

Risk Aversion and the Gender Gap in the Vote for Populist Radical Right Parties

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Abstract: *Previous research has established that men are more likely to vote for populist radical right parties (PRRPs) than women. This article shows how cross-national and temporal variations in PRRPs' electoral success interact with individuals' risk propensity to affect this gender gap. We hypothesize that gender differences in the electoral support of PRRPs stem from disparities in risk-taking. We conceptualize risk in terms of two components, social and electoral, and demonstrate that women are more risk-averse regarding both. Our analysis is based on public opinion data from 14 countries (2002–16) combined with macrolevel data on PRRPs' past parliamentary fortunes. To distinguish between the social and electoral components in risk-taking, we use the illustrative case study of Germany. Findings demonstrate that gender differences in risk-taking and, by implication, the differences between women's and men's responses to the electoral context are key to understanding the voting gender gap.*

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Populist radical right parties (PRRPs) in Western democracies have consistently garnered more electoral support from men than from women (Akkerman and Hagelund 2007; Givens 2004, 2005). This gap has been described as “a complex and intriguing puzzle” (Betz 1994, 146) since no comparably consistent gender differences have emerged regarding immigration and minority-integration policies, which are pivotal in the PRRPs' electoral campaigning (Harteveld and Ivarstflaten 2018).

Several studies have explored the gender gap in the support for PRRPs and the above puzzle related to it (e.g., Gidengil et al. 2005; Givens 2004; Spierings and Zaslove 2015). However, to the best of our knowledge, no research into this subject has systematically factored in the electoral context and its effects on vote choices of

men and women as possible elements that elucidate the wider picture. This article joins a growing group of scholars in arguing that the electoral success of PRRPs can be explained based on the interplay of demand- and supply-side factors (Van Kessel 2015). Regarding the electoral gender gap, we contend that the explanation does not lie solely in voters' characteristics but also involves party-specific qualities and voters' perceptions of and responses to them. Namely, we focus on PRRPs' past electoral fortunes (or lack thereof) as criteria for risk assessment on the part of voters in choosing a party. We contend that the decision to vote for a PRRP is contingent on an individual's propensity for risk-taking, which is known to be gendered. Following this rationale, we show how demand and supply factors interact and translate differently with the electoral behavior of men and women.

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We propose a theoretical framework to explain the observed difference in the electoral support for PRRPs among men versus women and then apply it to a large sample of voters. We maintain that for an individual, voting for a PRRP is fraught with a certain degree of risk. Not only are these parties comparatively unknown entities with limited parliamentary experience at best, but they also challenge the certainties of the existing political order (Steenbergen and Siczek 2017). Consequently, we expect that risk-averse voters will shun them during elections. We establish that women are more risk-averse than men on two dimensions. First, when political behavior is concerned, women tend more than men to avoid voting for parties that have no chance of winning seats in parliament, as a case in point, many of the PRRPs; and second, with regard to socially acceptable behavior, women are less prone than men to translate their extreme ideological positions to vote choice.

That said, we argue that the risk of voting for PRRPs varies depending on the electoral context. When PRRPs' prospects to (re)enter parliament are high, the decision to vote for these parties is less risky, both electorally and socially: electorally because in such circumstances, voting for these parties would not be tantamount to wasting one's vote; socially because when a PRRP has previously been supported by a large enough portion of the electorate, it can be perceived as a normative political player. Therefore, it stands to reason that the differentiated effect of risk propensity, both electoral and social, on the vote of men and women should manifest more strongly specifically in risky situations, when PRRPs are marginalized.

To test our arguments, we use data from the European Social Survey (2002–16) in a set of 14 democracies, combined with electoral data on past achievements of PRRPs. Based on individual-level analysis, we find that women's ideological positions and risk-taking propensities are different from men's and that both these tendencies translate to a disparity in their vote choices. Moreover, to the extent that women are more sensitive to risk than men, this differentiated effect is augmented in what we will term a "risky political context," that is, a situation when voting for PRRPs entails the risk of "wasting" one's vote. Next, we differentiate between the two explanations proposed here for the gender gap in voting for PRRPs—that is, women's propensity for risk aversion, both social and electoral—which may be observationally equivalent in a comparative context. To this end, we use the possibility afforded by the German electoral system to cast two separate votes, one for a candidate and the other for a party list, as a tool to distinguish between electoral and social risk.

Overall, findings from the cross-national analysis and the German case study fully align with our theoretical expectations. Women's proneness to avoid risk is manifested not only in their ideological positions and reported risk-taking propensities but also in their sensitivity to the risks presented by a given political context. These findings highlight important interrelations between individual characteristics and the party-specific political supply side, and they carry far-reaching implications for the study of the fluctuations in the popularity of PRRPs in Western democracies.

The Gender Gap in Voting for PRRPs: Existing Explanations

Empirical studies have repeatedly demonstrated that PRRPs have a larger male constituency (Akkerman and Hagelund 2007; Givens 2004, 2005; Spierings and Zaslove 2015; Van der Brug and Fennema 2007) but have diverged in their accounts of this finding. One set of explanations focuses on gender differences in preferences and attitudes, which are supposed to lead women to vote for other parties. Hartevelde and Ivarsflaten (2018) found that women are more motivated than men to control prejudice and therefore refrain from voting for PRRPs, which often resort to extremist or even fascist rhetoric and thus raise normative concerns about discrimination and prejudice. Other explanations revolve around gender differences in personality traits and populist attitudes. Thus, Coffé (2019) shows that masculine personality traits are positively correlated with voting for PRRPs, and Spierings and Zaslove (2017) make a case for the salience of populist attitudes in this respect.

Another line of inquiry attributes the gap to men's and women's different structural positions in the labor market. According to this account, the anti-immigrant sentiment of PRRPs is framed to appeal to those harmed by globalization, usually blue-collar male workers whose jobs have been jeopardized by the influx of immigrant laborers (Betz 1994; Givens 2004; Norris 2005).

Yet another explanation for the gender gap appeals to the anti-feminist agenda promoted by many of the PRRPs. Most of these parties hold a traditional view of women's roles and the family model, and many are characterized by a hierarchical and male-dominated structure (Mudde 2019). This account, however, had not been borne out empirically and was therefore discarded. Specifically, Spierings and Zaslove (2015), as well as De Koster (2014), show that neither gender-role attitudes

nor moral progressiveness has much to do with either voting for PRRPs or the attendant gender gap.

Recent studies have suggested that the dynamics of PRRPs' electoral success and of the gender gap therein are contingent on the interaction between the demand- and supply-side factors. An examination of these aspects, the argument goes, would supplement the existing explanations and afford a comprehensive understanding of the political picture (Van Kessel 2015). Some studies (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2015; Spierings and Zaslove 2017) have addressed supply-side differences across countries at the system level. Spierings, Lubbers, and Zaslove (2017) extend this approach by modeling macrolevel factors indicative of the supply of PRRPs and show that the likelihood of voting for PRRPs depends on the specific characteristics of a party and the presence of other right-wing parties in the arena. Apart from this work, supply-side explanations for the gender gap in voting for PRRPs have not yet been rigorously modeled systematically or statistically.

Nevertheless, Spierings, Lubbers, and Zaslove's work (2017) bolsters our case that supply involves more than party positions. Therefore, when examining the supply side, it is crucial to incorporate other factors, such as the electoral context. Accordingly, we account for the gender gap through a combination of demand-side factors pertaining to trait differences between the sexes and supply-side parameters anchored in the electoral context in which PRRPs compete.¹

Building on the existing literature, this article advances a novel explanation for the gender gap in electoral support for PRRPs. Our argument is based on the well-established gender differences in risk propensity, which we bring to bear on the electoral arena. The model we set forth here predicts that the gender gap in the vote for PRRPs will be attenuated in the wake of a mainstreaming of the populist radical right, a process currently underway in Western countries.

Gender Differences in Risk-Taking, Risk Aversion, and Risk Perception

Our argument hinges on the notion that under certain conditions, voting for a PRRP can present a risk. Risk is commonly predicated of situations in which individuals

must make decisions or choices involving different alternatives with uncertain future consequences (Schubert 2006, 706). The act of *risk-taking*, that is, making a risky choice, involves two components, *risk tolerance* (i.e., risk aversion or acceptance) and *risk perception* (i.e., the subjective assessment of risk). In what follows, we elaborate on these three constructs and their links to gender.

Numerous studies have established robust gender differences in risk-taking behaviors, with women generally taking fewer risks than men. The idea that men are more likely to take risks than women is supported by a meta-analysis of 150 studies in psychology specifically addressing gender gaps in risk-taking tendencies (Byrnes, Miller, and Schafer 1999). Studies in economics, ranging from lab experiments to field observations, report similar conclusions (Eckel and Grossman 2008; Sunden and Surette 1998). Gender differences in risk-taking behaviors can be attributed to differences in risk aversion, risk perception, or both.

Risk aversion (or its flip side, *risk acceptance*) is often conceptualized as a personality trait and, as such, interfaces with other related Big Five traits such as Extroversion and Openness (Kam 2012). Risk aversion is contingent on an individual's tendency toward sensation seeking, which is "a trait defined by the seeking of varied, novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences, and the willingness to take physical, social, legal, and financial risks for the sake of such experience" (Zuckerman 1994, 27). As a personality trait, risk aversion is conceived of as a stable predisposition and is not issue or case specific (Nicholson et al. 2005; Weinstein and Martin 1969).

Women have been shown to be generally more risk-averse than men. Evidence to that effect comes from a variety of fields, including psychology and economics. Kam (2012), for example, documented gender differences in risk attitudes based on a large battery of survey questions. Wilson and Daly (1985, 61) went so far as to describe the trait of risk tolerance as "an attribute of the masculine psychology."

Risk perception is the subjective judgment that people make about the characteristics and severity of a risk. Extant literature grounds risk perception in two psychological models. The risk-and-return model assumes that individuals weigh the perceived returns (or benefits) of a given action against its perceived risks (or costs) and are open to a trade-off between those costs and benefits (Kam 2012). The risk-as-feelings model (e.g., Slovic and Peters 2006; Slovic 2010) frames risk perception as highly dependent on the way individuals intuit a situation.

Studies of risk perception have overwhelmingly found that men seem to be less concerned about hazards than women (Slovic 2010). Based on 25 hazard

¹Although the focus here is on PRRPs' electoral histories, this element is only part of the electoral context, which encompasses other party-related parameters, such as its "newness" or its perceived ideological extremity.

studies, Flynn, Slovic, and Mertz (1994) have shown that men perceived risks to be smaller than did women. Some studies suggest that gender differences in risk-taking are based on emotional reactions to risky situations. Whereas women tend to focus on the negative side of a risky situation's outcome distribution and perceive such a scenario as a threat, men often interpret risky situations as challenges requiring their involvement (Arch 1993; Ehrlich and Maestas 2010; Steenbergen and Siczek 2017).

The Gendered Implications of a Risk Associated with Voting for a PRRP

Previous studies have established a relationship between voters' tendencies in perceiving and tolerating risk and their political choices and behavior (e.g., Eckles and Schaffner 2011; Ehrlich and Maestas 2010; Kam 2012; Kam and Simas 2010; Nadeau, Martin, and Blais 1999). Some studies have argued that one's risk aversion affects one's vote choice because voting is regarded as a gamble (Kam and Simas 2012, 747). More specifically, findings show that risk-averse voters are less likely to support challenger candidates over incumbents (Eckles et al. 2014; Kam and Simas 2012), opposition parties over governing parties (Morgenstern and Zechmeister 2001), and change over the status quo (Morisi 2018; Steenbergen and Siczek 2017).

Based on the above research, we develop a theory that connects gender differences in risk-taking with the gender gap associated with voting for PRRPs. We argue that voting for PRRPs is a risky behavior, both electorally and socially, and therefore one's decision to vote for these parties is governed, to a large extent, by one's levels of risk aversion. We further elaborate how risk aversion will be mostly manifested in risky electoral contexts, such that women will perceive such a situation as riskier than men and will behave (vote) accordingly.

Electoral Risk in Voting for PRRPs

Voters may construe voting for PRRPs as electorally risky for two main reasons. First, PRRPs are usually challenger parties with little parliamentary experience relative to other party families. Not all of them have gained parliamentary representation, and the conduct of most of those that have done so is rather unpredictable (Steenbergen and Siczek 2017). Moreover, PRRPs question the status quo and campaign against the political establishment—an agenda that some voters undoubtedly

find appealing but others may consider as risky. Thus, the risk that PRRPs pose on account of their conduct, goals, and priorities may deter risk-averse voters, who are usually inclined to avoid challenger and inexperienced parties or candidates (Eckles et al. 2014; Kam and Simas 2012).

Second, voters may fear that they would “waste” their vote if the party they voted for did not eventually make it into parliament. Withholding a vote for a “risky” party on such grounds is subsumed in the literature under the category of strategic voting. Whereas nonstrategic voters cast a vote for the party/candidate they choose on substantive grounds, irrespective of other considerations, strategic voters take into account the possible outcome of their voting decision (Abramson 2010; Cox 1997).

When voting strategically, individuals will vote for a second-best party/candidate if their most preferred option is perceived as non-viable. Therefore, to act strategically, voters must have an assessment of a party's electoral viability. Lago (2008) argues that voters make such assessments based on history heuristics, whereby a party's viability depends on whether it has won seats in parliament in the past. As already mentioned, many PRRPs are new challenger parties that have not yet garnered sufficient electoral support to win a seat in parliament. Therefore, voting for these parties poses an electoral risk for voters, who fear they would “waste” their vote on a party that will not eventually make it into parliament.

Given the robust, well-documented gender gap in risk aversion, as well as the electoral risk PRRPs present in the eyes of voters, we hypothesize that risk aversion mediates the effect of gender on voting for PRRPs as follows:

H1: Risk-averse voters are less inclined to vote for PRRPs. As women are more risk-averse than men, they are less inclined to vote for PRRPs.

Next, we contend that the likelihood of voting for PRRPs depends not only on the degree of one's risk aversion but also on one's assessment of the risk associated with such a choice. While we do not directly measure the perceived risk of voting for a PRRP, we argue that this perception is affected by the electoral context in which voting decisions are made: A risky context will lead to a greater perceived risk among women since they are more sensitive than men to risky situations.

In the case in point, a risky electoral context involves PRRPs that have yet to win a seat in parliament. Voters may consider such PRRPs as riskier for the following two reasons: (a) they are viewed as less predictable or less stable, and (b) they lack previous electoral success to build on or replicate in the ensuing elections.

As already stated, the literature on risk perception shows that women are more concerned than men about hazards and focus on the negative side of a risky situation's outcome distribution. That is, given the same objective conditions, women often perceive a situation as riskier than men do. As a result, we anticipate that in a risky electoral context, gender will moderate the effect of risk aversion on vote choice, as women will be more sensitive to PRRPs' past electoral success:

H2: In risky electoral contexts, risk-averse women are less likely to vote for PRRPs compared to risk-averse men.

Political Extremism: The Social Risk of Voting for PRRPs

Voting for PRRPs can also be considered as a social risk, due to their usually extreme and radical platforms. As inherent challengers, PRRPs fundamentally defy key institutions and values of liberal democracy, including minority rights and separation of powers (Mudde 2019). Such extreme ideological positions may deter voters who tend to conform with social norms. Though the act of voting is private, voters incorporate social norms into their electoral decisions, which are in consequence affected by social cues and parties' reputation (Harteveld et al. 2019). Our theoretical argument, elaborated below, is that voting for a PRRP is associated with the risk of diverging from social conventions and prevailing opinions. Since women and men differ in risk-taking tendencies, the electoral consequences of such social risk will be different for each gender.

Emerging literature connects social personality traits with support for PRRPs. For instance, Bakker, Rooduijn, and Schumacher (2016) show that a low score on Agreeableness, a trait that relates to higher levels of pro-social behaviors, predicts voting for populist parties. Studies by Blinder, Ford, and Ivarsflaten (2013) and by Harteveld and Ivarsflaten (2018) show that people who are highly motivated to control prejudice are less likely to support extreme right parties. The latter study highlights the implication of this finding for the gender gap in voting for PRRPs: Even when they hold stereotypic attitudes or beliefs, women are more inclined to control them based on socially driven norms anchored in anti-prejudice principles. Moreover, the social risk of voting for PRRPs is likely to be more salient for women, as they may incur harsher criticism than men when displaying rebellious or extreme behavior. Thus, Harteveld et al. (2019) show

that women are less likely than men to vote for small, extreme, or socially stigmatized parties.

In parallel to the influence of electoral risk, we expect the effect of social risk on voting for PRRPs to be contingent on these parties' electoral status. Put simply, not all PRRPs are equally socially risky to vote for. In this article, we focus on PRRPs' reputation in terms of their previous electoral parliamentary experience. Thus, voting for PRRPs that have never gained parliamentary representation poses a greater social risk since these parties do not bear a stamp of stability or acceptance (Valentim 2021). Following this rationale, we expect women's lower rate of support for PRRPs to be connected to their lower tendency to translate extreme political attitudes to political behavior, that is, voting for PRRPs. Like the previous hypothesis, this assumption rests on the premise that women perceive a greater social risk of voting for PRRPs in risky situations than men. In such an electoral context, a man will be more likely to translate his extreme right ideological position to voting for PRRPs than a woman who holds the same extreme position. We hypothesize that in a risky electoral context, gender will moderate the effect of ideological extremism on vote choice:

H3: In a risky electoral context, ideological extremism affects women's vote for PRRPs less strongly than men's.

Empirical Strategy Data and Measurement

This study draws on three sources of data. At the individual level, we utilize all eight waves of the European Social Survey (ESS) between 2002 and 2016, with a total of 75 country-years. We also employ the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) data (Modules 4 and 5) to analyze strategic voting in Germany. We supplement these data with macrolevel variables tapping the changing electoral fortunes of PRRPs. In keeping with the idea that gender differences in political behavior are affected by culture, we limit our analyses to Western European countries. The countries and the populist radical right parties included in the analysis are presented in Table A1 in the supporting information (SI; p. 4).

Dependent Variable

Vote Choice. This variable was gauged using the question, "Which party did you vote for in the last

election?”² Respondents’ vote choices were sorted into party families (see SI Appendix B, p. 8, for details on the sources we used to classify parties into families). We proceeded by focusing on the populist radical right. The dependent variable is a dummy variable, where 1 denotes respondents’ vote for PRRPs and 0 otherwise.

Main Predictors

PRRPs’ Electoral Strength and Parliamentary History. To operationalize PRRPs’ electoral strength, we employed the following three measures: (1) a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if these parties had ever entered parliament in the past; (2) PRRPs’ vote share in the last national election preceding the survey; and (3) the share of seats in the national legislature, determined at the last national election preceding the survey. Measure 1 relates to Lago’s (2008) argument regarding the heuristics voters rely on, and Measures 2 and 3 have been frequently used to capture strategic voting in studies focusing on far-right parties (Cohen 2020).

Risk Aversion Previous studies proved that a general item outperforms other measures in predicting risky behavior across a wide range of areas in life (Dohmen 2011). Accordingly, as has been used extensively in political science (e.g., Margalit and Shayo 2020; Nadeau, Martin, and Blais 1999; Steenbergen and Siczek 2017), we measured individuals’ risk aversion utilizing a single item. Participants were presented with a description of a person (“She/he looks for adventures and likes to take risks”) and asked to indicate, on a scale of 1 to 6, to what extent the person described was like them, with higher values indicating higher risk aversion. Consistent with the literature on risk aversion, this item correlates with age and gender (partial $r = 0.31$, partial $r = -0.14$, $p < .01$ for both).

Left–Right Self-Placement Individuals’ ideological self-placement was measured on an 11-point self-placement ideology scale (0 = left, 10 = right).

Control Variables We controlled for a set of sociodemographic and attitudinal variables including age, gender, education, unemployment, and whether respondents are foreign-born. Additionally, we controlled for two indicators that are often mentioned as explanations for PRRP support: trust in politicians and political interest. Studies have shown that the rise of PRRPs in

European democracies is associated with a growing public alienation from the political elites—a process that has frequently been manifested as protest votes against mainstream politicians and political parties (Inglehart and Norris 2017). The item gauging trust in politicians was rated on a scale ranging from 0, “no trust at all,” to 10, “complete trust” ($M = 3.9$; $SD = 2.3$). Political interest was measured using the item “How would you assess your interest in politics?” rated on a 4-point scale (reverse-coded so that higher values denote greater interest in politics; $M = 2.5$; $SD = 2.3$).

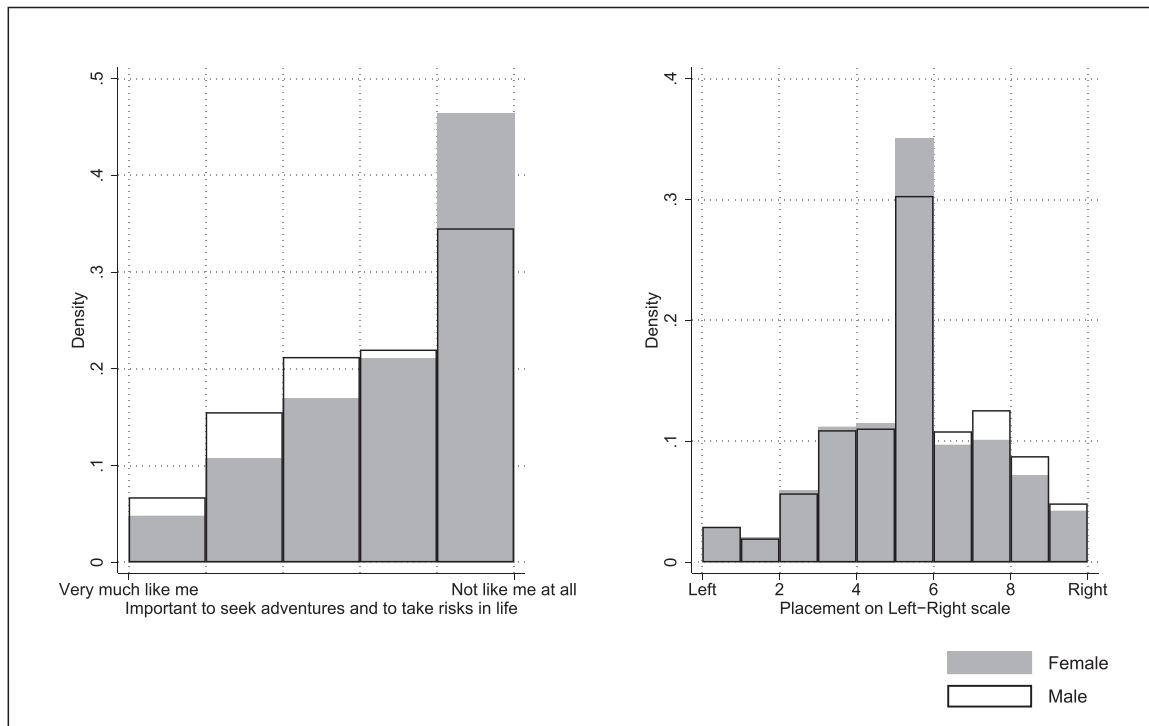
Additionally, we included two anti-immigrant scales (economic and cultural anti-immigrant attitudes, respectively) created based on five items available from the ESS. These scales are described in detail in the SI (note to SI Figure C1, p. 25). Consistent with the literature, the distribution of the two anti-immigrant scales for the two sexes emerged as similar, and no significant differences were documented between genders.

Models and Estimation

The empirical analysis follows four trajectories. First, we establish descriptive differences in risk aversion and ideological self-placement between genders. This is followed by two sets of regression models. In the first set of models, we (re)establish the gender gap in voting for PRRPs and show the relationship between risk aversion and vote choice. These models involved pooled data for both risky and non-risky contexts. The results informed the second set of models, which examined whether men and women behave differently in risky contexts. Accordingly, the second set of models comprises probit regressions to predict the probabilities for female and male respondents, respectively, to choose PRRPs over other parties based on the former’s past electoral achievements. These cross-level interaction models reveal a larger gender gap in risky contexts, indicating that the gender gap in the electoral support for PRRPs is rooted in risk-related attitudes and perceptions.

Third, we test the differential gendered effects of ideological extremism and risk aversion on vote choice. To that end, we interact risk aversion and ideological extremism with gender. The analyses are performed on both the pooled data and in contexts where voting for PRRPs is fraught with risk, in accordance with the second and third hypotheses, respectively. In light of our theoretical premises, we would expect that risk-averse and ideologically extremist female voters will refrain to a greater extent from supporting the radical right. Importantly, we would expect a larger differentiated effect in risky

²Social risk aversion might lead female respondents to falsely deny having voted for a PRRP—more so than men. Yet, other studies that used Computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI) data rather than personal interviews (e.g., Coffé 2019) still registered a gender gap in voting for PRRPs.

FIGURE 1 Distributions of Risk-Taking Tendencies and Left–Right Self-Placement

Note: Left-hand panel presents the distribution of men and women on a general item of risk aversion; right-hand panel shows self-placement on the left–right scale broken down by gender. For both of these distributions, the p-value of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of equality $\leq .001$.

electoral contexts. The fourth trajectory situates the analysis in Germany, where the possibility of vote splitting provides a tool to distinguish between the electoral risk and social risk as explanatory mechanisms for the gender gap.

Results

Risk Aversion, Political Extremism, and the Vote for PRRPs

We begin with Figure 1, documenting descriptive differences in risk aversion and political extremity between women and men.³ The left-hand panel shows differences between women's and men's self-perception in terms of seeking adventures and risks, with more men than women reporting high risk propensity. Women are 1.5 times more likely than men to indicate that the description in the item described above is not at all like them (category 6). On this item, men score on average 3.7 ($SD = 1.38$), whereas women score 4.1 ($SD = 1.4$).

³SI Figures C4 and C5 (pp. 28–29) show that the above pattern holds in each of the countries included in the study.

The right-hand panel shows that, compared to men, women have a lower tendency to hold extreme political attitudes. On average, more women than men locate themselves at the center of the left–right ideological dimension. As already explained, even for voters who are ideologically positioned at the extremes, we expect the social risk of voting for PRRPs to act as a deterrent, and especially so for those more sensitive to risk, that is, women. Although we do not hypothesize about compositional differences in political extremity between genders, patterns documented in Figure 1 align with this social risk perspective. Since women are socialized to conformity and to abiding by existing norms, they are more likely than men to position themselves at the center and less likely at the extreme right.⁴

Thus far, we have documented compositional gender differences, showing that men are on average positioned ideologically to the right of women and

⁴No gender gap was registered in the extreme left ideological spectrum. One explanation for this asymmetric gap is the fact that the radical left in Western Europe is more established and normalized than the radical right. Radical left parties are also less disliked by voters than populist radical right parties.

TABLE 1 Support for Populist Radical Right Parties

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Male	0.21*** (0.01)	0.20*** (0.01)	0.29*** (0.05)	0.25*** (0.03)	0.24*** (0.02)
Risk avoider		-0.02*** (0.00)	-0.01* (0.00)	-0.02*** (0.00)	-0.02*** (0.00)
Populist radical right parties in parliament in t-1			0.02 (0.07)		
Male* Populist radical right parties in parliament in t-1			-0.13** (0.05)		
Populist radical right parties' vote share in t-1				3.96*** (0.19)	
Male* Populist radical right parties' vote share in t-1				-0.30+ (0.16)	
Populist radical right parties' seat share in t-1					3.02*** (0.17)
Male* Populist radical right parties' seat share in t-1					-0.25* (0.13)
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Country-year fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant	-3.06*** (0.07)	-3.02*** (0.07)	-3.49*** (0.10)	-3.87*** (0.08)	-3.67*** (0.08)
Observations	115,084	115,084	115,084	115,084	115,084

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. Models 1-2 are additive probit regressions; Models 3-5 present the results of the interaction of gender with risky political contexts. The dependent variable is dichotomous (1 = vote for populist radical right party; 0 = vote for other party). All models include country and year FEs.

†p < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

that they are more risk-tolerant. Next, to investigate the effect of risk aversion on the gender gap in voting for PRRPs, we estimate probit models, presented in Table 1. All models include respondents' demographic background and attitudinal variables, as well as country and year fixed effects (full models are presented in SI Table C1, p. 9).

Model 1, with only gender on the right-hand side, confirms the gender gap documented in the literature, such that men are overrepresented among the populist radical right electorate. Model 2 adds risk aversion. The negative and significant coefficient obtained shows that risk-averse voters are less prone to support the populist radical right. In Model 2, although the decline in the gender coefficient is small, the risk-averse voters' lower tendency to support the populist radical right, combined with men's greater risk acceptance (Figure 1), results in a higher rate of support for the PRRPs among men compared to women. These results are consistent with Hypothesis 1.

The Effect of a Risky Electoral Context

We now factor in the effect of context to examine whether the electoral behavior of women and men is different in the face of a risky electoral choice. Models 3-5 in Table 1 report the results of probit regression models predicting the vote for PRRPs as a function of these parties' past electoral and legislative success. Specifically, we report the effect of cross-level interactions between gender and a risky context on the vote. The negative coefficient of gender (male) interacted with past electoral success (see SI Figure C2, p. 26, for a graphic presentation of this interaction) indicates that, as anticipated, women's vote is more affected by a risky electoral context than men's. As per Model 3, in cases where PRRPs entered parliament in previous elections, the predicted probability for female voters to support PRRPs is more than double compared to cases where PRRPs did not make it into parliament in the past. For men, no significant differences in the predictive probabilities to vote for PRRPs were found between risky and non-risky electoral contexts.

TABLE 2 Support for Populist Radical Right Parties Electoral and Social Risk

	Electoral Risk		Social Risk	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Male	0.15*** (0.04)	0.07 (0.10)	0.08* (0.04)	0.08 (0.08)
Risk-averse	-0.01* (0.01)	-0.07*** (0.02)	-0.01* (0.00)	-0.03** (0.01)
Male* Risk averse	0.01 (0.01)	0.04 [†] (0.02)		
Left-Right self-placement	0.13*** (0.00)	0.09*** (0.01)	0.12*** (0.01)	0.08*** (0.01)
Male* Left-Right self-placement				0.02 [†] (0.01)
Country fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant	-3.47*** (0.08)	-2.41*** (0.20)	-3.43*** (0.08)	-3.23*** (0.17)
Observations	115,084	29,668	115,084	44,132

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. Models 1 and 3 present the result of the interaction of risk propensity (Risk-averse) and ideological extremism Left-Right self-placement with gender. Models 2 and 4 replicate the results of models 1 and 3 only in cases where voting for radical right is a risky political behavior. All models include country and year FEs.

[†]p < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

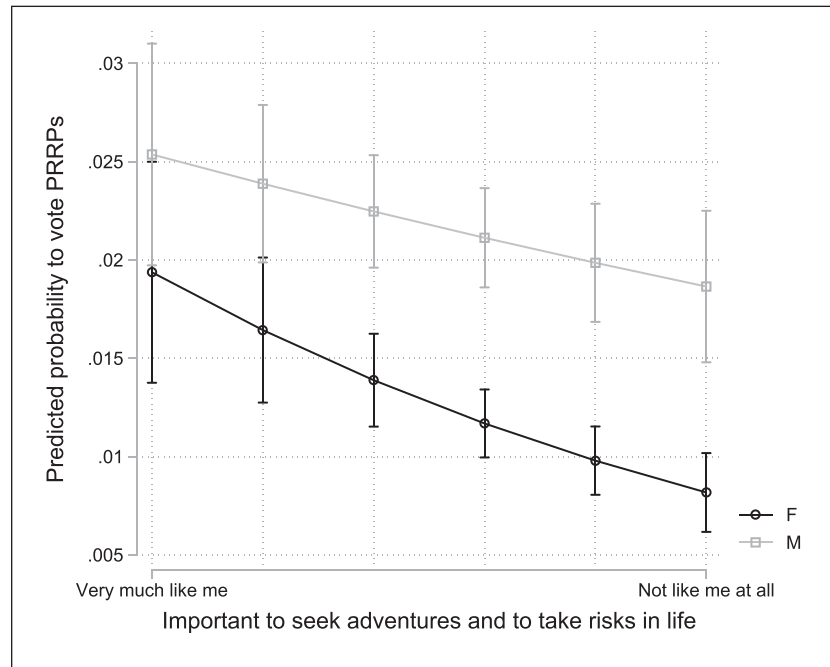
To corroborate these findings, we investigated whether Green parties, which had also started out as challenger parties and in the 1980s were still relatively unknown, garnered more support from men than from women. Assessing the gender gap in the vote for these parties from the 1980s until 2016, we find that women refrained from voting for Green parties while these were new and therefore a risky choice. However, when these parties gained electoral success and established themselves in European party systems, women joined them at higher numbers than men. These findings, displayed in SI Figure C3 (p. 27), are in line with our assumption that women are more risk-averse than men when it comes to vote choice.

What mechanisms account for the gender differences in *political behavior* in a risky electoral context observed in Models 3–5 in Table 1? Our second and third hypotheses suggest that compared to men, women perceive greater risk in an uncertain context and are less prone to translate extreme ideological positions to political behavior, such as voting for PRRPs. Put differently, risk aversion and ideological extremism both have a differential effect on the vote of men and women, especially in a risky electoral context. Table 2 tests these hypotheses. Model 1 interacts gender with risk aversion, and Model 3 interacts gender with ideological

self-placement; thus, the parameters of risk aversion and ideological self-placement are each assigned a gender-specific coefficient. Models 2 and 4 are similar to Models 1 and 3, respectively, but are executed only on those cases in which voting for the radical right is a risky choice—specifically, where the vote share of PRRPs is lower or equal to the median vote share of these parties in the pooled data. Filtering the cases according to this criterion cuts the sample size by more than half, thereby distilling the effect of the political context and yielding a more accurate estimation of the interaction terms. For robustness purposes, we reran our analysis on cases where PRRPs did not enter parliament in *t*-1—thus splitting our sample elsewhere—and using a different measure for a risky context. The results were similar to the ones presented in Models 2 and 4 (SI Table C3, p. 12).

Comparing Models 1 and 3 (all cases) with Models 2 and 4 (risky context), respectively, reveals that the coefficients (for risk aversion/ideological extremism and the respective interaction terms with gender) are larger in Models 2 and 4, with a consequent higher statistical significance. Therefore, to substantively evaluate the effect of risk aversion and ideological self-placement on the vote, and in particular the differential effect in this regard between women and men, we calculated, for both genders, the predicted probability of voting for PRRPs

FIGURE 2 Predicted Probabilities to Vote for PRRPs across Levels of Risk Aversion



Note: Predicted probabilities to vote for PRRPs by gender across levels of risk aversion in risky contexts. Higher values on the horizontal axis represent a greater tendency to avoid risks. The analysis draws on Model 2 in Table 2.

based on Models 2 and 4 across different levels of risk aversion and ideological self-placement. Figures 2 and 3 present the results of this analysis.

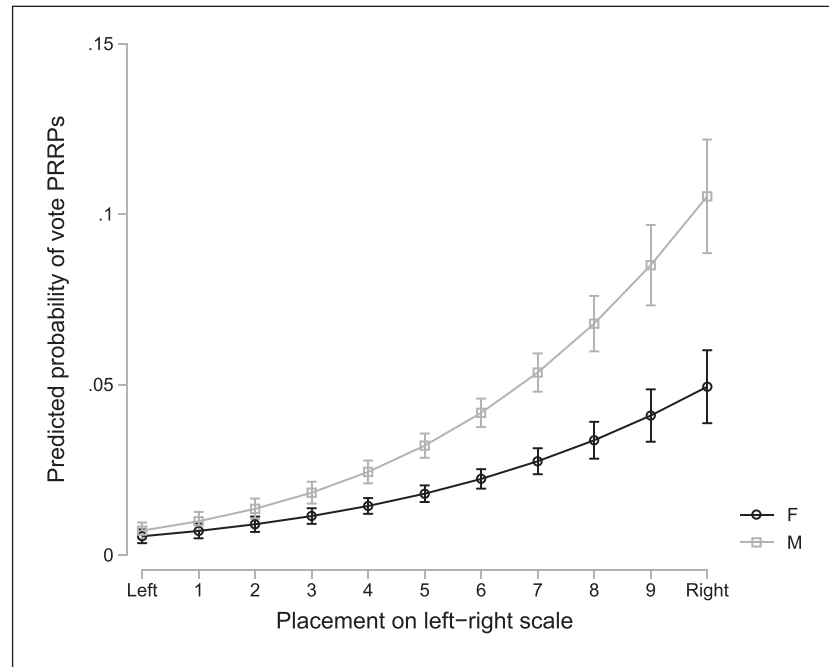
Figure 2 displays predicted probabilities for women and men to vote for PRRPs as a function of their risk aversion. The black line represents women's and the gray line men's predicted vote (95% confidence intervals in parentheses). The downward trending of the graphs for both men and women indicates that one's tendency to avoid risk decreases the likelihood of one's voting for PRRPs, as could be expected. For men, however, the differences between risk-averse and risk-accepting individuals are not statistically significant. For women, these differences are significant, indicating that, compared to risk-accepting women, risk-averse women tend to refrain more from voting for PRRPs.⁵ The figure also demonstrates the differences in the effect risk aversion has on women's and men's likelihood to vote for PRRPs. The more we move toward the risk-averse side of the horizontal axis, the larger are the differences between

men's and women's likelihood to vote for PRRPs. Put differently, risk-averse women are less likely to vote for PRRPs compared to risk-averse men. This shows that women's electoral behavior is sensitive to risky contexts, whereas men's is not. These findings attest to gender differences in the perception of risk whereby not only are women more risk-averse than men (Figure 1), but they may also tend to perceive realities as riskier than men and are therefore more reactive to a risky context in their vote. The results of the analysis support Hypothesis 2.

Figure 3 displays the predicted probabilities of voting for PRRPs in risky electoral contexts across values of left-right self-placement, holding other variables at their respective means. As expected, as we move from left to right along the self-placement continuum, the probability of supporting PRRPs substantially increases: from about 1% for those who place themselves ideologically on the left to about 10% for those located on the extreme right. In all positions on the left-right ideological scale, women are less likely to support PRRPs compared to men. More importantly, the change in probability is of greater magnitude for men than for women, suggesting that, consistent with our expectation, the effect of extreme right ideological position on the vote is substantially larger among men than among women.

⁵We reran a regression similar to that presented in Model 2 in Table 2, but for non-risky context. Results show no statistically significant differences in the predicted probabilities to vote for PRRPs between risk-averse and risk-taking female voters (see SI Figure C6, p. 30).

FIGURE 3 Predicted Probabilities to Vote for PRRPs across Levels of Ideological Self-Placement



Note: Predicted probabilities to vote for populist radical right parties by gender across levels of ideological self-placement in a risky context. The analysis draws on Model 4 in Table 2. All other variables are kept at their respective means.

Right-extremist men are twice as likely to vote for PRRPs than their female counterparts (10% and 5.2%, respectively). In other words, men position themselves on the extreme right more than women (see Figure 1), and their ideological positions translate more strongly to vote choice. We suggest that, in keeping with Hypothesis 3, this is a good indication that women perceive the social risk of voting for PRRPs in risky situations as greater compared to men.

To the extent that women are prone to avoid PRRPs, which parties do right-extremist women vote for? SI Table C4 (p. 14) shows that extreme right-wing women tend to vote for conservative parties. In multinomial regression models, we compared respondents' propensity to vote for PRRPs (reference category) versus other party families. Results of this estimation support the hypothesis that, compared to men, women are less likely to vote for PRRPs even when they are ideologically closest to these parties. This finding also corroborates our contention that, being socially risk-averse, women refrain from voting for PRRPs as their behavior is more reactive to party reputation and societal norms.

Robustness Checks

We reran our analysis with partly different empirical specifications. By and large, the results hold across almost all variations. The details are described below.

Model Specification The analysis in Table 1 was rerun using hierarchical logistic models (SI Table C5, p. 15). This analysis was also repeated using linear probability modeling. Results are similar to those reported for the main analysis.

Classification of PRRPs A different classification of populist radical right parties was used in repeated analyses, based on Norris (2005; see SI Appendix B, p. 8, for the list of PRRPs included in each classification; see SI Tables C6 and C7, pp. 16–17, for the analysis). Our results hold.

Additional Control Variables Studies have shown that blue-collar workers and small business groups tend to vote for PRRPs (e.g., Ivarsflaten 2005). Accordingly, the analysis was repeated, controlling for occupational class (SI Table C8, p. 18). As PRRPs also advance anti-feminist agendas and culturally conservative attitudes that might drive women away, we also controlled for these parties' ideological positions on the second

dimension. The results are fully consistent with those obtained originally (SI Tables C9 and C10, pp. 20–22). Lastly, women might systematically disagree with PRRPs' visions of illiberal democracy more than men, which may, in turn, affect the gender gap in the vote for these parties. In the main analysis, we control for trust in politicians, a proxy for the democratic dissatisfaction that is often seen as driving populist support. In the supporting information (Table C11, p. 23), we also control for respondents' level of agreement with the item "Political parties that wish to overthrow democracy should be banned." Results are consistent with those reported in the main analysis.

Risky Context As part of the main investigation, the sample was split according to country-years in which the vote share of PRRPs is lower or equal to the median vote share, and the analysis was then repeated for this population, as per Models 2 and 4 in Table 2. These models were rerun using a different measure: country-years where PRRPs did not make it into parliament in $t-1$. The results, displayed in SI Table C3 (p. 12), are similar to and in fact slightly stronger than the results reported in the main analysis, assuaging concerns over arbitrariness in choosing the cut-off point to delimit risky contexts.

Isolating Electoral and Social Risk Aversion: The German Case

The analysis of the cross-national observational data presented above lends support to the two hypothesized mechanisms behind the gender gap in the vote for PRRPs, namely, electoral risk and social risk. Although the two causal sequences differ in microfoundations, the above cross-sectional analysis cannot provide decisive evidence as to which mechanism is at work. Indeed, these two dynamics are not mutually exclusive: Women may be reluctant to vote for new populist right-wing parties, or for parties that did not make it into parliament in the past, owing to either a behavioral proclivity to avoid electoral risks or their tendency to conform to societal norms, or both.

To distill the effect of electoral risk, we leverage the case of Germany, which assists us in two ways. First, the German mixed-member proportional electoral system allows each voter two ballots, therefore enabling us to identify voters who made a socially risky choice by voting for a PRRP on one vote but refrained from doing so on the other. This minimizes the possible effect of a socially driven risk aversion and foregrounds the electoral-risk mechanism. Second, we examine our argument compar-

ing two German parties that present a similar degree of electoral risk: a PRRP (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD) and a mainstream centrist party (Freie Demokratische Partei, FDP). Similar results obtained for both parties will point to an electoral risk-aversion mechanism, which applies to electorally risky parties in general, not only PRRPs.

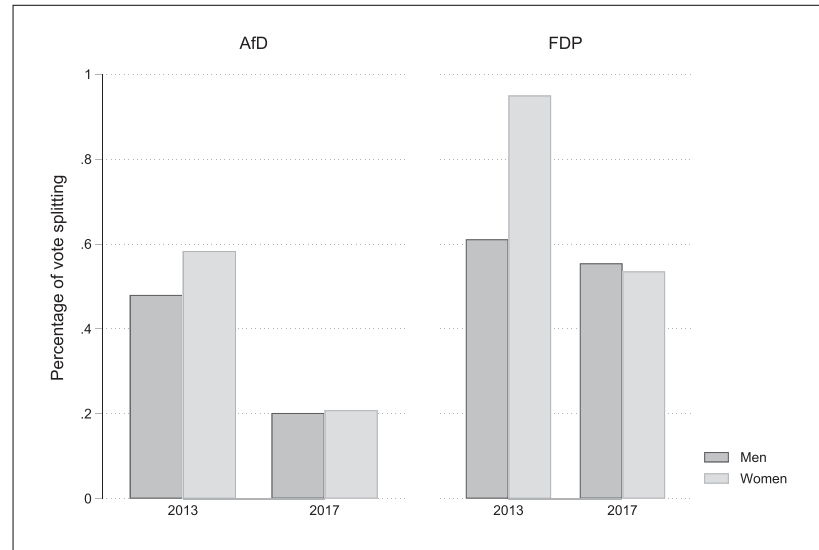
Background

The first tier in German elections is a district single-member, plurality vote, where a winning candidate amasses the most votes. A second, closed-list, proportional-representation tier affords a chance to gain representation in parliament even to small party lists if they get more than 5% of all national list votes. Because voters are incentivized to cast their first vote for a less favored but more competitive candidate, the large mainstream parties have historically dominated the first vote, whereas smaller parties have fared better in the second vote. In such a scenario, the degree of ticket splitting between the two ballots provides a measure of strategic voting (Gschwend 2007): The more one fears wasting one's (first) vote, the more likely one is to split tickets—voting strategically for a viable large-party candidate in the first vote and nonstrategically for a party list in the second. Thus, to factor out the social risk mechanism and address only the one based on electoral risk, we focus on those voters who cast their second ballot for the radical right party. In expressing their commitment to this party through their second ballot, AfD voters have already overcome their apprehension of any social risk this choice may be fraught with. Therefore, refraining from casting one's first vote for a radical right party is likely motivated by an electoral risk aversion rather than by social risk aversion.

The 2013 and 2017 German federal elections constitute a particularly promising case for analysis, as not only the right-wing populist AfD but also the mainstream center-right FDP presented an electoral risk, which moreover varied in magnitude for both these parties from one election to the other. However, in this context, voting for the AfD would have been construed as socially risky, whereas voting for the FDP would not have involved any social risk.

In the 2013 elections, supporters of both AfD and FDP risked "wasting their votes." AfD had been founded only a few months previously, and based on polls, it was projected to receive on average less than 3% of the vote in the next elections, well below the electoral threshold. While FDP (Cantow, Fehndrich and Zicht 2022) was

FIGURE 4 Ticket Splitting in the 2013 and 2017 Federal Elections in Germany



Note: Women's and men's ticket splitting for the AfD (left) and FDP (right) in Germany in the 2013 and 2017 federal elections.

founded in 1948 and, from that time, was a member of each parliament and most cabinets up to 2013, it had arrived at the 2013 elections after suffering considerable losses in several subnational elections. In the 6 months before the elections, public opinion polls projected the FDP to receive, on average, 4.9% of the vote (Cantow, Fehndrich and Zicht 2022), just below the electoral threshold. Indeed, both parties eventually failed to gain seats in the 2013 Bundestag, falling short of the 5% national threshold.

The picture changed considerably in the run-up to the 2017 federal elections. In the preceding months, AfD had gained seats in 14 of the 16 German state parliaments. FDP had likewise regained its representation in most state parliaments between 2015 and 2017. In the 6 months leading up to the elections, both were projected to receive between 8% and 9% of the vote (Cantow, Fehndrich and Zicht 2022). Having a robust state-level standing and favorable polls, the two parties went on to (re)gain representation in the Bundestag, with 94 (AfD) and 80 (FDP) seats.

Analysis Strategy and Data

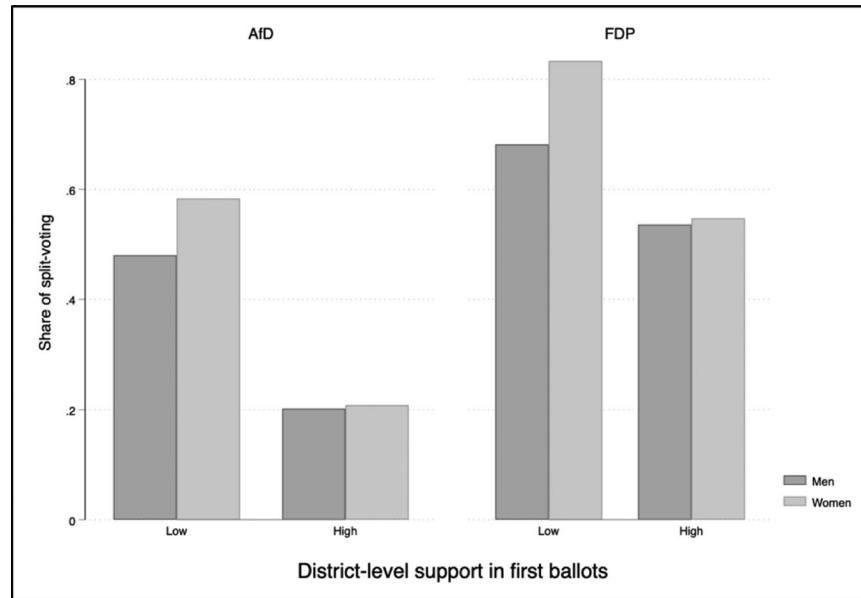
Utilizing the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) data from the relevant modules (4 and 5), we focused on voters who cast their second ballot for either the AfD or the FDP. We identified those who voted for ei-

ther party with their second ballot in both 2013 and 2017 and measured the rate of ticket-splitting among those voters. That is, out of all AfD/FDP second-ballot supporters, we calculated the share of voters who split their vote (i.e., did not cast their first ballot for an AfD/FDP candidate), analyzing these ratios separately for men and women. Comparing 2013 with 2017, we first present the gender gaps in vote splitting across time. The second analysis is geographical: We pool the data for both elections, divide it by districts, and compare gendered ticket splitting for each party between districts where its candidate received below-median electoral support in the first vote (6% for AfD and 4% for FDP) and districts where its candidate received above-median electoral support.

Results

We begin with a two-by-two comparison of the gender gap in ticket splitting within each party between the 2013 and 2017 elections and between the AfD and FDP in each election. Figure 4 displays the results of this comparison. It shows that the share of ticket splitting among AfD supporters (left panel) in the 2013 elections is more than twice that in 2017. This stands to reason, as the AfD, an unknown commodity in 2013, swiftly gained electoral credibility in the run-up to the 2017 federal elections. Of even greater salience is the difference in the *gender*

FIGURE 5 Ticket Splitting in High- and Low-Support Districts in Germany



Note: Women's and men's strategic voting for the AfD (left) and FDP (right) in Germany in districts where these parties' candidates had won a low share of votes and in districts where this share had been high.

gap in AfD ticket splitting between the two elections. Whereas in 2013, women split tickets more than men, in 2017, no such difference is discernible. The results for the FDP supporters (right panel) are striking in that almost no difference in ticket splitting emerges among men between 2013 and 2017. Women, on the other hand, split their vote more than men for the FDP candidate in 2013, when this party constituted an apparent electoral risk; in 2017, this gender gap disappears, as in the case of the AfD.

The longitudinal comparison presented above is not causally definitive, as differences in voting may be driven by various processes. A pooled geographical comparison helps elucidate the picture. Figure 5 compares men's and women's ticket splitting in districts with high and low support for the AfD and FDP candidates. It shows that in a risky context (i.e., low support for the AfD or FDP candidate on the first vote at the district level), women refrain from casting their vote for these parties' candidates to a greater extent than men. This gender gap in ticket splitting tapers off in districts where these parties' candidates stand a better chance of being elected. Thus, in the face of an ostensibly risky electoral choice, women were less likely than men to vote for the respective party's candidate, even when they cast their second vote for that party on the list. In districts

where either AfD or FDP candidates were regarded as less electorally risky, the gap between women and men disappears.

The analysis of the German case demonstrates that the effect of a risky electoral context on the gender gap in voting holds for both an ideologically extreme right-wing party (AfD) and a mainstream centrist party (FDP). As at issue are second ballots cast for these parties, it can be safely assumed that the voters' choice was unaffected by social risk aversion. Therefore, we can be as confident that their reticence to cast their first ballot for these parties' candidates was motivated by electoral risk aversion. The finding that, regarding both the AfD and the FDP, women tended more than men to split their vote in riskier electoral contexts supports our case for the existence of a gender-driven electoral risk mechanism not yet identified or described in the literature.

Conclusion

This article explores gendered voting patterns for the fastest-growing party family in Europe—populist radical right parties (PRRPs). In light of cross-country and longitudinal differences in the electoral success of PRRPs,

assessed based on their representation in parliament, we have shown that a key explanation for the gender gap in the vote for these parties is risk aversion.

This article contributes to the burgeoning literature investigating the gender gap in voting for PRRPs. While studies show robust gender differences in support for PRRPs, such disparities are not present in political attitudes highly relevant in voting for such parties, that is, immigration and minority integration policies. Why, then, do fewer women than men vote for populist right parties? This article proposes two explanations for this gap, both related to risk aversion. The first is electoral risk, as these parties are often new, unknown entities and might not make it into parliament; consequently, risk-averse voters are apprehensive of either wasting their vote or the uncertainty regarding these parties' largely unpredictable policies. The second is social risk: PRRPs usually champion extreme and radical causes. Such agendas lead risk-averse voters, wishing to abide by the social norms they have internalized, to direct their ballot elsewhere. We expect both these explanatory dynamics to have a greater effect on women than on men.

Both these lines of inquiry have been borne out. Findings indicate that women are less inclined to vote for PRRPs out of concern that their vote will be lost, and also because of the social risk involved in voting for parties that are considered extreme or nonconformist. Moreover, when the context of voting for PRRPs is construed as risky, women's electoral response is stronger than men's, indicating that in such situations, women perceive the risk of voting for these parties as higher than men do. Conversely, men's vote for PRRPs is not affected by a risky context. By virtue of its design, targeting risky contexts, this study adduces suggestive evidence for the effect of risk perception on voting behavior. Future studies could bolster and add nuance to this case through experimental research. To demonstrate the salience and efficacy of the mechanism driven by electoral risk, we have examined the case of Germany, whose electoral system allows isolating such an effect. In Germany, we have found that strategic voting behavior among PRRP supporters presents a gender gap only in contexts involving an electoral risk. Additionally, this pattern is manifest among voters supporting a mainstream party.

This article also taps into a larger debate on gender and populism that is currently unfolding in the literature. We join a growing body of research addressing as yet unresolved questions regarding the links between gender, populism, and radical right parties and contribute to the literature that examines voting patterns for the radical right. In this regard, we have addressed not only the individual-level demand side, but also the

party-level supply side and the interaction between these two domains. In combining individuals' characteristics and their gendered variation with contextual factors, this study accomplishes two objectives: First, it links the well-established gender gap in support for PRRPs to a basic personality trait, risk aversion; and second, it suggests two mechanisms that account for the different effect of a generalized, consistent gender disparity in risk propensity in different contexts. Thus, we propose a novel theory and adduce empirical evidence explaining why men and women differ substantially in supporting some parties at certain times, but much less so on other occasions and in different circumstances. Furthermore, our theoretical model yields a testable prediction: In parallel with similar trends, such as those documented for Green parties, as current PRRPs gain greater electoral success, we should expect a decline in the gender gap.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Appendix A: List of populist radical right parties by country and wave

Appendix B: Party classifications

Appendix C: Additional analyses