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Make My Money Mine! How is Macroeconomic Welfare Spending associated with the Electoral Support for Populist Radical Right Parties in Western European Countries?

Abstract

This paper argues that consumptive welfare state expenditures reinforce the electoral support for Populist Radical Right Parties (PRRPs) among their active sympathisers, since this part of the electorate perceives higher expenditures as unjust towards the deserving parts of society and subsequently becomes (more) receptive to the welfare state agendas of PRRPs. This effect may be extrapolatable to the broader electorate. The findings contribute to discussions on the recalibration of the welfare state and its partisan implications. Theoretically, the paper picks up on recent literature on PRRPs' welfare state politics and discourse, the welfare preferences of their voters as well as relative deprivation. Methodologically, the paper employs basic multiple regressions at the macro-level political conflict within the EU-15 countries between 1990 and the present day, and a multi-level logit model at the individual level.

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Introduction

In January 2024, the German politician Sahra Wagenknecht launched the party Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW). Previously, Wagenknecht had been a member of the left-wing party Die Linke but was startled by the party's liberal stances towards immigration. From the outset, experts certified the freshly founded BSW as having great potential to appeal to voters critical towards immigration but in favour of left-leaning economic policies. Unsurprisingly, Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) – Germany's largest Populist Radical Right Party (PRRP) – was quickly identified as the potential main competitor of Wagenknecht's new party (Vock, 2024).

These developments resonate with the standing contention that PRRPs and left-wing parties compete over a culturally conservative but economically progressive part of the electorate (Oesch & Rennwald, 2018). Moreover, they relate to an evolving focus on socio-economic matters within political science research on PRRPs (Keskinen, 2016; Röth, Afonso & Spies, 2018). Until recently, scholars have attributed the electoral success of PRRPs predominantly or even exclusively to their positions on the cultural axis of political conflict, like their opposition to immigration (Rooduijn, 2015). In particular, inquiries increasingly call for investigations into the role that the welfare state plays in the vote choice of said part of the electorate (Rathgeb & Busemeyer, 2022). The demand-side-oriented account presented here builds on an integrated approach to the variations in the electoral support for PRRPs. It argues that PRRPs conceptualise the welfare state as a political issue cutting across axes by publicly portraying high consumptive welfare state expenditures as means distributed to undeserving immigrants and not to deserving natives. In this argumentative avenue, the subsequent considerations are tied to the following research question: Firstly, how are macro-level welfare state spendings associated with the electoral fortunes of PRRPs in Western European countries; and secondly, how does this association relate to their traditional anti-immigration positions on the cultural axis of political conflict?

Finally, the paper posits that the broached claims about an unfair distribution of welfare provisions appeal to feelings of relative deprivation within (sympathising) parts of the electorate. The respective voters become (more) receptive to the welfare state agenda of PRRPs, which results in reinforced support for PRRPs. In sum, consumptive welfare expenditures positively affect the electoral support for PRRPs. This picks up on a scientific need for bridging welfare state and party research as well as on previous suggestions to shift respective research from the local to the national level. Lastly, the argument hypothesises the interconnections of the welfare state, immigration, and populist radical right support by theoretically departing from the welfare state rather than from immigration. Such a somewhat unconventional approach contributes to the literature on the recalibration of the welfare state and can inspire fresh perspectives on the interconnections under analysis.

The remainder of the study is organised as follows: The first section briefly reviews the literature on the welfare state and its relationship with PRRPs in Western Europe, showing how bridging these two branches of political science from a welfare-related

starting point is theoretically valuable. A second section expands this review by hypothesising how consumptive welfare state expenditures may affect electoral support for PRRPs. The third section establishes a research design to test the hypotheses put forward. Subsequently, the hypotheses are tested both at the macro-level through descriptive statistics, a simple measure of correlation (Pearson's R) as well as normal ordinary least squares regressions; and at the individual level by employing a multi-level logistic regression. Finally, the last section discusses the results of the analyses.

Literature review

Since Esping-Andersen's (1990) seminal book *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, scholars have eagerly discussed his assignment of (Western) countries to either a liberal, conservative, or social democratic welfare regime. This led to a dominance of welfare regime analyses in comparative social policy research, with *regime* referring to "[…] specific patterns of work and welfare", which result from the interactions between societal institutions such as the state, market, or family (Vis & van Kersbergen, 2013, p. 53). While these approaches produce valuable insights into the overall faring of Western welfare states, they reveal little about the implications of public welfare spending on party competition within individual nation-states. For instance, many studies also acknowledge that immigration interacts with national welfare spending (e.g., Soroka et al., 2016) and assess the impact of immigration on the welfare state regime as a whole (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2011; Freeman, 2020), but do not take national partisan dynamics into the equation. However, looking at these interlinkages is fruitful as there is substantial literature suggesting a link between variations in the immigration rate within a country and electoral outcomes for PRRPs (Otto & Steinhardt, 2014; Barone et al., 2016; Halla, Wagner & Zweimüller, 2017). Interestingly, the studies suggesting such a link typically utilise triggered economic as well as welfare insecurities as explanations. For instance, Otto and Steinhardt (2014) note that the relationship between immigration and increasing votes for PRRPs across city districts in the German city of Hamburg is "driven by natives' concerns about negative implications for welfare and local amenities" (p. 76).

Similar to Otto and Steinhardt (2014), most of the work on the (causal) relationship between immigration and populist radical right supports focuses on the local (welfare-related) effects of immigration (Cavaillé & Ferwerda, 2023). Notwithstanding, in a recent meta-analysis of studies, Cools, Finseraas and Rogeberg (2021) found the average causal effect of local immigration on populist radical right vote choice to be weaker than commonly assumed in the literature when correcting for reporting bias. Simultaneously, they discovered a great heterogeneity in effect sizes and concluded that (a) immigration could be of importance for populist radical right vote choice only under specific circumstances and (b) that "[…] immigration at the national level might be more important for voters than local immigration […]" (p. 1003). This calls for research examining how other matters of political competition interact with national-level immigration regarding electoral support for PRRPs. Here, national-level welfare

spending constitutes an important complementary theme because, as outlined, inquiries connecting variation in immigration to electoral outcomes (for PRRPs) often point towards welfare insecurities in the electorate. Hence, such spending is a vital object of political competition.

Ranking individual-level anti-immigration stances among the independent variables with the most explanatory power over electoral support for PRRPs (Rooduijn, 2015, p. 5) further motivates interconnecting welfare spending, immigration, and electoral support for PRRPs. Moreover, the majority of studies to date have related this support to the cultural axis of political conflict (e.g., Werts, Scheepers & Lubbers, 2013; Ziller & Schübel, 2015). Some have even described the economic positions of PRRPs as intentionally "blurry" (Rovny, 2013). Only recently, the literature started challenging this assessment by showing that PRRPs indeed hold clear contentions on the economic axis and pursue a distinct welfare state agenda voters know about. This agenda emphasises consumptive welfare expenditures like public pensions or cash benefits over investment policies such as job training or active labour market programs (Otjes et al., 2018; Enggist & Pinggera, 2022). The rationale behind the current interest in consumptive welfare state spending versus spending on social investment originates from previous research on the recalibration of the welfare state, which shows that welfare attitudes in the electorate go beyond simple approval or resentment (van Oorschot & Meuleman, 2012). Rather, these attitudes are, inter alia, contingent upon the overarching orientation of the specific provisions. A multitude of research stresses the importance of juxtaposing social investment with passive – or consumptive – measures of income (Roosma, Gelissen & van Oorschot, 2013; Fossati & Häusermann, 2014; Busemeyer & Garritzmann, 2017; Ronchi, 2018). In line with many of these inquiries, this paper conceptualises consumptive welfare spending as passive social policy instruments (e.g., income redistribution, public pensions, social spending disbursed in cash), as opposed to measures aiming to foster the educational and labour market activities of their recipients (compare Fossati & Häusermann, 2014).

Over time, left-wing parties have started to emphasise social investments over consumptive welfare provisions to appeal to "[…] their growing constituency of progressive socio-cultural professionals […]". However, this shift fuels their contest over voters traditionally favouring high consumptive welfare spending (Abou-Chadi & Immergut, 2019, quote on p. 697). In light of this contest, it is not surprising that PRRPs stress the significance of consumptive welfare state expenditures in their welfare politics. The emphasis on consumptive welfare spending is also embedded in a distinct, chauvinistic welfare state model: On the one hand, PRRPs advocate a chauvinistic welfare approach, which restricts social services to allegedly deserving natives. On the other hand, PRRPs pronounce the importance of former productivity in the distribution of welfare state provisions. The more a person contributes to society, the more this person is deserving of high welfare state benefits (Abts et al., 2021). These perceptions of deservingness have been identified as predictors of populist radical right vote choice in previous research (Attewell, 2020). Furthermore, PRRPs communicate their welfare state agenda in a populist and moralising manner, which denounces the current welfare state as inefficient and depicts immigrants as "welfare state tourists" who are not

deserving of welfare state provisions from both the chauvinistic and the productivity perspective. The combination of striving to restrict (consumptive) welfare provisions to deserving natives and moralising discursive strategies allows PRRPs to publicly defend "welfare arrangements in principle, and even to argue in favour of their expansion in some areas like old age care and pensions, while, at the same time, criticising the concrete functioning of the welfare state" (Abts et al., 2021, pp. 26–27, quote on p. 27). Several studies underscore the societal effectiveness of this discursive proceeding (Nordensvard & Ketola, 2015; Van Hootegem, Abts & Meuleman, 2021; Enggist & Pinggera, 2022), which solidify the established proposition that voters are aware of PRRPs' welfare state agenda. Although a fair share of the existing work on the correspondence between immigration, welfare chauvinism, and subsequent PRRP support acknowledges interdependencies among the three, these studies often do not account for the salience of consumptive expenditures as opposed to social investments.

Finally, studies mainly view welfare chauvinism and chauvinistically motivated welfare attitudes/actions of the electorate and policymakers as the consequence of immigration and its factual economic consequences (Brils, Muis & Gaidytė, 2022). However, the welfare chauvinism of PRRPs does not necessarily function on the grounds of immigration's objective, material consequences but appeals to the consequences of immigration as *perceived* by voters (Heizmann, Jedinger & Perry, 2018; Hameleers, 2020; Cervi, Tejedor & Villar, 2023). Hence, PRRPs do not need to base their welfare chauvinistic discursive political strategies on factually present immigration, but on illustrating the consequences of possible immigration for the (existing) welfare spending of most interest to their electorate (i.e., consumptive welfare spending). The next section draws on the conducted literature review and theoretically substantiates this assessment.

Theory and Hypotheses

Bridging welfare state and party research

The conducted literature review indicates that bridging welfare state and party research presents a promising avenue of research because PRRPs reside at an ideological intersection between immigration and consumptive welfare state spending (also compare Rathgeb & Busemeyer, 2022, p. 15). Although welfare state regime analyses are predominant, several studies recognise the scientific valence of these interlinkages. Notwithstanding, they tend to (a) focus on the local level and (b) their arguments depart from the standpoint of measurable impacts of immigration on social policy and welfare provisions. However, considering that PRRPs do not rely on facts in their discursive proceeding, it appears sensible to reverse this conceptualisation and select welfare state measures – in particular, measures of consumptive welfare state spending – as the theoretical starting point. Therefore, this paper is interested in theorising the effect of macro-economic consumptive welfare state provisions on the electorate's stances towards PRRPs in the context of national-level immigration measures.

Theoretical mechanism: Relative deprivation

As implied, large-scale cross-sectional studies exploring the link between recalibrated welfare spending and voting behaviour against a backdrop of immigration are scarce in contemporary literature on PRRPs. Nevertheless, such inquiries can still draw on neighbouring research when hypothesising the exact interplay between national consumptive welfare expenditures, immigration, and the electoral fortunes of PRRPs (Otto & Steinhardt, 2014; Barone et al., 2016; Halla, Wagner & Zweimüller, 2017). Besides work shedding light on triggered economic insecurities within the electorate through high influxes of immigration and subsequent tendencies to vote for PRRPs (Lubbers, Gijsberts & Scheepers, 2002; Burgoon et al., 2019), the described discursive strategies, which PRRPs adopt in communicating their welfare state agenda, are also smoothly compatible with recent academic contributions on feelings of relative deprivation as an important driver of vote choice.

The term relative deprivation describes a situation "[…] where a person: (i) desires to have X but does not have it; (ii) believes that someone else, or some other people, which may include him/herself at some previous point in time, do have X; and (iii) perceives it as both feasible and just that he/she has X" (Burgoon et al., 2019, p. 57). Hence, in the context of relative deprivation, economic hardship is not necessarily examinable through consulting aggregated data like the unemployment rate, replacement rates, or income, but is based on the individual's perception of their unsatisfactory situation. Moreover, scholars argue (a) in favour of a negative association between relative deprivation and institutional trustworthiness (Klandermans, Roefs & Olivier, 2001) and (b) regularly find a positive effect of subjective social status loss on PRRP vote choice (Gidron & Hall, 2017).

PRRPs offer a distinctive welfare state agenda, which comprises a welfare chauvinistic emphasis on consumptive welfare provisions and former productivity. They effectively communicate this agenda in an anti-elitist, populist manner by depicting immigrants as welfare state tourists who are undeserving of welfare provisions and deprive natives of the provisions to which they are entitled. Since voters are aware of PRRPs' welfare stances, the described narrative invokes sentiments of relative deprivation among the electorate – especially among voters regularly exposed to PRRPs' political communication. These sentiments of relative deprivation facilitate electoral support for PRRPs. It should be noted that the outlined theoretical mechanism, which connects PRRPs' welfare state agendas and their discursive strategies to electoral support for PRRPs, rests on theoretical assumptions rather than on standing knowledge. All these assumptions are grounded in contemporary research. A short discussion of the repercussions for the explanatory validity of the theoretical mechanism can be found in the limitations section.

There are two possible consequences of variation in national expenditures on consumptive welfare provisions in the context of the established mechanism. On the one hand, social policies generally play a crucial role in addressing concerns among citizens (compare Chung & Mau, 2014). Hence, voters might support a PRRP because they

perceive their agenda as the best-fitting remedy for their concerns and insecurities. There are, in fact, empirical arguments according to which PRRP vote choice is partly also attributable to pragmatic considerations of voters (Van Der Brug, Fennema & Tillie, 2005) and for societal groups exposed to high social risks, evidence shows that directed consumptive social expenditures (unemployment benefits, pensions, etc.) reduce the likelihood of PRRP support by mitigating socio-economic concerns (Vlandas & Halikiopoulou, 2022).

Consumptive welfare spending on the macro-level

On the other hand, people tend to unfavourably evaluate policies from which they do not benefit (Busemeyer & Neimanns, 2017). Therefore, higher expenditure levels could fuel feelings of relative deprivation and, subsequently, increase PRRP support because most of the electorate does not directly profit from consumptive welfare provisions. Thus, this provides PRRPs with the opportunity to discursively frame high consumptive welfare expenditures as a symptom of a malfunctioning welfare state that favours undeserving immigrants over deserving natives. In a similar vein, consumptive welfare state expenditures may be perceived as a service that is reserved for deserving natives, and the possibility of undeserving immigrants also profiting from this service in the future could induce insecurities about future social status loss and future relative deprivation. Thus, considering the national-level research context, this paper hypothesises:

> *H1: A greater amount of consumptive welfare expenditures at the national level increases the (overall) electoral support for PRRPs.*

Finally, the effect of consumptive welfare expenditures is expected to differ contingent on the immigration rate because variations in immigration are theoretically interlinked with economic and welfare concerns. The relationship between consumptive welfare expenditures and PRRP support is thus conceptualised as a dynamic factor of electoral behaviour conditional on the immigration rate. The claims about the distribution of consumptive welfare provisions made by PRRPs only function based on their anti-immigration stances, and the effect hypothesised under H1 should, therefore, be greatly affected by variations in the immigration level. The precise form of this interaction effect remains unclear. On the one hand, high consumptive welfare expenditures may mitigate feelings and perceived risks of relative deprivation and subjective social status loss in the face of the external factor of immigration. On the other hand, consumptive welfare expenditures could enhance such feelings within the broader electorate since the distribution of the financial means is again perceived as unjust towards natives – a claim predominant in the welfare state agenda of PRRPs. These unclarities also apply to situations of low immigration. Here, PRRPs could have less discursive space to play off immigration against welfare provisions. On the contrary, PRRPs could still capitalise on

feelings of relative deprivation, as they are, by definition, not dependent on facts. Therefore, the second hypothesis of this paper is kept vague and reads:

H2: The effect of consumptive welfare expenditures is conditional on the immigration rate.

Research Design, Data, and Methods

Definition of the populist radical right

Although most scholars have similar approaches to defining the populist radical right[1] – sometimes also denoted as extreme right, radical right, or populist right – there is no consensus (Mudde, 2016a) on the exact composition of the party family. This is not only due to the occasional emergence of new parties in the ideological environment of the PRRPs which previous studies could not account for, but also reflected in a disagreement over the populist definitional element of PRRPs and the (not) belonging of certain parties. For example, some studies incorporate the British United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) in their analyses (Enggist & Pinggera, 2022), whereas other research disregards them as members of the PRRP party family (Mudde, 2016b). It is beyond the scope of this paper to present a theoretically and empirically complete outline of PRRPs. Therefore, the following sections use a modified version of the overview provided by Mudde (2007). All parties mentioned by Mudde are part of the analyses conducted here, and the modifications pertain to PRRPs founded after the publication of the used overview and some additional parties that are argued to contain a PRRP character within the political science discourse.

Table 1: PRRPs considered in the analyses

Country	Party
Austria	• Bündnis Zukunft Österreich (BZÖ) • Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ)
Belgium	• Front National • Vlaams Belang • Vlaams Blok
Denmark	• Dansk Folkeparti
Finland	• Perussuomalaiset (PS) | True Finns
France	• Front National

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[1] Often, nativism, authoritarianism, and populism are presented as the three core elements of PRRPs' ideologies.

Germany	• Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)[2]
	• Die Republikaner (REP)
Greece	• Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS)
Italy	• Fratelli d'Italia[3]
	• Lega Nord
Netherlands	• Forum for Democracy
	• List Pim Fortuyn[4]
	• Party for Freedom
Portugal	• Partido Nacional Renovador (PNR)
Sweden	• Sverigedemokraterna
Spain	• VOX
United Kingdom	• United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)[5]

Since this inquiry aims at shedding light on the linkages between consumptive welfare expenditures, the immigration rate, and the electoral support of PRRPs in Western European countries, the broached support constitutes the main dependent variable of interest. The national consumptive welfare expenditures represent the central independent variable, and the immigration rate resembles the most viable control and interaction variable. The reason why this paper uses welfare spending measures rather than generosity measures such as replacement rates is a theoretical one: In essence, the argument made here is about the discourse of PRRPs, not the factual performance of the welfare state. For this discourse, welfare spending appears more suitable, because they are easier to process in a framework of a striking message towards the electorate than more abstract measures like replacement rates.

The precise measurements and application contexts are introduced below. All data utilized for assessing the expenditure levels is drawn from the Comparative Political Dataset (CPDS) (Armingeon et al., 2023), the data on the national immigration rates stems from the Eurostat database and the information on electoral support is taken from both the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) and the European Social Survey (ESS). The sample of countries is limited to Western European countries – namely to the EU-15 countries – because the referenced literature almost exclusively analyses this group of countries. In addition, evidence suggests that the PRRPs of Central and Eastern European countries (CEE) differ from their Western European counterparts in some of their ideological premises (Buštíková, 2018). The reasoning behind limiting the sample

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[2] Sola (2018)
[3] Donà (2022)
[4] Koopmans & Muis (2009)
[5] Webb and Bale (2014)

to EU-15 counties is hence twofold: Firstly, almost all of the literature explored in the theory section draws on data from Western European Countries. Consequently and secondly, the established hypotheses may not be generalisable to other political contexts. In fact, immigration has until recently not been a particularly salient issue in the CEE countries (Minkenberg, 2017), and evaluating the electoral performance of PRRPs "[…] in terms of a native backlash against the immigration population serves poorly as an explanation in countries where immigration does not represent a salient issue" (Brils, Muis & Gaidytė, 2022, p. 59). However, immigration and, in particular, anti-immigration stances form an integral part of the theorised mechanism. By construction, this mechanism could, therefore, not apply to the political context of CEE countries.

Methodological challenges and levels of society

The first part employs a simple measure of correlation, namely Pearson's R, and runs basic OLS regressions to gain a descriptive, superficial insight into the interdependencies between the main variables on the macro level. This may seem oversimplistic. However, in the final data set, the initially low number of observations is further reduced due to missing values, rendering a straightforward multiple regression with party- and time-level fixed effects of PRRP vote shares in a given national election on the level of consumptive welfare expenditures[6] statistically inefficient. Nevertheless, considering both the macro- and the micro-levels of society is still a desired mode of analysis that contributes to a more nuanced perspective on the interrelations under analysis.

Since the sketched approach returns nothing more than mere correlations at the macro-level of political conflict, which could possibly be induced through all kinds of (causal) mechanisms, a second part attempts a more thorough investigation by employing a multi-level logit model to an ESS data set compiled from seven survey waves (waves three through nine). This logit model takes the self-indicated closeness to PRRPs of respondents as a proxy for electoral support. The ESS also comprises a question that relates to the vote choice of the respondents in the national election and is used widely in contemporary research (e.g., Abou-Chadi & Wagner, 2019). At first sight, this recall question might seem more suitable for the established research context. But considering the theory section, the interplay between consumptive welfare expenditures and the immigration rate is conceptualised as a dynamic factor in the electoral behaviour of voters. Notwithstanding, respondents do not necessarily answer the ESS recall question on vote choice in the same year in which the corresponding election took place. Hence, respondents could support a PRRP due to shifts in the immigration rate (and the expenditure level) without having voted for a PRRP in the last national election. Consider the case of Germany: In the 2013 federal elections, immigration was of secondary topical salience (Muno & Stockemer, 2021). Two years later, the 2015

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[6] These two variables would correspond to the measurement strategies of neighbouring endeavours. Compare for example Starke, Obinger and Castles (2008) and Werts, Scheepers and Lubbers (2013)

immigration crisis had not only boosted the topical salience of immigration and the immigration rate (roughly 0,8% in 2013 vs. roughly 1,9% in 2015)[7] but had also triggered previously latent anti-immigration stances in the population as well as an increase in the electoral support for the PRRP AfD (Sola, 2018). Consequently, respondents may not have voted for the AfD in the 2013 election despite supporting the party at the time of the interview. Bearing in mind that the established research design builds on several hundred observations for a specific country-year combination, such situations would potentially bias the results of the envisaged model. The self-indicated closeness to a PRRP at the time of the interview, therefore, offers a more goal-oriented option. Moreover, the measurement of electoral support through self-indicated partisan closeness has a handy theoretical implication: While vote choice at some point in the past may have been conditional on a plethora of factors and not necessarily a good proxy for affiliation with a party, the question about the party closest to a voter allows respondents to resort to the residual category "Don't know". Hence, indicating a PPRP as the closest party to oneself becomes an intentional decision. Therefore, the question effectively captures the part of the electorate that is actively sympathetic towards PRRPs. For the interpretation of the results, this subtle but important distinction means that analyses at the macro-level pertain to the broader electorate, whereas individual-level analyses focus on the active sympathisers of PRRPs.

In contrast to the dependent variable of electoral support, the central independent variable is based on the same two measurements, expressed as a percentage of national gross national product, in all analyses. The first measurement encompasses all social spending of a nation-state in a given year disbursed in cash. The second consists of a self-crafted consumptive welfare spending index. The index conceives of consumptive welfare state spendings as the unweighted sum of total public and mandatory private expenditure on old age, public and private mandatory expenditure (in cash) on early retirement for labour market reasons, public and mandatory private unemployment compensation and severance pay (in cash), and cash expenditure for unemployment benefits. The immigration rate is defined as the number of foreigners establishing their "usual residence in the territory of a Member State for a period that is or is expected to be, of at least 12 months, having previously been usually resident in another Member State or a third country" (Eurostat[8]), expressed as a percentage of the total population in a given year. All in all, the data used for the analyses on the individual level ranges from 2006 until 2020 and includes more than 100 country-year combinations – in the employed multi-level logit model, these combinations provide the clusters.

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[7] These numbers are based on own calculations using the described data set.
[8] The full reference plus link is given in the reference section.

Analyses and Results

Political conflict at the macro-level

The immigration rate seems to be highly correlated with PRRP vote share. On the contrary, a look at the joint trajectories of consumptive welfare expenditures and the vote shares of PRRP does not suggest a relationship. The employment of a simple measure of correlation, namely Pearson's R, corroborates this impression: While there is a loose negative correlation between PRRP vote shares and consumptive welfare spending and total social spending in cash, the two respective correlation estimates are far from being statistically significant. By contrast, computing the correlation between the immigration rate and the vote shares of PRRPs yields a considerably positive, statistically significant estimate.

Figure 1: immigration rate (% of population) and vote shares (%) of PRRPs in EU-15 countries between 1990 and 2019. All graphs created using the ggplot-package in R. Data extracted from the CMP, the CPDS and Eurostat.
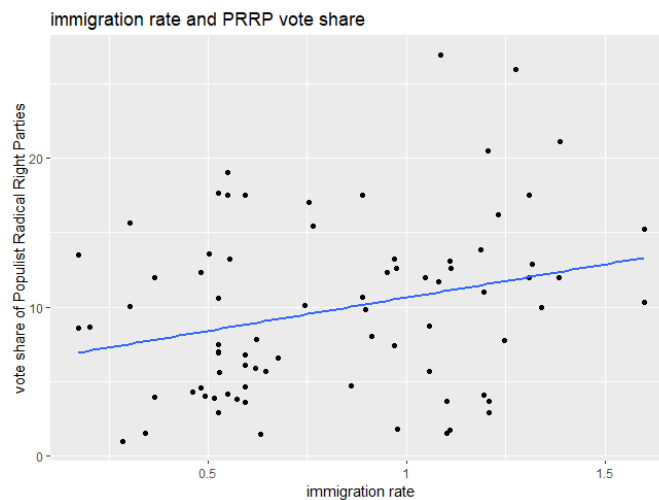
Figure 2: Social Spendings in Cash (% of GDP) and vote shares (%) of PRRPs in EU-15 countries between 1990 and 2019.
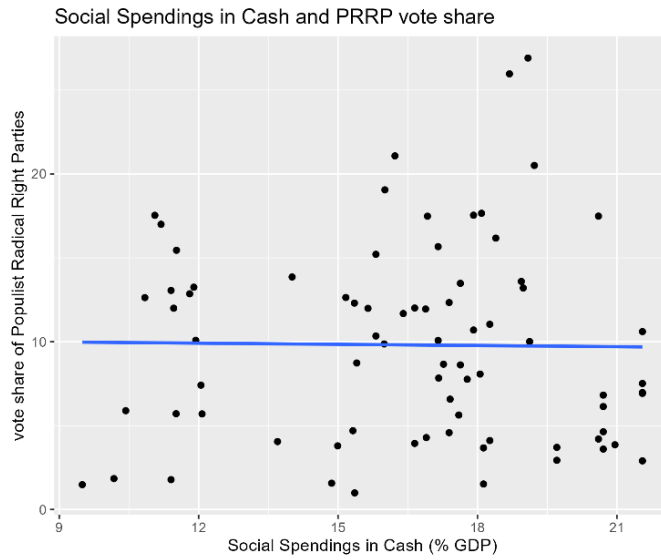
Social Spendings in Cash and PRRP vote share

Figure 2: Consumptive Welfare Spending (% of GDP) and vote shares (%) of PRRPs in EU-15 countries between 1990 and 2019.

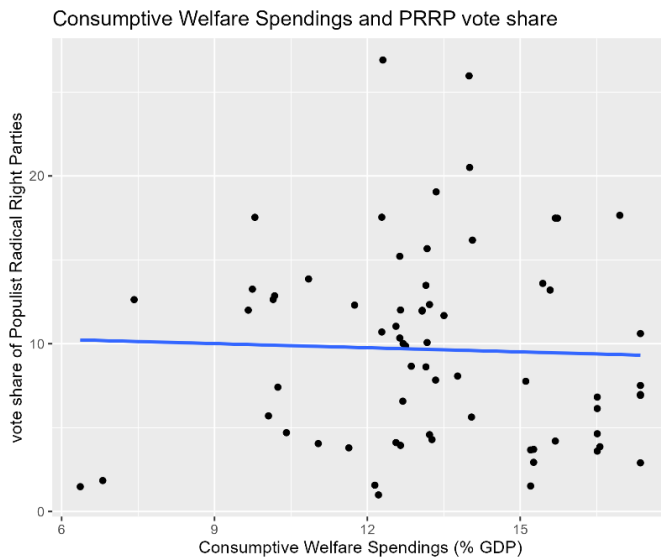Consumptive Welfare Spendings and PRRP vote share

Table 2: Correlations between consumptive welfare state expenditures/the immigration rate and PRRPs' vote share

	Pearson's R	p-value | 95% confidence interval (lower and upper bound)	t-value | degrees of freedom
Consumptive Welfare Spendings	-0.03	0.77 | -0,27, 2.0	-0.30 | 666
Social Spendings in Cash	-0.01	0.91 | -0.23, 0.21	-0.11 | 75
Immigration rate	0.26	0.02 | 0.05, 0.47	2.48 | 75

Nonetheless, these estimates can only serve as a starting point, since the evaluated findings are not only based on a small number of observations but also do not account for other possibly confounding factors and lack general methodological appropriateness. Moreover, the hypothesised interaction between consumptive welfare expenditures and the immigration rate cannot be tested in the established setting. To address this shortcoming at least roughly, the results of four basic linear ordinary least regressions are shown below:

Table 3: Regression results, macro-level

	Dependent variable:			
	PRRPs' vote share			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Consumptive Welfare Spending	0.725[*]			
	(0.393)			
Social Spendings in Cash		0.535[*]		
		(0.272)		
immigration rate (log)	2.795	3.737[*]		

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	(2.036)	(2.035)		
share of people older than 60 as % of population	0.005	-0.227	-0.028	-0.343
	(0.378)	(0.336)	(0.372)	(0.345)
real GDP growth	-0.194	-0.349	-0.067	-0.315
	(0.339)	(0.328)	(0.342)	(0.327)
unemployment rate	-0.490***	-0.424**	-0.555***	-0.507***
	(0.172)	(0.161)	(0.173)	(0.171)
Consumptive Welfare Spendings × immigration rate (log)			-2.008*	
			(1.184)	
Social Spendings in Cash × immigration rate (log)				-1.261
				(0.925)
Constant	2.905	6.215	-19.927	-11.658
	(7.342)	(6.124)	(15.280)	(14.455)
Observations	65	76	65	76
R^2	0.185	0.170	0.224	0.191
Adjusted R^2	0.116	0.110	0.143	0.121

Note: Standard Errors in Parentheses.
No additional model specifications.

$^*p<0.1; ^{**}p<0.05; ^{***}p<0.01$

After controlling for basic co-variates such as the percentage of people older than 60 or real GDP growth and in line with H1, a positive relationship between consumptive expenditures emerges that is significant at the 10% level. This relationship remains, regardless of whether expenditures are measured through consumptive welfare spending or social spending disbursed in cash. Notably, this effect reverses when interacting expenditures with the immigration rate, offering some superficial support

for H2. In situations of high immigration, the effect of expenditures is mitigated and potentially reversed.

Individual level: Building a multi-level logit model for PRRP support

The following analyses are motivated by the superficial insights at the macro-level and apply the broached multi-level logit model to the individual level of PRRP support. Following the Maximum Likelihood Approach outlined in King (1998), the baseline logit model used here reads:

$$(\mathbf{1}) \; Y_i \sim f_{bern}(y_i | \pi_i)$$

$$(\mathbf{2}) \; \pi_i = \frac{1}{(1 + \exp{(-(x_i \beta)))}}$$

where $x_i \beta$ is a short expression for $\beta_0 + \beta_1 x_{i1} + \beta_2 x_{i2} + \cdots + \beta_k x_{ik}$, Y_i denotes the dependent variable (identification with a PRRP) and π_i corresponds to the probability of a respondent identifying with a PRRP. A multi-level logit model acknowledges that the observed outcomes (level 1) are nested in clusters of a higher-level structure (level 2) and potentially allows the relationship of x_i and y_i to vary across clusters. In the set-up research design, a dummy variable delineates respondents of the ESS sample who indicated a PRRP as the party closest to them from respondents who feel closest to other parties in a given year and country. The central predictors of interest are the consumptive welfare spending and the social spending in cash, as well as their interaction with the immigration rate. Against this backdrop, the model estimates the average change in the probability[9] of feeling close to PRRPs if consumptive welfare spending increases or decreases while recognising that respondents are exposed to the ESS interview in a specific country-year combination with a specific baseline probability of PRRP identification.

The procedure for modifying the introduced baseline model in a multi-level sense follows the three-step guide proposed by Sommet and Morselli (2017). The guide, inter alia, comprises centring the predictor variables around their grand mean in the whole sample. This centring facilitates the interpretation of the resulting regression coefficients, because the average change in the parameter of the outcome variable associated with a one-unit increase in the predictor variables consequently reflects the average change when all predictor variables are set to their grand mean. The corresponding regression coefficient can then be interpreted as the overall sample effect of the predictor of interest on the outcome (ibid., p. 211). In other words, centring all

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[9] In the strict sense, a logistic regression estimates the change in log-odds. However, logit models are commonly used to predict the probability of an event against the background of different levels in the included independent variable. This is also the goal here.

variables included in the multi-level logistic regression around their grand sample mean yields an estimate of the average statistical effect of consumptive welfare expenditures on the electoral support for PRRPs measured through self-indicated closeness to PRRPs in the sample drawn from seven ESS rounds. This proceeding matches the purpose of this inquiry since it is interested in the average effect of consumptive welfare state expenditures in EU-15 countries and not necessarily in estimating effect sizes for specific country-year combinations.

The intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) in the final data set lies at 27%, meaning that 27% of the chances of supporting a PRRP are explained by the differences between country-year combinations. This assessment underscores the relevance of the chosen methodological approach.

Lastly, Sommet and Morselli (2017) advise evaluating the variance of the effect of relevant lower-level variables across clusters to guarantee a good model fit (pp. 212-213). This proceeding is particularly important when examining the interplays of level-1 and level-2 predictors. However, the established hypotheses only pertain to level-2 variables (variables measured for one country-year combination, e.g., total social spending in cash). Furthermore, there is no theoretical reason why the effect of consumptive welfare state expenditures would vary contingent on country and year other than the immigration rate – a level-2 interaction included in the further model specifications. Hence, the implemented model does not allow the relationship between consumptive welfare expenditures and PRRP support to vary within clusters, as this can also help prevent over-parameterisation (p. 212). Nevertheless, the results of a likelihood ratio test[10], which compares a model specification with random slopes for the effect of consumptive welfare spending to one without models, as recommended by Sommet and Morselli (2017), can be found in the appendix.

The considered control variables are the unemployment rate, a battery of commonly used individual-level variables, the effective number of parties in the electoral system, real GDP growth, and the immigration rate. For nearly all these control variables, scholars have at least suspected a relationship with electoral support for PRRPs at some point in time. For example, economic performance has often been connected to the success of radical right forces (Engler & Weisstanner, 2020). Similarly, researchers are interested in the influence of age (Miller-Idriss, 2018), religion (Minkenberg, 2018), education (Ivarsflaten & Stubager, 2012), unemployment (Sipma & Lubbers, 2020), general fractionalisation (Hudde, 2022), and political trust (Söderlund & Kestilä-Kekkonen, 2009) on PRRP support. Besides controlling for possible confounding, the respective coefficients point in reasonable directions: More trust in political parties and perceiving immigration as a culturally enriching process reduce the probability of supporting PRRPs (Ziller & Schübel, 2015), while a self-placement further right on the left-right scale increases the probability. The models use the ESS weights as recommended. The results of the final models are shown below:

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[10] The results are insignificant and therefore do not suggest a better fit when allowing random slopes.

Table 4: Regression results, Individual-Level Analyses (European Social Survey)

	Dependent variable:			
	self-indicated closeness to PRRPs			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Consumptive welfare spending	0.194**	0.221**		
	(0.094)	(0.097)		
Social spendings in cash			0.042	0.085
			(0.055)	(0.071)
Immigration rate (log)	0.760		0.922**	
	(0.478)		(0.424)	
High immigration		0.410		0.151
		(0.410)		(0.388)
Low immigration		-1.435**		-0.927
		(0.607)		(0.653)
Electoral fractionalization	-0.727	-0.542	0.959	1.175
	(1.870)	(1.889)	(1.913)	(2.042)
Unemployment rate	-0.127	-0.191**	-0.021	-0.107
	(0.089)	(0.088)	(0.083)	(0.088)
Real GDP growth	0.051	0.041	0.027	0.013
	(0.072)	(0.071)	(0.074)	(0.076)
Left-right scale placement[11]	0.304***	0.304***	0.296***	0.296***
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)

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[11] 1 = left, 10 = right

Trust in political parties[12]	-0.118***	-0.118***	-0.134***	-0.134***
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Cultural life enriched by immigrants[13]	-0.309***	-0.309***	-0.304***	-0.304***
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Age	-0.019***	-0.019***	-0.019***	-0.019***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Gender[14]	0.337***	0.337***	0.316***	0.316***
	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.041)	(0.041)
Years of education	-0.047***	-0.047***	-0.055***	-0.055***
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Self-indicated religiosity[15]	-0.064***	-0.064***	-0.065***	-0.065***
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Satisfaction with democracy[16]	-0.190***	-0.190***	-0.184***	-0.184***
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Total welfare state generosity	0.019	0.044	0.046	0.062
	(0.055)	(0.054)	(0.045)	(0.047)
Consumptive welfare spendings×high immigration		-0.312**		
		(0.141)		
Consumptive welfare spendings×low immigration		0.242		
		(0.172)		
Social spendings in cash×high immigration				-0.149

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[12] 1 = no trust, 10 = full trust
[13] 1 = cultural life undermined, 10 = very enriched
[14] 1= male, 0= female
[15] 0 = not at all religious, 10 = very religous
[16] 0=extremely dissatisfied, 10 = extremely satisfied

				(0.123)
Social spendings in cash×low immigration				0.083
				(0.175)
Constant	-4.330***	-4.293***	-3.930***	-3.953***
	(0.278)	(0.316)	(0.228)	(0.291)
Observations	44,201	44,201	51,474	51,474
Log Likelihood	-7,318.528	-7,314.223	-7,921.547	-7,921.948
Akaike Inf. Crit.	14,669.060	14,666.440	15,875.090	15,881.900
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	14,808.200	14,831.680	16,016.680	16,050.020

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. All coefficients were estimated using the lme4 package in R

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

The first model examines the relationship between consumptive welfare spending and electoral support for PRRPs among sympathisers. In line with H1, consumptive welfare spendings increase the probability that a respondent indicates a PRRP as closest to them. This effect remains in model 3 in which the consumptive welfare state expenditures are measured as the yearly social spending in cash of an EU-15 country between 2006 and 2020, rather than in the form of the consumptive welfare spending of this country-year combination, although the effect is not significant. This may speak in favour of the ability of the crafted index to adequately capture consumptive welfare expenditures. When removing some of the individual-level controls, the effect of social spending in cash reaches statistical significance at conventional levels.[17]

Predicted probabilities: parametric bootstrap

To predict probabilities for the overall sample of European countries, the coefficients of model 1 were used to bootstrap one thousand hypothetical effect coefficient vectors from the sampling distribution (compare King et al., 2000)[18]. Although barely mentioned, bootstraps of some kind are frequently used in political science to obtain confidence intervals for an estimated parameter (Puth, Neuhäuser & Ruxton, 2015). In cases of multi-variate models applying to an unbalanced design and a large number of

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[17] Please refer to the appendix for the respective regression results.
[18] To be more specific: The estimated variance-covariance matrix of model 1 and the estimated coefficients were used as the variance and mean parameter of a multi-variate normal distribution. Then, a thousand draws from this distribution were generated.

observations, parametric bootstraps usually perform best (Konietschke et al., 2015). Since all utilised predictor variables are already grand-mean centred, this paper chooses an at-average approach, meaning that all control variables are held constant at their average[19]. While this proceeding has some inferential shortcomings, it is still common in quantitative political science research that involves logit models (compare Hanmer & Ozan Kalkan, 2013). Based on the thousand bootstrapped coefficient vectors, the average predicted probabilities of a respondent who indicated a PRRP as closest to them at different levels of consumptive welfare spending were generated by using equation **(2)** before averaging over the resulting probability estimates for each level of consumptive welfare spendings. The 26th and 975th values of the respective distribution of probabilities estimated through the bootstraps were used as the bounds of a 95% confidence interval:
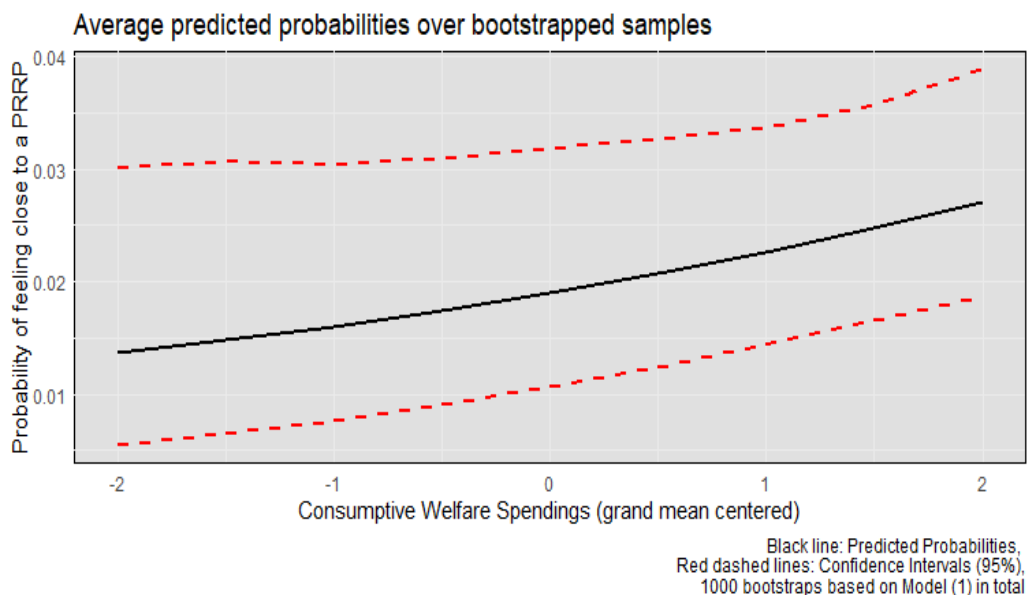

Figure 4: Probability of PRRP identification at different levels of consumptive welfare spendings

All in all, consumptive welfare expenditures reinforce the electoral support for PRRPs among sympathising parts of the electorate. However, a back-of-the-envelope calculation –as performed in the graph above – illustrates that this effect is small: On average, an increase of expenditures from two percentage points below the mean to two points above the mean for an average respondent in an average country-year cluster raises the probability of actively sympathising with a PRRP by no more than 1.2%. Nonetheless, this finding may be extrapolatable and have important implications for broader parts of the electorate, because a similar trend is observable at the macro-level of political conflict on which electoral support is measured through vote shares rather than self-indication.

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[19] The gender variable was held constant at "male".

Interaction between consumptive welfare state expenditures and the immigration rate

The second and fourth models add the interaction term with the immigration rate to both measures of consumptive welfare state expenditures. The immigration rate in a country is classified as low if it lies within the first quartile of all the observed values in the sample, as medium (reference category) if located within quartile 2 or 3, and as high if it exceeds the cut-off value separating the third from the fourth quartile. Interestingly, the positive association found in models 1 and 3 now reverses, and in country-year combinations with high immigration rates, consumptive welfare state expenditures seemingly reduce the effect of expenditures on PRRP support among respondents compared to country-year combinations with a medium immigration rate. On the contrary, consumptive welfare state expenditures increase the effect in country-year combinations with a low immigration rate compared to combinations with a medium immigration rate. These results are consistent with an alternative approach, which abstains from coding a dummy variable for the immigration rate and only interacts with the not grand mean-centred version with the two measures of consumptive welfare state expenditures[20]: If the immigration rate inclines, the positive effect of consumptive welfare expenditures on electoral support for PRRPs decreases and eventually reverses. Again, the observed individual-level trend among sympathisers mimics the tendencies found at the macro-level, and consumptive welfare state expenditures hence matter most in instances of low immigration. This exacerbates H2 and underpins the argument that consumptive welfare expenditures are a (tiny) piece in the puzzle of electoral support for PRRPs in Western Europe. More precisely, the effect of consumptive welfare state expenditures on actively sympathising with PRRPs could be stronger in instances of low immigration due to fears of spiralling future status loss if more immigrants enter the country. However, these results on the immigration rate generally come with high standard errors, and the interaction effects only partly reach statistical significance.

Discussion of results

Although confronted with a small-N problem at the macro-level, which precludes the application of methodologically appropriate tools, some descriptive evidence underlines the finding of a positive association between consumptive welfare state expenditures and electoral support for PRRPs. The analyses conducted at the individual level corroborate this assessment by employing a multi-level logistic regression, and the data thus speaks in favour of H1. The same holds for H2, but the estimates are less clear-cut and should be taken with caution.

On the grounds of the outlined theoretical premises, this suggests that (sympathising) parts of the electorate perceive high consumptive welfare state expenditures as unjust towards deserving members of society. In turn, these parts become more receptive to

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[20] A respective version can be found in the appendix.

the welfare state agenda of PRRPs. Surprisingly, but in line with H2, interacting consumptive welfare state expenditures with the immigration rate reverses the direction of the effect. In countries and years with a high immigration rate, consumptive welfare state expenditures reduce the chances of electoral support for PRRPs in the model, *compared* to countries with a medium immigration rate. While this is counterintuitive at first glance, two mechanisms could explain the results. First, eyeballing the small effect sizes, the impact of consumptive welfare state expenditures may be of secondary relevance. Thus, consumptive welfare state expenditures might only be of relevance for societal groups at risk and not for the broader electorate or sympathisers not at risk. As shown in the theory section, directed consumptive welfare state expenditures reduce the likelihood of PRRP support within these groups (Vlandas & Halikiopoulou, 2022).

Secondly, high consumptive welfare state expenditures embedded in countries and years with low or medium immigration rates could be connected to insecurities about redistributions of the services when the immigration rate inclines. In contexts of high immigration rates, this link to fears of relative deprivation could break, and consistently high consumptive welfare state expenditures may help mitigate experienced and feared hardships. The latter explanation could prove particularly valuable for further theory building on the contest between parties like the BSW – which strongly oppose immigration but speak out for more welfare provisions – and PRRPs. In times of low immigration, consumptive welfare provisions allow both partisan types to discursively capitalise on fears of relative deprivation and concerns about future immigration. Be that as it may, the general finding of the paper is that consumptive welfare state provisions can affect support for PRRPs. This is a promising insight for future research on electoral competition within multi-polar party spaces in Western Europe, comprising emerging parties such as Wagenknecht's BSW. Said finding also underpins the relevance of a recalibrated perspective on the welfare state when theorising its interrelations with partisan politics. Scholars have only recently begun to bridge welfare state literature and examinations of the populist radical right (Rathgeb & Busemeyer, 2022). The theoretical and empirical understanding of corresponding integrated factors driving the electoral faring of PRRP is still far from sufficient.

Limitations

The limitations of the paper and the possible avenues for future research are manifold. Despite accounting for the different baseline probabilities of PRRP support across countries and years through choosing a multi-level approach, the presented findings are not causal. They posit a positive association between consumptive welfare state expenditures and (individual-level) support for PRRPs. However, the developed theoretical mechanism behind this association was not tested itself but derived from existing literature. Therefore, the presupposed assumptions about the connections between high expenditure levels and sentiments of relative deprivation are not established facts and require further exploration. This is a viable avenue for future research because consumptive welfare state expenditures connect to PRRP support. A

closer look at the channels and methods through which PRRPs communicate their welfare state agenda could thus be promising (compare Poblete, 2015). Moreover, the direction of the posited theoretical chain remains unclear: Do people perceive consumptive welfare state expenditures as unjust after becoming receptive to the welfare state agenda of PRRPs, or do people become receptive to this agenda because they experience consumptive welfare state expenditures as means disbursed to undeserving members of society?

Furthermore, this paper did not consider how high consumptive welfare state expenditures interact with individual-level anti-immigration stances. Especially for further theory building, exploring these cross-level interactions is a point of departure as auspicious as methodologically challenging. The implementation and interpretation of cross-level interaction is itself a controversial topic within social sciences (Sommet & Morselli, 2017, pp. 213–214), and a complete operationalisation of individual-level anti-immigration stances necessitates sophisticated attitudinal indexes (compare, e.g., Cutts, Ford & Goodwin, 2011) beyond the scope of this paper.

Conclusion and findings

This paper has sought to contribute to the literature researching PRRPs against the backdrop of the welfare state by exploring the association between consumptive welfare state expenditures and electoral support for Western European PRRPs. It has argued that PRRPs discursively conceptualise the welfare state as a political issue cutting across the economic and cultural axes of political conflict, and they publicly centre their welfare state agenda around increasing consumptive welfare state expenditures for deserving recipients only. As part of this discursive strategy, PRRPs exploit high levels of consumptive welfare state expenditures to portray the disbursed provisions as means distributed to undeserving "welfare state tourists" and not to deserving natives. This discursive proceeding links to people's insecurities about (future) relative deprivation and (future) subjective social status loss in the face of immigration influxes. Therefore, electoral support for PRRPs should rise when consumptive welfare state expenditures are high – especially among parts of the electorate already sympathising with the party family. The findings indicate that consumptive welfare state expenditures are indeed associated with higher electoral support for PRRPs among sympathisers. The respective effect is small and may be conditional on the immigration rate and extrapolatable to broader parts of the electorate.

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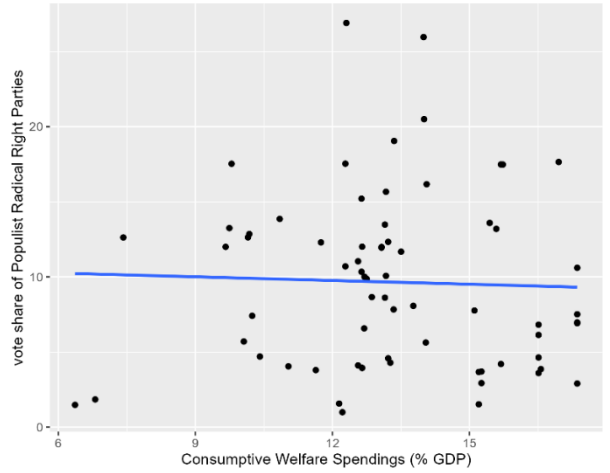
Appendix

Appendix 1: descriptive statistics: immigration rate and consumptive welfare state expenditures between 1990 and 2019 in EU-15 countries
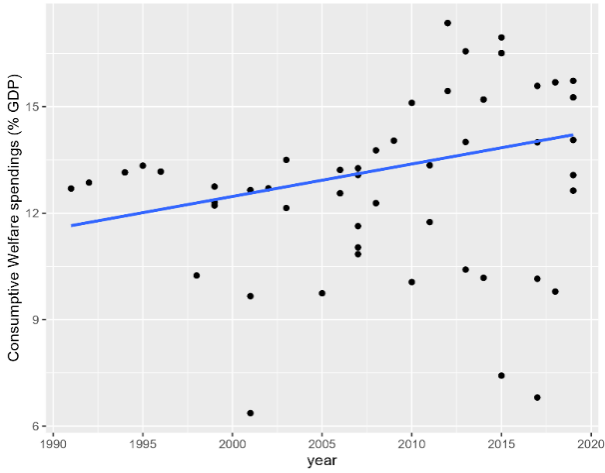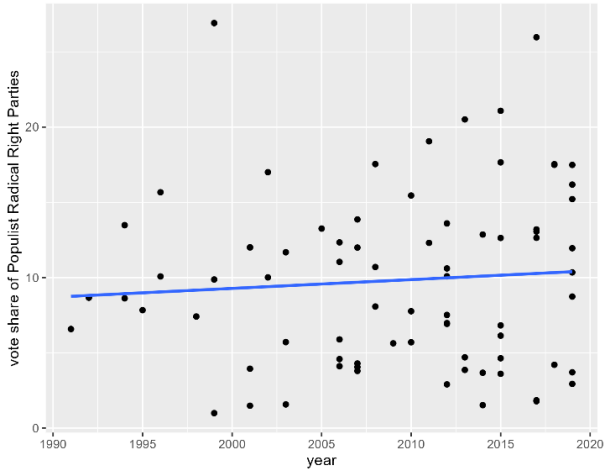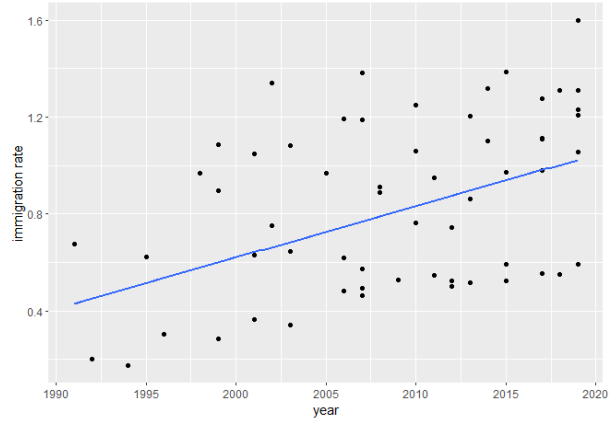
Appendix 2: regression table from adjusted models: Predictor variables not grand-mean centred, less predictors and interaction between consumptive welfare state expenditures and the continuous version of the immigration rate variable instead of the categorical dummy variable. Note that interactions in Model 2 and 4 contribute to variance inflation and make the coefficients of the consumptive welfare state expenditures and the immigration rate hardly interpretable

	Dependent variable:			
	self-indicated closeness to Populist Radical Right Parties			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Consumptive Welfare Spendings	0.283[***]	0.792[***]		
	(0.077)	(0.162)		
Social Spendings in Cash			0.175[**]	0.955[***]
			(0.081)	(0.203)
unemployment rate	-0.129	-0.206[***]	-0.047	-0.233[**]
	(0.083)	(0.080)	(0.104)	(0.110)
immigration rate	1.150[**]	8.410[***]	2.515[***]	14.860[***]
	(0.448)	(2.114)	(0.595)	(3.028)
effective number of parties	-0.160	-0.053	0.080	0.143
	(0.101)	(0.099)	(0.121)	(0.115)
real GDP growth	0.088	0.070	0.096	0.083
	(0.060)	(0.056)	(0.081)	(0.077)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
left-right scale	0.225***	0.225***	0.220***	0.220***
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.009)
trust in political parties	-0.219***	-0.219***	-0.235***	-0.235***
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.010)	(0.010)
cultural life enriched by immigrants	-0.346***	-0.347***	-0.351***	-0.351***
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Consumptive Welfare Spendings and immigration rate		-0.581***		
		(0.167)		
Social Spendings in cash and immigration rate				-0.791***
				(0.191)
Constant	-4.594***	-11.137***	-7.307***	-18.606***
	(0.976)	(2.070)	(1.298)	(2.958)
Observations	41,564	41,564	53,825	53,825
Log Likelihood	-7,538.625	-7,533.487	-8,761.122	-8,754.385
Akaike Inf. Crit.	15,097.250	15,088.980	17,542.240	17,530.770
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	15,183.600	15,183.960	17,631.180	17,628.600

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Appendix 3: Comparison of the deviances of two versions of Model 1 with and without random effects. The conducted likelihood-ratio test did not yield significant results and allowing the effect to vary across clusters does hence not guarantee a better model fit.

	log likelihood	deviance	chi squared (degrees of freedom)	p-value
Model 1 (no random effects)	-12195	24422		
Model 1 alt (random effects)	-12194	24442	1.0753 (2)	0.5841

Appendix 4: Pseudo R^2 (McFadden) for Models 1 through 4

Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
0.46	0.46	0.49	0.49

Appendix 5: Variance Inflation Tests for expenditure parameters Models 1 through 4

Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
2.46 (Consumptive Welfare Spendings)	2.83 (Consumptive Welfare Spendings)	1.46 (Social Spendings in Cash)	2.61 (Social Spendings in Cash)