how the radical right positions itself relative to other party families on the welfare state size (Figure 1) and recalibration dimensions (Figure 2). Since not all party families are represented by a reasonably strong, important party in each of the countries, and since there are substantial country differences, we aggregate differences to country means rather than absolute values in order to prevent a bias due to the different representations of party families among countries. Therefore, values of 0 mean that, on average, a party family occupies a position that corresponds to the country means on the generosity (Figure 1) or the investment/consumption dimension (Figure 2). Positive (negative) values indicate that a party family puts more (less) emphasis on a large welfare state (Figure 1) and prioritises investment (consumption) more than the other parties (Figure 2).

⁷ Weighted by age, gender, education, and vote choice in the last election. To exclude the politically unsophisticated, we restrict ourselves to voters' evaluations. Doing so does not change the findings.

⁸ The number of perceptions by party varies substantially between countries (from an average of 373 per party in the Netherlands to 790 in the United Kingdom, depending on the number of relevant parties) but to a lesser degree within countries.

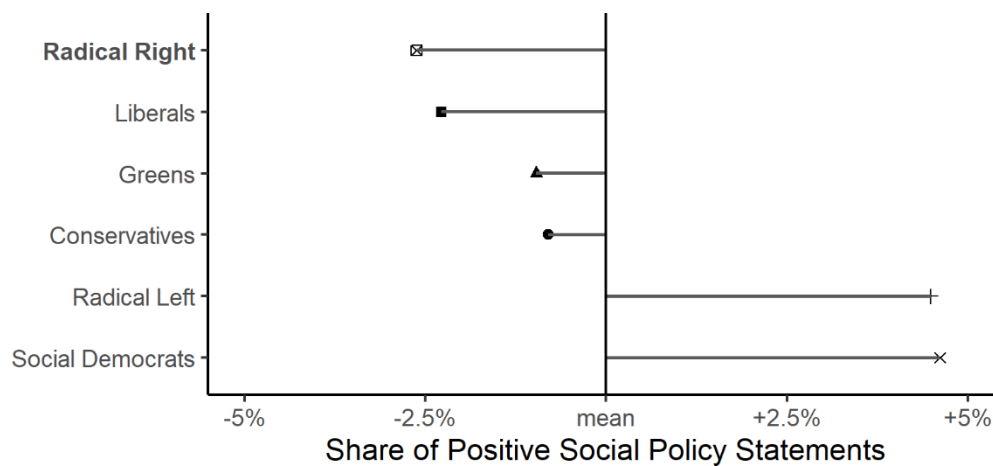


Figure 1. Different party families' emphasis on welfare expansion based on their election manifestos

As stated in Hypothesis 1, we expect radical right parties to de-emphasise social policy. Figure 1 confirms these expectations. Of all party families, radical right parties devote the least attention to the welfare state in their election manifestos, with manifesto space that is devoted to welfare expansion amounting to around 3 percentage points less than average. Evidently, they avoid speaking too much about social policy. Even parties with constituencies that are less dispersed and are overall more sceptical of social policy expansion, such as the liberals or the conservatives, put more emphasis on social policy. Hence, radical right parties might strategically downplay the relative importance of economic issues as a reaction to their constituency's division in terms of economic preferences. These considerations mirror existing findings on the radical right's position blurring (Rovny 2013; Rovny and Polk 2020).

As Figure A2 in the Appendix shows, this finding holds for most countries. AFD, PVV, and UKIP each devote the lowest share of their electoral manifestos to social policy. Likewise, the FrP emphasises the welfare state less than centre-right and left parties but is undercut by MDG (Greens). In Italy, the LN is levelled with other parties on the right but is still considerably less prone to focus on social policy. The picture for Austria and

Sweden is somewhat different. While we also find the left at the strong emphasis pole, and the centre-right at the opposite, the placements of both FPÖ and SD are located towards the centre. While the former case is somewhat surprising, the latter confirms existing evidence that contrary to some other European radical right parties, the SD are rather supportive of a generous welfare state (Nordensvard and Ketola 2015), and that supporting a large welfare state has become a strategic policy tool in Scandinavian countries where a strong welfare state is deeply rooted in national identity (Kuisma and Nygard 2019; Jønsson and Petersen 2012), which is supported by the high shares observed for Norway as well.

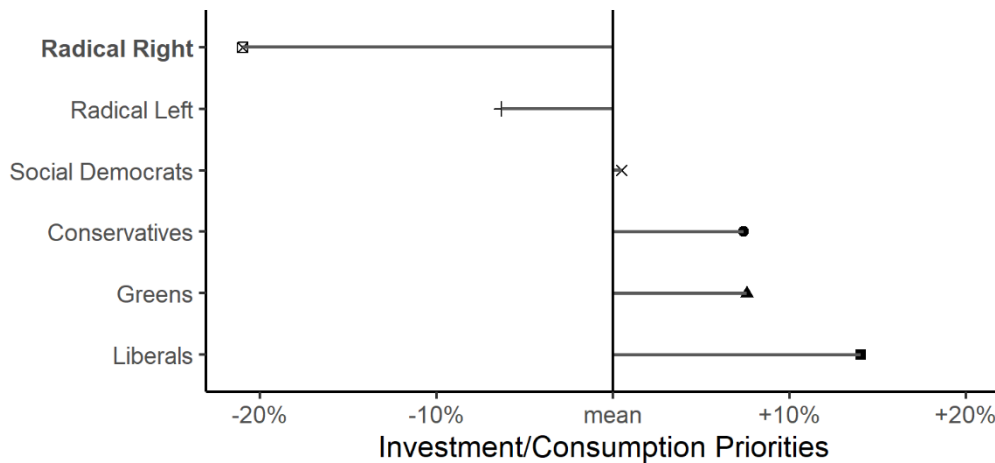


Figure 2. Different party families' positioning on the recalibration dimension based on their election manifestos

In line with recent findings, radical right parties seem to blur their position with regard to typical economic issues such as welfare state generosity. However, we claim that even though they avoid putting too much emphasis on social policy, radical right parties do take a very clear stance on what type of social policies they prefer, namely consumption policies. Figure 2 provides evidence in favour of this expectation. By far, radical right parties reveal the highest share of statements in favour of consumption

(relative to social investment). In fact, this share is more than 20 percentage points higher than the average. This is very much in line with their constituency's preferences. Hence, even though the salience of social policy issues is (strategically) kept low, radical right parties present themselves as the strongest preservers of a traditional, consumptive welfare state and the fiercest opponents of welfare state recalibration. While previous research has convincingly shown that the economic position of radical right parties is ambiguous and that they blur their stances, our findings support these assertions with regard to how much welfare state they press for but not concerning what kind of a welfare state they prefer. Overall, this finding mitigates the 'blurriness' of radical right parties' economic position.

The opposite pro-investment pole is occupied by the parties that first and foremost cater to middle-class voters who are much more positive about social investment, namely the liberals, the conservatives, and the greens. Faced with vertical cross-class coalitions, the social democrats and the radical left parties must cater to groups in their constituency that have quite distinct preferences when it comes to social investment and consumption priorities. For social democratic parties, we find that they employ a broad appeal strategy by promising to expand both social investment and consumption policies in their manifesto without making it clear which welfare policies they would promote if voted into government and confronted with limited resources.

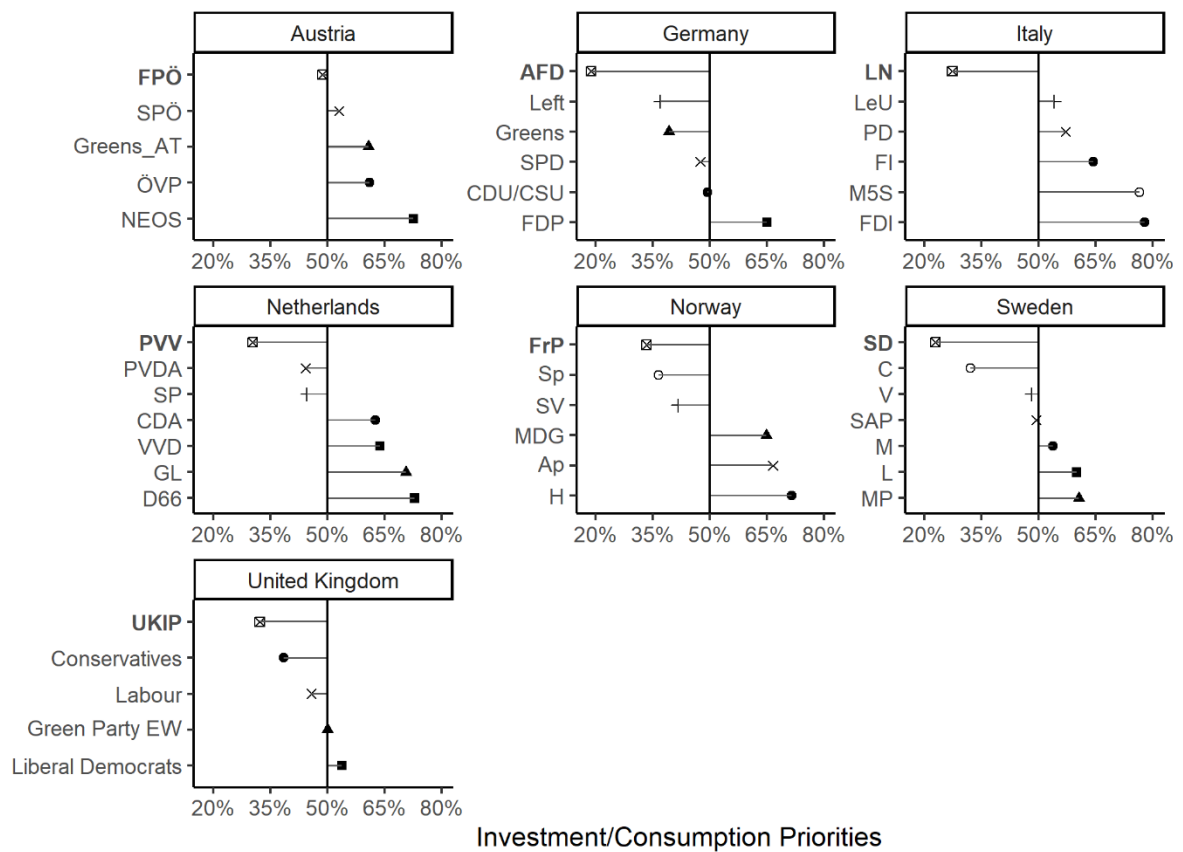


Figure 3. Parties' positioning on the recalibration dimension based on their election manifestos, by country

To delve deeper into the findings, Figure 3 disaggregates the evidence from Figure 2 by country. On the y-axis, the share of positive statements about social investment and consumption (minus a few negative statements) is shown (on a scale from 0% to 100%), with the vertical line indicating that a party attributes as many positive statements to social investment as to consumption. Here, we see that in all countries there are both parties that prioritise investment and parties that prioritise consumption in their electoral manifestos. Moreover, the main findings of the total sample are replicated in all countries; in every country, it is the radical right party that constitutes the consumptive pole. They are represented with around a third or less of positive mentions about the welfare state directed towards social investment by each party. The only exceptional case is Austria,

where we find a general trend towards social investment that does not leave the FPÖ unaffected, resulting from a comparatively strong national focus on both vocational and tertiary education. Likewise, the opposite pole is occupied by either green or liberal parties in all countries except Italy⁹ (where there are no relevant green or liberal parties) and Norway (where it is the conservative party).

In electoral manifestos we have observed that the radical right indeed presents a clear preference for consumption over social investment. However, we have also discovered that in order to de-emphasise the first dimension of welfare politics, radical right parties are rather reserved when it comes to talking about welfare politics in the first place. This begs the question whether their pronounced sympathy for consumption over investment is heard by voters and conveyed to the public. Looking at voters' perceptions helps assess this question.

⁹ Note that FDI have been classified as a conservative party, following both the Comparative Manifesto Project and the 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey. However, there are valid arguments for a classification of FDI as a radical right party (the 2017 Chapel Hill Survey newly considers them 'radical'). Our findings are however robust, irrespective of what family we assign them. Nonetheless, finding them at the social investment pole of the recalibration dimension is surprising. It is a result of their particularly strong emphasis on educational matters in the analysed 2013 manifesto. This result however is not replicated in the 2018 manifesto (see A1 for more information on why we included the 2013 manifesto).

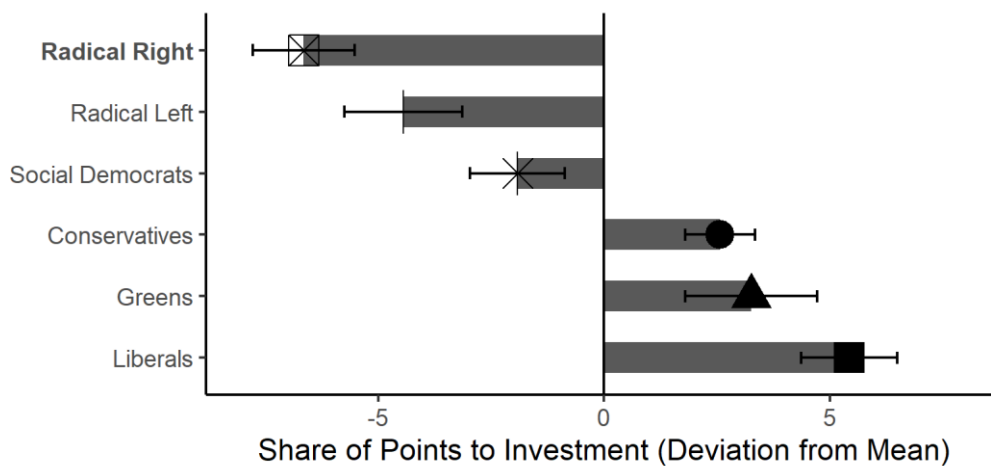


Figure 4. Perceptions of party positioning on the recalibration dimension (social investment vs. consumption), aggregated by party family

Figure 4 shows how party families are perceived by all voters, and it appears that public perceptions of party positions conform surprisingly well to parties' communication in their respective manifestos.¹⁰ It aggregates the positions on the recalibration dimension by party family, reinforcing our manifesto-based findings. Again, the liberal, green, and more moderately conservative party families occupy the investment pole. Social democratic parties lean towards consumption, but voters are less sure whether they would advance recalibration of the welfare state or preserve income-replacing schemes. This might very well be due to these parties presenting a welfare program that equally demands both investment and consumption thereby remaining ambiguous as to what they would prioritise if forced to do so—something that our analysis of election manifestos supports. Radical left parties are perceived even more strongly to prioritise consumptive policies than they present themselves in election manifestos. Most importantly for our purposes,

¹⁰ This analysis includes Denmark but lacks observations for Austria and Norway since individual-level data are not available.

however, voters ascribe the consumption pole on the recalibration dimension to the radical right party family.

Figure A3 in the Appendix shows how party positions on the investment–consumption recalibration dimension are assessed on average in each of the six countries.¹¹

Having compared the order of parties on the investment–consumption dimension, we find similarities between manifestos and perceptions of parties in at least some countries, such as the Netherlands and Germany; however, in other countries, such as Italy, they differ quite strongly. Radical right parties’ perceived prioritisation of consumptive over investing social policies remain remarkably consistent across countries. The German AFD, the Sweden Democrats, the Danish DPP, and the Dutch PVV all occupy the most extreme position on the recalibration dimension in terms of their countries’ voters’ perspectives. Only the Italian Lega is placed merely second by voters with respect to their consumption profile, behind the Five Star Movement, which, strangely enough, has put a lot emphasis on education in particular in its manifesto but is, together with its former coalition-partner, apprehended as a force to defend the consumption-oriented focus of the Italian welfare state. The analysis of perceptions shows that despite differences in the size, historical origin, and institutional embeddedness of the party system, all radical right parties under scrutiny are clearly seen as opposing the modernisation of the welfare state from consumption to social investment policies. This finding also holds if we exclude parties’ own voters’ evaluations (Figures

¹¹ Note that not all parties whose manifestos we have coded were presented to voters for evaluation. Most notably, we lack UKIP evaluations because the party sank into near insignificance before we conducted our survey in the autumn of 2018.

A4 and A5) or only consider radical right voters (Figures A6 and A7). Thus, radical right parties are perceived to occupy the consumption pole by both their own supporters and other parties' voters.¹²

Our result somewhat challenges the view that radical right parties' stances on economic and welfare issues are difficult for voters to grasp. This established view seems true concerning positioning on the preferred size of the welfare state. However, when it comes to the welfare state's goals and operating principles, radical right parties do not only communicate the most clearly, they are even perceived by the public as communicating, most unmistakably, what kind of welfare state they do and do not want.

Discussion and conclusion

In this article, we have argued that radical right parties' welfare state stances are more multi-faceted and clearer than previous research would assume. Our point ensues from the argument that the main conflict about welfare politics is no longer only about the size of the welfare state but also about what the welfare state should do (invest in human skills or substitute income). We propose, based on recent arguments from welfare state literature, that preferences on this second dimension of welfare politics (what we call recalibration) are structured differently than preferences about welfare state size and redistribution. As a result of that, parties have very different incentives for how to behave and position themselves on this recalibration dimension, leading to an entirely different conflict structure than one might expect on economic issues.

¹² This alleviates potential concerns that our findings are solely driven by radical right voters who evaluate their party's position in accordance with their own consumption-oriented preferences.

Our findings for seven West European countries show intriguing results for radical right parties. While among all parties, radical right parties speak the least about the welfare state in their electoral manifestos in a possible attempt to de-emphasise the issue, they state clearly which social policies they like the most or dislike the least, namely consumptive policies such as pensions. Not only do radical right parties clearly state this priority, but despite remaining the most silent on welfare issues, voters seem to be aware of radical right parties' priorities and assess them correctly. This clear radical right party positioning on the recalibration dimension does not come out of nowhere and is less surprising in light of voters' attitudes. Furthermore, on the demand side, radical right voters constitute the clear pole that prioritises consumption over investment. Overall, we affirm the previous research findings that radical right parties present blurry or moderate stances on the issue of the optimal welfare state size, presumably to neither alienate their more welfare-enthusiastic working-class voters nor their more welfare-sceptical middle-class constituencies. However, this current appreciation for radical right parties as presenting centrist or even blurry welfare positions in the literature is only half the story.

The finding that radical right voters and radical right parties have clear preferences and provide unambiguous, clearly discernible stances on whose needs the welfare state should cater to and how it should do so portends several implications. First, our finding contributes to party competition literature by implying that welfare issues' salience in the political debate is not inevitably problematic for radical right parties. Their strategic situation is less uncomfortable than previously assumed since their electorate has unclear preferences only with regard to one welfare dimension but not the other. This becomes even more important in times of fiscal austerity. If the predominant conflict is not (only) about the generosity and size of the welfare state but also about which policies should be financed and which should not, then a high salience of welfare issues might harm social

democratic parties that are bound to disappoint one part of their electorate after promising both investment to their new middle-class and consumption to their working-class constituency in electoral manifestos. In contrast, radical right parties might capitalise on such a discourse by rallying consumption-oriented voters. This might also help to explain why the increased salience of welfare issues that has recently been observed during times of economic crises (Traber *et al.* 2018) has not harmed radical right parties electorally as much as one could have expected.

Second, our findings call into question the prevalent opinion among researchers, that the (working-class) vote for the radical right is based exclusively on socio-cultural rather than economic motivations. Future research on determinants of radical right voting should not limit itself to conventional redistribution or welfare support questions when assessing the impact of economic preferences; rather, it should explore whether the clear positioning of radical right parties on the recalibration dimension matters for the vote. The first commendable steps in this direction have recently been made, e.g. by Attewell (2020).

Third, the clear positioning of radical right parties on what kind of a welfare state they will pursue casts a different light on their role in welfare policy making, especially considering their government participation or their role of kingmaker in some countries. Radical right parties might therefore help the left expand or at least stabilise consumption policies such as pensions. At the same time, they can be expected to be the most formidable opposition to expanding social investment policies such as childcare or tertiary education. This points to an important role of the radical right in coalition formation that the welfare state literature should not neglect. Lastly, our article corroborates and extends the expectation that Beramendi *et al.* (2015) expressed with regard to the remarkable similarity between the conflict over social investment vs.

consumption and what is often termed the second, non-economic dimension. There seems to be an overlap between not only demand side preferences but also the supply side conflict structure, with green and socially liberal parties at the universalist/social investment pole being opposed to radical right parties at the particularistic/consumption pole and social democratic parties getting trapped in the middle.

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Appendix

Table A1. An overview of the included parties and party family classifications

Country	(English) Party Name	Abbreviation	Party Family	Year of Manifesto	Number of Social Policy Statements
Austria	Austrian Freedom Party	FPÖ	Radical Right	2017	81
	Austrian People's Party	ÖVP	Conservative	2017	541
	The New Austria and Liberal Forum	NEOS	Liberal	2013*	106
	The Greens	Greens AT	Green	2017	178
	Austrian Social Democratic Party	SPÖ	Social Democratic	2017	574
Denmark	Venstre, Denmark's Liberal Party	Venstre	Liberal	-	
	Social Democrats	SocDem	Social Democratic	-	
	Red-Green Alliance	RGA	Radical Left	-	
	Liberal Alliance	LA	Liberal	-	
	Danish People's Party	DPP	Radical Right	-	
Germany	Alternative for Germany	AFD	Radical Right	2017	65
	Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union	CDU/CSU	Conservative	2017	97
	Free Democratic Party	FDP	Liberal	2017	170
	Alliance 90/Greens	Greens	Green	2017	353
	The Left	Left	Radical Left	2017	493
	Social Democratic Party of Germany	SPD	Social Democratic	2017	341
Ireland	Fianna Fáil	FF	Conservative	-	
	Fine Gael	FG	Conservative	-	
	Labour Party	Labour	Social Democratic	-	
	Sinn Féin	SF	Radical Left	-	
Italy	League	LN	Radical Right	2018	110
	Go Italy	FI	Conservative	2013*	22
	Brothers of Italy	FDI	Conservative	2013*	44
	Free and Equal	LeU	Radical Left	2018	50
	Democratic Party	PD	Social Democratic	2018	222
	Five Star Movement	M5S	-	2018	271
Netherlands	Party of Freedom	PVV	Radical Right	2012*	37
	Christian Democratic Appeal	CDA	Conservative	2017	184
	Democrats 66	D66	Liberal	2017	327
	People's Party for Freedom and Democracy	VVD	Liberal	2017	289
	Green Left	GL	Green	2017	128
	Socialist Party	SP	Radical Left	2017	87
	Labour Party	PVDA	Social Democratic	2017	265
Norway	Progress Party	FrP	Radical Right	2017	529
	Conservative Party	H	Conservative	2017	349
	Centre Party	Sp	-	2017	503
	Green Party	MDG	Green	2017	196
	Socialist Left Party	SV	Radical Left	2017	513
	Labour Party	Ap	Social Democratic	2017	414

Spain	Citizens	Cs	Liberal	-	
	Podemos	Podemos	Radical Left	-	
	People's Party	PP	Conservative	-	
	Spanish Socialist Workers' Party	PSOE	Social Democratic	-	
Sweden	Sweden Democrats	SD	Radical Right	2018	89
	Moderate Coalition Party	M	Conservative	2018	203
	Liberals	L	Liberal	2018	119
	Centre Party	C	-	2018	57
	Green Ecology Party	MP	Green	2018	94
	Left Party	V	Radical Left	2018	174
	Social Democratic Labour Party	SAP	Social Democratic	2018	81
United Kingdom	United Kingdom Independence Party	UKIP	Radical Right	2017	135
	Conservative Party	Conservatives	Conservative	2017	247
	Liberal Democrats	LibDem	Liberal	2017	220
	Green Party of England and Wales	Green Party EW	Green	2012*	327
	Labour Party	Labour	Social Democratic	2017	206

Due to, on the one hand, data availability and, on the other hand, the absence of a strong radical right party, we cannot use every country for every part of the analysis. However, we always use as many countries as possible. Generally, we included all parties with a vote share of at least 5% in the last general election before the voter data collection (autumn 2018). For the coding of manifestos, we complemented the list with smaller parties represented in parliament even if their vote share was lower than 5%, to achieve the best possible representation of each party family in each country.

For the empirical manifesto-based section, we use Austria, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. In Ireland and Spain, radical right parties did not gain any seats in the latest election coded by MARPOR. In Denmark, manifestos are generally too short to be meaningfully coded with regard to the recalibration dimension.

For the analysis of individual preferences (Figure A1), we make use of the eight countries for which we have individual level data, namely Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

For party perception analysis, which is based on the same individual-level data, we use data from Denmark, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the UK, i.e. from the countries that had a relatively strong radical right party at the time of the survey or were also included in the manifesto analysis.

*While we usually use the latest available manifesto for a party, the manifestos for the Italian FDI and FI, the Dutch PVV, the Austrian NEOS, and the Green Party of England and Wales are very short, containing less than 300 quasi-sentences (compared to a median of about 1,500 quasi-sentences among the other manifestos we used). In order to avoid getting biased results due to the brevity of these manifestos, we used these five parties' second newest manifestos, which are longer (2013 for the FDI with 461 quasi-sentences, 2013 for the FI (PdL) with 210 quasi-sentences, 2012 for the PVV with 927 quasi-sentences, 2013 for NEOS with 1,236 quasi-sentences, and 2015 for the Green Party of England and Wales with 2,235 quasi-sentences).

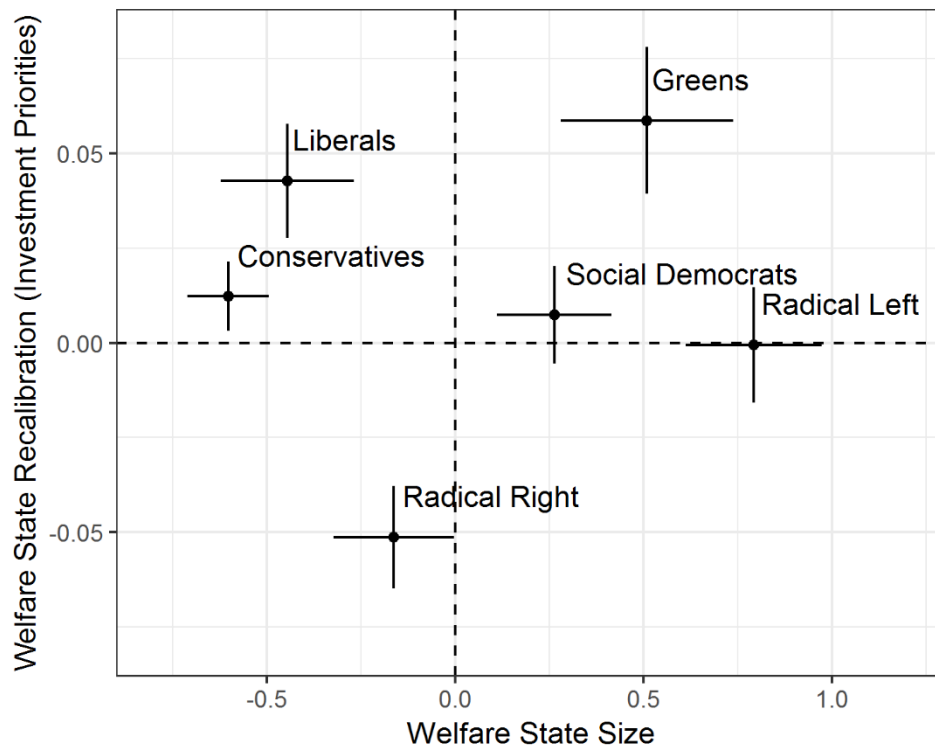


Figure A1. Party electorates' preferences regarding welfare state size and welfare state recalibration

This figure illustrates the aggregated welfare state preferences of voters from different party families within the two-dimensional space we propose as the accurate depiction of current welfare politics. The values indicate the aggregated position as deviation from the respective country mean on the welfare state size dimension and aggregated priorities as deviation from the country mean on the welfare state recalibration dimension. The confidence intervals are extracted from a bivariate regression of an individual's position on partisanship. Magnitude differences between party families are mainly a result of the varying number of partisans per family.

Description of data and operationalisation:

An original online survey from the project ('ANONYMIZED'), with 12,500 respondents in eight countries (Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom), fielded between October and December 2018.

X-axis (aggregated position as deviation from the respective country mean on the welfare state size dimension): Mean of answers given to: 'The government should ...' (1) '... increase old age pension benefits', (2) '... increase the availability of good-quality childcare services', (3) '... expand access to good-quality university education for students from lower-income families', (4) '... increase unemployment benefits', (5) '... expand services that help reintegrate the long-term unemployed into the labour market'.

Y-axis (aggregated priorities as deviation from the country mean on the welfare state recalibration dimension): 'Now imagine that the government had the means to improve benefits in some social policy fields, but not in all of them. You can allocate 100 points. Give more points to those fields in which you consider benefit improvement more important, and fewer points to those areas in which you consider benefit improvement less important.': (1) old age pensions, (2) childcare, (3) university education, (4) unemployment benefits, (5) labour market reintegration services. Mean of share of points given to 2 + 3 + 5.

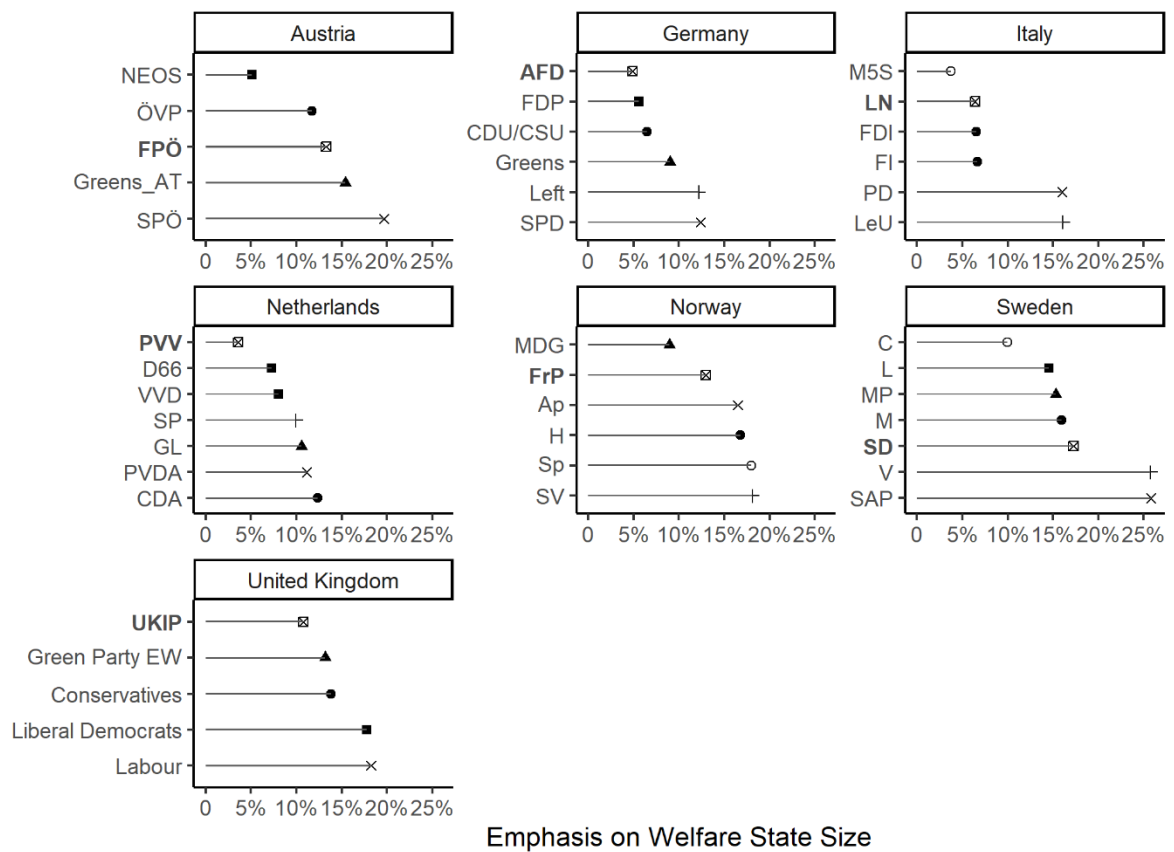


Figure A2. Parties' emphasis on welfare expansion based on their election manifestos, by country

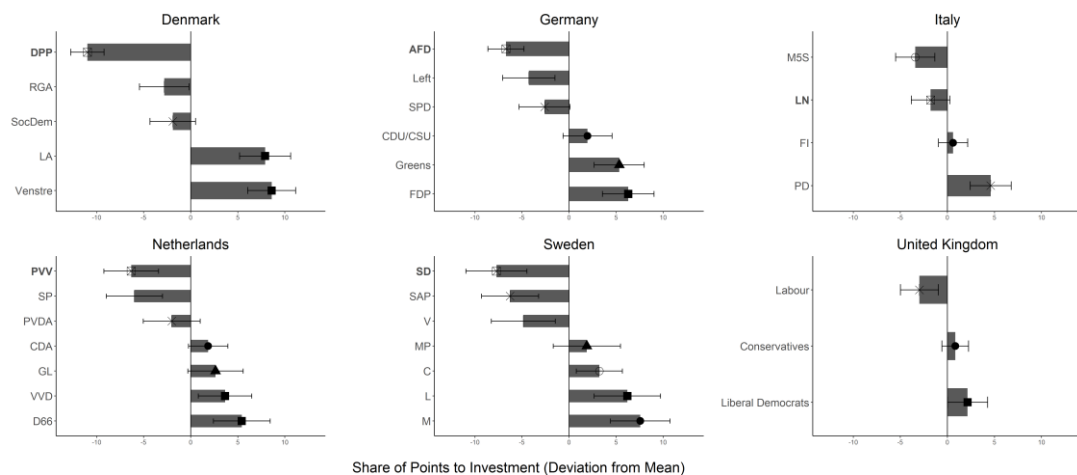


Figure A3. Perceptions of party positioning on the recalibration dimension (social investment vs. consumption), by country

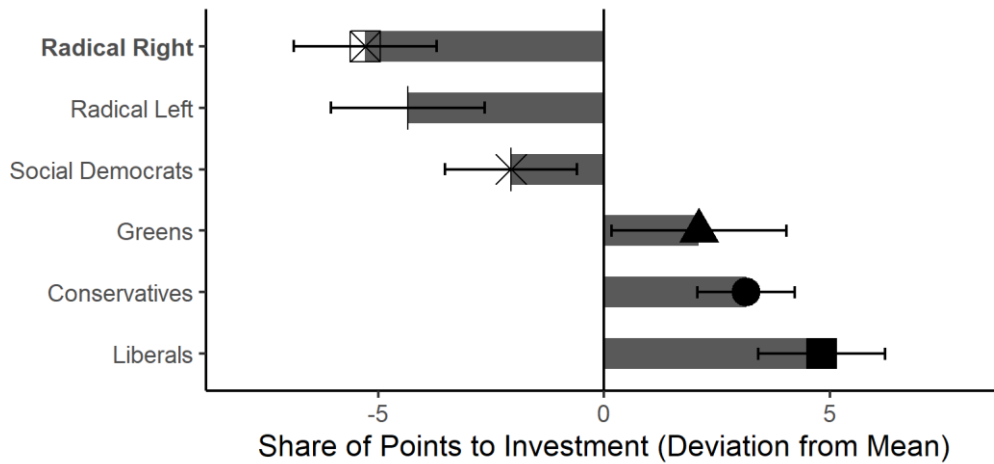


Figure A4. Perceptions of party positioning on the recalibration dimension (social investment vs. consumption), excluding own party voters' evaluations, aggregated by party family

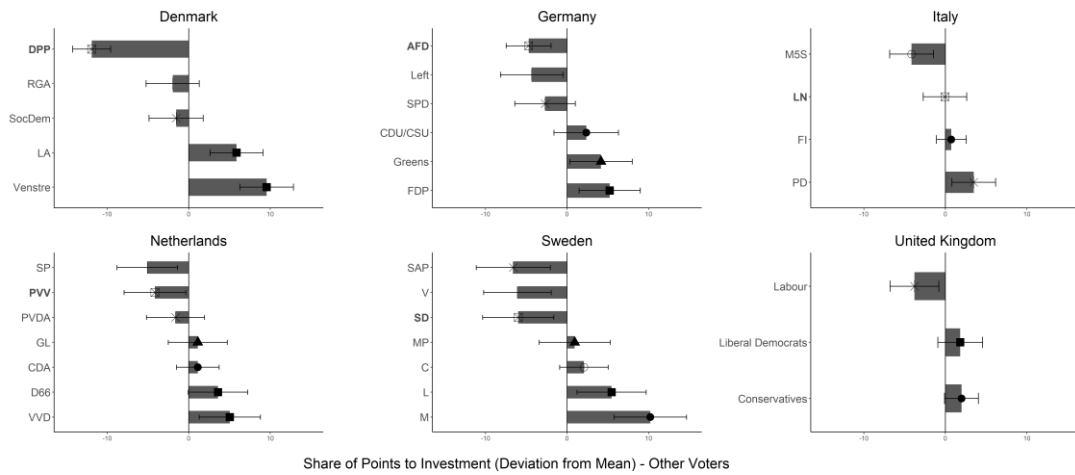


Figure A5. Perceptions of party positioning on the recalibration dimension (social investment vs. consumption), excluding own party voters' evaluations, by country

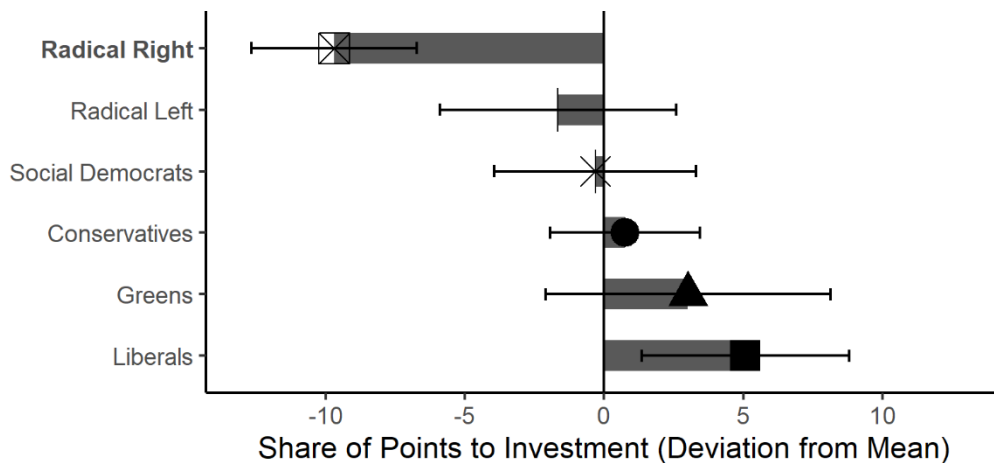


Figure A6. Perceptions of party positioning on the recalibration dimension (social investment vs. consumption), only considering radical right voters' evaluations, aggregated by party family

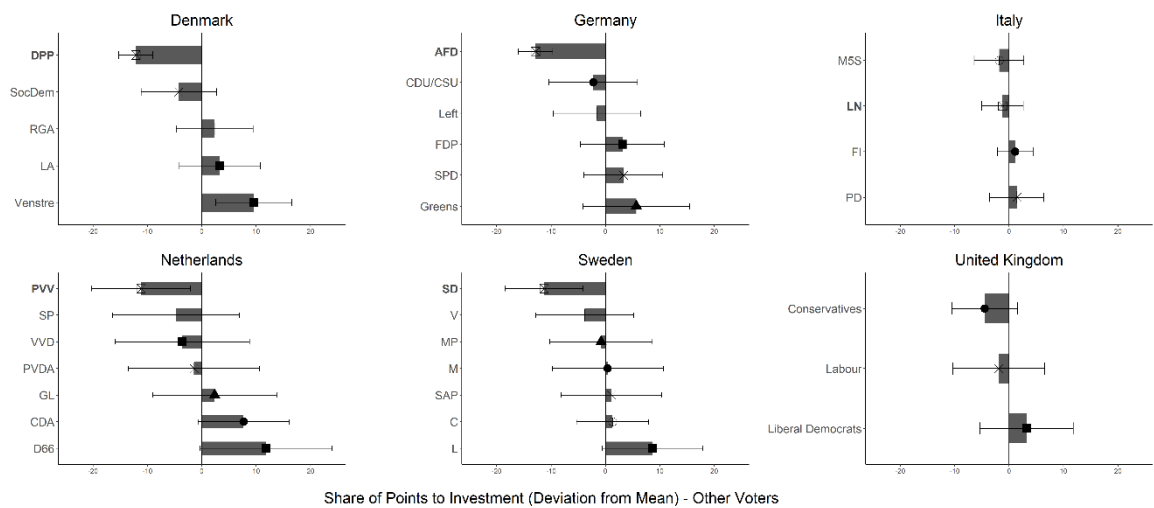


Figure A7. Perceptions of party positioning on the recalibration dimension (social investment vs. consumption), only considering radical right voters' evaluations, by country