

**Radical Right-Wing Populist Party Preference and Perceived Group Threat**

**Time, Context, and Moderators**

Inauguraldissertation

zur

Erlangung des Doktorgrades

der

Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Fakultät

der

Universität zu Köln

2014

vorgelegt von

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**Tag der Promotion:** 19.01.2014

*For my sister*



## **Acknowledgements**

This dissertation is the result of my three year fellowship as a PhD-student of the Research Training Group “Social Order and Life Chances in Cross-National Comparison” (SOCLIFE) at the University of Cologne. Completing this research project would not have been possible without the support of several individuals. I would like to take the opportunity and express my gratitude.

First and foremost, I thank my supervisors Elmar Schlüter and André Kaiser. Their academic guidance has been invaluable. I am grateful for their wisdom and consecutive mentoring that eventually enabled me to pursue an academic career. I am deeply indebted to Russell Dalton who invited me to the University of California, Irvine. His scientific expertise paired with an enthusiastic nature is encouraging and admirable. Furthermore, I thank Marcel Lubbers, who was my host during my research stay at the Radboud University Nijmegen, for many fruitful discussions. I highly appreciated his precious expertise.

I also like to thank some scholars who paved the way for this endeavor. Hermann Dülmer’s seminar on “voting behavior” in 2008 certainly laid the foundation for my substantial research interests. I further like to thank him for encouraging me to apply for this graduate program. I am grateful for the support of Bernd Weiß, who supervised my diploma-thesis and continues to be a great mentor.

I like to convey my appreciation to the Research Training Group SOCLIFE. Above the financial support, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), this research group provided a stimulating academic environment. I thank my colleagues for three inspiring years. In particular, I thank Conrad Ziller for numerous fruitful debates. I also like to thank Hans-Jürgen Andreß and Achim Goerres for their insightful comments along the way and Richard Norrie, who calmed me down during challenging times as a first year graduate student. Many

credits go to Hawal Shamon and Ravenna Penning for their administrative support. Without them, many conference participations, my research stays in the Netherlands and the United States, as well as several workshops and courses would not have happened.

On a personal note, I owe many thanks to my friends who reminded me to keep pushing forward. Among others, I thank Tom Schröder, Mark Steinberg, Nelson Vlijt, Giulia Barile, Nicolai Ridani, Philipp Thomé, and Greta Grün. Finally, I thank my parents, Gabriele Hannen and Erwin Berning, along with my sister Maria Berning, for their unconditional love and support.

Mainz, November 2014

Carl Berning

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# **1. Chapter: Introduction**

On March 19<sup>th</sup> in 2014, after the Dutch communal elections, Geert Wilders – leader of Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV, Party for Freedom) – held a speech at the PVV’s election party. He asked the crowd: “do you want, in this city and in the Netherlands, more or fewer Moroccans?” The crowd started chanting enthusiastically: “fewer, fewer, fewer”. Wilders responded: “then we can manage that” (NOS, 2014). It is noteworthy that the PVV is not merely some xenophobic residual party, without any political relevance. On the contrary, the PVV gained major influence by propping up a minority government after the 2010 general elections until 2012.

Over the last two decades, radical right-wing populist parties obtained significant influence in national parliaments of many European countries. In 1999, Jörg Haider and the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ, Freedom Party of Austria) became the second strongest power in Austria’s national parliament. The Schweizer Volkspartei (SVP, Swiss People’s Party) still holds the plurality of seats in the national parliament in Switzerland, as it has since 2003. There are also some less successful examples of the radical right-wing populist party family in Western Europe. The British National Party (BNP), for example, has no representation in the national parliament and remains on the political periphery. In Germany, the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD, National Democratic Party) and the Republikaner (REP, Republicans) had some minor achievements in the early nineties, but are practically irrelevant to national politics nowadays. The same goes for the Spanish (neo)fascist party Alianza Nacional (AN, National Alliance), founded in 2005, being far from any congressional representation. Examples of participation in the political sphere or electoral success of radical right-wing populists are not limited to national settings. In the European elections in the spring of 2014, radical right-wing populist parties significantly increased their influence in the European parliament. For the first time in the history of European elections, there were three countries where a radical right-wing populist party received the largest share of votes: in

Denmark the Dansk Folkeparti (DF, Danish People's Party), the French Front National (FN, National Front), and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). Given the relevance of radical right-wing populist parties in Europe, the success (or failure) of the "third wave" of the far-right is all too frequently the subject of scholarly discussion and publications. In fact, "no party family has been studied as intensely as the populist radical right. Whereas the (edited) books on the party families like the Christian democrats or liberals can be counted on the fingers of one or two hands, those on the populist radical right (irrespective of the term used) might already outnumber the combined total of books on all other party families together" (Mudde, 2007:2).

Despite this large body of literature, further research on the radical right-wing populists is much needed, not least because the consequences of radical right-wing populist policies are both sensitive and very real. For example, the Swiss radical right-wing populist party SVP narrowly passed a referendum to "stop mass immigration" in 2014, with 50.3% supporting the initiative. While the full aftermath of this decision is still subject to political debates, the nativist message is reason for concern since "the politics behind the Swiss motion to stop EU migration is not unique to Switzerland" (Abu-Hayyeh et al., 2014:94).

Previous research on radical right-wing populist parties established a broad set of factors motivating preferences for such parties, with a common consensus on the core electorate. The typical voter is usually a younger male, with lower education, living in a rather rural environment (Arzheimer, 2012a). Along these characteristics, the average person in favor of radical right-wing populist parties is likely to be a Eurosceptic (Lubbers and Scheepers, 2007; Werts et al., 2013) and politically dissatisfied (Mudde, 2007). Despite the growing cluster of determinants, scholars by consensus identify perceived group threat, i.e., the anticipation of negative consequences for the well-being of an ingroup due to immigrants and immigration, as the major and most important attitudinal predictor for preferences of radical right-wing populist

parties in Western Europe (Arzheimer, 2008; Cutts et al., 2011; Lubbers et al., 2002; Norris, 2005; Rydgren, 2008; Swyngedouw, 2001; van der Brug et al., 2000). While perceived group threat is repeatedly shown to affect radical right-wing populist party preferences, little is known about the underlying mechanisms linking these two concepts. Hence, in this dissertation I seek to provide further evidence on the nexus of perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences.

With my contribution I aim for a deeper understanding of the most prominent link in research on radical right-wing populist parties – this aim is threefold. At its heart is the relationship between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences. First, I test the temporal order of perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences. Second, I examine the ideological climate of group threat perception as a contextual antecedent of preferences for radical right-wing populist parties. Third, I analyze if media attention to radical right-wing populist parties affects radical right-wing populist party preferences and, if so, to what extent media attention operates as a factor further illuminating the link between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist preferences. Before I discuss the contributions of this work in depth (Chapters 2 to 4), I will set the stage with a presentation and discussion of previous efforts to define the pivotal concept – radical right-wing populism – followed by an overall review of the major theoretical and empirical contributions of previous research. This introduction will close with extended summaries of each article, as well as an outline of methodological data and design aspects of the present research.

## **1.1. Radical right-wing populism**

The classification of different radical right-wing populist parties into a single category has received much scholarly attention. The most commonly used labels are *extreme right* (Arzheimer, 2012a; Ignazi, 1992), *radical right* (Kitschelt and McGann, 1995; Norris, 2005), *anti-immigrant* (Fennema, 1997; Van der Brug et al. 2005), *neo-populist* (Taggart, 1995),

*populist radical right* (Mudde, 2007) or various combinations of these (Mudde, 1996). In this dissertation I will use the term radical right-wing populism (e.g., Betz, 1993). This strikes the balance between an overly narrow category and a broad inclusive definition. It gives enough leverage to compare parties with a similar core ideology, including anti-establishment ideas, anti-pluralism, and ethnic nationalism. In the following I will discuss definitions of the party family in question, including the label. While some scholars have called the conceptualizing of radical right-wing populism a “war of words” (Mudde, 1996), it “is not a question merely of semantics; it is an important step in understanding the parties and explaining their emergence” (Rydgren, 2007:242).

Defining the third wave of radical right-wing populist parties goes back to the work of Ignazi (1992), who pointed out that “the fascist or extremist or right wing family has been frequently considered in previous classifications as a sort of residual category” (Ignazi, 1992:6). In order to close this gap he proposed three criteria: the placement on the left-right continuum, an ideology that refers to fascism, and opposition to the political system (Ignazi, 1992). Ignazi later added that “the class of extreme right parties is divided into two types, depending on whether or not they are linked to fascist ideology” (Ignazi, 2003:33), and thereby he made a distinction between traditional and post-industrial extreme right parties. According to Betz (1993), radical right-wing populist parties “tend to combine a classic liberal position on the individual and the economy with the sociopolitical agenda of the extreme and intellectual new right, and they deliver this amalgam to those disenchanted with their individual life chances and the political system” (Betz, 1993:414; see also Betz, 1994:4). Betz’s (1994) major contribution was to highlight that the success of radical right-wing populist parties is due to deprivation in a modernizing world. The potential electorate felt left behind – culturally and economically excluded from the merits of a transformation from industrial to post-industrial capitalism. This is known as the ‘losers of modernization’ thesis. In line with the work of

Betz, one of the most influential contributions on radical right-wing populism was carried out by Kitschelt and McGann (1995). Kitschelt and McGann attribute the emergence of radical right-wing populist parties to a party competition setting. They postulated the so-called ‘winning formula’ for the most successful radical right-wing populist parties. The formula is, with some preconditions, a combination of neo-liberal market orientation and a cultural authoritarian stance (Kitschelt and McGann, 1995). The focus on the neo-liberal economics in Betz’s and especially Kitschelt and McGann’s studies has been subject to an intense academic debate (Arzheimer, 2012b; Betz, 1996; Ivarsflaten, 2002; de Lange, 2007). For example, Norris (2005) noted that “contrary to Kitschelt’s thesis of a ‘winning formula’, it appears that anti-foreigner feelings and cultural protectionism provide far better explanations of the success of the radical right in Austria and Switzerland than any appeal to free market liberalism” (Norris, 2005:182). As a response to this discussion, Betz concedes that the radical right-wing populist party family is in fact not focusing on neo-liberalism (Betz, 2003). Kitschelt and McGann later also acknowledged that their argument was time-bound and offer a modified version of the winning formula “with a muted appeal to freemarket liberalism” (McGann and Kitschelt 2005:150).

One rather recent, and probably the most comprehensive, conceptualization of the radical right-wing populists is the contribution of Mudde (2007). In his extensive work he identifies the core ideology as “a combination of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism” (Mudde, 2007:26). The conceptual framework established in Mudde’s contribution defines an abstraction ladder with nativism at the bottom, defined as the combination of nationalism and xenophobia. Furthermore, nativist parties, who are also authoritarian<sup>1</sup>, are considered radical right;

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<sup>1</sup> Mudde (2007) acknowledges that definitions of authoritarianism are rather heterogeneous. He keeps his to a simplistic form of the Frankfurter Schule’s one, marked by an uncritical disposition towards authority, including punishment of outgroups by the will of this ingroup authority (Mudde, 2007:22).

and finally, anti-democratic radical right parties are defined as extreme right. In this typology, the populist radical right is a subtype of the radical right (Mudde, 2007:23ff).

These conceptualizations of radical right-wing populist parties are by no means an extensive enumeration. Nevertheless, the aforementioned conceptualizations of the radical right-wing populists are the most prolific scholarly publications and convey an adequate overview of existing definitions and their evolution. In order to describe the concept of radical right-wing populism – as used in this dissertation – more directly, I will now unravel the term into its components.

Radical right-wing populist parties of Western Europe are *radical* in the sense that they reject the socio-political and sociocultural system of contemporary democracies (Betz, 1993). While they support the free market economy and individual achievements, radical right-wing populist parties oppose diversity of ideas and pluralism (Lipset and Raab, 1970; Rydgren, 2007). Thus, some consider radical right-wing populist parties as extremist (Ignazi, 1992; 2003), as they disagree with central ideas of liberal democracy, e.g., “the constitutional protection of minorities” (Mudde, 2007:25). The opposition of radical right-wing populist parties to pluralism and cleavage, virtually their hostility towards constitutions, hence an anti-democratic stance, culminates in their ideal political system as “ethnocracy instead of democracy” (Minkenberg, 2000:175).

Radicalism or extremism is not bound to the radical right-wing populists, since it might also characterize the far-left accurately (March and Mudde, 2005). Therefore, their position on the political spectrum needs to be included in our terminology (see Inglehart, 1984). Categorizing radical right-wing populist parties as *right-wing* is mostly based on their attitude toward (non-)egalitarianism, hierarchy, and particularism (Bobbio, 1996). They oppose, in contrast to leftist parties, universal individual rights. Their right-wing orientation is mostly

defined by their attitudes on the socio-cultural dimension of the political space (Rydgren, 2007). They represent law and order and put forward the idea of authoritarian politics, e.g., rigorous immigration policies. The definition as right-wing on the socio-economic dimension is not as straightforward. While a right-wing stance on this dimension would assume little state involvement in the economy, some radical right-wing populist parties are in fact protectionist in their economic policies. Beyond that, the economy is not necessarily a core topic of radical right-wing populist party ideology (Mudde, 2007:119ff).

The last characteristic defining radical right-wing populist parties in Western Europe is *populism*. Populism is a strong anti-establishment ideology and rhetoric. Notably, populism is at the core of radical right-wing populist parties, yet certainly not only a characteristic of the far-right. There are also, e.g., (neo-) libertarian- or socialist-populists. In contrast to radical right-wing populists the former focus on the economy and the latter promote egalitarian values (Mudde, 2007). The populist view of the radical right-wing populists is that of corrupt elites and that “not only elites but other groups as well (immigrants, ethnic minorities) are excluded from the ‘pure people’.” (Rydgren, 2007:245). This theme is caring about the common man and his concerns about national identity and negative consequences of mass immigration. Those concerns are, from the radical right-wing populist’s point of view, overlooked or suppressed by mainstream parties, which in turn heightens feelings of political discontent in a potential electorate (Knigge, 1998).

In sum, and as Betz (1994) puts it: “radical right-wing populist parties are radical in their rejection of established socio-cultural and socio-political system and their advocacy of individual achievement, a free market, and a drastic reduction of the role of the state without, however, openly questioning the legitimacy of democracy in general. They are right-wing first in their rejection of individual and social equality and of political projects that seek to achieve it; second in their opposition of the social integration of marginalized groups; and

third in their appeal to xenophobia, if not overt racism and anti-Semitism. They are populist in their unscrupulous use and instrumentalization of diffuse public sentiments of anxiety and disenchantment and their appeal to the common man and his allegedly superior common sense” (Betz, 1994:4). The radical right-wing populist party family is certainly heterogeneous; nevertheless, this section aims to establish a common theoretical conceptualization of radical right-wing populism, rather than to pinpoint differences between various radical right-wing populist parties. As mentioned before, this dissertation focuses mainly on the electorate and less on the parties. With this, I am not arguing that unique party characteristics are not related to party preferences, but “[a]mongst scholars of voting behavior, there is little doubt that these parties attract similar voters and should be grouped together in a single, albeit very heterogeneous, party family” (Arzheimer, 2012a:37).

## **1.2. Literature review**

Previous research on explanations for radical right-wing populist preferences is multifaceted and rather complex. It shows that assumptions and indicators overlap. Despite the similarities of measurement, major groups of explanations can be identified (Arzheimer 2012a; Rydgren 2007). In order to structure explanations of radical right-wing populist party preferences, I make use of the ‘supply-side’ and ‘demand-side’ typology, introduced by Eatwell (2003:48). The contributions of this dissertation mainly focus on the electorate, thus, on the demand-side. Nevertheless, I will discuss previous findings and theoretical explanations for both categories, to provide a comprehensive overview and an informed point of departure.

### *1.2.1 Demand-side explanations*

The first category of explanations for radical right-wing populist party preferences goes back to the classical work of Adorno et al. (1950) and the well-known thesis of “the authoritarian personality”. The rationale of this class of explanations, also known as personality traits and

value orientation (Arzheimer, 2012a:37), is that mobilization depends on individual personality structures. While situations and institutions are important mobilizing factors, this perspective suggests that the driving force is a potential fascist personality. In other words, “it is up to the people to decide whether or not this country goes fascist” (Adorno et al. 1950:10). A more recent proposal of the effect of rather stable value orientations, other than the appeal to authoritarianism, is a reaction or backlash to post-materialistic values (Kitschelt and McGann, 1995). After the emergence of Green parties and the new left-libertarian movement in the 70s, some voters might have felt abandoned by the authorities and unconnected to the new post-materialistic internationalist values. These voters are certainly not the educated upper (middle) class, since individuals with a professional degree do not regularly compete with lower educated immigrants for employment. Empirically, there is evidence that in particular unskilled men prefer radical right-wing populist parties (Kitschelt and McGann, 1995; Givens, 2004). The higher support of radical right-wing populist parties among men has also been explained by personality traits. Despite the complex nexus of gender and preferences for radical right-wing populist parties (see Mudde, 2007:90ff), some scholars argue in this vein that women are inherently less radical and rather conservative.

The second class of explanations refers to social disintegration or anomie. This refers to feelings of insecurity and the perceived breakdown of a supportive social structure or social norms in general. “As a result, individuals lose a sense of belonging and are attracted to ethnic nationalism, which according to psychological research increases a sense of self-esteem and efficacy” (Eatwell, 2003:52f). Furthermore, not only do nationalistic attitudes appear to be stabilizing, but also traditional, family-oriented are appealing for those experiencing social disintegration. Nevertheless, there is only limited evidence for this thesis and some argue that “[v]oters of the new radical right-wing parties are not the isolated, asocial individuals that would be predicted from this theory” (Rydgren, 2007:247). In fact, there is evidence that so-

cial alienation rather contributes to electoral abstention than to the likelihood of voting for a radical right-wing populist party (Zhirkov, 2014). These explanations are at least connected to the so-called “losers of modernization” thesis (Betz 1994).<sup>2</sup> They draw upon the idea that individuals are threatened by rapid social change. Their feelings arise from growing immigration or globalization; other factors are unemployment or inflation. These groups are mainly low- or unskilled workers, as well as some groups of the lower middle class – the petit bourgeoisie. Individuals expect to express their resentment of the present situation, their protest, by voting against the current authorities. The idea of a pure protest explanation for radical right-wing populist preferences has been the subject of recent discussions. The majority of today’s scholars assume that the motivation to vote against something is mixed with perceived group threat drawn from ideological and economic insecurities, and the theoretical explanation is therefore not unideological (Knigge, 1998; Swyngedouw and Ivaldi, 2001). Voting for radical right-wing populist parties is motivated by feelings of protest, but not more than for voters of any other party (van der Brug et al., 2000).

Another class of explanations focuses on ethnic competition between majority group members and immigrants. The umbrella framework, known as group threat theory, combines explanations of realistic group conflict (Blalock, 1967) and social identity (Tajfel et al. 1971). Group threat relates to perceived competition over scarce material resources, e.g., employment or housing, as well as to anxiety of cultural identity loss. Some scholars highlight the different dimensions of perceived group threat in their work on radical right-wing populist party preferences. Lucassen and Lubbers (2012) show that perceived cultural group threat is a much stronger predictor than perceived economic group threat for preferences of radical right-wing populist parties for eleven Western and Eastern European countries. Despite the merits

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<sup>2</sup> The categorizations of explanations vary. For example Rydgren (2007) clearly distinguishes between the social breakdown/anomie and the losers of modernization theses, while Arzheimer (2012a) presents them in a combined category.

of these findings, previous conceptualizations suggest a common, integrated theoretical framework (McLaren, 2003; Stephan and Renfro, 2002). Previous research agrees on perceived group threat as the most important attitudinal predictor for radical right-wing populist party preferences (Arzheimer, 2008; Cutts et al., 2011; Lubbers et al., 2002; Norris, 2005; Rydgren, 2008; Swyngedouw, 2001; van der Brug et al., 2000). As Rydgren noted: “[e]ven if not all voters who hold anti-immigration attitudes vote for a new radical right-wing party, most voters who do vote for such parties hold such attitudes” (Rydgren, 2007:250). The underlying assumption is an ideological proximity of the party family in question to individual attitudes. Therefore, voters who feel threatened by immigration and anticipate negative consequences due to immigration for their ingroup are likely to prefer radical right-wing populist parties in order to alleviate their concerns about immigration and influence the political agenda by supporting radical right-wing populist policies. In a recent study, Arzheimer (2008) examined the most common motivational factors for radical right-wing populist voters. He could show that neither economic liberalism nor a protest vote had any statistically significant influence, after controlling for perceived group threat. Some individuals are more likely to perceive immigrants as threatening based on their social demographics and position. For example, education is an important predictor for radical right-wing populist preferences (Elchardus and Spruyt, 2010), since, e.g., higher educated individuals are less likely to be affected by employment competition. Another socio-economic factor for radical right-wing populist preferences is age. Younger individuals are more likely to prefer radical right-wing populist parties, since they tend to have higher levels of insecurity (Betz, 1994).

The fourth category of explanations draws upon the social capital theory (Putnam, 1993; 2000). Social capital theory suggests that, e.g., social trust promotes tolerance and democratic values. It helps to overcome (cultural) differences and fosters mutual understanding (Herrerros and Criado 2009; Sullivan and Transue 1999). Also, other characteristics of the social capital

complex, such as civic engagement, are theoretically expected to heighten norms of cooperation and openness toward others (Paxton, 2007). The effect of higher generalized trust, due to civic engagement, is not only true for individuals who are actively participating. The theory of social capital claims that individuals living in an area with a high level of civic engagement will also benefit from the so-called rainmakers effect (van der Meer, 2003). The individual-level link between social capital and radical right-wing populist party preferences finds little support in empirical research. Rydgren (2009) tests to what extent social trust, civic engagement, and social isolation explain preferences for radical right-wing populist parties in five Western European countries. He concludes that the different components of social capital explain only a marginal amount of the variance in radical right-wing populist voting (Rydgren, 2009). These findings underpin previous evidence from Belgium (Coffé, 2005) and are replicated for radical right-wing populist parties from Eastern Europe (Rydgren, 2011). Other studies do find considerable effects of social capital on radical right-wing populist party preferences; yet these studies measure social capital in the aggregate (Coffé et al., 2007; Dinas and van Spanje 2011; Jesuit, 2009). The difference between findings for the effect of social capital on radical right-wing populist party preferences, whether measured at the individual or aggregate level, might suggest that the assumed mechanism is more complex or that an aggregated measure simply overestimates the explanatory power of social capital. Another reason for mixed empirical evidence might be that social capital is not only associated with positive behavior. Along with conceptualizations of social capital as social trust or norms of reciprocity, the theoretical framework also mentions the “dark side of social capital” (Putnam, 2000:350ff). It has been argued that some kinds of civic engagement might promote exclusionary attitudes (Paxton, 2007). These different forms of social capital have been conceptualized as bringing versus bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000). While the former leads to the positive consequences described earlier, the latter results in particularized trust and in- versus outgroup distinction. To my knowledge, the literature on radical right-wing populist parties

broadly overlooks this side of social capital, which might explain why previous studies present heterogeneous findings.

### *1.2.2 Supply-side explanations*

Along the lines of individual explanations centered on the electorate, another set of propositions in research on radical right-wing populist preferences focuses on the supply side. This perspective aims to complete the puzzle of why radical right-wing populist parties are successful in some countries and fail in other. Supply-side factors are especially fruitful in cross-national analyses of radical right-wing populist parties.

Supply-side explanations emphasize structural determinants of the success or failure of radical right-wing populist parties. The so-called political opportunity structures enable a party to emerge and succeed (Altermatt and Kriesi 1995; Carter, 2005; Kitschelt and McGann, 1995). In the literature on political opportunity structures, three broader sets of determinants for radical right-wing populist party preferences can be identified. First, beyond the composition of the electorate, countries differ in institutional characteristics, such as electoral thresholds, openness or accessibility of a political system, and the degree of centralization/federalism (e.g., Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Jackman and Volpert, 1996). Second, the success of radical right-wing populist parties is expected to be related to party system variables. These are indicators that measure, e.g., party competition, the degree of convergence between mainstream parties, or the coalition constellation (e.g., Lubbers et al., 2002; Spies and Franzmann, 2011). Third, one can presume a radical right-wing populist party's fortune to be affected by short-term contextual characteristics. Prominently, immigration, as the core issue of such parties, and unemployment rates seem to be influential (e.g., Arzheimer, 2009; van der Brug et al., 2005). Furthermore, scholars have argued that the media plays a significant role for the political opportunities of radical right-wing populist parties (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2007; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2001).

Regarding the first group of supply-side explanations, the institutional factors, it has been suggested that radical right-wing populist parties benefit from the level of openness in an electoral system, because one could expect that voters might think that voting for a small radical right-wing populist party is a wasted vote. There is not much support in the literature for this thesis, except Jackman and Volpert (1996). They find a negative effect of the electoral thresholds on radical right-wing populist support, but only when the number of parliamentary parties is high (Jackman and Volpert, 1996). Ten years later, Arzheimer and Carter (2006) presented a positive (unconditional) link. They measured electoral thresholds as disproportionality in a more advanced design, including cross-national socio-demographic differences, and found a positive significant effect on radical right-wing populist party preferences. Arzheimer and Carter present two potential explanations for these counterintuitive findings. First, the electorate of radical right-wing populist parties might not be aware that in a disproportional political system a vote for a small party seems to be less influential. Second, supporters of radical right-wing populist parties might perceive their vote as an expressive act and care less about actual seats and representation (Arzheimer and Carter 2006).

The argument for centralization/federalism proposes two competing hypotheses. On the one hand, in a decentralized country second-order elections might fuel radical right-wing populist party preferences because the electorate might be more supportive of new (grass root) parties. On the other hand, second-order elections might also function “as a kind of security valve for the political system” (Arzheimer and Carter, 2006:423), since voters can vote against existing authorities and signal their protest without doing much damage. Empirically, there is no support for either perspective (Arzheimer, 2009; Arzheimer and Carter, 2006).

Studies on party system factors, the second class of supply-side explanations, have attracted a great deal of scholarly work in recent years. Probably one of the first comprehensive studies on radical right-wing populist party preferences was presented by Lubbers et al.

(2002). Lubbers and colleagues argued that the more relative space radical right-wing populist parties have compared to their main rival regarding their stance on immigration restriction policies, the more support they receive (Lubbers et al. 2002). However, empirically they find no significant effect of the relative difference to the main competitor on radical right-wing populist party support. Arzheimer and Carter (2006) could support these findings (but see Carter, 2005). Until recently, empirical work assessing party competition mostly focused on either a general left-right continuum or on a non-economic scale (Spies, 2011:18). This shortcoming was addressed by Spies and Franzmann (2011), who tested their assumption from a two-dimensional perspective. Interestingly, they find that the position of the main rival only contributes to the success of radical right-wing populist parties, when measured on a general left-right scale (Spies and Franzmann, 2011). Party convergence is expected to provide an opportunity for radical right-wing populist parties in mobilizing voters, since they might face little alternative between established parties in a system with a high level of convergence voters (Kitschelt and McGann, 1995). In respect to empirical findings, previous research seems inconclusive. While some studies support the convergence thesis (Abedi, 2002; van der Brug et al. 2005), others find no evidence for an effect of distance between established parties on electoral success of radical right-wing populist parties (Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Norris, 2005). Also, in research on the degree of party convergence between established parties, the non-economic dimension of the political spectrum was mainly overlooked. Spies and Franzmann (2011) provide evidence that only convergence on the non-economic dimension affects the radical right-wing populist parties' vote share. Closely related to assumptions on convergence is the effect of the coalition constellation on radical right-wing populist preferences. Also in this case, voters might perceive a lack of alternatives when dealing with a grand coalition. Arzheimer and Carter's (2006) findings support this expectation.

Besides studies on effects of institutional factors and party system variables on radical right-wing populist party preferences, previous work also shows that short-term structural variables account for variance of such parties. Immigration and unemployment are most prominently used as additional contextual determinants. Theoretically, derived from group threat and ethnic competition theory, immigration and unemployment are expected to increase perceived competition over resources or the anxiety of identity loss. Empirical work has addressed immigration mainly find a positive relationship with preferences for radical right-wing populist parties (Arzheimer, 2009; Erlingsson et al., 2012; Lubbers et al., 2002), while some find no significant relationship (van der Brug et al., 2005; Westinen, 2014). Studies including unemployment are less consistent. Arzheimer (2009) reports a positive link, whereas van der Brug et al. (2005) find no correlation, and still others find a negative link between unemployment and radical right-wing populist party preferences (Erlingsson et al., 2012; Westinen, 2014). One assumption underlying the effect of immigration and unemployment is that the electorate perceives these issues to be concerning and relevant, when there are more immigrants and unemployed people around. Nevertheless, many countries face a high level of economic and ethnic segregation, thus the actual percentage of immigrants and unemployment rates differ tremendously between neighborhoods. Therefore, the explanations as to how the electorate perceives immigrants as a threat to ingroup interest and well-being do not necessarily involve actual contact with outgroup members. One proposition in conceptualizing the link between aggregated measures such as immigration or unemployment and individual preferences for radical right-wing populist parties is to include the effects of media attention. That is, voters depend on information provided by media. In other words, when, e.g., immigration is high on the public agenda, due to many media reports (McCombs and Shaw, 1972), voters are likely to perceive immigration as a relevant and important issue. There is some evidence in the literature that media attention to radical right-wing populist parties fuels their electoral success (Boomgaarden and Vlieghart, 2007; Vlieghart et al.,

2012; but see also van der Pas et al., 2011). For media attention to immigration the effect on preferences for radical right-wing populist parties is rather inconclusive (Lubbers and Scheepers, 2001; Walgrave and de Swert, 2004). Still, because previous research paid only little attention to the media, its severity continues to be rather unknown (Arzheimer, 2012a:49).

### **1.3. Overview of the dissertation**

As noted earlier, at the core of radical right-wing populist parties is a harsh anti-immigrant stance (Ivarsflaten, 2008). Hence, it is not surprising that most studies find that people's concerns about negative consequences due to immigrants and immigration are the strongest attitudinal predictor for radical right-wing populist party preferences. Despite the merits of previous contributions related to other determinants of radical right-wing populist party preferences, perceived group threat, as the most prominent predictor, deserves more attention. The understanding of this central relationship, between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences, is essential for informed explanations of the radical right-wing populists success. This dissertation sets out to do so and each Chapter aims to provide evidence for further understanding of the link in question.

Turning to the contributions of this work, individual radical right-wing populist preferences present a number of fascinating puzzles. Each of these puzzles arises from observed differences across regions and across time periods, overlooked by previous empirical work. The central propose of this dissertation is to unravel the nexus of perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences.

*Second Chapter: The dynamics of radical right-wing populist party preferences and perceived group threat: A comparative panel analysis of three competing hypotheses in the Netherlands and Germany (with Elmar Schlüter)*

The second Chapter of this dissertation seeks to disentangle the temporal order of perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist preferences. As outlined above, previous research highlights perceived group threat as the major determinant of radical right-wing populist preferences (Arzheimer, 2008; Cutts et al., 2011; Lubbers et al., 2002; Norris, 2005; Rydgren, 2008; Swyngedouw, 2001; van der Brug et al., 2000). However, these contributions rely on a single theoretical perspective: that is, perceived group threat increases preferences for radical right-wing populist parties. Most of the previous evidence for this relationship depends on cross-sectional data and the temporal order is therefore merely assumed. Consequently, it is unclear if the temporal order of both concepts is valid – i.e., group threat perceptions precede preferences for radical right-wing populist parties. With this contribution, I aim to answer the question: Does perceived group threat precede radical right-wing populist party preferences? Or do radical right-wing populist preferences precede perceived group threat? Or do both concepts are linked in a reciprocal manner, i.e., radical right-wing populist party preferences increase perceived group threat and, in turn, group threat perceptions increase radical right-wing populist party preferences?

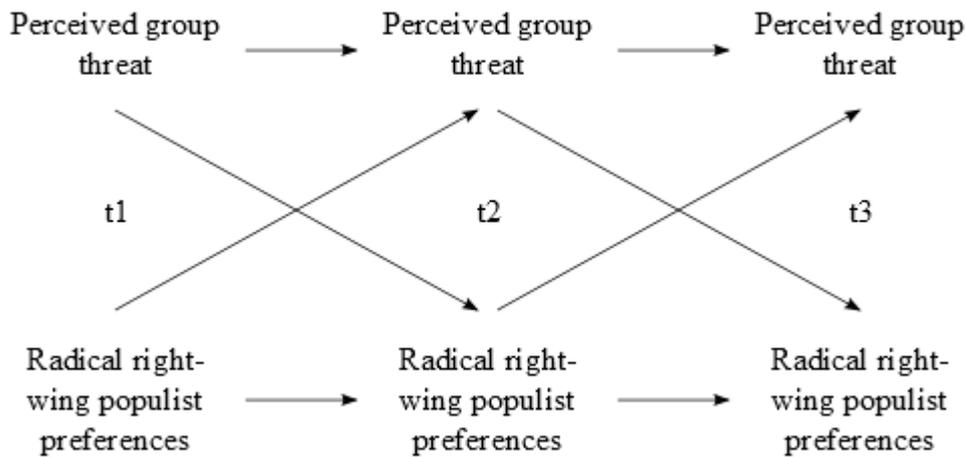
Theoretically I make use of three competing conceptualizations. The first perspective builds on group threat and group conflict theory and the proposition that interethnic competition will result in majority members anticipating negative consequences due to immigration. These perceptions of group threat will lead to increased preferences for radical right-wing populist parties, in order to alleviate their concerns about immigration and defend the interest of their ingroup (Mughan and Paxton, 2006). The second conceptualization draws upon the theoretical school of party identification and partisanship (Campbell et al., 1960; Green et al., 2002; Carsey and Layman, 2006). Within this perspective, preferences for a party shape individual attitudes (Campbell et al., 1960: 131). In the case of the radical right-wing populists, the electorate might be more responsive to an anti-immigrant rhetoric – typical for the radical

right-wing populist parties and especially their leaders (Mudde, 2007; Rydgren, 2007). Therefore, they will perceive immigrants and immigration to be more threatening, consistent with their party's doctrine. The third perspective combines both aforementioned conceptualizations in a bidirectional relationship. While the theoretical assumptions in the first and second perspectives are also applicable for the relationship of the third conceptualization, they are not mutually exclusive, but reciprocal.

To test these hypotheses I draw upon multiwave panel data from the Netherlands and Germany. More specifically, I use the Dutch Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS), administered by CentERdata (Tilburg University, Netherlands). LISS is based on a representative sample of the Dutch population and includes measures for perceived group threat and two radical right-wing populist parties – the Trots op Nederland (ToN, Proud of the Netherlands) and the PVV. For the ToN data is available for three annual waves (2008 to 2010) and for the PVV for six annual waves (2008 to 2013).

Methodologically, I make use of an autoregressive cross-lagged design (Finkel, 1995; Selig and Little, 2012; Schlueter et al., 2008). Figure 1.3.1 depicts the logic of the autoregressive cross-lagged design. This approach enables us to analyze the cross-lagged correlation beyond the autoregressive prediction of the study's main constructs – perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences (Finkel, 1995; Schlueter et al., 2008).

Figure 1.3.1: The autoregressive cross-lagged design



*Third Chapter: The Ideological Climate of Perceived Group Threat - a Multilevel Study on Radical Right-Wing Populist Party Preferences of Swiss Districts*

In the third Chapter, I aim to examine to what extent the well-established effect of perceived group threat on radical right-wing populist party preferences (Arzheimer, 2008; Cutts et al., 2011; Lubbers et al., 2002; Norris, 2005; Rydgren, 2008; Swyngedouw, 2001; van der Brug et al., 2000) can be extended to the contribution of an ideological climate of group threat perceptions. Unfortunately, the ideological climate of perceived group threat (Christ et al., 2013; Fasel et al., 2013; Poteat and Spanierman, 2010) as a predictor for individual preferences for radical right-wing populist parties is broadly overlooked in previous research. Accordingly, the third Chapter is guided by the following research question: To what extent are preferences for radical right-wing populist parties explained by an ideological climate of local perceived group threat?

The point of departure for the present study is the rationale that individual political behavior depends on opinions and attitudes of families, friends, colleagues, and other social contacts. The perception that immigrants are a threat to the well-being of the ingroup stems

not only from personal observations and experience, but also from normative and ideological guidance of social interactions (Huckfeldt et al., 2005). The attitudes of the proximal social environment, e.g., on immigration, as a collective characteristic is assumed to be more than the sum of its parts. This forms an ideological climate (Welzel and Deutsch, 2012). I assume that the ideological climate of perceived group threat emanates on individual radical right-wing populist party preferences, beyond the effect of internalized, individual perceptions that immigrants are posing a threat to ingroup members (Green and Staerklé, 2013).

In this study I focus on sub-national, local differences of the ideological climate, since the prevailing group threat perception diffuses with social interaction, which is more likely with vicinity. Notably, the normative guidance is necessarily an effect of close peers. In line with previous conceptualizations, I assume that every social encounter, such as casual conversations, contributes to the perceived ideological climate (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1995: 124ff). The average group threat perception of a local context is treated as a proxy for the ideological climate conveyed by social interactions, consistent with previous work on the descendants of perceived group threats (Christ et al., 2013; Fasel et al., 2013; Poteat and Spanierman, 2010; Sarrasin et al., 2012).

The site of study is Switzerland. I analyze preferences for the SVP – one of the most successful radical right-wing populist parties in Western Europe – using the Swiss Electoral Study (SELECTS) gathered in 2011 (SELECTS, 2011). The study draws from a representative sample of the Swiss population and an additional cantonal oversampling, which allows gauging effects of areas that are rather sparsely populated, which is not too unusual in Switzerland. Despite preferences for the radical right-wing populist party and measures of perceived group threat, SELECTS provides local sampling points, which enable analyses at the district level.

To examine the theoretical model I make use of a multilevel structural equation modeling for complex sample designs. This methodology offers several advantages: First, using multi-level structural equation modeling generates more appropriate standard errors (Hox, 2002), given the data structure of individuals nested in districts. Second, it enables correction for measurement and sampling error (Marsh et al., 2009). Third, I can decompose the effect of perceived group threat to individual and contextual components (Lüdtke et al., 2008; Raudenbush and Bryk, 2002:139).

*Fourth Chapter: Group Threat, Media Attention, and Radical Right-Wing Populist Party Preferences*<sup>3</sup> – *Longitudinal Evidence from the Netherlands (with Marcel Lubbers and Elmar Schlüter)*

In the fourth Chapter I put the link between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist preferences into a longitudinal perspective. Much of the existing research on the radical right-wing populists examines differences between individuals and their likelihood to prefer such parties; however, little is known about how party affections for radical right-wing populist parties change over time. Building on previous findings that identify perceived group threat as the most important attitudinal motivation for radical right-wing populist party preferences (Arzheimer, 2008; Cutts et al., 2011; Lubbers et al., 2002; Norris, 2005; Rydgren, 2008; Swyngedouw, 2001; van der Brug et al., 2000), this study aims to extend knowledge of the longitudinal explanation. Considering media attention to radical right-wing populist parties in explanations for intra-personal change of preferences for radical right-wing populist parties appears to be fruitful, since I expect it to not only affect changes directly (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2007; van der Pas et al., 2011; Vliegenthart et al., 2012), but also function as a

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<sup>3</sup> It should be acknowledged that I use the term radical right-wing populist party “sympathies” in order to utilize a label that is closer to the actual measurement in the version of this Chapter that is submitted for publication. For coherence reasons I will continue to use the term “preferences” within this dissertation. A further discussion of the work’s main construct is given in Section 1.5.

moderating factor for the link between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences.

Group threat theory, commonly used to explain the success or failure of radical right-wing populist parties, stresses the importance of media attention (Allport, 1954; Blumer, 1958). I incorporate media attention as the number of news reports covering radical right-wing parties into the investigation. I assume that radical right-wing populists' fortunes depend on media attention to these parties, because especially radical right-wing populist parties rely on voter mobilization through awareness. If radical right-wing populist parties are high on the public agenda, the potential electorate might perceive their topics to be relevant and concerning and in turn they aim to alleviate their (now seemingly important) threat perceptions by preferring a party which promised to fight for their concerns.

Additionally to these direct effects of media attention, I test moderation influences of media attention on the link between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences. I hypothesize that media attention to radical right-wing populist parties reinforces the relationship between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences, because awareness of these parties is likely to intensify the perception that they are good representatives for someone who anticipates negative consequences due to immigrants and immigration.

To test these hypotheses I make use of the use of two different data sources. I combine the individual information of the Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS), administered by CentERdata (Tilburg University, Netherlands), with computer-assisted content analyses of newspaper articles. LISS provides a representative sample of the Dutch population. I include six annual waves, from 2008 to 2013. The content analyses are based on the five most read newspapers of the Netherlands, for a period of 56 days before each interview.

In terms of methodology, I utilize a multilevel structural equation model for longitudinal data (Song et al. 2008) and with that adequately tackle the specific challenges of the data structure in hand, such as unbalanced and nested data or measurement error. The site of the study is the Netherlands and I examine preferences for the Dutch PVV and its leader Geert Wilders.

#### **1.4. Data, methods and measures**

Each Chapter is written as a single contribution. Combining them into a cumulative dissertation provides the opportunity to gain insights on very different research questions, yet on a very similar relationship. I note that since each Chapter is an independent contribution, explanations might overlap. Table 1.4.1 summarizes all articles and gives an overview of research questions, data and methods.

**Table 1.4.1: Overview of the Chapters**

Chapter	Research problem (abbreviated)	Data	Method
2	Temporal order of perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences	Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS) 2008-2013  Political Attitudes, Political Participation and Voter Conduct in United Germany 1998-2002	Autoregressive cross-lagged design
3	Ideological climate of perceived group threat	Swiss Electoral Study (SELECTS) 2011	Multilevel structural equation modeling
4	The role of media attention in longitudinal explanations for radical right-wing populist preferences	Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS) 2008-2013  Content analyses of Dutch newspapers	Multilevel structural equation modeling for longitudinal data

As mentioned above, in each Chapter I make use of representative survey data. Pre-collected survey data comes with the advantage of providing information on attitudes and political behavior for a large-scale national sample, while being cost- and work-efficient (Kiecolt and Nathan, 1985). The focus of this dissertation is on an individual-level, micro relationship and therefore I refrain from including cross-national differences. While the role of country characteristics in relation to the link between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences poses interesting questions, the focus on single countries only draws the attention to the relationship I study and minimizes statistical noise contributed by cross-national differences.

This dissertation is problem-driven and theory-based – utilizing state-of-the-art research methodology. The relationship studied, between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences, is at the heart of contemporary public and scholarly debate. My findings provide empirical evidence that advances understanding of the underlying mechanism. Where possible, constructs were measured using latent factors of multiple indicators, in order to account appropriately for measurement error (Joereskog, 1993). The uses of (multi-level) structural equation modeling enable rigorous empirical tests of temporal order, contextual effects and moderating factors for perceived group threat in relation to preferences for radical right-wing populist parties.

### **1.5. Measuring radical right-wing populist preferences**

Before I present the single studies I will briefly discuss the measurement of my dependent variable – radical right-wing populist party preferences. In each paper a direct measure of party utilities is used, in contrast to a discrete choice measurement<sup>4</sup>. To be more specific, respondents were asked “What do you think of [the radical right-wing populist party/leader]?” or “Please indicate the probability of voting for [the radical right-wing populist party]”, with response options given on an 11-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 *very unsympathetic* to 10 *very sympathetic* (Chapters 2 and 4), 0 *do not like them at all* to 10 *like them a lot* (Chapter 4), or 0 *very small probability* to 10 *very large probability* (Chapter 3).

These measurements have several advantages relative to a discrete choice measure. Theoretically, voting assumes or at least allows preferences for more than the party of choice, i.e., voters might sympathize with two or more parties. In a discrete choice setting, respondents are forced to make a distinct decision between all parties and this may lead to biased results, since only the affection for one party is measured. Thus, measuring actual preferences enables

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<sup>4</sup> In a discrete choice setting, respondents would be asked, e.g., “if elections took place tomorrow to elect deputies, for which party among the following ones would you be most likely to vote?” and response options would be a list of potential parties.

me to gauge even small differences and provides a more sensible indicator (van der Eijk et al., 2006). With this measure I can include respondents who sympathize with radical right-wing populist parties to some degree, even if they would not vote for them. Furthermore, measuring utilities comes with statistical advantages, because multi-nominal or binary measures of party choice are commonly analyzed with logit- or probit-estimators. These research designs are associated with certain problems, e.g., unobserved heterogeneity (Mood, 2010). Using a utility measure allows linear regression analyses and makes comparison of coefficients across different models or groups (more) possible. A disadvantage is that these measures do not allow for any assumptions about the actual voting behavior, or whether an increase in radical right-wing populist party preference would actually change their party of choice.

## 1.6. Specification of the contributions of the co-authors

**Chapter 2:** *The dynamics of radical right-wing populist party preferences and perceived group threat: A comparative panel analysis of three competing hypotheses in the Netherlands and Germany* has been co-authored by Prof. Dr. Elmar Schlüter, Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen. I am the first author of the article. The article has been submitted for publication to the journal *Social Science Research*.

Carl Berning:

- Development and structuration of the article
- Development of the theoretical framework
- Compilation of the research literature
- Data preparation
- Empirical analyses
- Discussion of the results

Elmar Schlüter:

- Support for theoretical and empirical strategy of the study
- Revision of all parts of the article

**Chapter 4:** *Group Threat, Media Attention, and Radical Right-Wing Populist Party Preferences – Longitudinal Evidence from the Netherlands* has been co-authored by Associate Professor Marcel Lubbers, PhD, Radboud University Nijmegen, and Professor Dr. Elmar Schlüter, Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen. I am the first author of the article.

Carl Berning:

- Development and structuration of the article
- Development of the theoretical framework
- Compilation of the research literature
- Data preparation
- Empirical analyses
- Discussion of the results

Marcel Lubbers:

- Support for theoretical and empirical strategy of the study
- Revision of all parts of the article

Elmar Schlüter:

- Support for theoretical and empirical strategy of the study
- Revision of all parts of the article

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**2. Chapter: The dynamics of radical right-wing populist party preferences and perceived group threat: A comparative panel analysis of three competing hypotheses in the Netherlands and Germany (with Elmar Schlüter)**

**Abstract:** Existing cross-sectional research considers citizens' preferences for radical right-wing populist parties to be centrally driven by their perception that immigrants threaten the well-being of the national ingroup. However, longitudinal evidence for this relationship is largely missing. To remedy this gap in the literature, we developed three competing hypotheses to investigate: (a) whether perceived group threat is temporally prior to radical right-wing populist party preferences, (b) whether radical right-wing populist party preferences are temporally prior to perceived group threat, or (c) whether the relation between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences is bidirectional. Based on multiwave panel data from the Netherlands for the years 2008-2013 and from Germany spanning the period 1994-2002, we examined the merits of these hypotheses using autoregressive cross-lagged structural equation models. The results show that perceptions of threatened group interests precipitate rather than follow citizens' preferences for radical right-wing populist parties. These findings clarify our knowledge of the dynamic micro-social mechanisms underlying radical right-wing populist party preferences.

## 2.1. Introduction

Questions pertaining to the consequences of immigration and the integration of immigrants continue to rank high on the political and public agenda of numerous destination countries. In the political culture of Western Europe, this debate has often been accompanied by the emergence of radical right-wing populist parties. Advocating harsh anti-immigrant policies often coupled with explicit opposition to Islam, radical right-wing populist parties have gained considerable success in several elections (Rydgren, 2007). This development has prompted researchers across the social science disciplines to uncover the sources underlying citizens' preferences for radical right-wing populist parties (Betz, 1994; Norris, 2005; Lubbers et al., 2002). Within this literature, a widely acknowledged working consensus is that citizens' perceived group threat – broadly defined here as the view that immigrants harm the well-being of the national ingroup – represents the single most important individual-level source of radical right-wing populist party support (Arzheimer, 2008; van der Brug, et al. 2000; Cutts et al., 2011; Norris, 2005; Lubbers et al., 2002; Rydgren, 2008; Swyngedouw, 2001)<sup>5</sup>. Nevertheless, this impressive body of research is not without its limitations. In particular, many of the aforementioned studies focus on a single theoretical perspective only and test their predictions drawing on cross-sectional research designs. As a consequence, it is still unclear whether the basic proposition that threat perceptions are temporally prior to radical right-wing populist party preferences is valid. For instance, does the view that immigrants harm the well-being of the national ingroup indeed precede radical right-wing populist party preferences, as a group conflict perspective suggests? Or should radical right-wing populist

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<sup>5</sup> It should be acknowledged that alternative to the term 'perceived group threat,' describing the general idea that immigrants and immigration pose negative consequences for the host society, researchers have invented a multitude of labels, including 'foreigners impact on society' (Semyonov et al., 2006), or 'ethnic threat' (Scheepers et al., 2002). See also Rydgren's (2008) approach on different 'immigration frames.' Notwithstanding these semantic differences, all of these constructs generally are tested based on very similar – if not identical – empirical operationalizations.

party preferences be considered to precede threat perceptions, as the literature on party identification implies? Or do both processes operate in tandem, suggesting that there is a reciprocal dynamic relation between threat perceptions and radical right-wing populist party preferences? Apparently, the existence of alternative directions of influence between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences seems both sensible and very real. However, up to now, studies approaching the nexus of perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences from a longitudinal perspective are largely missing. Yet without such research initiatives, conclusive evidence on the theoretical mechanisms that account for the association between threat perceptions and radical right-wing populist party preferences over time cannot be established. This study aims to improve upon this gap in the literature. Drawing on various lines of social science inquiry, our theoretical contribution is that we develop and test three competing hypotheses on the longitudinal relation of perceived group threat and RPP party preferences. On an empirical level, we examine the empirical adequacy of these perspectives by applying autoregressive cross-lagged structural equation models to multiwave panel data from two European countries, the Netherlands and Germany. This broad empirical source provides a rare opportunity to examine the cross-national generalizability of the nexus between threat perceptions and radical right-wing populist party preferences. Specifically, parallel to intensive discussions on immigration-related issues, both the Netherlands and Germany witnessed the emergence of radical right-wing populist parties, albeit at different points in time. In the Netherlands, the *Party for Freedom* (Partij voor de vrijheid, PVV), founded by its leader Geert Wilders in 2006, as well as the *Proud of the Netherlands* (Trots op Nederland, ToN) party, founded by Rita Verdonk in 2008, gained considerable electoral success and public support (Dutch Electoral Council 2014). In Germany, the radical right-wing populist party *The Republicans* (Die Republikaner, REP) received considerable political success in the early 1990s and attracted much public attention (Cole, 2005).

Given that the Dutch *Party for Freedom and Proud of the Netherlands* (Vossen, 2010; 2011) as well as the German *The Republicans* (Cole, 2005; Thränhardt, 1995) are all known for their populist anti-immigrant positions, these examples provide instructive test cases for a longitudinal investigation of the theoretical ideas outlined above.

## **2.2. Theoretical Background**

### *2.2.1 Perceived group threat predicts radical right-wing populist party preferences*

The theoretical framework most commonly applied to connect citizens' perceptions of threat from immigrants with radical right-wing populist party support is group conflict theory, or, synonymously, group threat theory (Arzheimer, 2008; van der Brug, et al. 2000; Cutts et al., 2011; Swyngedouw, 2001). The basic assumption underlying this perspective is that inter-ethnic competition for valued resources leads majority members to perceive immigrants and immigration as a threat to the well-being of their national ingroup. These perceptions of threatened group interest have been found to relate to both tangible (e.g., employment or housing opportunities) and non-tangible goods (e.g., religious or language issues). The group conflict approach further maintains that even if majority members see their personal well-being as unaffected by immigrants, they might still view immigrants as endangering the interests of the national ingroup (Riek et al., 2006, p. 337). Presuming that there is a fundamental need of group members to secure the dominant position of the national ingroup, a sense of group threat is seen to motivate majority members to defend or restore the dominant status of their ingroup (Mughan and Paxton, 2006; Schlueter and Scheepers, 2010). Hence, given the radical right-wing populist parties' strong anti-immigrant policy principles, support of these parties represents an appealing strategy to achieve this aim.

### *2.2.2 Radical right-wing populist party preferences predict perceived group threat*

An alternative theoretical perspective on the dynamic relation of threat perceptions and radical right-wing populist party preferences derives from the vast literature on partisanship and party identification (Campbell et al., 1960; Green et al., 2002; Carsey and Layman, 2006). At its core, this body of research converges in the general proposition that citizens' identification with their preferred political party centrally drives the formation of their political attitudes. As Campbell et al. (1960) put it, "Identification with a party raises a perceptual screen through which the individual tends to see what is favorable to his partisan orientation. The stronger the party bond, the more exaggerated the process of selection and perceptual distortion will be" (Campbell et al. 1960, p. 133). This logic connects with socio-psychological models of cognitive dissonance which emphasize that people are fundamentally motivated to avoid inconsistent information (Festinger, 1957; Harmon-Jones and Mills, 1999; see also Downs, 1957). Accordingly, citizens will seek to minimize any discrepancies between their own opinion and the position articulated by their preferred party (Carsey and Layman, 2006; Evans and Pickup, 2010).<sup>6</sup> Together, these arguments predict that the closer citizens feel to a radical right-wing populist party, the more strongly they should see immigrants and immigration as a threat to the well-being of the national ingroup.

### *2.2.3 Perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences are reciprocally related*

Clearly, the theoretical approaches outlined above conceive of the relation between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences in different ways. Focusing on the role of interethnic competition, a group conflict perspective stresses that perceived group threat predicts radical right-wing populist party preferences. In contrast, a party identification

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<sup>6</sup> Note that whereas these researchers aim to explain attitudinal change as a consequence of changing preferences for different parties, here we are concerned with investigating attitudinal change as a consequence of relatively stronger/weaker preferences for a single (radical right-wing populist) party.

approach assigns primary importance to the heuristic function of party programs as an information shortcut for shaping citizens' attitudes toward political issues. This view anticipates that radical right-wing populist party preferences predict threat perceptions. However, these alternative conceptions are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Instead, it seems tempting to link radical right-wing populist party preferences and threat perceptions in a bidirectional manner. In fact, researchers have long acknowledged the possibility of reciprocal relations between party identification and attitudes (Campbell et al., 1960, p. 135). By extension, we can imagine a person whose negative sentiments towards immigrants have already found expression in manifest radical right-wing populist party preferences, just as the group conflict model suggests. Then, as outlined above, a salient level of party identification could be expected to foster the person's view that immigrants are detrimental to the dominant social and economic position of his or her national ingroup. Thus, a longitudinal approach to the nexus of threat perceptions – radical right-wing populist preferences enables us to reconcile what at first appraisal might appear to be diametrically opposing theoretical positions.

### **2.3. Hypotheses**

To sum up, from the above considerations we derive the following hypotheses regarding the dynamic relation of radical right-wing populist party preferences and perceived group threat. First, a group conflict perspective leads us to anticipate that citizens' sense of threatened group interests predates their preferences for a radical right-wing populist party.

*Hypothesis 1: The more that citizens perceive immigrants as posing a threat to the interests of their ingroup, the more they prefer radical right-wing populist parties.*

Contrary to this view, we take the literature on party identification to suggest that radical right-wing populist party preferences precede perceptions of group threat.

*Hypothesis 2: The more that citizens prefer radical right-wing populist parties, the more they perceive immigrants as posing a threat to the interests of their ingroup.*

Finally, assuming that the above relations operate in tandem suggests a bidirectional relation between threat perceptions and radical right-wing populist party preferences over time.

*Hypothesis 3: Citizens' perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences are reciprocally related. The more that citizens perceive immigrants as posing a threat to the interests of their ingroup, the more they prefer radical right-wing populist parties, and more that citizens prefer radical right-wing populist parties, the more they perceive immigrants as posing a threat to the interests of their ingroup.*

## **2.4. Methods**

### *2.4.1 Autoregressive cross-lagged models*

To test our theoretical expectations, we employed latent autoregressive cross-lagged structural equation models (Finkel, 1995; Selig and Little, 2012; Schlueter et al., 2008). For the purposes of this study, this method allowed us to estimate the influence of radical right-wing populist party preferences at time  $t$  on radical right-wing populist party preferences at time  $t + 1$ . A parallel autoregressive path was estimated for the influence of respondents' perceived group threat at time  $t$  on their level of perceived group threat at time  $t + 1$ . Including these autoregressive effects controls for the baseline values of each endogenous variable over time (Gollob and Reichardt, 1991). Then, cross-lagged paths were specified that gauge the influence of perceived group threat at time  $t$  on party preference at time  $t + 1$ , and, conversely, the influence of party preference at time  $t$  on perceived group threat at time  $t + 1$ . A key advantage of this method is that because the autoregressive effects of each construct with its own lagged measurement are taken into account, the cross-lagged effects inform on how

much net change in the one construct can be attributed to change in the other construct. As an added benefit, by using latent variables this method adequately accounts for measurement error among multiple indicators (Joereskog, 1993). To evaluate the empirical adequacy of our models, we used multiple fit statistics: the  $\chi^2/df$  ratio (Marsh and Hocevar, 1990), the comparative fit index (CFI) (Bentler, 1990), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) (Steiger and Lind, 1980). We chose a  $\chi^2/df < 5$ , a CFI  $> .95$ , and RMSEA  $< .06$  to indicate acceptable model fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999). To compare the goodness of fit between alternative models, we examined differences in the  $\chi^2$  values and degrees of freedom. All analyses were based on raw data using full information maximum likelihood estimates<sup>7</sup> for missing data as available in Mplus 7 (Muthén and Muthén, 1998-2012).

## **2.5. The dynamics of radical right-wing populist party preferences and perceived group threat in the Netherlands, 2008-2013 (Study 1)**

### *2.5.1 Data*

We examined our hypotheses using multiwave panel data from the Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS), administered by CentERdata (Tilburg University, Netherlands). The LISS panel is based on a simple random sample of households from the nationwide address frame of Statistics Netherlands. To reduce coverage error, prospective panel members without Internet access at the time of recruitment were provided with a personal computer with the necessary devices to complete the online questionnaires at home via the Internet.<sup>8</sup> Apart from a slight underrepresentation of the elderly, the LISS sample is largely representative of the Dutch population aged 16 to 65 years (Scherpenzeel and Das, 2010). We limited our analysis to those respondents without a migration background who

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<sup>7</sup> Standard errors and  $\chi^2$  test statistics are robust to non-normality and non-independence of observations (Muthén and Muthén, 2012, p. 603).

<sup>8</sup> More information on the LISS panel can be found at [www.lissdata.nl](http://www.lissdata.nl)

participated in all waves of the study periods. Data on the *Party for Freedom* is available for six annual waves (2008 to 2013), yielding a sample size of  $N = 2442$ . Data on the *Proud of the Netherlands* party is available for three annual waves (2008 to 2010), resulting in a sample size of  $N = 3951$ . These alternative operationalizations of radical right-wing populist parties in combination with varying time frames are beneficial, for they help to generalize the results of hypothesis testing.

### 2.5.2 Measures

#### *Perceived group threat*

We measured perceived group threat using three items. Specifically, respondents were asked to evaluate the following statements: (i) ‘There are too many people of foreign origin or descent in the Netherlands,’ and (ii) ‘Some sectors of the economy can only continue to function because people of foreign origin or descent work there.’ Response options ranged from 1 (fully disagree) to 5 (fully agree) on a 5-point Likert-scale. Resembling approved indicators in related research (Scheepers et al., 2002; Semyonov et al., 2006; Schlueter et al., 2013), these items reflect different aspects of the view that immigrants and immigration endanger the welfare of the national ingroup. For example, whereas the first item assesses a general perception that immigrants and immigration bear negative consequences for the host society, the second item clearly taps into the domain of economic threats. In addition, to assess cultural threats we employed respondents’ answers to the following question: (iii) ‘Where would you place yourself on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means that immigrants retain their own culture and 5 means that they should adapt entirely?’ We reverse coded item (ii) so that higher values indicate higher threat perceptions.

#### *Radical right-wing party preferences*

We used two items on party sympathy and party leader sympathy as proxy indicators to assess respondents’ preferences for each of the two radical right-wing populist parties under study

(Rosema, 2006). With regard to the *Proud of the Netherlands* party, respondents were asked: ‘What do you think of the *Proud of the Netherlands* party?’ and ‘What do you think of Rita Verdonk?’ Parallel questions were presented with regard to the *Party for Freedom*, namely: ‘What do you think of the Party for Freedom?’ and ‘What do you think of Geert Wilders?’ Response options for all items were given on an 11-point scale, ranging from 0 (very unsympathetic) to 10 (very sympathetic). Preliminary analyses showed that the indicators for party sympathy and the respective party leader were very strongly correlated.<sup>9</sup> We therefore averaged the items for the (a) *Party for Freedom/Geert Wilders* and for the (b) *Proud of the Netherlands party/Rita Verdonk* to form indices.<sup>10</sup> For both indices, higher values reflect stronger radical right-wing populist preferences.

#### *Control variables*

Our research aim was to examine the temporal order of perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences. To reduce concerns about potentially spurious associations among these constructs, we included several covariates that may be associated with both perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist right-wing preferences (Arzheimer, 2008; Lucassen and Lubbers, 2012). In this regard, previous research suggested that people who are younger, are without a job, and have little education are more likely to see themselves in competition with immigrants over jobs or housing (Betz, 1994). We therefore included *age* measured in six categories (1 = 15-24 years; 2 = 25-34 years; 3 = 35-44 years; 4 = 45-54 years; 5 = 55-64 years; 6 = 65 years and older), *educational attainment* (1 = primary school to 6 = university), and a dichotomous measure for *unemployment* (1 = unemployed) in our models. Consistent with existing studies (Givens, 2004), we also con-

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<sup>9</sup> The correlation for the Party for Freedom was  $r = .93$ ,  $p < .001$ ; for the Proud of the Netherlands party, the correlation was  $r = .91$ ,  $p < .001$ .

<sup>10</sup> We decided to use these items as weighted summative indices, because estimation problems occurred when we sought to employ these items as observed indicators for latent constructs in the measurement models. Note, however, that the very strong correlations of the items measuring party preference /party leader preference indicate a negligible level of random measurement error.

trolled for respondents' *gender* (1 = *male*) and the *urban character* of the place of residence (five categories, from 1 = extremely urban to 5 = not urban). Further, to account for a possible association with respondents' *religiosity* (Abu Raiya et al., 2008), we introduced *church attendance* in our models (1 = every day; 2 = more than once a week; 3 = once a week; 4 = at least once a month; 5 = only on special religious days; 6 = less often; 7 = never). *Eurocepticism* has also been found to relate to both threat perceptions and radical right-wing populist preferences (Lubbers and Scheepers, 2007; Werts et al., 2013). We therefore included a single item asking, 'Where would you place yourself on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means that European unification should go further and 5 means that it has already gone too far?'

### 2.5.3 Results: Perceived group threat and preferences for the 'Party for Freedom', 2008-2013

To evaluate the operationalization of the latent group threat construct by its observed indicators, we first estimated a series of longitudinal measurement models. Model A1 conceives of perceived group threat as a latent variable with the residuals of the observed indicators allowed to correlate over time (Joereskog, 1979). The fit statistics demonstrate that model A1 provided a good match to the data ( $\chi^2 = 77.55$ ;  $df = 75$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 1.03$ ; CFI = 1.0; RMSEA = 0.004). In model A2, we then investigated the extent to which this measurement model comprises equivalent factor loadings over time, i.e., corresponds to longitudinal metric invariance (Byrne et al., 1989). Establishing metric invariance for longitudinal analyses is important, for it helps to ensure that the observed indicators assess the same attributes over time. The following tests showed that most factor loadings remained invariant over time, with the exception of item (ii) for the years 2009-2011. After relaxing the equivalence assumption for this loading, the fit of model A2 was not more adverse as compared to model A1 ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 14.7$ ;  $\Delta df = 8$ ;  $p > .05$ ). This establishes partial metric invariance (Byrne et al., 1989), which is sufficient for a longitudinal assessment of the structural model parameters.

The results from the autoregressive cross-lagged models are summarized in Table 2.5.1. The initial model A3 visualized in Figure 2.5.1 showed a very good match to the sample data ( $\chi^2 = 963.87$ ;  $df = 195$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 4.94$ ;  $CFI = .979$ ;  $RMSEA = .040$ ).

**Table 2.5.1: Perceived group threat and preferences for the Party for Freedom**

No.	Model	$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	CFI	$\Delta df$	$\Delta\chi^2^a$
A3	threat→ preferences, preferences→ threat	963.867	195	4.94	.040	.979	-	-
A4	threat→ preferences	964.014	200	4.82	.040	.979	5	1.681
A5	preferences→ threat	2608.411	200	13.04	.070	.933	5	1638.88***

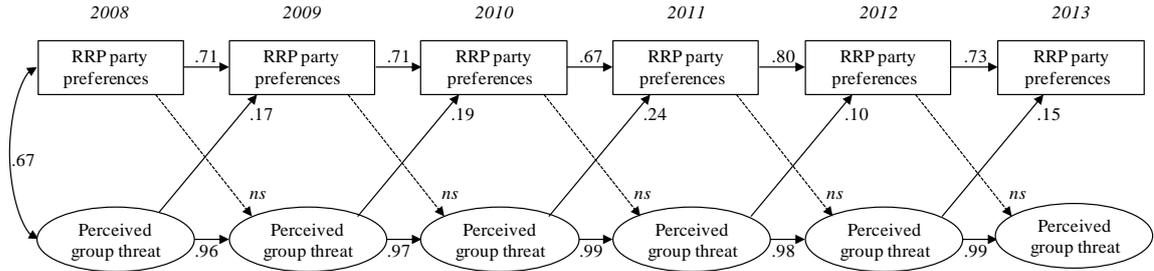
\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; <sup>a</sup>Satorra-Bentler scaled  $\chi^2$  difference test.

We begin by considering the results for the autoregressive relations shown in Figure 2.5.1. The data revealed high stability coefficients for radical right-wing populist party preferences. This means that respondents' relative rank ordering for perceived group threat remained almost entirely intact over the period under study. Regarding the dynamic relations between threat perceptions and radical right-wing populist party preferences, we found that the cross-lagged coefficients from perceived group threat to radical right-wing populist party preferences were significantly positive across the whole study period. Consistent with *hypothesis 1*, this means that higher levels of perceived threat increased respondents' radical right-wing populist party preferences over time, controlling for respondents' preexisting radical right-wing populist party preferences<sup>11</sup>. The key statistical evidence for *hypothesis 2* would be significantly positive cross-lagged coefficients from radical right-wing populist party preferences on perceptions of threatened group interest. However, the figure shows that for all occa-

<sup>11</sup> Notice that the dynamic influence from perceived group threat to radical right-wing populist party preferences decreased after the fourth panel wave in 2011. Specifically, whereas the standardized cross-lagged coefficient was  $\beta = .24$  for the 2010-2011 period, the corresponding parameter estimate for the 2011-2012 period dropped to  $\beta = .10$ . Interestingly, this drop occurred after the Freedom party suffered a general loss in popularity (Dutch Electoral Council 2014). Thus, future might therefore study more systematically whether party popularity moderates the strength of relation between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences.

sions these coefficients remained statistically indistinguishable from zero. By implication, this pattern of results also provided no support for the existence of reciprocal relations between radical right-wing populist party preferences and perceived group threat, as *hypothesis 3* suggested.

**Figure 2.5.1: Autoregressive cross-lagged model A3 for the relation of perceived group threat and preferences for the Dutch radical right-wing populist party: Party for Freedom.**



**Note: Rectangles depict observed variables; ovals show latent variables. All coefficients are standardized estimates,  $p < .001$ ; ns = non-significant.**

To probe the robustness of these findings, we tested two additional models (Farrel, 1994). Model A4 included only the cross-lagged paths from perceived group threat to radical right-wing populist party preferences, whereas the cross-lagged paths from radical right-wing populist party preferences to perceived group threat were constrained to zero (Figure 2.5.1). The results reconfirmed the previous finding that perceived group threat predicted radical right-wing populist party preferences over time. Specifically, the data revealed significantly positive cross-lagged coefficients from threat perceptions to radical right-wing populist party support for all measurement occasions. Further, as compared to the reference model A3, the fit of the more parsimonious model A4 did not decrease significantly ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 1.68$ ;  $\Delta df = 5$ ;  $p > .05$ ). Conversely, model A5 comprised only the cross-lagged paths from radical right-wing populist party preferences to perceived group threat, and the cross-lagged paths from perceived group threat to radical right-wing populist party preferences were constrained to zero. Consistent with the initial results, we found no evidence that radical right-wing populist party preferences predicted perceptions of threatened group interests over time. Moreover, as com-

pared to model A3, model A5 adjusted considerably worse to the data ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 1638.88$ ;  $\Delta df = 5$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Finally, re-estimating these models with the control variables predicting perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences at each measurement occasion did not alter our previous findings.

#### 2.5.4 Results: Perceived group threat and preferences for 'Proud of the Netherlands', 2008-2010

Following the same analytic strategy as before, the results of the initial model B1 demonstrated that all items loaded as expected on the latent group threat factor, which met the requirement for an adequate fit to the sample data ( $\chi^2/df = 0.95$ ; CFI = 1.0; RMSEA = 0.0). In model B2, constraining the factor loadings to equality did not decrease model fit ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 9.48$ ,  $\Delta df = 4$ ,  $p > .05$ ). This established metric measurement invariance over the period under study (Byrne et al., 1989).

Focusing on the *Proud of the Netherlands* party, Table 2.5.2 presents essentially the same cross-lagged models as those reported in Table 2.5.1.

**Table 2.5.2: Perceived group threat and preferences for the Proud of the Netherlands-Party**

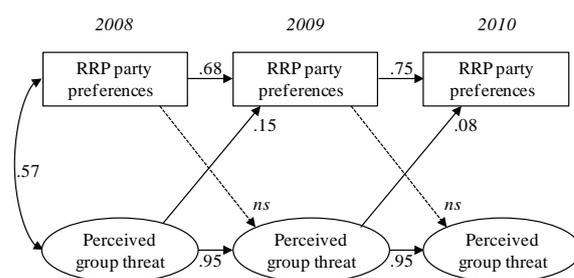
No.	Model	$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	CFI	$\Delta df$	$\Delta\chi^2^a$
B3	threat→ preferences, preferences→ threat	169.336	41	4.13	.028	.993	-	-
B4	threat→ preferences	172.309	43	4.01	.028	.993	2	3.278
B5	preferences→ threat	264.030	43	6.14	.036	.988	2	94.855***

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; <sup>a</sup>Satorra-Bentler scaled  $\chi^2$  difference test.

Model B3 allowed cross-lagged effects for both perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences (Figure 2.5.2). As indicated by the fit statistics, this model showed a good correspondence to the data ( $\chi^2 = 169.34$ ;  $df = 41$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 4.13$ ; CFI = 0.993; RMSEA = 0.028). The findings can be dealt with rather concisely. First, consistent with the

previous results, we found a considerable degree of stability for radical right-wing populist party preferences and very high autoregressive coefficients for perceived group threat. Second, in line with *hypothesis 1*, the data revealed significantly positive parameter estimates from perceived group threat to radical right-wing populist party preferences over the study period. Third, the results provided no support for the assumption underlying *hypothesis 2*, according to which radical right-wing populist party preferences predict perceived group. Finally, the absence of significant cross-lagged effects from radical right-wing populist party preferences to perceptions of threatened group interests indicated that the idea of reciprocal dynamic relations as subsumed in *hypothesis 3* was rejected.

**Figure 2.5.2: Autoregressive cross-lagged model B3 for the relation of perceived group threat and preferences for the Dutch radical right-wing populist party: Proud of the Netherlands.**



**Note: Rectangles depict observed variables; ovals show latent variables. All coefficients are standardized estimates,  $p < .001$ ; ns = non-significant.**

As before, to scrutinize these results we compared the findings of model B3 with the results of two further model specifications. Specifically, model B4 allowed only for cross-lagged effects from threat perceptions to radical right-wing populist party preferences. The results provided renewed evidence that an increase in perceived group threat heightened respondents' radical right-wing populist party preferences. Conversely, model B5 allowed only for cross-lagged effects from radical right-wing populist party preferences to threat perceptions. Accompanied by a significantly decreased model fit ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 102.21$ ;  $\Delta df = 2$ ;  $p < .001$ ), the cross-lagged effects from radical right-wing populist party preference to perceived group threat remained statistically insignificant. Additional analyses revealed that allowing the con-

trol variables to predict the endogenous variables in our models left the results virtually unaffected. Collectively, these findings provided further evidence that perceived group threat may be an antecedent of radical right-wing populist party preferences.

### *2.5.5 Discussion*

The main result from the above set of models is that perceptions of threatened group interests appear to precipitate radical right-wing populist party preferences. In contrast, the data reveal no evidence for reverse or reciprocal relations among threat perceptions and radical right-wing populist party preferences. However, the very high stability coefficients in respondents' level of perceived threat are also worthy of comment. On the one hand, uncovering strong autoregressive relation is certainly useful in and of itself, for it reflects that the relative rank ordering in perceptions of threatened group interest show only very little change over time. On the other hand, it should be acknowledged that the strong autoregressive effects for perceived group threat could also be seen as a potential limitation of the present data. That is, cross-lagged effects from radical right-wing populist party preferences might become increasingly difficult to detect the less variation in the endogenous variable there is left to explain. This begs the question as to whether the present findings could also be obtained given alternative empirical sources. Serendipitously, the multiwave panel data presented below provided a well-suited opportunity for this purpose.

## **2.6. The dynamics of radical right-wing populist party preferences and perceived group threat in Germany, 1994-2002 (Study 2)**

### *2.6.1 Data*

Data from the panel study 'Political Attitudes, Political Participation and Voter Conduct in United Germany 1998-2002' (Falter et al., 2012) allowed us to reexamine the dynamic relation of perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences in a differ-

ent context. Data collection for this three-wave panel survey took place around the German national elections in 1994, 1998, and 2002 by means of face-to-face interviews with the German general population aged 16 years or older. We included only German citizens in our sample who participated in all three waves of the panel survey. This yielded a sample size of  $N = 1423$ .

### 2.6.2 Measures

#### *Perceived group threat*

Two items are available to operationalize respondents' perceived group threat from immigrants. On a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (fully disagree) to 5 (fully agree), respondents' were asked to evaluate the following statements: (i) 'The Federal Republic of Germany is swamped by foreigners', and (ii) 'Foreigners living in Germany should marry partners from their own ethnic group.' These items can be read to reflect respondents' relative agreement with both a traditional threat measure (item i) and an ethnic exclusionary normative claim (item ii).

#### *Radical-right wing party preferences*

We employed a single item to assess respondents' preferences for the German radical right-wing populist party *The Republicans*. Respondents were asked 'What do you think of *The Republicans*?', with response options given on an 11-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (do not like them at all) to 10 (like them a lot).

#### *Control variables*

As before, we re-estimated all autoregressive cross-lagged models including a series of control variables. *Age* was measured in years. *Educational attainment* was assessed using four categories (1 = compulsory school; 2 = secondary school; 3 = university-entrance diploma; 4 = university degree). To measure *unemployment*, a dichotomous indicator was used (1 = unemployed), and respondents' *gender* was assessed with female as the reference category (1 =

male). We also accounted for *religiosity* with church attendance measured on a seven-point scale (1 = more than once a week; 2 = once a week; 3 = at least once a month; 4 = more than once a year; 5 = once a year; 6 = less than once a year; 7 = never). Finally, we introduced a control variable for the *urban character* of respondents' place of residence (1 = up to 2000 inhabitants; 7 = more than 500,000 inhabitants). To control for differences between West Germany and the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), we introduced a single dichotomous indicator with West Germany as the reference category (1 = former GDR).

### 2.6.3 Results

We first note that according to the fit statistics, the longitudinal measurement model assessed in model C1 provided an excellent match to the data ( $\chi^2 = 20.16$ ;  $df = 9$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 2.24$ ; CFI = 0.994; RMSEA = 0.030). Because there were only two observed indicators available to operationalize the latent threat-variable, we refrained from a formal measurement invariance test. Yet visual inspection of this model showed that all factor loadings were of sufficient size and quite similar for each measurement point.

**Table 2.6.1: Perceived group threat and preferences for The Republicans**

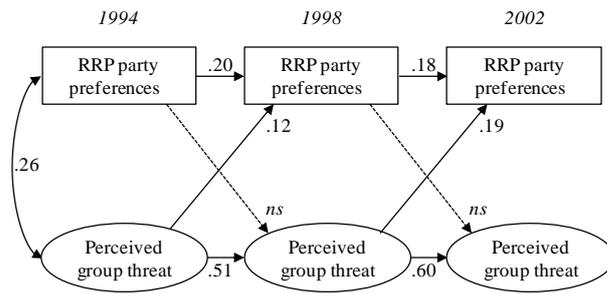
No.	Model	$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	CFI	$\Delta df$	$\Delta\chi^2^a$
C2	threat→ preferences, preferences→ threat	81.844	13	6.29	.061	.966	-	-
C3	threat→ preferences	81.007	15	5.40	.056	.967	2	1.11
C4	preferences→ threat	127.359	15	8.49	.073	.944	2	44.84***

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; <sup>a</sup>Satorra-Bentler scaled  $\chi^2$ -difference test.

Turning to the results from the autoregressive cross-lagged models (Table 2.6.1) with the initial model C2, we find that the stability coefficients for both respondents' perceived group threat from immigrants as well as their preferences for the radical right-wing populist party *The Republicans* were considerably lower as compared to the previous analyses (Figure

2.6.1). However, our primary interest is in the cross-lagged coefficients. Reconfirming the conclusions from the previous study, we found significantly positive cross-lagged effects from perceived group threat on radical right-wing populist party preferences for the period under study. This provides renewed support for *hypothesis 1*, which conceives of radical right-wing populist party preferences to represent a consequence of preexisting perceptions of threatened group interests. The reverse effects from radical right-wing populist party preferences were, however, never distinguishable from zero to a statistically significant degree. As before, we then replicated the analysis in two ways. First, we repeated the analyses with and without the control variables. Because doing so left all parameter estimates virtually unaffected, we only report the results without the control variables. Second, we conducted additional model comparisons. In model C3, we found that constraining the reverse paths from radical right-wing populist party preferences to perceived group threat to zero did not significantly decrease model fit ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 1.11$ ;  $\Delta df = 2$ ;  $p > .05$ ). Conversely, model C4 only allowed radical right-wing populist party preferences to affect perceptions of threatened group interests. However, this model specification adjusted significantly worse to model C2 ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 44.84$ ;  $\Delta df = 2$ ;  $p > .001$ ), and there was no evidence for the existence of cross-lagged effects from radical right-wing populist party preferences.

**Figure 2.6.1: Autoregressive cross-lagged model C2 for the relation of perceived group threat and preferences for: The Republicans.**



**Note:** Rectangles depict observed variables; ovals show latent variables. All coefficients are standardized estimates,  $p < .001$ ; ns = non-significant.

## 2.7. Discussion and Conclusions

The central aim of this study was to improve our understanding of the longitudinal relation between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences. To achieve this aim, we developed and tested three competing hypotheses. Whereas a group-conflict perspective suggested that perceptions of threatened group interests are antecedent to radical right-wing populist party support, theory and research on party identification led us to anticipate that radical right-wing populist support precede perceptions of threatened group interests. Additionally, integrating these theoretical perspectives suggested that there may be a bidirectional relation between threat perceptions and radical right-wing populist party preferences. To investigate the empirical merits of these hypotheses, we applied an autoregressive cross-lagged approach to multiwave panel data from the Netherlands covering the years 2008-2013 and from Germany for the period 1998-2002. The results of this longitudinal cross-national assessment provide consistent support for the view that perceptions of threatened group interests are temporally prior to radical right-wing populist party preferences. In contrast, we found no support for the existence of reverse or reciprocal dynamic effects of citizens' radical right-wing populist party support on their levels of perceived group threat. This pattern of results brings much needed longitudinal evidence to the longstanding but rarely examined axiom that perceived threat is temporally prior to radical right-wing populist party prefer-

ences. This key finding also is consistent with a causal interpretation. However, we have taken care to avoid causal language and do not claim causal effects. Given that the panel data that we used stem from self-reports, we cannot know whether some unobserved or poorly measured third variable may account for the empirical relations revealed by the data. It might therefore be useful to complement the autoregressive cross-lagged approach used in this study with other research designs. For example, by drawing on experimental designs (e.g., Coan et al., 2008), researchers might actively make radical right-wing populist party cues salient and reexamine the occurrence of subsequent changes in perceived group threat.

There are additional opportunities to expand and improve upon this research. For instance, the present evidence should be of particular interest to researchers seeking to link macro-level conditions with radical right-wing populist party preferences measured at the micro-level. It seems promising to employ perceived threat as a mediating variable of macro-level influences (e.g., immigrant group size, institutional features) on micro-level radical right-wing populist support (e.g. Rink et al., 2009). Further, although this study sheds new light on the nexus of group threat – radical right-wing populist party preferences, it does not examine the processes involved. Yet an emerging line of inquiry (Devos et al., 2002; Stephan and Renfro, 2002) suggests that threat perceptions induce intergroup emotions (e.g., group-based anger or fear) that, in turn, contribute to outgroup derogation. Thus, studies in this vein might productively explore to what extent intergroup emotions mediate the contribution of perceived group threat to radical right-wing populist party preferences. These areas offer just two of many opportunities that we hope will be pursued. Hence, the results here are important, for they represent a significant first step toward a better understanding of the dynamic micro-level mechanisms underlying citizens' radical right-wing populist party preferences.

## **2.8. Acknowledgements**

The LISS panel data were collected by CentERdata (Tilburg University, The Netherlands) through its MESS project funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research.

This research was conducted while the first author was a visiting researcher at the Department of Sociology at Radboud University Nijmegen. We thank Marcel Lubbers for helpful comments and advice on an earlier version of this paper.

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### **3. Chapter: The ideological climate of perceived group threat - a multilevel study on radical right-wing populist party preferences of Swiss districts**

**Abstract:** Explanations for radical right-wing populist party preferences received a lot of scientific attention and previous research agrees upon perceived group threat as the most important predictor. However, scholars almost exclusively focused on the role of perceived group threat as a individual-level determinant, overlooking an ideological climate. We extend previous knowledge by examining the ideological climate of group threat perception as a contextual antecedent of radical right-wing populist party preferences. We argue that above and beyond personal perceived group threat, the prevalence of local perceived group threat exerts a normative influence on personal radical right-wing populist party preferences. We examine our theoretical model using voting preferences for the Swiss People's Party (SVP). Based on multilevel structural equation modeling, we find clear evidence for a contextual effect of perceived group threat on individual-level SVP preferences.

### **3.1. Introduction**

During the last two decades radical right-wing populist parties attained major success in many European countries and preferences for such parties are frequently subject to scientific discussion. The core selling point of radical right-wing populist parties is a strong anti-immigration stance (Ivarsflaten, 2008; Rydgren, 2007: 244). Determinants derived from micro-level theories explaining preferences radical right-wing populist parties are well documented and scholars agree upon perceived group threat - generally defined as the expectation of negative consequences due to immigration - as the major attitudinal predictor (Ivarsflaten, 2008). Previous research analyzing local variation of radical right-wing populist party preferences is mostly limited to structural determinants, adopted from cross-national research (Evans and Ivaldi, 2010; Golder, 2003), e.g. the percentage of immigrants (Fitzgerald and Lawrence, 2011). The ideological climate as an antecedent of anti-immigrant attitudes and a characteristic of the social context (Christ et al., 2013; Fasel et al., 2013; Poteat and Spanierman, 2010) is broadly overlooked in research on radical right-wing populist party preferences. As a consequence, it is still unclear whether the nexus between perceived group threat and preferences for radical right-wing populist parties is limited to personal attitudes. Or does an ideological climate of group threat perceptions affect individual radical right-wing populist party preferences beyond personal perceptions of immigrants as a threat to ingroup interests? We seek to fill this void and investigate how individual preferences for radical right-wing populist parties are affected by an ideological climate. Therefore, our central research question reads as follows: to what extent are preferences for radical right-wing populist parties explained by an ideological climate of local perceived group threat?

Our contribution to the literature is twofold: (1) theoretically, we extend previous research on radical right-wing populist parties by developing a more comprehensive explanation on how the proximal social environment contributes to individual radical right-wing populist

party preferences. This explanation explicitly acknowledges that individuals rely on another for guidance and that the prevailing attitude of families, circles of friends, amongst colleagues, or other social encounters affects individual political opinions (Berelson et al., 1954; Huckfeldt et al., 2005: p. 21ff.). (2) Empirically, we provide evidence for the link between an ideological climate of perceived group threat and support for one of the most successful radical right-wing populist parties in Western Europe, the Swiss People's Party (SVP).

In this study we focus on differences between local contexts, i.e. Swiss districts. Recent research gives evidence for the impact of local conditions on preferences for radical right-wing populist parties (Fitzgerald and Lawrence, 2011). Nevertheless, further research on sub-national predictors is indispensable to investigate the dynamics of local differences in radical right-wing populist electoral mobilization. The focus on only one country enables us to rule out cross-national differences (e.g., Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Lubbers et al., 2002), even though the Western European radical right-wing populist party family appears to have a lot in common, the socioeconomic and structural homogeneity within a country compels the attention to the association we study. The site of the study provides a promising test case for the research question outlined above, given the SVP's rigorous position towards immigrants and immigration, as well as Switzerland's large local differences of SVP support.

### **3.2. Theoretical framework**

People who feel threatened by immigration or immigrants tend to prefer radical right-wing populist parties in order to alleviate their concerns about immigration. They utilize their party support to influence legislation in line with personal policies preferences (Mughan and Paxton, 2006). The attitudinal proximity of preferences for radical right-wing populist parties finds support in the literature, contrary to a pure, non ideological protest motivation (Swyngedouw, 2001; van der Brug and Fennema, 2003). The preference for radical right-wing populist parties is associated with other motivations (Mudde, 2007), as authoritarianism

or political distrust; however, none of these predictors are known to confound the impact of perceived group threat as the key attitudinal motivation (Ivarsflaten, 2008).

The theoretical framework of perceived group threat as the principal attitudinal motivation for radical right-wing populist party preferences (van der Brug et al., 2000; Cutts et al., 2011; Norris, 2005; Lubbers et al., 2002; Rydgren, 2008; Swyngedouw, 2001) stems from group threat and group conflict theory. This strand of research is subdivided into two integral elements of threat perceptions. On the one hand, threat arises from competition over economic or political resources, i.e. realistic, materialistic threat. On the other hand, people perceive group threat to non-tangible goods – i.e. symbolic or cultural threat (Sherif et al., 1961; Blalock, 1967). Both sets of explanations are not mutually exclusive and previous conceptualizations of perceived group threat suggest a common theoretical framework (McLaren, 2003; Stephan and Renfro, 2002).

The rationale described above finds much support in previous research. However, the focus on individual-level attributes overlooks that the prevailing attitude of families, friends, colleagues or other social encounters can exert its own, genuine effect on radical right-wing populist party preferences. With the present study, we extend the individual explanation to the proximal social environment. But how does the social prevalence of perceived group threat affect preferences for radical right-wing populist parties? We need to consider that people's information and concerns about immigration descend not only from personal experiences, but largely from social encounters (Huckfeldt et al., 2005). In fact, “individuals are embedded in everyday environments that provide normative and ideological reference knowledge guiding their thinking about societal phenomena such as immigration” (Green and Staerklé, 2013: 876).

The average group threat perception, serving as normative and ideological reference, might evolve to more than the sum of its parts, i.e. a distinct collective characteristic (see Blau, 1960). Hence, an ideological climate is a collective property which is conceptually and statistically more than the mass of individual attitudes (Welzel and Deutsch, 2012). Therefore, we can only infer to an ideological climate of perceived group threat when the average group threat perception is not only the accumulation of individual perceptions of immigrants as a threat to ingroup interests.

The logic of an ideological climate effect links the individual to its environment and the respective prevailing opinion via social interaction (Marsh, 2002). The rationale underlying this effect, derived from explanations of social values and normative reference (Blau, 1960; Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1995), assumes that radical right-wing populist party preferences are shaped by perceived social pressure. The expectation of social pressure might induce into compliance with a normative belief among those who recognize their environment's concern on issues of immigrants and immigration, but do not share this stance. Following this perspective, the ideological climate is an aggregate level concept of predominant attitudes, and expected to emanate on individuals beyond internalized beliefs in a normative manner (Green and Staerklé, 2013).

Previous research has shown that ideological climates are relevant in explanations of perceived group threat's descendants (Christ et al., 2013; Fasel et al., 2013; Poterat and Spanierman, 2010; Sarrasin et al., 2012; Semyonov et al., 2006). Combined, these studies are evidence for the effect of an ideological climate on perceived group threat, anti-immigrant sentiments, and related constructs. However, research on preferences for radical right-wing populist parties is needed, as the social dynamics resulting in preferring far-right parties may differ from the dynamics resulting in e.g., prejudice or out-group derogation.

In our study, the average perceived group threat in a local context serves as a proxy for the ideological climate of the social environment, i.e. social interactions. Because one could argue that individuals are also referring to reference groups outside of their respective geographical area for guidance, as well as not everyone has at least some interactions with the respective local social environment. That being said, we can assume that on average communication and interaction is more likely with geographical proximity, and a prevailing attitude diffuses with social interaction (Blau, 1960; Marsh, 2002). Even if individual social networks lay completely outside of their respective context, e.g., if all friends and family are living in another region, individual attitudes are still affected by their context's prevailing attitude through casual conversations or any kind of social interaction (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1995: pp. 124 ff). Furthermore, the interaction's collocutor itself accumulates knowledge about immigration from its own – likely local – social interactions, which in sum exaggerates the concept of an ideological climate as a local virtue. Applying these assumptions to the present study, we expect that the average perceived group threat will enhance individual radical right-wing populist party preferences, beyond personal perceptions of immigrants as a threat to their ingroup interests.

### **3.3. The Swiss People's Party (SVP)**

The SVP is one of only a few radical right-wing populist parties in Western Europe which has been able to outpoll the established mainstream parties. From the early 1990s up until 2011, the SVP has steadily increased its vote share in subsequent national elections. Although this trend came to an end in 2011, when the SVP lost some of its electoral support, it still holds the plurality of seats in the national parliament and has done so since 2003 (BFS, 2011).

During the last twenty years the SVP ran severe anti-immigration and anti-Muslim campaigns (Dardanelli, 2005).<sup>12</sup> These campaigns could not have been more obvious with its harsh positioning on anti-immigration issues and are perfectly in line with the core issue of radical right-wing populist parties (Husbands, 2000; McGann and Kitschelt, 2005). Although there is some dissent on which parties should be associated with the radical right-wing populist party family, most scholars agree on categorizing the SVP as such (Coffé and Voorpostel, 2010; Fitzgerald and Lawrence, 2011; McGann and Kitschelt, 2005). Expert judgment surveys confirmed the SVP's sharp position towards immigration restriction policies (Lubbers, 2000).

### **3.4. Data and Method**

#### *3.4.1 Data*

In order to test our hypotheses we use the most recent data from the Swiss Electoral Study (SELECTS), which was collected in 2011 (SELECTS, 2011). SELECTS is based on a national representative sample of 2000 respondents. Additionally, SELECTS provides a cantonal oversampling of 2391 individuals, yielding data from a total of 4391 people. The Swiss Electoral Study 2011 provides the information of sample points on the lowest level, i.e. zip-code.<sup>13</sup> We aggregated the municipalities to districts<sup>14</sup> resulting in 145 units of analysis on level two.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The election poster of 2007 shows three white sheep kicking a black sheep out of the country, captioned with 'For more security'. The campaign poster in 2009 promotes the banning of minaret buildings. In the foreground, it depicts a woman dressed in a burka, whilst minarets appear as rockets in the background, launching from Switzerland. The party poster of 2010 is showing a man marching across the Swiss flag, captioned 'That's enough. Stop mass immigration'.

<sup>13</sup> The analysis of average perceived group threat between zip-code areas given this data would be invalid, since in more than 60% of all sampled zip-code areas information of only one respondent is gathered.

<sup>14</sup> Swiss districts are administrative units, larger than zip-codes and smaller than Cantons.

<sup>15</sup> Clear assignment of municipalities to districts is given by the Official List of Communes (FSO, 2012).

Only respondents eligible to vote<sup>16</sup> in the national elections are surveyed in the SELECTS. Respondents with missing cases on all variables are excluded, leading to a sample size of N = 4363 nested in 145 districts with a mean of 29 respondents per district.

### 3.4.2 Measures

#### *Dependent variable*

We use a single indicator, the probability to vote for the SVP, to assess the respondents radical right-wing populist party preference. The respondents were asked: *Please indicate the probability of voting for the SVP, when 0 represents a very small probability and 10 is a very large probability.*

#### *Perceived group threat*

Perceived group threat is measured with four items on a 5-point Likert-type scale with 1 *totally agree* to 5 *totally disagree*. The respondents were asked if they agree that there are *too many Muslim immigrants in Switzerland* (Q1), that *migrants exacerbate the job market situation* (Q2), that *Swiss culture is vanishing due to immigration* (Q3) and that there is *violence and vandalism due to young immigrants* (Q4). These measures correspond to items in related research on perceived group threat (Scheepers et al., 2002; Schlueter et al., 2013). All items are rescaled in the way that a higher value equals a higher degree of perceived group threat.

#### *Control variables*

We introduce the following control variables, in order to account for confounding influences. Previous research shows that the probability to vote for a radical right-wing populist party is correlated with socio-demographic and structural variables (Lubbers et al., 2002; Mudde,

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<sup>16</sup> Respondents are at least 18 years old. In the canton Glarus the voting age is 16, but just for communal and cantonal elections.

2007). It is known that women are less likely to prefer radical right-wing populist parties (Givens, 2004). We use a dichotomous measure for *gender* with female as the reference category. Scholars agree on radical right-wing populist parties coming off well among a younger electorate (Coffé and Voorpostel, 2010). Therefore, we include *age* in years in your model. The so-called *losers of modernization* (Betz, 1994) are vulnerable towards progress and competition. To account for this, we control for *education*, assessed in eight categories, beginning from 1 *compulsory education* up to 8 *University*, and *social class* with a simplified Goldthorpe classification (*manual worker, self-employed, routine non-manual worker and professionals*, with *not in paid work* as a reference). As a convention of previous research we include a dummy for the linguistic classification of the respondent's place of residence, with 1 *German* and 0 *other linguistic areas*. Furthermore, include a measure capturing the difference between rural and urban areas. The SVP started as a grass roots party with a strong electorate in rural areas (Kriesi et al., 2005). It consists of a 4-point scale with 1 *central city in an agglomeration* 2 *other municipality in an agglomeration* 3 *isolated town/city* and 4 *rural municipalities* as reference.

On the district level, we also control for the percentage of foreign population, measured with the proportion of permanent residents with a citizenship other than a European Union 27 country. The presence of immigrants might increase competition over scarce resources (e.g. Dülmer and Klein, 2005; Lubbers et al., 2002; but: Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Jesuit et al., 2009; Kestilä and Söderlund, 2007).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> We also estimated our model with an alternative measure of foreign population, i.e. the percentage of permanent residents without a Swiss citizenship, which did not cause any substantial differences in our results.

### 3.4.3 Analysis

In our analysis we examine the influence of perceived group threat on the self-rated probability to vote for the SVP, controlling for confounding variables.<sup>18</sup> In order to test our postulated hypotheses, we use a two-level structural equation model for complex sample designs with individuals nested within districts.<sup>19</sup> This methodology generates more appropriate standard errors taking the nested data structure into account (Hox, 2002) and corrects for sampling- and measurement error (Marsh et al., 2009). All analyses are based on robust maximum likelihood estimates with missing data (Enders and Bandalos, 2001) conducted in *Mplus 7* (Muthén and Muthén, 1998-2012). By using multilevel structural equation analysis we can quantify the effect of individual perceived group threat (within effect) and the effect of district's average perceived group threat (between effect), and estimate a more reliable measure than utilizing a manifest approach (Lüdtke et al., 2008). Centrally, we are interested in the contextual effect of perceived group threat, which is, mathematically speaking, the difference of the *between* and the *within* (see Figure 3.5.2 for clarification) effect (Raudenbush and Bryk, 2002: p. 139).

To assess the goodness of fit, we provide some of the following commonly used indices: CFI,  $\chi^2/df$ ; RMSEA, and SRMR (Bentler, 1990; Boomsma, 2000; Hu and Bentler, 1999; Marsh and Hocevar, 1985). Models with  $\chi^2/df < 5$ , RMSEA  $< .06$ , SRMR  $< .06$ , and CFI  $> .95$

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<sup>18</sup> The effects of socio-demographic background variables on radical right-wing populist party preferences are expected to be mediated by perceived group threat (Arzheimer, 2008). Hence, we also test for indirect effect of socio-demographic and structural background variables on preferences for radical right-wing populist parties in our structural model.

<sup>19</sup> The choice of an appropriate macro-level is crucial in multilevel analysis, first for substantial and then for statistical reasons. Our theoretical framework assumes social interaction, which is less likely in a greater area as a Canton. However, to account for the cantonal nesting of district, we make use of clustered standard errors corrected for 26 cantons.

are considered to have a good fit to the data. Model comparisons are based on Satorra-Bentler scaled differences in the  $\chi^2$ -values and degrees of freedom (Satorra and Bentler, 2001).

For all substantial variables we present standardized coefficients. The standardized coefficient of the contextual effect is the difference of the standardized between and within effect, with factorial invariance across levels, i.e. measured on the same metric (Hoffman and Stawski, 2009). We apply design weights to account for the cantonal oversampling.

## 3.5. Results

### 3.5.1 Measurement model

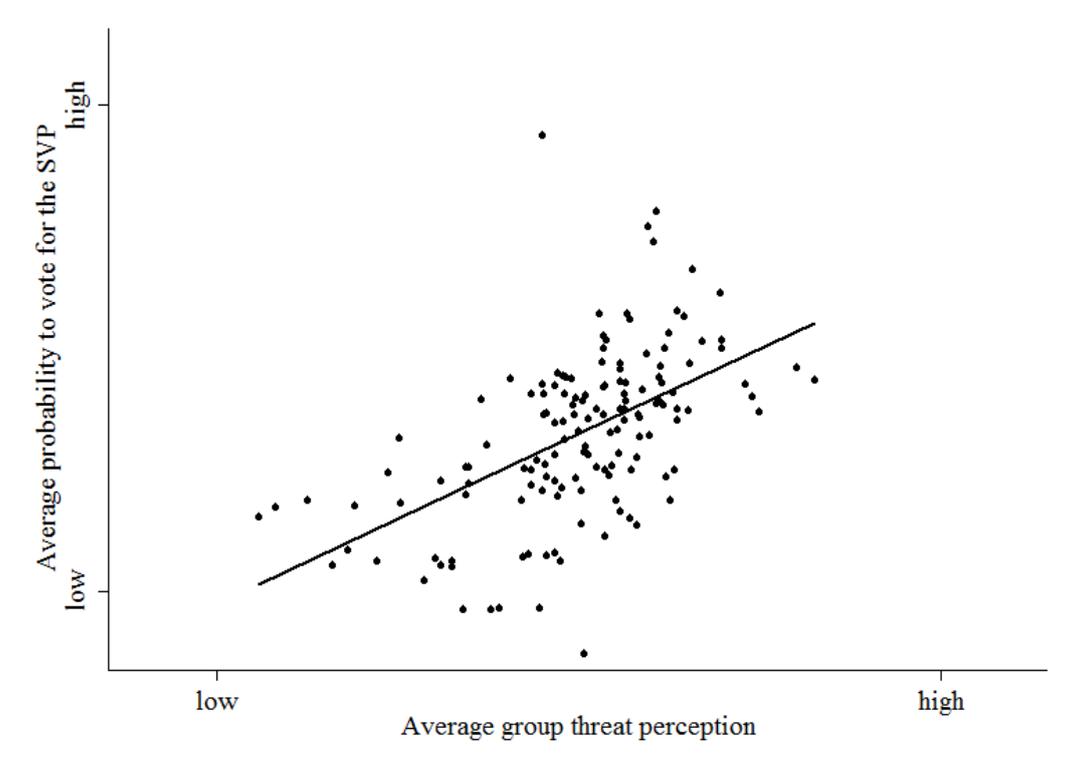
Before we turn to our hypothesis testing we provide results of our two-level confirmatory factor analysis. We measure perceived group threat as a latent variable on the individual- and district-level (Lüdtke et al., 2008), specifying a one factor solution. The results of our measurement model for perceived group threat show an excellent fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 18.355$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = .0355$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 4.59$ ,  $RMSEA = .029$ ,  $CFI = .996$ ,  $SRMR_{within}=.014$ , and  $SRMR_{between}=.049$ ). Furthermore, constraining the factor-loadings to be equal across levels did not significantly decrease the model fit ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 1.67$ ,  $\Delta df = 3$ ,  $p > .1$ ). This establishes metric cross-level invariance (Marsh et al., 2009), which helps in interpreting the differences of the within- and between-effects of perceived group threat on radical right-wing populist party preferences.

### 3.5.2 Descriptive results and structural model

Figure 3.5.1 shows the correlation between the average SVP preferences and average group threat perception. We find a significant strong positive correlation ( $r = .54$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Adjusting for percentage of immigrants did not alter our results. This is evidence for a rather

strong ecological relationship, i.e. the average SVP support corresponds to a higher average group threat perception, yet inference about an ideological climate needs further analyses.

**Figure 3.5.1: District's average SVP preference and group threat perception (r = .54, p < .001)**



Now we turn to the results of our structural model (Table 3.5.1). The overall model fits well to the data with  $\chi^2/df = 5.11$ , RMSEA = .031 and CFI = .960. Before we present the results of our central variables, we will briefly discuss the results of our socio-demographic control variables shown in Table 3.5.1. The results are generally in line with previous research. We find that men are more likely to prefer the SVP. With age the probability to vote for the SVP decreases. Explanations of social class predicting radical right-wing populist preferences are congruent with our findings. People from the working class and the so-called petty bourgeoisie have a higher probability to vote for the SVP and education decreases preferences for the SVP. The effects of social class are mediated by individual perceived group threat.

**Table 3.5.1: Structural model**

<i>Exogenous variables</i>	<i>Endogenous variables</i>						
	Perceived group threat				SVP preferences		
<b>Individual-level</b>	b	SE	$\beta$		b	SE	$\beta$
Male	.015	.045	.008		.740	.133	.103 ***
Age	.008	.002	.134 ***		-.030	.004	-.149 ***
Education	-.117	.010	-.256 ***		-.013	.017	-.008
Manual worker	.311	.070	.120 ***		.144	.183	.015
Routine non-manual	.090	.062	.039		-.124	.146	-.015
Self-employed	.179	.119	.039		.648	.247	.039 **
Professional	-.029	.062	-.014		-.074	.142	-.010
Isolated town/city	-.352	.204	-.029		-.481	.368	-.011
Agglomeration	-.018	.036	-.009		-.179	.133	-.025
Central City	-.158	.041	-.070 ***		-.410	.119	-.050 ***
German	.293	.077	.144 ***		.550	.169	.075 ***
Perceived group threat					2.169	.139	.599 ***
<b>District-level</b>							
Foreign population	-	-	-		.785	1.795	.071
Perceived group threat	-	-	-		4.546	.987	.993 ***
<b>Contextual effect</b>							
Perceived group threat	-	-	-		2.377	.964	.394 **

Model Fit:  $\chi^2 = 255.767$ ,  $df = 50$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 5.11$ , RMSEA = .031 and CFI = .960

Note: Unstandardized regression coefficients, clustered standard errors, and standardized regression coefficients. N = 4363 individuals, nested in 145 districts; weighted data;  
 \*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Our controls accounting for the large urban-rural disparities in Switzerland show that living within a city decreases the probability to vote for the SVP, alike respondents from non-German speaking areas. The SVP emerged as a rural party, thus the impact supports our expectations (Kriesi et al., 2005). On the contextual level, we find no significant direct effect of the percentage of foreign population on the average preference for the SVP.

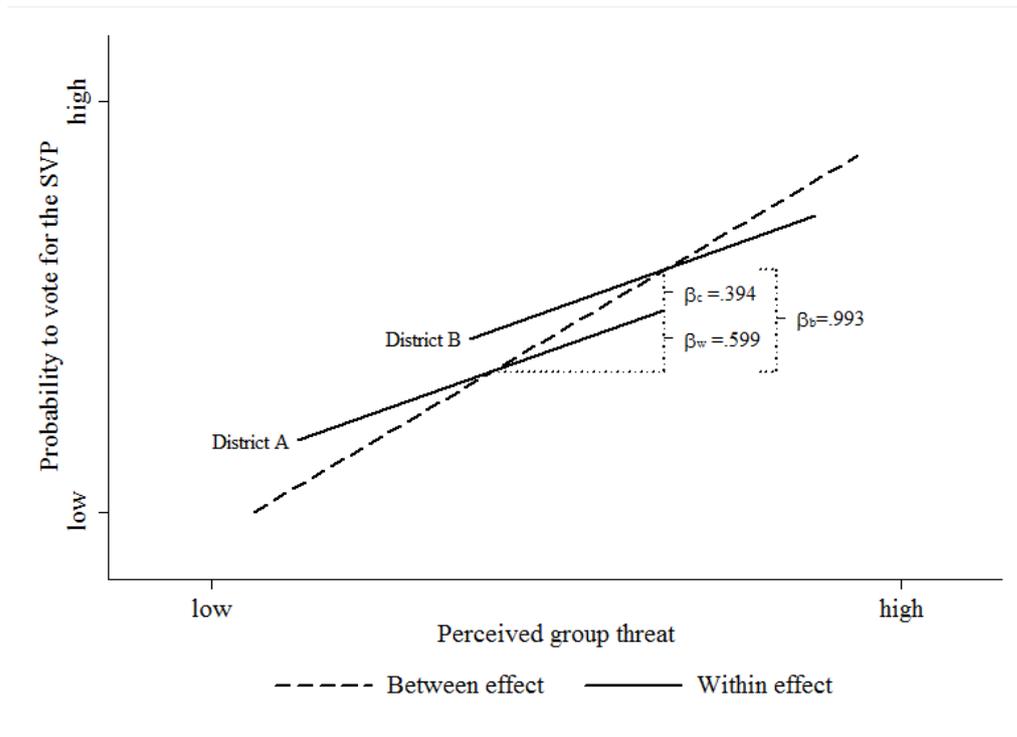
On the individual-level, the results reveal that under control of alternative explanations perceived group threat has a strong and positive effect on the probability to vote for the SVP. At the district level, we find a significant positive effect of the average group threat percep-

tion on the average SVP voting probability. In line with our theoretical expectation, the contextual effect, i.e. the difference of the between and within effect, is positive and significant. It turns out that the average perceived group threat in Swiss districts has a significant positive effect on the individual preference for the SVP.

In other words, two people with an equal socio-demographic background, equal attitudes towards immigrants, but residing in different districts which differ in their ideological climate of perceived group threat, are expected to have a different probability to vote for the SVP. Under the assumption that district B exceeds district A in its average perceived group threat by 1 standard deviation, the person living in district B has a probability to vote for the SVP which is .394 standard deviations higher than the person living in district A, everything else being equal. Figure 3.5.2 visualizes the difference of a contextual and a between effect.

The solid lines are capturing the individual/within effect ( $\beta_w$ ) of perceived group threat on the probability to vote for the SVP. The dashed line shows the between effect ( $\beta_b$ ) of different average perceived group threat on the average SVP preference in each district. The y-axis measures fitted values of the individual probability to vote for the SVP regressed against the individual perceived group threat. In Figure 3.5.2 only two exemplary districts are shown, in favour of clarity. The slope of the dashed regression line is  $\beta_b = .993$ . The slope of the solid regression lines is  $\beta_w = .599$ . The margin in which  $\beta_b$  exceeds  $\beta_w$  is the contextual effect ( $\beta_c = .394$ ). In other words, the contextual effect is evidence that the between effect is more than the sum of individual group threat perceptions.

Figure 3.5.2: Disentangling individual-level and contextual effect



### 3.6. Discussion

In this study we examine to what extent the local prevailing group threat perception, i.e. an ideological climate, emanates on individual radical right-wing populist party preferences, beyond the sum of its parts. To test this relationship, we draw upon recent survey data from Switzerland, enabling a comparison of group threat climates in 145 local contexts, i.e. Swiss districts. With this research strategy we offer an alternative theoretical explanation and empirically contribute to a deeper understanding on how the local context affects individual radical right-wing populist party preferences.

Our findings provide clear evidence that the average perceived group threat increases the average radical right-wing populist party preferences. Moreover, by disentangling the between and within component of perceived group threat, we can show that an ideological climate of perceived group threat has a substantial influence on individual radical right-wing populist party preferences, above internalized group threat perceptions. In other words, a per-

son living in a district with more perceived group threat on average has a higher probability to vote for the SVP, in comparison to a resident of a district where perceived group threat is not as prevalent - everything else being equal.

With regard to individual perceived group threat, our results support previous findings in that perceived group threat increases radical right-wing populist preferences (Arzheimer, 2008; van der Brug and Fennema, 2003). The ideological proximity to radical right-wing parties explains these findings, building on theoretical framework of group threat/conflict. Furthermore, we find that influences of socio-demographic and structural background variables are also mediated by individual perceived group threat. The mediating relationships give further micro-level evidence for the underlying mechanism motivating preferences for radical right-wing populist parties.

Our results presented here are not without limitations. A generalization of our findings beyond the Swiss context might be debatable. However, previous comparative research shows the electorate of radical right-wing populist parties in Western Europe is motivated by the same explanatory variables (Lubbers et al., 2002). The question, if and which national conditions moderate the effect of an ideological climate on radical right-wing populist party preferences deserves further scientific attention. An ideological climate effect diffuses with social interaction; therefore, we can speculate that in socially disintegrated, atomized societies preferences for radical right-wing populist parties is less affected by the average group threat perception, than in integrated and coherent societies. Another issue refers to the underlying mechanism how the prevailing group threat perception pervades individual radical right-wing populist preferences. Firstly, we have neither information on the quantity of actual interactions, nor if concerns about immigration are part of it. Secondly, we are bounded by cross-sectional data, i.e. only estimate inter-individual correlations and therefore refrain from causal assumptions.

Notwithstanding these limitations, we believe that our findings contribute to a better understanding on how local contexts affect individual radical right-wing populist preferences. Previous research of cross-regional analyses mostly used measurements that are common in cross-national analysis. After all, explanations are mostly limited to political and economic conditions, omitting the social factum of prevailing attitudes in a local environment. Our study shows that an ideological climate of perceived group threat is all too relevant in explanation for cross-regional variation of individual radical right-wing populist party preferences. In sum, the average perception that immigrants are a threat for ingroup interests constitutes a social property and poses a genuine effect on individual radical right-wing populist preferences beyond individual group threat perceptions. Therefore, this research contributes towards a better understanding on how the local context affects individual radical right-wing populist party preferences.

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**4. Chapter: Group threat, media attention, and radical right-wing populist party preference: Longitudinal evidence from the Netherlands (with Marcel Lubbers and Elmar Schlüter)**

**Abstract:** This contribution aims to provide evidence for the sources of preferences for radical right-wing populist parties in a longitudinal perspective by examining the effects of media attention to radical right-wing populist parties. We extend previous knowledge by evaluating the impact of media attention on individual changes in radical right-wing populist party preferences. We also consider to what extent media attention moderates the effect of perceived group threat on radical right-wing populist party preferences. In order to test our hypotheses, we utilize individual level panel data from the Netherlands and combine it with information from content analysis of major Dutch newspapers. Drawing upon multilevel structural equation models, our findings indicate that media attention positively affects changes in radical right-wing populist party preferences. Furthermore, we find that the effect of perceived group threat on radical right-wing populist party preference is enhanced by media attention to radical right-wing populist parties. In sum, this study shows that media attention to radical right-wing populist parties is pivotal for the fortune of such parties.

## 4.1. Introduction

Radical right-wing populist parties and their electorate received much academic attention in the last two decades. The core characteristic of these parties is their harsh position on immigration restrictions (Ivarsflaten, 2008). Scholars agree upon voters concern about negative consequences due to immigration as the most important motivation to prefer a radical right-wing populist party (Arzheimer, 2008; van der Brug et al., 2000; Cutts et al., 2011; Norris, 2005; Lubbers et al., 2002; Rydgren, 2008). Previous research mostly focused on explaining who prefers radical right-wing populist parties; yet, only little is known on why individual preferences for radical right-wing populist parties change over time. Our study aims to improve upon this gap in the literature.

When examining change of radical right-wing populist party preferences, previous research focused either on aggregated growth (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2007; Vliegenthart et al., 2012; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2001; Poznyak et al., 2011, Walgrave and de Swert, 2004), or solely on socio-demographic and structural influences, overlooking attitudinal characteristics (Rink, 2011). Despite the merits of prior research, the relative neglect of analyzing intra-individual radical right-wing populist party preferences change is unfortunate, because the underlying longitudinal mechanism remains unknown. For example, in the Netherlands perceived group threat appears to be rather stable in recent years (Meulemann et al., 2013: 359), but preferences for radical right-wing populist parties show considerable amount of longitudinal variation (van de Meer, 2013). Therefore, perceived group threat cannot account for the majority of changes in radical right-wing populist party preferences. In order to explain the dynamics of individual radical right-wing populist party preferences, we need to consider an explanation with longitudinal variance. Including the role of media attention, i.e., news media content, is fruitful in this endeavor. The growing literature on preferences for radical right-wing populist parties paid rather limited attention to salience of radical right-

wing populist relevant news content and existing evidence is inconclusive (but see Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2007; van der Pas et al., 2011; Vliegenhart et al., 2012). Furthermore, empirical evidence for the effect of media attention on intra-individual change of radical right-wing populist party preferences remains missing and so is evidence for media attention as a potential moderator for the most prominent link in radical right-wing populist party research, i.e., perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preference.

We aim to contribute to the existing literature in two significant ways. First, we provide evidence for the role of mass media attention in explanations of radical right-wing populist party preferences in an individual longitudinal perspective. Second, we investigate if, and if so, to what extent media reports function as a moderator for the effect of perceived group threat on radical right-wing populist party preferences.

The site of our study is the Netherlands. For several reasons the Netherlands are a national setting that is well-suited to investigate the nexus of media attention, perceived group threat, and changes of individual radical right-wing populist party preferences: First, the Netherlands witnessed the rise of rather successful and rigorous radical right-wing populist parties (Pennings and Keman, 2003; Vossen, 2011). Most recently the Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV, Party for Freedom, founded in 2006) propped up a minority government from 2010 until 2012. Its founder and leader Geert Wilders has a reputation for his hardline anti-Islamic stance and his strong position towards immigration restriction policies (Vossen, 2010, 2011). Second, the Netherlands are characterized with an increasingly volatile electorate (van der Meer, 2013), and third, Dutch media shows increasing coverage of the radical right-wing populist's core issues (Lubbers, Scheepers, & Wester, 1998).

## 4.2. Theoretical framework

In current research on radical right-wing populist party preferences, group threat and group conflict theory are prominent theoretical frameworks (Rydgren, 2007). Within these frameworks, group threat perception is assumed to stem from an anxiety of losing a cultural identity, and from economic fear related to loss of employment and material security (Sherif et al., 1961; Blalock, 1967). These conceptualizations refer to threats related to non-tangible goods, as conflicts of values due to immigration and further to an anticipated clash between native and immigrants groups over scarce economic resources. Perceptions of these cultural and economic migrant threats are expected to increase the likelihood to vote for radical right-wing populists, since these parties proclaim to serve the interests of those of the defined in-group against migrants and ethnically defined out-groups. Previous research had provided abundant evidence of this association (Ivarsflaten, 2008; Lucassen & Lubbers, 2012).

### 4.2.1 *Media attention*

Why should media attention contribute to preferences for radical right-wing populist parties? In general, issues frequently mentioned in news reports are also salient in the public debate (Yang and Stone, 2003). The media pushes the public agenda, also on information relevant for RRP party preference. Thus, media attention provides a fertile ground for longitudinal explanations of changes in RRP party preferences.<sup>20</sup> In our case, we examine media attention to radical right-wing populist parties themselves.

The salience of radical right-wing populist parties is expected to affect radical right-wing populist party preferences through awareness. All parties partly mobilize their potential support through visibility (Oegema and Kleinnijenhuis, 2000). Since radical right-wing populist

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<sup>20</sup> In contrast to the relation mentioned above, one could at least argue on the reverse causal direction, i.e., an increase in preferences for radical right-wing populist parties will lead to an increase in media attention. In the present study we refrain from causal interpretation; yet, utilizing a conceptualization consistent with related research (Schlueter and Davidov, 2013; Vliegenhart et al., 2012). Moreover, Van der Pas et al. (2011) have shown that increased support for the PVV was related to less visibility of the party in the media a week later.

parties generally recruit their electorate on the political margin, they largely depend on voters becoming (more) aware of their existence. The electorate of radical right-wing populist parties is likely to be less politically sophisticated, informed, and literate in party programs, given their relatively low educated profile; therefore, a media awareness increase of radical right-wing populist parties may strengthen their potential radical right-wing populist party preference (see also Dalton, 2014: 230).

Empirical findings are inconclusive however. Van der Pas et al. (2011) have shown for Geert Wilders that weekly changes in media visibility were not associated with changes in popular support in the polls, nor with other media portrayal characteristics such as expressed vision and confidence. Other studies could show that the visibility of radical right-wing populist parties in news reports positively affected individual preferences for these parties (Vliegenhart et al., 2012; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2001). An important proposition is that news reports set the public's agenda (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). In this research we neither cover the valence of news reports, nor do we assume direct exposure to mass media. We are focusing on salience, assuming that the general public debates will pick up on topics that are frequently mentioned in the news via interpersonal communication (Yang and Stone, 2003).

#### *4.2.2 Media's influence of the relevance of perceived group threat in radical right-wing populist preference*

A proposition of the group threat framework and most often used in explanations of preferences for radical right-wing populist parties is individual group threat perception. In this line of research, preferences for radical right-wing populist parties arise from some people's need to ease their perception that immigrants are threatening the interests of their in-group. From a rational choice perspective, they are expected to utilize their vote choice in favor for their policy preference of restrictive immigration legislation (Mughan and Paxton, 2006). This motivation, i.e., an attitudinal proximity of voters to their party, is by no means different to

other parties (van der Brug et al., 2000). Explanations for radical right-wing populist party preference as non-ideological protest find no, to only limited support in the literature (Swyngedouw, 2001; van der Brug and Fennema, 2003).

One implication of the group threat theory is a dynamic mechanism. That is, group threat perceptions are not only static and explainable by, e.g., early childhood predisposition (Allport, 1954), but also, dynamic and may increase or decrease throughout adulthood. One rationale underlying this is that intergroup relations will vary over time (Blumer, 1958), in such as people make new friends with different ethnic backgrounds, travel or move to a new neighborhood. Another reason for a longitudinal mechanism is that economic conditions might change over the life course, e.g., people might get laid off (Meuleman et al., 2013; Lancee and Pardos-Prado, 2013). Including these dynamic components of explanations for radical right-wing populist party preference is crucial for a more comprehensive empirical test.

In addition to separate influences of perceived group threat and media attention on radical right-wing populist party preferences discussed above, we now turn to the interaction of both constructs and their relation to preferences for radical right-wing populist parties. With this interaction we not only contribute to the understanding of the prominent link between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences, we also strengthen the postulated assumption of a genuine effect of media attention on preferences for radical right-wing populist parties.

We assume that media attention does not only affect preferences for radical right-wing populist parties directly, but also, reinforces the link between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences (Lubbers and Scheepers, 2001: 434). An increase of radical right-wing populist parties in the news likely heightens the voters' perceptions that

radical right-wing populist parties' issues are more relevant and that their perceived group threat is very sensible. This in turn may contribute to an urge to alleviate immigration concerns by sympathizing with radical right-wing populist parties. Put differently, the radical right-wing populist electorate, who perceives immigrants as threatening, is likely to feel that they are right about their perception when radical right-wing populist parties are frequently mentioned in the media. Furthermore, an increase in salience of radical right-wing populist parties may trigger the link between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences, because an increase in awareness of those parties may simply contribute to the feeling that radical right-wing populist parties are a good representation of interests for people who perceive immigrants as threatening.

### **4.3. Hypotheses**

Our theoretical assumptions described above are tested with the following hypotheses. Our general expectation regarding the role of media attention to radical right-wing populist parties reads as follows:

*Hypothesis 1: The higher the media attention to radical right-wing populist parties, the higher the preference for radical right-wing populist parties.*

The expectations of the moderating effects regarding perceived group threat and media attention on radical right-wing populist party preferences are:

*Hypothesis 2: The positive effect of perceived group threat on radical right-wing populist party preferences increases when media attention to radical right-wing populist parties is larger.*

## 4.4. Data and methods

### 4.4.1 Data

In order to test our theoretical assumptions, we need two different data sources. We combine individual level multi-wave panel data and information from computer-assisted content analyses of newspaper articles. Regarding the individual level data, we make use of the Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social sciences (LISS) administered by CentERdata (Tilburg University, The Netherlands). The LISS panel is a representative sample of Dutch citizens, drawn from the population based on a true probability sample (Scherpenzeel and Das 2010).<sup>21</sup> The data are available for six waves from 2008 to 2013. We limited our analyses to respondents who participated at least in two waves of the study period. Since we focus on attitudes of majority group members, we excluded respondents with a migration background. The number of observations is  $N_{\text{obs.}} = 25043$  of  $N_{\text{ind.}} = 6177$  individuals.

### 4.4.2 Measures

#### *Radical right-wing populist party preferences*

We measure preferences for radical right-wing populist parties with an equally weighted sum index of two items.<sup>22</sup> For the first item respondents were asked for the sympathy for the PVV: “What do you think of the Party for Freedom?” The second item gauges the evaluation of the party leader by asking: “What do you think of Geert Wilders?” The response options for both items were compromised on an 11-point scale, from 0 – very unsympathetic to 10 – very sympathetic. Hence, a higher value reflects a higher radical right-wing populist party preference.

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<sup>21</sup> The LISS panel was conducted via internet. Recent research shows that in the case of LISS, the interview mode had no effect on data quality (Revilla and Saris 2013). All respondents without access to the internet were provided with a PC and adequate devices. Further information in the LISS panel can be found at [www.lissdata.nl](http://www.lissdata.nl).

<sup>22</sup> We replicated all analysis with only single items for radical right-wing populist party preferences, i.e., sympathy for the leader and sympathy for the party, and found no substantial differences in the results, due to high correlation between both items ( $r=.92$ ).

### *Perceived group threat*

To operationalize perceived group threat, we use three items. Respondents were asked to evaluate the following statements on a 5-point Likert type scale: “There are too many people of foreign origin or descent in the Netherlands”; “Some sectors of the economy can only continue to function because people of foreign origin or descent work there.” Answer options ranged from 1 – fully disagree to 5 – fully agree. These items correspond to operationalizations of perceived group threat in related research (Scheepers et al., 2002; Schlueter et al., 2013; Semyonov et al., 2006). Additionally, respondents were asked: “Where would you place yourself on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means that immigrants retain their own culture and 5 means that they should adapt entirely?” The second item was rescaled, so that higher values of all measures reflect higher group threat perception.

### *Media attention*

To assess media attention we conducted a computer assisted content analyses of five major Dutch newspapers. Specifically, we compiled the number of articles published in *De Telegraaf*, *AD/Algemeen Dagblad*, *De Volkskrant*, *NRC Handelsblad*, and *Trouw* for radical right-wing populist party related news. To gauge the number of articles related to the radical right-wing populist party we electronically searched for “PVV OR Wilders”. We analyzed all articles published between one and 56 days prior to the interview for each wave and each person. This period is long enough to let news reports influence the public’s agenda. Moreover, it is in line with our assumption regarding the temporal order, i.e., media attention predict radical right-wing populist party preferences, since we measure media attention preceding the interviews. In total we compiled 311 search strings.<sup>23</sup> We transformed the frequency scores to

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<sup>23</sup> We searched for: DATE(<[Date of interview]) AND DATE(>=[Date of interview – 56 days]) AND PVV OR Wilders.

range from 0 – minimum to 1 – maximum. Therefore, a higher score represents a higher radical right-wing populist party’s media attention.

### *Controls*

Previous research shows that men are more likely to sympathize with radical right-wing populist parties (Givens, 2004); hence, we control for gender using a dichotomous measure with 1 – male. Age is expected to have a negative influence (Coffé and Voorpostel, 2010); we capture this by including year of birth as a continuous measure. There is also evidence that little education increases radical right-wing populist party preference (Betz, 1994). We measure education on a 3-point scale with 1 – primary school, vmbo (intermediate secondary education), 2 – havo/vwo (higher secondary education/preparatory university education), mbo (intermediate vocational education), and 3 – hbo (higher vocational education), wo (university).

We control for the effect of economic developments with an individual measure of unemployment (Lancee and Pardos-Prado, 2013), measured with a dichotomous variable with 1 – unemployed. Recent research shows that euroscepticism is also positively related with preferences for radical right-wing populist parties and perceived group threat (Werts et al., 2013). We account for this potential confounding factor with a single item, asking “Where would you place yourself on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means that European unification should go further and 5 means that it has already gone too far?”.

### *4.4.3 Research method*

We use multilevel structural equation modelling for longitudinal data to test our hypotheses (cf. Song et al. 2008). This approach offers several advantages. First, we can take the nested data structure into account, i.e., observations nested within individuals, which yields to adjusted standard errors and we are able to decompose the total variance of radical right-wing

populist party preference into within and between components. Second, our analytical approach does not compel balanced data, i.e., individuals do not require having the same number of observations (Hox, 2002). Third, this technique allows us to measure perceived group threat as a latent variable at both levels, controlling for sampling and measurement error (Marsh et al., 2009). All models are based full information maximum likelihood estimates, available in Mplus 7 (Muthén and Muthén, 1998-2012).

In order to assess the goodness of fit of our measurement model we use multiple fit indices:  $\chi^2/df$  ratio, the comparative fit index (CFI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) (Bentler, 1990; Boomsma, 2000; Hu and Bentler, 1999; Marsh and Hocevar, 1985). We consider models with  $\chi^2/df < 5$ ,  $RMSEA < .06$ ,  $SRMR_{(within; between)} < .06$ , and  $CFI > .95$  to have a good fit to the data.

We measure perceived group threat with three items as one latent factor. In order to ensure that this factor of perceived group threat is in fact the same construct measured on both levels, we need to establish metric cross-level invariance (Marsh et al., 2009). We use Satorra-Bentler scaled  $\chi^2$  difference-tests (Satorra and Bentler, 2001) for model comparison. In favor for interpretation, we centered year of birth on its mean and following the suggestions of Enders and Tofighi (2007) we facilitate group mean centering for all other variables, except dichotomous measures.

## **4.5. Results**

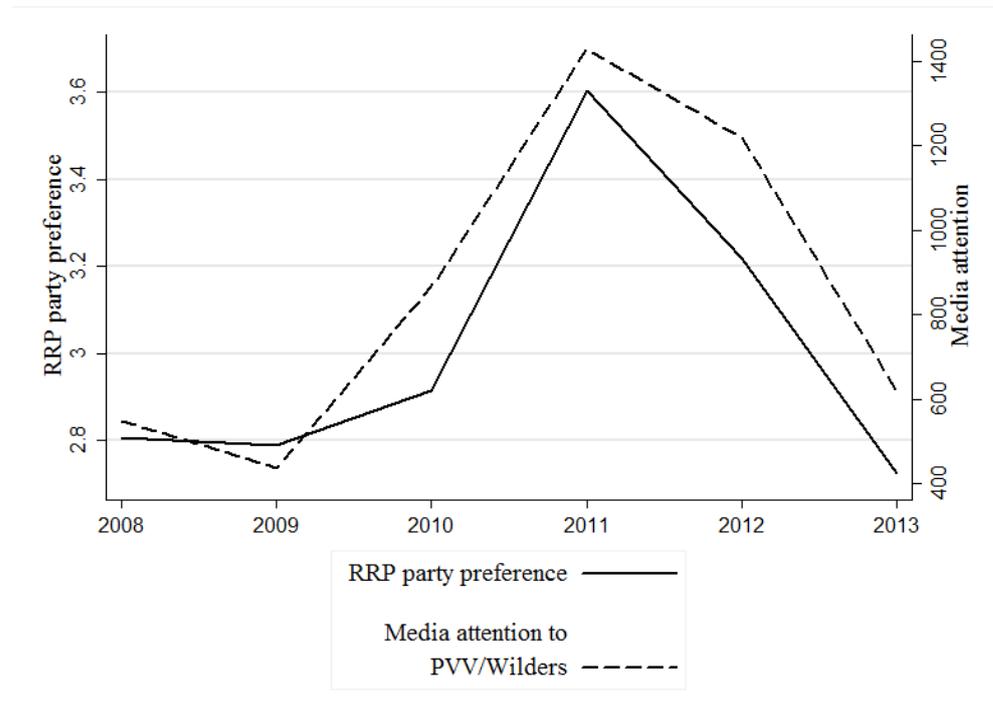
Before we turn to our hypotheses testing we present the trend of media attention and radical right-wing populist party preferences in the Netherlands. Then, we briefly discuss the results of our measurement model for perceived group threat, and continue with the results of our multilevel structural equation models.

#### *4.5.1 Media attention and radical right-wing populist party preferences in the Netherlands*

Figure 4.5.1 depicts the average frequency of articles mentioning Geert Wilders or his PVV (dashed line), as well as the aggregated scores of radical right-wing populist party preferences (solid line) over time. The illustration shows that media attention to radical right-wing populist parties largely follows the trend of preferences for the party. Both lines start rather low and build up to their peak in 2011. All respondents were interviewed at the turn of the year, i.e., the maxima at 2011 was about two to three month after the right-wing government formation of the VVD and the Christen-Democratisch Appèl (CDA, Christian Democratic Appeal), propped up by the PVV.

The formation of the government took about four months preceding the general elections in June 2010 with Geert Wilders' PVV winning the third largest share of seats. After both trends rocketed in 2011 they significantly sank in 2012 and plummeted in 2013, right after the government resolved prematurely in mid-2012. In the general elections in September 2012, the PVV once more came in third; yet this time, VVD and the Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA, Labor Party) were able to form a government without the PVV's support.

**Figure 4.5.1: Radical right-wing populist party preferences and media attention**



In sum, these findings suggest an association of media attention to radical right-wing populist parties and preferences for such parties. In order to draw further inference, we need to control confounding factors and put the trend into perspective of intra- and inter-individual differences. Before we do so, by presenting the results of our multilevel structural equation model, we first turn to our measurement of perceived group threat.

#### 4.5.2 Measurement model

As mentioned earlier, we measure perceived group threat with a latent variable on two levels, i.e., within and between respondents. The results show that our measurement model fits the data really well with  $\text{Chi}^2 = 5.896$ ,  $\text{df} = 2$ ,  $\text{p-value} = .052$ ,  $\text{Chi}^2/\text{df} = 2.948$ ,  $\text{RMSEA} = .008$ ,  $\text{CFI} = .999$ ,  $\text{SRMR}_{\text{within}} = .007$ , and  $\text{SRMR}_{\text{between}} = .003$ . In order to establish metric invariance, we restricted all factor loadings to be equal across levels. A comparison to an unrestricted model results reveals that metric invariance did not significantly decrease the model fit ( $\Delta\text{Chi}^2 = 5.896$ ;  $\Delta\text{df} = 2$ ; n.s.). We find that only little variance is situated at the lower level ( $\text{ICC} = .934$ ). Only about 6.5% of all perceived group threat's variation is explained by

intra-individual difference. Nevertheless, the results show significant within-variance, thus we proceed with a decomposed measure of perceived group threat.

#### 4.5.3 *Structural model*

We now turn to our hypotheses testing. An initial model (not presented), without explanatory variables, shows that 76.3% of the total variance is located at the individual level. In other words, 23.7% of differences in preferences for radical right-wing populist parties are due to differences over time within individuals. In Table 4.5.1 we present the results of our structural model. Model 1 depicts the results for the test of hypotheses 1. We find a significantly positive effect of media attention to Wilders/PVV on radical right-wing populist party preferences (Hypothesis 1).<sup>24</sup> With this, we can reconfirm findings of previous research (Vliegthart et al., 2012; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2001) and reaffirm our bivariate observations.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The correlation between our explanatory variables and our dependent variable might be due to some unobserved, time trending factor (Wooldridge, 2009: 363). Thus, we reran our analysis controlling for survey year (measured with a continuous variable from 0 – 2008 to 5 – 2013). The results confirmed our findings presented here.

<sup>25</sup> We also estimated the effects of media attention to immigration related news on radical right-wing populist party preferences, following the suggestions of previous research (Boomgaarden and Vliegthart, 2007; Vliegthart et al., 2012). The results show that this additional measure of media attention has no effect on radical right-wing populist party preferences whatsoever. Moreover, we find no significant slope variation for media attention to immigration topics between individuals. Including media attention to immigration in our model does not alter our findings.

**Table 4.5.1: Multilevel structural equation models for radical right-wing populist party preferences**

	Model 1		Model 2	
	b	SE	b	SE
Within level				
Media attention	0.899	.033**	0.908	.033**
Between level				
Intercept	2.148	.143**	2.142	.143**
Male	0.364	.050**	0.365	.050**
Year of birth	.020	.001**	0.020	.001**
Low education	Ref.		Ref.	
Med education	-0.125	.062*	-0.126	.062*
High education	-0.265	.064**	-0.265	.064**
Unemployed	-0.007	.338	-0.009	.338
Euroscepticism	0.247	.038**	0.249	.038**
Perceived threat	2.323	.057**	2.347	.057**
Media attention X perceived threat		-	0.426	.052**
Variance within	1.436	.032**	1.435	.032**
Variance between	2.148	.143**	2.142	.143**
Variance slope	1.061	.134**	0.908	.033**
$\delta$ (slope, intercept)		.342**		.269**
Log likelihood	-146920.177		-146889.976	
AIC	293898.354		293839.952	
BIC	294134.154		294083.883	

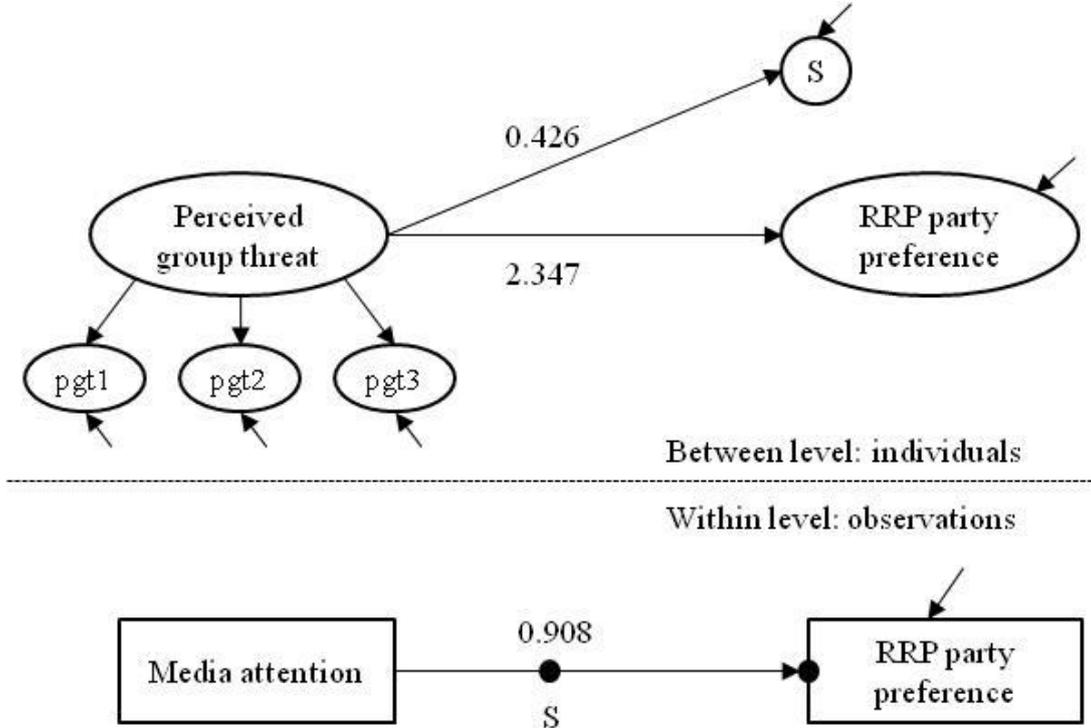
In favor of conceptual clarity, within components of unemployment, euroscepticism, and perceived group threat are not shown.

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .001$

The effect of media attention to Wilders/PVV shows significant slope variation. Therefore, we can proceed by testing the moderation effect of media attention to Wilders/PVV as postulated (Hypothesis 2). Model 2 reports the interaction effect of perceived group threat and media attention to Wilders/PVV on radical right-wing populist party preferences. The results show a positive and significant interaction. This means that the effect of perceived group threat on preferences for radical right-wing populist parties is stronger when the media pays more attention to radical right-wing populist parties. Figure 4.5.2 summarizes the results of model 2 for our focal variables. From model 1 to model 2 we find a decreasing slope variance of the media attention to Wilders/PVV effect. This indicates that differences of media atten-

tion effects between respondents are explained by inter-individual differences of perceived group threat.

Figure 4.5.2: Multilevel structural equation model (model 2)



Note: Rectangles depict observed variables and ellipses indicate latent variables. Arrows between shapes indicate paths and all other arrows represent residual variances. The black dot between media attention and radical right-wing populist party preference indicates the random slope (S) and black dots next to rectangles depict random intercepts. Controllvariables are not shown.

The results of our control variables are generally in line with previous research and do not confound our findings.<sup>26</sup> We can show that men have higher levels of radical right-wing populist party preferences, as well as younger respondents. Moreover, we find that education decreases radical right-wing populist party preferences. Our results show that euroscepticism

<sup>26</sup> Previous research further introduced political dissatisfaction as a motivation to prefer radical right-wing populist parties (Mudde, 2007; but Zhirkov, 2014). Aside the merits of this factor as an additional motivation to prefer an radical right-wing populist party, the longitudinal argument of political satisfaction to predict preferences for a radical right-wing populist party who joined the government is theoretically inconclusive. Nevertheless, to test the robustness of our findings we reran our analyses including the potential confounding factor. The results were substantially concordant.

increases radical right-wing populist party preferences. We do not find an effect of unemployment.<sup>27</sup>

## 4.6. Discussion

The main goal of this research was to examine individual changes of radical right-wing populist party preferences and how they relate to media attention to radical right-wing populist parties. In particular, we first analyzed to what extent media attention to radical right-wing populist parties relates to changes in radical right-wing populist party preferences. Second, we assessed if, and if so, to what extent media attention moderates the effect of perceived group threat on radical right-wing populist party preferences. To investigate our theoretical assumptions we utilized a multilevel structural equation approach drawing upon six annual waves of a representative Dutch panel survey for 2008 to 2013. In order to gauge the effects of media attention, we combined the panel data with results from a computer assisted content analysis on media-attention to immigration and Wilders/PVV.

Our results show that media attention to radical right-wing populist parties is positively related to individual preferences for radical right-wing populist parties. Essentially for radical right-wing populist parties is mobilization through visibility. Further analyses reveal that the effect of media attention to radical right-wing populist parties moderates the effect of perceived group threat on individual preferences for radical right-wing populist parties. With these findings we show that visibility of radical right-wing populist parties does not only mobilize the potential radical right-wing populist electorate, but also reinforces the effect of the strongest motivation for radical right-wing populist party preference – perceived group threat.

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<sup>27</sup> We also tested an interaction of media attention to Wilders/PVV and perceived group threat at level one. Controlling for the within level interaction led to estimation problems, due to only small variance of perceived group threat on the lower level. In order to reduce model complexity given the rather small number of time points, we decided to only allow the slopes of media attention and time to vary across individuals. Subsequent analyses showed that setting slopes of other within measures at random did not alter our results.

These findings extend previous research in several significant ways. First, our findings expand upon earlier research on the effect of media attention on changes in radical right-wing populist party preferences. Second, the moderation of the link between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences by media attention to radical right-wing populist parties is of key importance to shed light in the puzzling longitudinal relationship of rather stable attitudes and volatile party preferences. In sum, we extend upon our theoretical knowledge of the underlying mechanism at work, especially since group threat theory postulates a dynamic relationship.

The interpretations of our findings come with certain limitations. We only draw inference on the effects of media attention in the sense of general salience. We refrain from analyses of the news reports' valence. On the one hand we believe that it is first and most importantly visibility of topics that affects the public debate, rather than the tone of news content. Just as Cohen (1963) used to tell: "the news media may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (Cohen, 1963: 13). On the other hand, we have no information on the news a respondent actually consumed. Furthermore, one can question the generalizability of our findings beyond the Dutch context. Nevertheless, previous research shows similar effects for media attention on radical right-wing populist party preferences across different radical right-wing populist parties and contexts (Vliegenhart et al., 2012). That said, we encourage future research to investigate to what extent the longitudinal mechanism presented here is potentially moderated by cross country differences.

To conclude, the present study provides insights on the longitudinal explanation underlying preferences for radical right-wing populist parties. Existing research is mostly limited to inference on inter-individual differences or aggregated change. Our study supports assumptions based on group threat theory, acknowledging differences between inter- and intra-indi-

vidual changes, while considering moderation. In the light of rising radical right-wing populist parties in Western Europe, one has to stress media's responsibility; yet, pay heed to the micro-level antecedents of radical right-wing populist party preferences.

#### **4.7. Acknowledgment**

The LISS panel data were collected by CentERdata (Tilburg University, The Netherlands) through its MESS project funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research.

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## **5. Chapter: Conclusion and discussion**

This dissertation set out to shed light on the nexus of perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences. These efforts were motivated by previous research as it repeatedly identifies perceived group threat as the most important, i.e., strongest, attitudinal determinant for individual radical right-wing populist party preferences (Arzheimer, 2008; Cutts et al., 2011; Lubbers et al., 2002; Norris, 2005; Rydgren, 2008; Swyngedouw, 2001; van der Brug et al., 2000). While it is certainly valuable to investigate additional factors that might contribute to the emergence of radical right-wing populist parties, it is crucial to learn more about this outstanding predictor and its link to the explanandum.

Several vital research questions about the link between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences remain unanswered. As elaborated in Chapter 2, the strong correlation between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences has no implications for the temporal order of both constructs; however, the temporal order is pivotal for a sound theoretical explanation. Beyond that, the existing literature only assumes that this relationship is bound to the individual-level, and empirical tests that extend – theoretically and empirically – these explanations to an ideological climate are missing (see Chapter 3). And lastly, whereas earlier work highlights the importance of perceived group threat for individual radical right-wing populist party preferences, the longitudinal linkage of both constructs is merely suggested. In other words, there is no empirical evidence of whether perceived group threat explains individual changes in radical right-wing populist party preferences. It appears puzzling that group threat perceptions are rather constant over time and radical right-wing populist party preferences show a tremendous amount of longitudinal variance. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that perceived group threat carries the entire explanatory burden of changes in radical right-wing populist preferences (Chapter 4). Chapters 2 to 4 address these questions in detail. In the present Chapter I will summarize the main findings of the contributions and discuss their implications.

## 5.1. Recapitulating and answering the research questions

*Second Chapter: The dynamics of radical right-wing populist party preferences and perceived group threat: A comparative panel analysis of three competing hypotheses in the Netherlands and Germany (with Elmar Schlüter)*

In the second Chapter I aimed to empirically compare three competing theoretical perspectives regarding the temporal order of perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences. The first perspective, led by group threat and group conflict theory, contends that perceived group threat precedes radical right-wing populist party preferences. The second conceptualization, drawing upon the theoretical assumptions of party identification, assumes that radical right-wing populist party preferences are temporally prior to perceived group threat. The third perspective combines the two conceptualizations in a reciprocal relationship. The empirical comparison of these three theoretical perspectives is pivotal for a conclusive assumption about the underlying mechanism. To answer the research questions I facilitated representative panel data from the Netherlands and Germany. My assumptions were empirically tested in an autoregressive cross-lagged design.

The results show that group threat perceptions are temporally prior to preferences for radical right-wing populist parties. This is evidence for the assumption of group threat theory. I find no support for alternative conceptualizations whatsoever. The results are consistent for three radical right-wing populist parties in two countries, across multiple time-points. Furthermore, the findings are robust against confounding factors.

*Third Chapter: The Ideological Climate of Perceived Group Threat - a Multilevel Study on Radical Right-Wing Populist Party Preferences of Swiss Districts*

In the third Chapter I analyzed to what extent the average group threat perception of sub-national regions, in this case Swiss districts, exerts a genuine effect on individual radical

right-wing populist party preferences beyond individual group threat perceptions. The theoretical assumption tested in this study builds on the basic premise that individuals depend on their social environment for normative and ideological reference (Blau, 1960; Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1995). That is, individuals gather information on, e.g., immigration, via social interaction with friends, families, and other social encounters (Green and Staerklé, 2013). From this, I derive the hypothesis that if the average perception that immigrants are posing a threat to the well-being of the ingroup exceeds a contextual characteristic that is more than the sum of its parts, then I can infer to an ideological climate of perceived group threat. In other words, I assume that an individual will be more likely to prefer a radical right-wing populist party when she or he lives in a district where the average group threat perception is higher compared to a district where on average people do not perceive immigrants as an ideological or economic threat, regardless of her or his own concerns about immigration.

To test my theoretical assumptions I used cross-sectional data from Switzerland, representative of the Swiss population. Methodologically, I facilitated multilevel structural equation modeling for complex sample designs, with individuals nested in Swiss districts. My results show that the district's average perceived group threat positively contributes to individual radical right-wing populist party preferences, above and beyond individual group threat perceptions. These findings are robust against confounding factors as the percentage of immigrants and individual socio-demographic and structural background variables. This means that when comparing two hypothetical, identical persons, from two different districts that differ in their average group threat perception, I find that the one from the district with more perceived group threat on average is more likely to prefer a radical right-wing populist party, everything else – including individual group threat perceptions – being equal.

*Fourth Chapter: Group Threat, Media Attention, and Radical Right-Wing Populist Party Preferences – Longitudinal Evidence from the Netherlands (with Marcel Lubbers and Elmar Schlüter)*

The fourth Chapter elaborates upon radical right-wing populist party preferences in a longitudinal perspective. This Chapter draws upon the dynamic framework of group threat theory to explain intra-individual changes in radical right-wing populist party preferences. Furthermore, I include media attention to radical right-wing populist parties – as a fruitful proposition advanced in group threat theory (Allport, 1954; Blumer, 1958) – into explanations. The underlying assumption is that (in particular) radical right-wing populist parties rely on mobilization of their electorate through visibility and therefore benefit when radical right-wing populist parties are more salient in the general public. Next to the direct contribution of frequent media attention to radical right-wing populist parties' success, I hypothesize that media attention also reinforces the relationship between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences. An increase in awareness of radical right-wing populist parties might strengthen beliefs that radical right-wing populist parties are a good representation and take a strong stand for concerns of voters who already perceive outgroups to be a threat to the well-being of their ingroup.

I tested these assumptions with representative panel data from the Netherlands, enriched with computer-assisted content analyses of newspaper articles. Methodologically, I make use of multilevel structural equation modeling for longitudinal data. I find that an increase in individual group threat perceptions is positively related to radical right-wing populist party preferences. The analyses further reveal that changes in media attention are also positively associated with changes in radical right-wing populist party preferences. Lastly, I provide evidence that media attention moderates the effect of perceived group threat on radical right-wing populist party preferences.

## **5.2. Discussion: contributions and limitations**

In this section I will discuss the contributions of this dissertation to the literature. I aim to highlight the theoretical, methodological, and empirical advancements of knowledge on the link between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences.

The second Chapter of this dissertation brings vitally needed evidence for the longitudinal link between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences. My findings of a unidirectional relationship, i.e. perceived group threat predicts radical right-wing populist party preferences, advance theoretical assumptions of the underlying mechanism at work. Furthermore, in order to understand the causal nature of a relationship between two variables, a crucial characteristic is temporal precedence (Cook and Campbell, 1979; Shadish et al., 2002). Methodologically, this design enables a simultaneous test of three competing theoretical perspectives, which provide unambiguous findings of alternative conceptualizations of the temporal order of perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences. From an empirical perspective, Chapter 2 is one of the first studies that makes use of multiwave, large-scale panel data, to study preferences for radical right-wing populists in a longitudinal perspective. Most previous research made use of (repeated) cross-sectional data sources – with a few exceptions (Geishecker and Siedler, 2012; Rink, 2011). Despite the merits of these contributions, (repeated) cross-sectional data allows only limited inference about the temporal order of two constructs.

In the third Chapter, I provide an alternative theoretical perspective on how the local context is linked to individual radical right-wing populist party preferences. The theoretical argument of an ideological climate bridges contextual differences of the prevailing group threat perception to individual radical right-wing populist party preferences. Methodologically, Chapter 3 provides a state-of-the-art research design, which enables me to disentangle the total (co-)variance into between and within components, allowing for a more comprehen-

sive test for these kinds of theoretical assumptions. With these analyses, I present empirical evidence for an effect of the average group threat perception beyond the sum of its parts, for one of the most successful radical right-wing populist parties in Western Europe.

The fourth Chapter contributes to the literature with evidence for the dynamic relationship of perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences. I utilize a methodology that allows a more comprehensive test of the longitudinal nexus, considering that I disentangle variation between and within persons. This study makes it possible to extend previous knowledge on the effect of media attention on radical right-wing populist party preferences to intra-individual changes. Furthermore, I can show that media attention also functions as a moderator for the effect of perceived group threat on radical right-wing populist party preferences, which partly explains the puzzling observation of stable group threat perceptions and volatile preferences for radical right-wing populist parties.

In general, interpretations of research findings come with limitations, as do these presented in this dissertation. First, one can raise the questions on generalizability of these results beyond the respective national context studied. While the work of this dissertation is certainly bound to statistical inferences from samples of the respective country, assumptions about similar results patterns in other countries are not too farfetched. In Chapter 2 for example, I strengthen the argument about a general mechanism by analyzing my hypotheses on the temporal order of perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences for three very different radical right-wing populist parties in two countries. Furthermore, I benefit from previous research that provides much evidence for a very similar electorate of radical right-wing populist parties – motivated by very similar explanatory factors – across Western Europe (Lubbers et al., 2002). This research also, e.g., concerns the effect of media attention (Vliegenhart et al., 2012). Nevertheless, I encourage future research to investigate national characteristics interrelated to the relationships studied in this dissertation. Second, and as with

all analyses of secondary data, this dissertation deals with problems of pre-collected indicators. I was limited in the way, e.g., how perceived group threat was measured. The same issue applies to possible confounding factors. Both focal and control constructs might not be available in their ideal operationalization. In order to cope with this, wherever possible, latent variable modeling was applied. The use of latent factors has the advantage, by combining multiple indicators to measure underlying latent constructs, of adjusting for measurement error. Moreover, to measure radical right-wing populist party preferences I used more accurate, (quasi-)continuous measures, compared to a dichotomous indicator, as discussed in Chapter 1.5. Third, while this dissertation set out to shed more light on the prominent link between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences, the findings raise the question of intermediary variables of this process, e.g., intergroup emotions such as anger or contempt (Mackie et al., 2000). Nevertheless, by definition, potential mediators, linking group threat perceptions and preferences for radical right-wing populist parties, will not confound the strong correlation between the two constructs.

### **5.3. Concluding remarks and future research**

The research presented in this dissertation advances previous knowledge on the link between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences as described above. These findings not only contribute to the scientific literature, but also provide rich socio-political implications.

First, the temporal order suggested by my findings, i.e., perceived group threat preceding radical right-wing populist party preferences, is all too relevant for policy makers fighting the emergence of radical right-wing populists, because in the end the radical right-wing populists fortune will only be stopped by effectively decreased concerns about negative consequences due to immigration, since the relationship is unidirectional. Therefore, I invite future research on perceived group threat antecedents to include preferences for radical right-wing populist

parties, to provide a more comprehensive model of attitudes and political behavior for the case of the radical right-wing populists.

Second, the ideological climate of perceived group threat and its effect on individual radical right-wing populist party preferences is a first step to a deeper understanding of how the local context affects people's preferences for radical right-wing populist parties. I provide evidence that the social environment is important, the more so because I find no influence of structural characteristics such as the percentage of immigration. In future research on local context, the proximal social surrounding needs to be taken seriously to illustrate the underlying mechanism. For a broader picture, estimating the effect of the ideological group threat climate, conditioned on national characteristics, seems promising and would extend the findings presented here to a cross-national perspective.

Third, the contribution of radical right-wing populists' media attention to the success of such parties should be a reason to change news coverage of radical right-wing populist parties. As others have noted already, in some countries the media agreed upon boycotting radical right-wing populist parties in their news reports, or at least avoid extensive reporting (Vliegenthart et al., 2012:320). I showed that extensive news reports on radical right-wing populist parties not only increase individual preferences for them directly, they also enhance the effect of perceived group threat. For future research, beyond the rationale studied here, one promising path in the analyses of individual changes in radical right-wing populist party preferences seems to be the potential effect of exogenous shocks, e.g., economic crises or terrorism (Angouri and Wodak, 2014).

In conclusion, this dissertation presents evidence that perceived group threat precedes radical right-wing populist party preferences, that the local average group threat perception contributes to individual radical right-wing populist party preferences beyond individual per-

ceived group threat and that the link between perceived group threat and radical right-wing populist party preferences is positively moderated by media attention to radical right-wing populist parties. Thereby, I contributed to a deeper understanding of the most prominent link in research on radical right-wing populist parties.

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