

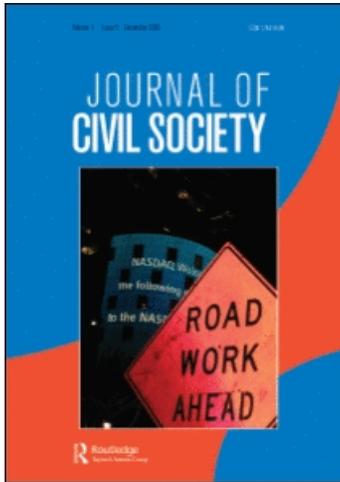
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### Social Isolation? Social Capital and Radical Right-wing Voting in Western Europe

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# Social Isolation? Social Capital and Radical Right-wing Voting in Western Europe

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**ABSTRACT** *Proceeding from mass society theory and the theory of social capital, this article discusses the effect of social isolation, social trust, and membership in voluntary organizations on radical right-wing voting in Belgium, Denmark, France, Norway, and Switzerland. By using data from the first and third rounds of the European Social Survey, a number of logistic regression models are estimated. The results indicate that social isolation and social capital, measured as active membership in voluntary organizations, are of marginal value for explaining radical right-wing voting, although there is some cross-national variation. Moreover, the results show that not even members of humanitarian aid and human rights organizations are less likely to vote for the radical right, which clearly questions the universalistic ambitions of Putnam's theory of social capital and its core idea that organizational membership fosters tolerance and civic virtues.*

**KEY WORDS:** Civil society, radical right, social capital, trust, voting behaviour

## Introduction

During the past 50 years, two dominant theories within political sociology—the theory of social capital (Putnam, 1993, 2000) and mass society theory—have proposed a link between social isolation and intolerance. Both of them emphasize the importance of civil society and voluntary organizations. The theories are related in that they argue that social integration fosters democratic values and tolerance, and that social disintegration leads to intolerance—or apathy. In this respect they share a long history, combining intellectual influences going back to de Toqueville (2003) and Durkheim (1952). De Toqueville saw membership in organizations as schools of democracy that foster cooperation, and Durkheim used social disintegration to explain various forms of deviant behaviour.

Given their preoccupation with trust and intolerance, it is strange that these theories have received almost no attention in the literature on the rise of the contemporary

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radical right-wing party family in Western Europe, including parties such as the French Front National, the Belgian Vlaams Blok (Vlaams Belang), the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), and the Danish People's Party, among several others. Although mass society theory was one of the dominant theories for explaining the rise of interwar fascism and Nazism,<sup>1</sup> it has not been properly tested as an explanation of the rise of the new radical right. Moreover, because social capital theory asserts that people who are active in civil society organizations and who have active friendship networks are more likely to be trusting of others and to share civic virtues and democratic values, it is not far-fetched to assume that socially isolated voters who lack membership in voluntary organizations will be more likely to support radical right-wing parties, given the fact that these parties base their appeals on intolerance and criticism of the political system. Yet, up until now there has been no systematic cross-country study of the effects of membership in civil society organizations and social trust on radical right-wing voting.

The purpose of this paper is twofold: (1) to study the scope conditions of social capital theory and mass society theory and (2) to test possible explanations to the electoral support of the radical right. First, both theories are rather universalistic in their claims, which make it important to test the boundaries of their empirical applicability. Second, the research literature on the radical right has proposed a large number of explanations for the emergence of the contemporary radical right (see Rydgren, 2007 for a recent review), but have not studied the effect of social isolation and social capital in a systematic way. In a recent paper, van der Brug and Fennema (2007, p. 483) suggested that future research should take these factors more seriously. To note, however, the purpose of this paper is not to specify models capable of fully explaining the rise of the radical right-wing parties or why some voters rather than others vote for such parties. My models would be restricted too much for that. The purpose is rather to critically examine the effect of a limited, but potentially important, set of explanations.<sup>2</sup>

The remainder of this paper will be structured as follows. In the next two sections, I will discuss mass society theory and social capital theory, respectively; as well as their potential relevance for explaining radical right-wing voting. Data will be presented in the third section. By using data from the first and third rounds of the European Social Survey (ESS, 2002–2003, 2006–2007), I will estimate a number of logistic regression models that test the effect of social isolation and social capital on the likelihood of voting for a radical right-wing party in the five Western European countries included in this study (Belgium, Denmark, France, Norway, and Switzerland).<sup>3</sup> The result of these analyses will be presented and discussed in the fourth section. The fifth section will conclude.

### **Social Isolation: The Mass Society Thesis**

Mass society theory argues that society is characterized by growing atomization and loss of community, which leads to increasing readiness to embrace new ideologies—in particular, ideologies that satisfy the desire for community (Kornhauser, 1959). According to Arendt (1973, p. 317), for instance, ‘the chief characteristic of the mass-man is . . . his isolation and lack of normal social relationships.’ More specifically, the modern individual is seen as largely lacking attachments to primary and secondary associations. Moreover, as a result of disintegration at the structural level, people are becoming increasingly disorganized at the psychological level; the psychological consequences of mass society are feelings of detachment and alienation (Gusfield, 1962, p. 21). According to Nisbet

(1970, p. ix), alienation in mass society can be described as ‘the state of mind that can find a social order remote, incomprehensible, or fraudulent; beyond real hope or desire; inviting apathy, boredom, or even hostility. The individual . . . does not feel a part of the social order . . .’ Because of the diminished importance of established primary and secondary associations, Nisbet (1970, p. 15) continues, ‘fewer individuals have the secure interpersonal relations which formerly gave meaning and stability to existence.’ As a result, people do not find satisfaction for their increasingly unfulfilled needs for identity, assurance, and affection—and as a result, their relationship to the world becomes more distant and distrustful (Fromm, 1994, p. 259; Gusfield, 1962, p. 21).

According to mass society theory, this situation fosters the emergence of extreme right-wing movements.<sup>4</sup> First, the diminished role of intermediate structures—family, local community, professional organizations, traditional civil society organizations—had the direct effect that more people were left unattached, and hence available for mobilizing efforts by charismatic leaders (Gusfield, 1962; Kornhauser, 1959, p. 33). Second, the decline of the well-working pluralist society, with its cross-cutting affiliations and loyalties of a local, proximate nature, removed an important barrier for keeping ‘the loyalties from moving towards a single and remote object, such as the nation’ (Coser, 1991; Shils, 1996, p. 159; cf. Simmel, 1955). Third, in order to reduce feelings of frustration, insecurity, and detachment that result from social isolation, people are motivated to replace decaying identities and social networks with new ones—real ones such as totalitarian social movement organizations that offer ‘quasi-communities’ (Kornhauser, 1959) as well as those that are only metaphysical or metaphorical in character, such as ethnic nationalism (cf. Arendt, 1973, p. 317; Fennema & Tillie, 1998; Fromm, 1990; Fromm, 1994, p. 18).

To summarize, the hypothesis derived from mass society theory is that social isolation is important for explaining why some people are more likely to support the radical right. This, in turn, implies that an explanation of the emergence of the radical right should focus on factors associated with objective social isolation, such as (lack of) friendship relations, (weak) family structures, (no) membership in civil society organizations, unemployment, as well as on factors associated with subjective feelings of social isolation, such as feelings of loneliness, alienation, and distrust (cf. Fennema & Tillie, 1998). Moreover, it is generally assumed within mass society theory that these factors are more likely to be operative in situations of severe crisis (Shils, 1996). However, as noted by Kornhauser (1959), among others, it cannot be assumed that all people will respond to social isolation with political extremism. They may also respond with apathy, by withdrawing from public life and political participation. Hence, in some situations, socially isolated individuals are at least as likely to choose exit as voice (Hirschman, 1970). In fact, as indicated by Kornhauser (1959, p. 93), lack of ties to institutions and organizations may be more important than lack of friendship relations in explaining radical right-wing mobilization: ‘the totally isolated individual (that is, the person without any social ties) will be unable to maintain his personal organization sufficiently to engage in cooperative ventures of any kind, whereas the individual who has personal ties but no broader ties in the society is more likely to be available for mass movements.’ This might in particular be the case for isolated unemployed individuals (Kornhauser, 1959, p. 159).

As mentioned above, mass society theory has not been commonly used as the basis for explanations of the rise of the contemporary radical right-wing parties, although there have been some scattered studies that have presented support for hypotheses derived from this

theory. Mayer and Perrineau (1992) and Mayer and Moreau (1995), for example, found among the voters for the Front National<sup>5</sup> and the Republikaner a higher level of social isolation, and a correlation was found between preferences for anti-immigrant parties and social isolation among the Dutch voters (see Eatwell, 2003, 2005; Fennema, 2005; Fennema & Tillie, 1998 for references to a few studies using ecological data). However, up until now there have been no systematic cross-country studies of the effect of social isolation on radical right-wing voting.

### **Social Capital: Networks, Organization Membership, and Generalized Trust**

The theory of social capital is not a unitary one (Portes, 1998, p. 2000). Within sociology, it is common to view social capital as a range of resources available to people through their social network contacts (Bourdieu, 1986; Lin, 2001), or more broadly as aspects of the social structure that facilitate certain actions for actors embedded within these structures (Coleman, 1988, 1990). Such resources could be economic capital, information, obligations of reciprocity derived from mutual trust, and—for Coleman—social norms (Herreros, 2004). Within political science, however, it is more common to follow Putnam's (1993, 2000) conception of social capital as 'features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions' (Putnam, 1993, p. 167). Although Putnam emphasized the importance of social networks, the object of study *par excellence* is membership in voluntary organizations, and the civic values and mutual trust assumed to emerge through active membership in such associations.<sup>6</sup> As Stolle and Rochon (1998, p. 48) put it, within political science 'associational memberships have become the indicator of choice for examining the rate of formation or destruction of social capital.' Building on de Toqueville, Putnam (1993, p. 89–90) argues that 'associations instill in their members habits of cooperation, solidarity, and public-spiritness . . . Participation in civic organizations inculcates skills of cooperation as well as shared responsibility for collective endeavors.' Later, others have added to the list of beneficial effects of membership in voluntary associations and have seen them as a place for practicing compromise and tolerance and for stimulating political participation (Paxton, 2002).<sup>7</sup> However, as has been increasingly emphasized within the literature, not all kinds of organizations are likely to have the same effect on trust, tolerance, and other civic virtues. In fact, the *raison d'être* of some organizations is to promote the logic of separation and to produce mistrust or even hatred of (some) other people (Paxton, 2002; Portes, 2000; Rothstein, 2005, pp. 56–101). It has been proposed (Putnam, 1993, p. 175; Putnam, 2000, p. 22) that membership in horizontally ordered associations is likely to breed trust and civic values, whereas membership in hierarchically ordered organizations is not, and that membership in socially heterogeneous organizations—by providing bridging social capital—is more likely to foster generalized trust and tolerance than is membership in socially homogeneous organizations (which provides bonding social capital).

Keeping these distinctions in mind, earlier studies show that members of voluntary organizations tend to be more likely to share democratic and civic attitudes and norms, and that they tend to be more politically active (Almond & Verba, 1963; Leighley, 1995; Verba & Nie, 1972). However, with regard to the hypothesis that associational membership leads to more generalized trust, the findings of empirical studies are more mixed. Whereas some studies present supporting results (Paxton, 2002, 2007; Stolle &

Rochon, 1998; Van Oorschot, Arts & Gelissen, 2006), this relationship has been questioned by other studies (Delhey & Newton, 2003), who argue that more informal social networks are of greater importance than membership in more formal organizations. Wollebaek and Selle (2007) found that members of civil society organizations are indeed more trusting than non-members but, contrary to Putnam's (2000, p. 58) assumption, that active members are not more trusting than passive members. In addition, and this is of importance for this study, although Stolle and Rochon (1998) did find a correlation between associational membership and trust, no such correlation was found for tolerance.

Hence, as with mass society theory, we can derive from the theory of social capital the hypotheses that people who are active in civil society organizations, including churches (cf. Sztompka, 1999, pp. 131–132; Welch, Sikkink & Loveland, 2007, p. 26), and who have active friendship networks are more likely to be trusting of others and to share civic virtues and democratic values. It is not far-fetched to assume that such individuals are less likely to support radical right-wing parties, which base their appeals on intolerance and criticism of the political systems, and that people who lack membership in voluntary associations and who are socially distrustful are more likely to be among the radical right-wing voters. Of course, for similar reasons as were discussed above concerning mass society theory, an alternative hypothesis is that people who largely lack social capital abstain from voting altogether.

Yet, it is striking that the literature on the radical right has not been the least interested in the theory of social capital (cf. van der Brug & Fennema, 2007, p. 483; Veugelers, 2005, p. 409). The two notable exceptions are Coffé, Heyndels and Vermeir (2007), who showed that Vlaams Blok tends to be more successful in municipalities with sparse networks of organizations than in municipalities with dense networks of organizations, and Veugelers (2005) who studied the role of 'sour' or 'bad' social capital by showing that organized *piéd noirs* in France are more likely to support the Front National than those who are unorganized. However, up until now there have been no systematic cross-national studies that examine the role of social capital for radical right-wing voting.

## Data and Methods

As should be evident from the presentation above, mass society theory and the theory of social capital are not distinct theories; there are significant overlaps between the two. Yet, we can extract one principal hypothesis from mass society theory, that is, that (*H1*) people who are socially isolated, or who feel socially isolated, are more likely to be among the radical right-wing voters; and two main hypotheses from the social capital theory: (*H2*) those who lack ties to associations and organizations are more likely to vote for the radical right; as are (*H3*) socially distrustful people. In order to test these hypotheses, I estimate a number of logistic regression models. The first four models test different aspects of hypothesis *H1*. Models 1 and 2 involve variables that measure social isolation directly; model 3 involves variables that measure sentiments that are assumed to be associated with social isolation; and model 4 involves variables that measure the way people experience the social interaction they do have (are they treated fairly and with respect?). Models 1 and 2 are the core models for testing the effect of social isolation on radical right-wing voting; models 3 and 4 are complementary. Model 5, which tests hypothesis *H2*, includes variables measuring people's ties to associations and organized activity; and models

6 and 7, by including variables measuring social trust, test hypothesis *H3*. The models are further specified below.

All logistic regression models are tested against the dependent variable ‘to vote or not to vote for a radical right wing party’. Only individuals who voted in the last national election are included in the models. Here voters who voted for the radical right in the last national election in Belgium, Denmark, France, Norway, or Switzerland were coded 1 and other voters were coded 0. More specifically, the following parties are deemed to belong to the radical right: the Belgian Vlaams Blok (recently renamed Vlaams Belang), the Belgian Front National, the Danish People’s Party, the Danish Progress Party, the French Front National, The French Mouvement National Républicain, the Norwegian Progress Party, and the Swiss People’s Party.<sup>8</sup> The common features of these parties are a programmatic core of ethno-nationalist xenophobia (the key issue is opposition against immigration and the multicultural society) and anti-political-establishment populism (Minkenberg, 2001; Rydgren, 2005). However, there are important differences between the parties in terms of history and political orientations: in Belgium and France, the radical right-wing parties have closer affinities to the extreme right, whereas the Norwegian and Swiss parties are less extremist and more populist in orientation. The Danish parties are somewhere in between (Ignazi, 2003; Mudde, 2007; Rydgren, 2004).<sup>9</sup>

For the models presented in Table 1, I use data from the third round of the ESS, which were collected in 2006/2007.<sup>10</sup> Model 1 involves variables that measure social isolation. For the variable ‘meet socially’, respondents were asked how often they meet socially with friends, relatives, or colleagues, and the answers range from 1 (never) to 7 (very often). Here we anticipated negative associations, that is, the more often people engage in social interactions the less likely they are to vote for a radical right-wing party. For the variable ‘intimate friends’, respondents were asked if they have anyone with whom they can discuss intimate and personal matters, and here answers were coded as 0 (yes) and 1 (no). For the variable ‘feel lonely’, respondents were asked to what extent they have felt lonely over the past week, and the answers range from 1 (never) to 4 (always). For the variable ‘people who care’, respondents were asked to what extent they agree with the statement that there are people who care about them, and the answers range from 1 (agree strongly) to 5 (disagree strongly). For the variable ‘close to local people’, respondents were asked whether they feel close to local people, and the answers range from 1 (agree strongly) to 5 (disagree strongly). For these variables we anticipated positive associations. The variable ‘people in household’, finally, measures the number of persons residing in the household. Here we anticipated negative associations.

However, it is a good heuristic device to look at ‘extreme voters’ as well, that is, at voters who are located at the end poles of the scales. If there are any associations at all, we may assume that they appear in sharper profile when we look specifically at extremes. In Model 2, therefore, I have created dummy variables, which permit me to examine extreme values in greater detail. It should be noted that not all variables (categories) included in the model are shown in the Appendix. When creating dummies for a variable originally coded 1–5, for example, five dummy variables are created. Even if only one or two of them are shown in the Appendix, and mentioned in the description below, all of them (except the reference category) are included in the model. Hence, in the Appendix, I have included the variables ‘never meet socially’ and ‘meet less than once a month’, that is, those who were coded as 1 or 2 in the variable ‘meet socially’ (as was discussed above). ‘Meet everyday’ is the reference category. Similarly, I included the variables ‘always lonely’ and

**Table 1.** Social isolation, trust, and social capital, and the vote for the radical right (Model 8).  
Logistic regression analyses

	Belgium	Denmark	France	Norway	Switzerland
<i>Hypothesis H1</i>					
Meet socially (-)	0.90	1.05	1.03	1.01	1.08
Intimate friends (-)	0.47*	1.63	0.49*	0.94	0.41
Feel lonely (-)	0.65**	0.92	0.86	1.17	0.97
People who care (-)	1.14	1.09	1.43***	0.84	0.92
Close to local people (-)	1.01	1.07	1.02	0.86	0.89
People in household (+)	0.88	0.94	1.17*	0.94	1.02
Feel satisfied (-)	1.12	0.95	0.87**	1.03	1.03
Feel happy (-)	0.93	1.22*	1.19**	1.17**	0.94
Feel depressed (+)	1.03	1.20	1.45**	1.00	0.92
Life is good (-)	1.02	0.91	1.01	0.91	1.05
Positive (+)	0.93	1.00	0.96	0.87	0.99
Optimist (+)	1.07	1.08	1.11	0.91	1.02
Feel as a failure (-)	0.85	1.04	0.93	0.93	1.11
Treated with respect (-)	0.84*	0.93	1.09	0.92	1.28**
Treated fairly (-)	1.11	0.86	0.99	1.13*	1.19**
<i>Hypothesis H2</i>					
Active organization (-)	1.07	0.40**	0.46	0.73	0.82
How often organized (+)	0.96	0.99	1.00	1.03	0.90**
Organized activity (+)	1.10	1.05	1.08	1.06	0.90*
Church activity (+)	1.33***	0.99	1.01	1.14*	0.92
<i>Hypothesis H3</i>					
Social trust (-)	0.91*	0.89**	1.05	0.83***	0.96
Advantage (-)	1.03	0.99	0.88**	1.03	1.02
<i>Control variables</i>					
Male	1.73***	1.54*	1.39	1.36*	1.96***
Education	0.87**	0.71***	0.94	0.91	0.93
Unemployed	1.86	-	0.24	2.78**	1.43
Big city	2.18*	0.82	0.73	0.47**	1.84
Suburb	2.23*	1.15	0.92	1.22	2.06**
Village	2.48***	1.00	1.20	1.06	1.63*
Country	2.05	1.31	0.61	1.04	3.80***
Age	1.00	1.00	1.01	1.00	1.02***
Pseudo- $R^2$	0.088	0.090	0.089	0.068	0.083
Prob > $\chi^2$	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000
Log-likelihood	-391.05	-312.53	-299.96	-620.96	-523.64
$N$	1776	1384	1920	1727	1730

Note: \*Significant at the 0.1 level; \*\*Significant at the 0.05 level; \*\*\*Significant at the 0.01 level.

'mostly lonely', that is, those who were coded as 3 or 4 in the variable 'feel lonely'. 'Never lonely' is the reference category. The variables 'nobody cares strongly' and 'nobody cares' are coded from those who disagreed strongly or disagreed, respectively, with the statement that they had people who cared about them. The reference category consists of those who neither agreed nor disagreed. The variables 'not close, strong' and 'not close' are coded from those who disagreed strongly or disagreed, respectively, with the statement that they feel close to local people. Here as well, the reference category consists of those

who neither agreed nor disagreed. Finally, I included the variables 'live alone' and 'two persons' (in the household). The reference category consists of households that contain three persons or more. For all these variables, we anticipated positive associations.

Model 3 involves variables that measure sentiments associated with social isolation. The variable 'feel satisfied' ranges from 1 (extremely dissatisfied with life) to 11 (extremely satisfied), and the variable 'feel happy' ranges from 1 (extremely unhappy) to 11 (extremely happy). The variable 'life is good' ranges between 1 (extremely dissatisfied with how life turned out) to 11 (extremely satisfied). For these variables, we anticipated negative associations. The variable 'feel depressed' ranges between 1 (never depressed) to 4 (always depressed). Here we expected positive associations. For the variables 'positive', 'optimist', and 'feel like a failure', respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with the statement that they feel positive about themselves, the statement that they are optimistic about their future, and the statement that they feel like a failure. The answers range between 1 (agree strongly) to 5 (disagree strongly). We anticipated positive associations for the variables 'positive', and 'optimist' and a negative association for 'feel like a failure.'

Model 4 includes variables that measure the way people experience the social interaction they take part in. Are they generally treated with respect, and are they treated fairly? The variables 'treated with respect' and 'treated fairly' both range between 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). We anticipated negative associations.

Model 5 includes variables that measure people's ties to associations and organized activity. For the variable 'active organization', respondents were asked if they had worked in a voluntary organization during the past 12 months, 0 (no) and 1 (yes); we thus anticipated a negative association. For the variable 'how often organized', respondents were asked how often they get involved in work for voluntary organizations, and the answers range from 1 (often) to 6 (never). Similarly, for the variable 'social activity', respondents were asked how often they help with or attend organized activities, and the answers range from 1 to 6, where 6 corresponds to never. For the variable 'church activity', finally, people were asked about how often they attend church activities, and the answers range between 1 (often) and 7 (never). For these variables, we anticipated positive associations.

Model 6 involves variables that measure social trust. For the variable 'social trust', respondents were asked whether most people could be trusted. The answers range from 1 to 11, where 11 corresponds to most people can be trusted. The variable 'advantage' ranges between 1 (most people try to take advantage of me) to 11 (most people try to be fair). For these two variables we anticipated negative associations. In Model 7, involving the variables 'low social trust' and 'low advantage', I look specifically at those who scored low (1–3) on the scales discussed above.

Model 8 adds various control variables that have proven significant in earlier research on radical right-wing voting (Mudde, 2007; Norris, 2005; Rydgren, 2007). From this research, we know that male voters are generally more likely than female voters to support the radical right, as are voters with low to middle education and unemployed persons. Also urbanity and age are often significant factors, although their effects on radical right-wing voting are more likely to differ across countries. Males are coded as 1 and females as 0. The variable 'education' is measured on a scale where a value of 1 corresponds to low education and 7 to very high level of education. Unemployed persons are coded as 1, employed people and students are coded as 0. Age is measured in years. The variables 'big city', 'suburb', 'village', and 'countryside' are dummies for the respondent's area of residence. 'Small village' is the reference category.

Finally, let me briefly discuss the specification of the two models that will be presented in Table 2. Model 1 measures membership in a large range of different kinds of organizations, including sport clubs; organizations for cultural or hobby activities; trade unions; business, professional, or farmer's organizations; consumer or automobile organizations; organizations for humanitarian aid, human rights, minorities, or immigrants; organizations for environmental protection, peace, or animal rights; organizations for science, education, or

**Table 2.** Organization membership and radical right-wing voting. Logistic regression analyses

	Model 1	Model 2
<b>Belgium</b>		
Sport organization	0.72	0.80
Cultural organization	1.19	1.39
Trade union	2.00***	1.50
Business organization	0.76	0.62
Consumer organization	1.62	1.76
Humanitarian organization	0.58	0.93
Peace- or environmental organization	1.41	1.36
Science- or education organization	0.33*	0.30
Social club	0.33***	0.43**
Male		1.25
Education		0.63***
Income		1.09
Age		0.98**
Pseudo- $R^2$	0.046	0.079
Prob > $\chi^2$	0.001	0.000
Log-likelihood	-290.40	-241.69
$N$	1199	1013
<b>Denmark</b>		
Sport organization	0.76	0.84
Cultural organization	0.86	0.85
Trade union	1.17	1.44
Business organization	0.40**	0.27***
Consumer organization	0.88	0.83
Humanitarian organization	0.32**	0.45
Peace- or environmental organization	0.67	0.79
Science- or education organization	0.64	1.32
Social club	1.00	0.85
Male		2.10***
Education		0.52***
Income		0.90
Age		1.01
Pseudo- $R^2$	0.033	0.103
Prob > $\chi^2$	0.006	0.000
Log-likelihood	-343.66	-286.70
$N$	1245	1111
<b>France</b>		
Sport organization	0.63	0.64
Cultural organization	0.86	1.09

(Continues)

Table 2. Continued

	Model 1	Model 2
Trade union	1.36	1.26
Business organization	0.41	0.44
Consumer organization	0.91	0.82
Humanitarian organization	0.47	0.52
Peace- or environmental organization	2.31	2.54
Science- or education organization	0.48	0.62
Social club	0.62	0.39
Male		1.43
Education		0.77***
Income		1.02
Age		1.00
Pseudo- $R^2$	0.023	0.054
Prob > $\chi^2$	0.421	0.081
Log-likelihood	-197.51	-178.97
<i>N</i>	789	720
Norway		
Sport organization	0.70**	0.69**
Cultural organization	0.81	0.90
Trade union	0.61***	0.67***
Business organization	0.74	0.80
Consumer organization	1.08	1.10
Humanitarian organization	0.67*	0.75
Peace- or environmental organization	1.10	1.34
Science- or education organization	0.34***	0.34**
Social club	0.79	0.85
Male		1.73***
Education		0.57***
Income		0.99
Age		0.99**
Pseudo- $R^2$	0.039	0.090
Prob > $\chi^2$	0.000	0.000
Log-likelihood	-659.16	-604.40
<i>N</i>	1565	1517

Note: \*Significant at the 0.1 level; \*\*Significant at the 0.05 level; \*\*\*Significant at the 0.01 level.

teachers; or social clubs for the young, women, or retired/elderly. Membership is coded as 1, whereas non-membership is coded as 0. We anticipate negative associations. In Model 2, I have added control variables for gender (male, 1), education (coded as above), age (in years), and household's income, which is an interval-scale variable, where a low net income for the household receives a low value and a high net income a high value.

### Analyses and Discussion

Let us first examine the results for the logistic regression analyses of the likelihood of voting for a radical right-wing party. Model 8 is presented in Table 1 above; models 1–7 are presented in the Appendix.<sup>11</sup>

Models 1 and 2 fail to provide unanimous support for hypothesis *H1*, that is, that the likelihood of supporting a radical right-wing party is higher for socially isolated individuals.<sup>12</sup> Only for Denmark and to some lesser degree France, do we find some support for this hypothesis. For Belgium the results are ambiguous; for Norway we do not find any significant associations at all, and the results for Switzerland run contrary to our expectations. Moreover, although some individual variables yield significant associations, the models explain very little of the total variance. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, the results for Belgium are ambiguous. As expected, the more the people meet socially with friends, relatives, and colleagues the less likely they are to vote for the radical right (although this association does not remain significant when controlling for additional variables in Model 8). Moreover, in Model 2 we see that people who strongly felt that they had nobody who cares for them were more than three times as likely as voters who had no opinion on the matter to vote for the radical right. Yet, contrary to our expectations, we also found that people who lack friends with whom they can discuss intimate and personal matters were less likely to vote for the radical right, and similarly, the lonelier they felt the less likely they were to vote for one of the two radical right-wing parties. In Switzerland, the core variables ('meet socially', 'intimate friends', and 'feel lonely') fail to yield any significant associations, and the results for the remaining variables tend more to contradict hypothesis *H1*. Contrary to our expectations, people become less likely to vote for the radical right the more they disagree with the statement that they feel close to local people. For Denmark, people who lack friends with whom they can discuss intimate matters are more than twice as likely to vote for the Danish People's Party, and we find relatively strong positive associations for people who live alone or who live in two-person households. For France, people become considerably more likely to vote for the radical right the more they feel that they lack people who care about them. Yet, contrary to expectations, people who live alone are less likely to vote for the radical right. Finally, as mentioned above, for Norway we do not find any significant associations at all.

In addition, Model 3 fails to provide strong support for hypothesis *H1*. In Denmark and Norway, we find the expected negative association between 'life is good' and radical right-wing voting, that is, the more satisfied people are with the way their lives turned out the less likely they are to vote for the radical right. Moreover, in France we find that people who are dissatisfied with life are more likely to be among the radical right-wing voters, as are voters who feel depressed. However, in both Denmark and France voters who perceive themselves as happy are more likely to vote for the radical right. For Belgium and Switzerland, we do not find any significant associations at all. Nor do the results in Model 4 add much support to Hypothesis *H1*. Only in Belgium are people who feel that they are treated with respect less likely to vote for the radical right, and, contrary to our expectations, people who believe they are treated fairly are more likely to vote for the radical right in Belgium and Norway, as are people in Switzerland who are treated with respect.

If Hypothesis *H1* has received scant support, a reading of Model 5 shows that Hypothesis *H2* fares slightly better. In four out of five countries, people who in different ways take part in voluntary organizations and organized activities are less likely to vote for a radical right-wing party. This is the case in Denmark, France, and Norway for the variable that directly measures activity in organizations—where people who have worked for a voluntary organization during the last 12 months were considerably less likely to support the

radical right. Moreover, in Belgium and Norway people who are active in church organizations are less likely to vote for the radical right.<sup>13</sup> However, it should be noted that, when controlling for additional variables in Model 8, the variable ‘active organization’ remains significant only in Denmark, and that the models explain very little of the total variance. Switzerland breaks the pattern. The less people work in voluntary organizations, including church organizations, and the less likely they are to partake in organized activity, the less likely they are to vote for the radical right.

Similarly, Models 6 and 7 show that Hypothesis *H3* receives support in four out of five countries. The more the people are inclined to social trust the less likely they are to vote for a radical right-wing party. This is clearly the case in Belgium, Denmark, and Norway for the variable ‘social trust’ and in France for the variable ‘advantage’. These associations seem robust and remain significant when controlling for additional variables in Model 8.

Hence, none of the hypotheses receive strong support from the logistic regression analyses, even if hypotheses *H2* and *H3* (derived from social capital theory) receive more support than hypothesis *H1* (derived from mass society theory). The results clearly indicate that social isolation as such is not a strong predictor of radical right-wing voting. Active involvement in voluntary associations fares slightly better—and social trust even better, although these factors still explain rather little of the variance.

Yet, we would need more fine-grained data in order to further study the role of social capital for radical right-wing support. As was discussed above, we may assume that civic virtues and values originate foremost from activity in horizontally ordered, socially heterogeneous voluntary organizations, and that it is principally people active in such organizations who would be disinclined to vote for the radical right. For people active in hierarchically ordered, socially homogeneous organizations, we would expect to see no such effect, or even the opposite effect. Unfortunately, the ESS data do not allow us to distinguish between different kinds of organizations along these lines. It is not far-fetched to assume, however, that organizational activity would be more strongly associated with a disinclination to vote for a radical right-wing party if we could have isolated horizontally ordered, socially heterogeneous voluntary organizations from other organizations.

Moreover, it is a plausible assumption that membership in voluntary organizations has different effects on radical right-wing voting, depending on what kind of activity the organizations are formed around, so that sport clubs have less effect than organizations for humanitarian aid, for example. I was able to address this question by using data from the first round of the ESS, although it only supported analyses for Belgium, Denmark, France, and Norway.<sup>14</sup>

In Table 2, we fail to see a clear pattern between different types of organizations and their effects on radical right-wing voting. When controlling for gender, age, income, and education in Model 2, few significant associations remain (with the partial exception of Norway). In Belgium, only members of social clubs for the young, women, and retired were less likely to vote for the radical right. In Denmark, perhaps counter-intuitively, only members of business and professional organizations were less likely to vote for the Danish People’s Party, and in France we failed to find significant associations at all. However, in Norway members of sport clubs, trade union members,<sup>15</sup> and members of science or educational organizations were less likely to vote for the Norwegian Progress Party. Yet, the most striking results are that neither members of humanitarian aid and human rights organizations nor members of environmental

protection and peace organizations were among the voters less likely to vote for the radical right. However, when comparing these results with those reported above in Table 1, we should keep in mind that the models in Table 2 include measures of organizational *membership* and not active *involvement* in organizations. Still, these results are clearly counter-intuitive. Yet, this analysis strengthens the impression that social trust, or generalized trust, is of more direct importance than membership in voluntary organizations, *per se*, for explaining radical right-wing voting.<sup>16</sup>

## Conclusions

The overlapping purposes of this article were to study the scope conditions of social capital theory and mass society theory and to test possible explanations for the electoral support of the radical right. Let us start with the latter.

The results clearly indicate that social isolation and membership in voluntary organizations are of marginal value for explaining why some people rather than others vote for the radical right. Although we find some significant results in support of our hypotheses, the explained variance is generally low. And without support from individual-level data, the validity of studies using ecological data must be questioned. Even if the radical right turns out to be stronger in areas with few civil society organizations than in areas with many such organizations, this correlation might very well be spurious. In a recent paper, van der Brug and Fennema (2007, p. 483) suggested that future research on the radical right should take social isolation and social capital more seriously. This paper largely comes to an opposite conclusion. However, we should not underestimate the importance of ruling out possible explanations (as irrelevant or false): in social science ‘negative’ results can be as important as ‘positive’ ones. In this respect, this article is a contribution to the field of research on the radical right. Yet, on the other hand, these results indicate that research on the radical right should take social trust, or generalized trust, more seriously. In earlier studies, the operationalization of trust has been limited to political trust, that is, trust in political institutions. This paper suggests that trust should be conceived more broadly, and that trust in fellow citizens also plays a potentially important role for people’s voting behaviour. Moreover, the cross-national differences could be studied in more detail. For example, why is it that active membership in voluntary organizations in Switzerland led to *increased* likelihood of voting for the radical right? Is it an effect of the structure of civil society or of the fact that the Swiss People’s Party differs from other radical right-wing parties in its history and political orientation? These are questions of some interest, which I leave to future research.

However, concerning the effect of active membership in voluntary organizations, better data are needed. As argued above, it is possible that people, in particular, who are active in horizontally ordered, socially heterogeneous voluntary organizations are disinclined to vote for the radical right—so we would need data that allow us to distinguish between organizations along these lines. Still, with existing data it seems that social isolation—broadly conceived—is of little importance in itself for explaining radical right-wing voting. Moreover, which takes us to the issue of scope conditions, the results show that not even members of humanitarian aid and human rights organizations are less likely to vote for the radical right; something which clearly questions the universalistic ambitions of Putnam’s theory of social capital and its core idea that organizational membership fosters tolerance and civic virtues.

## Notes

1. This theory lost influence after new empirical research (Hamilton, 1982) demonstrated that interwar fascism was often strongest in communities that remained strong rather than in weak communities, and that support for Hitler was not overrepresented among socially isolated voters (Eatwell, 2005; Fennema, 2005), yet it still lingers.
2. Earlier research on the radical right has demonstrated the importance of sociological and demographical factors, such as (working) class background and gender (male), as well as of attitudinal factors, such as immigration skepticism and political distrust (Rydgren, 2007, 2008). Contrary to earlier explanations, which have focused on macro-level factors (such as the importance of post-industrialization on political attitudes (e.g. Betz, 1994) or psychological factors (in the tradition of Adorno *et al.*, 1969), this paper will examine the potential importance of meso-level factors.
3. The reason that these countries were selected (and not, e.g., Germany, Sweden, or the UK) is because they harbour radical right-wing parties whose electoral support is large enough to support meaningful quantitative analyses.
4. It should be noted that mass society theory dealt with totalitarian movements more generally, including not only right-wing extremism but also communism.
5. However, Mayer (1999) found no association between membership in civic organizations and voting for the Front National.
6. As acknowledged by Putnam (2000, p. 19), his conception of social capital comes close to what earlier was usually discussed in terms of civic virtues (Almond & Verba, 1963).
7. However, as has been increasingly noted within the literature on social capital, the link between membership in social associations and these outcomes is often not very well specified. This is, in particular, the case with trust (and, as a corollary, tolerance): Although it is plausible that repeated social interaction leads to increased trust (and tolerance) for the people within the group, it is unclear how this trust is generalized to people outside the group or association (Paxton, 2007, p. 50; Stolle, 1998). Moreover, most studies do not deal satisfactorily with the problem of (reverse) causality. As Stolle (1998, p. 498) noted, it is always possible that 'people who are more trusting will self-select into associations.'
8. The number of respondents who voted for the radical right varied between 82 in France to 227 in Norway for Round 3, and between 57 in France to 249 in Norway for Round 1. Hence, for all these countries' samples the proportion of radical right-wing voters are large enough to support meaningful quantitative analyses.
9. The inclusion of the Norwegian Progress Party in the radical right-wing party family deserves a special note. Although this party is mobilizing against immigration and multiculturalism, ethno-nationalism is less of an issue, and they are less dependent on the ethno-pluralist doctrine. It is thus questionable whether it should be included in the family of the radical right. Yet, its political messages are largely based on the same anti-immigrant frames as those employed by the radical right-wing parties. Moreover, there are good reasons to treat them as 'functional equivalents' to the radical right-wing parties: earlier research indicates that they are electorally successful for approximately the same reasons and satisfy approximately the same political demand. It is also common to include the Norwegian Progress Party in electoral studies of the radical right (Norris, 2005).
10. The response rate varied among countries, and was 61% in Belgium (1798 completed interviews), 52% in Switzerland (1804), 51% in Denmark (1505), 46% in France (1986), and 66% in Norway (1750). For the models presented in Table 2, I use data from the first round of the ESS, collected in 2002–2003. Here as well, the response rate varied among countries, and was 59% in Belgium (1899), 68% in Denmark (1506), 43% in France (1503), and 65% in Norway (2036). Hence, the results should be interpreted with some caution. For more information about the ESS, see [www.europeansocialsurvey.org](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org).
11. For readers who are unfamiliar with logistic regressions, the tables should be read in the following way: Instead of displaying coefficients ( $b$ ), as is common in OLS regressions, odds ratios ( $e^b$ ) are used. The odds ratio shows how the odds of the 'event' are influenced by changes in the independent variables. For example, an odds ratio of 2 means that the odds of the event are doubled by a one-unit increase in the independent variable. A value of 1 means that the change in the independent variable has no effect on the odds, and an odds ratio of 0.5 means that the odds of the event is halved as the independent variable increases by 1. Odds ratios greater than 1 thus signify positive relationships, odds ratios less than 1 negative relationships, and odds ratios equal to 1 no relationship at all. Log-likelihood is a value for the overall fit of the model, whereas pseudo- $R^2$  provides a way to describe or compare the fit of different models for the same dependent variable (cf. Pampel, 2000).

12. In these and following models, multicollinearity has been checked for. Multicollinearity is generally low, well below 0.75, which is often used as a rule of thumb threshold.
13. However, since I do not control for religiosity, we cannot know if it is organization membership that has an effect here, or if it is religion *per se*.
14. It should be noted that the data are on *types* of organizations, not on actual individual organizations. Number of respondents that claim to be members of these organizations are large enough to support meaningful quantitative analyses for all types of organizations and for all countries.
15. Trade union members might be assumed to have political orientations at odds with the radical right-wing parties; a factor deterring them from supporting these parties.
16. As was discussed above, mass society theory posits that under certain conditions people may respond to social isolation by withdrawing from political participation altogether. They may choose exit rather than voice (Hirschman, 1970). If that is true, that would be a possible explanation of the weak support for the social isolation hypothesis on radical right-wing voting. If true, that would also—if we follow mass society theory—indicate the existence of a possible reserve of potential voters that could be mobilized during a severe crisis, especially if a strongly charismatic leader were to appear. In order to address this question, I estimated the same logistic regression models as above, but on non-voting as the dependent variable. However, this hypothesis receives scant support by logistic regression analyses (not shown in this paper): The reservoir of socially isolated voters that could be mobilized during a severe crisis by the radical right is rather small.

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**Appendix.** Social isolation, trust, and social capital, and the vote for the radical right (Models 1–7). Logistic regression analyses

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
<b>Belgium</b>							
Meet socially	0.85**						
Never meet socially		2.13					
Meet < month		1.44					
Intimate friends	0.51*						
Feel lonely	0.74*						
Always lonely		–					
Mostly lonely		1.98					
People who care	1.13						
Nobody care strong		3.75*					
Nobody care		0.50					
Close to local people	1.14						
Not close, strong		1.27					
Not close		1.26					
People in household	0.88						
Live alone		1.11					
Two persons		1.13					
Feel satisfied			1.06				
Feel happy			0.92				
Feel depressed			0.94				
Life is good			1.00				
Positive			0.89				
Optimist			1.06				
Feel as a failure			0.88				
Treated with respect				0.84**			
Treated fairly				1.13*			
Active organization					1.13		
How often organized					0.98		
Organized activity					1.15*		
Church activity					1.35***		

(Continues)

## Appendix. Continued

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Social trust						0.90**	
Low social trust							1.50
Advantage						0.98	
Low advantage							1.17
Pseudo- $R^2$	0.019	0.022	0.004	0.013	0.021	0.009	0.004
Prob > $\chi^2$	0.010	0.383	0.865	0.004	0.001	0.003	0.176
Log-likelihood	-423.86	-419.66	-430.50	-429.71	-426.11	-431.51	-433.57
$N$	1790	1746	1788	1796	1797	1796	1796
Switzerland							
Meet socially	1.02						
Never meet socially		-					
Meet < month		1.45					
Intimate friends	0.51						
Feel lonely	0.81						
Always lonely		0.93					
Mostly lonely		1.08					
People who care	0.93						
Nobody care strong		-					
Nobody care		3.33					
Close to local people	0.72***						
Not close, strong		0.35					
Not close		0.40**					
People in household	0.95						
Live alone		1.02					
Two persons		1.51**					
Feel satisfied			1.07				
Feel happy			0.93				
Feel depressed			0.88				
Life is good			1.10				
Positive			0.86				
Optimist			1.02				
Feel as a failure			1.12				

Treated with respect				1.39***			
Treated fairly				1.12			
Active organization					0.75		
How often organized					0.91**		
Organized activity					0.87***		
Church activity					0.88**		
Social trust						0.97	
Low social trust							1.51
Advantage						1.06	
Low advantage							0.26*
Pseudo- $R^2$	0.016	0.027	0.012	0.009	0.028	0.002	0.005
Prob>Chi <sup>2</sup>	0.005	0.017	0.063	0.005	0.000	0.417	0.048
Log-likelihood	-569.87	-561.36	-576.85	-578.96	-570.66	-583.96	-581.97
N	1784	1766	1785	1791	1789	1797	1797
Denmark							
Meet socially	1.06						
Never meet socially		-					
Meet < month		1.26					
Intimate friends	2.11**						
Feel lonely	1.01						
Always lonely		1.08					
Mostly lonely		2.51					
People who care	1.12						
Nobody care strong		-					
Nobody care		12.00					
Close to local people	1.04						
Not close, strong		0.81					
Not close		2.24**					
People in household	0.86						
Live alone		1.77*					
Two persons		2.48***					
Feel satisfied			0.98				
Feel happy			1.21*				
Feel depressed			1.15				

(Continues)

## Appendix. Continued

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Life is good			0.86**				
Positive			1.05				
Optimist			1.10				
Feel as a failure			1.10				
Treated with respect				0.83			
Treated fairly				0.91			
Active organization					0.31***		
How often organized					0.95		
Organized activity					1.09		
Church activity					1.01		
Social trust						0.84***	
Low social trust							2.77**
Advantage						1.01	
Low advantage							0.93
Pseudo- $R^2$	0.015	0.041	0.011	0.003	0.023	0.019	0.007
Prob > $\chi^2$	0.105	0.034	0.370	0.378	0.002	0.001	0.076
Log-likelihood	-348.62	-338.98	-347.68	-353.17	-349.60	-349.53	-353.58
$N$	1457	1452	1461	1461	1477	1491	1491
France							
Meet socially	0.93						
Never meet socially		-					
Meet < month		2.34					
Intimate friends	0.52						
Feel lonely	0.93						
Always lonely		0.68					
Mostly lonely		1.34					
People who care	1.49***						
Nobody care strong		1.18					
Nobody care		0.79					
Close to local people	0.95						
Not close, strong		1.98					
Not close		1.24					

People in household	1.11							
Live alone		0.41**						
Two persons		0.93						
Feel satisfied			0.84***					
Feel happy			1.16*					
Feel depressed			1.31*					
Life is good			1.05					
Positive			0.87					
Optimist			1.06					
Feel as a failure			0.94					
Treated with respect				1.04				
Treated fairly				1.07				
Active organization					0.38*			
How often organized					1.00			
Organized activity					1.07			
Church activity					0.97			
Social trust						0.98		
Low social trust							0.84	
Advantage						0.86***		
Low advantage							2.37**	
Pseudo- $R^2$	0.029	0.058	0.027	0.001	0.011	0.016	0.008	
Prob > $\chi^2$	0.003	0.002	0.011	0.694	0.126	0.005	0.068	
Log-likelihood	-331.60	-320.71	-328.86	-337.65	-334.59	-336.20	-338.82	
$N$	1980	1960	1973	1975	1979	1983	1983	
Norway								
Meet socially	1.00							
Never meet socially		-						
Meet < month		0.67						
Intimate friends	1.09							
Feel lonely	1.18							
Always lonely		2.56						
Mostly lonely		0.56						
People who care	0.92							
Nobody care strong		-						

(Continues)

## Appendix. Continued

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Nobody care		2.53					
Close to local people	0.91						
Not close, strong		0.46					
Not close		0.64					
People in household	0.94						
Live alone		1.37					
Two persons		1.14					
Feel satisfied			1.00				
Feel happy			1.15**				
Feel depressed			1.13				
Life is good			0.85***				
Positive			0.84				
Optimist			0.89				
Feel as a failure			1.01				
Treated with respect				0.94			
Treated fairly				1.15**			
Active organization					0.68**		
How often organized					1.03		
Organized activity					1.06		
Church activity					1.12*		
Social trust						0.82***	
Low social trust							1.98*
Advantage						1.01	
Low advantage							1.36
Pseudo- $R^2$	0.003	0.013	0.011	0.007	0.012	0.021	0.003
Prob > $\chi^2$	0.626	0.394	0.038	0.011	0.002	0.000	0.107
Log-likelihood	-665.79	-658.47	-662.46	-670.20	-666.46	-660.76	-672.85
$N$	1739	1735	1739	1746	1748	1749	1749

Note: \*Significant at the 0.1 level; \*\*Significant at the 0.05 level; \*\*\*Significant at the 0.01 level.