



Satisfied unlike me? How the perceived difference with close network contacts prevents radical and protest voting

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Abstract

Fitting with a common scheme across European democracies, the last election in Belgium led radical (left and right) parties to increase their vote share. One of the key drivers of the radical vote is political dissatisfaction (Droste 2011). Yet, the latter does not always translate into radical or protest voting behaviors. Using the 2019s *RepResent Belgian Elections Study*, we show the moderating effect of close social contacts in this relationship. For dissatisfied voters who believe that most contacts are similarly discontent, the probability to vote for radical parties (or, if not, to adopt other protest behaviors) is reinforced. However, the odds decrease the more they perceive their contacts different from themselves, i.e., as politically satisfied voters. Then, they become more likely to avoid protest/radical choices and to vote for institutionalized parties. Overall, our study yields findings showing that voting behaviors should be studied by considering also the voters' social networks, which seem to exert a role in defining the acceptability of voting choices. What matters is not only how one perceives politics but also how one believes his close contacts perceive politics too.

Keywords Voting behaviors · Radical parties · Protest vote · Political dissatisfaction · Social networks · Belgium

Introduction

In Belgium, the outcomes of the 2019s elections led to this increasingly familiar scenario in Europe: a hard time for governing parties and a substantial proportion of citizens that expressed preferences in favor of radical right and radical left parties (Pilet 2020). Together, Vlaams Belang (11.9%) and PTB-PVDA (8.6%) have

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attracted 20.5% of all valid votes at the national level (House of Representatives). Although Belgian citizens voting for radical parties lean to the extreme right in Flanders and to the extreme left in Wallonia,¹ they share several common characteristics with other voters of radical parties in Europe. One is that they are dissatisfied with the way representative democracy works in Belgium (Goovaerts et al. 2020). According to the 2019s *RepResent Belgian Elections Study*, about 40% of the Belgian electorate was politically dissatisfied in the country before the election. All in all, it means that not all the dissatisfied Belgian citizens turned to radical parties; otherwise, they would have scored higher. Although this type of parties capitalizes feelings of dissatisfaction with democratic representation, they are not able to translate fully such negative attitudes toward politics into a vote for them. From that, the two questions that we propose to pose are (1) what are the mechanisms encouraging or preventing politically dissatisfied voters to cast a vote for radical parties as an expression of political discontent? (2) Moreover, if not voting for radical parties while dissatisfied, how do these voters behave then at the polls?

We argue that part of the answers lies in the way voters perceive the political (dis)satisfaction of their proximate social network. Based on an analysis of voter survey data, we found out that the difference with close social network contacts plays a key moderator role in-between the individual-level determinant (dissatisfaction) and its behavioral outcome (radical/protest vote). We demonstrate (1) that the positive effect of a voter's political dissatisfaction on the probability to vote for a radical party is reinforced when the close social contacts are seen similarly discontent, but that the odds much decrease as long as the difference with the contacts grows, meaning that the satisfaction becomes the perceived majority in the network. Moreover, (2) if not voting for radical parties while dissatisfied, we show that a voter's political dissatisfaction predicts positively the chances to adopt other protest voting behaviors, even more when the contacts are perceived discontent too. In contrast, the more different and satisfied are seen the contacts, the higher the probability to vote for institutionalized parties. Overall, our main finding is that the positive relationship between dissatisfaction and radical/protest behaviors is dampened when voters perceived their close contacts satisfied. The discussion highlights two underlying mechanisms potentially explaining this effect: information sharing and normative pressure.

State of art and theory

Why voting for radical parties?

In light of the growing relevance of these parties in our contemporary democracies, there is an extensive literature on why people vote for radical right or left parties.

¹ It is worth noting that the extreme left party (PTB-PVDA) has experienced also a significant electoral rise in the 2019 federal elections, not only in Wallonia but also in all Flemish constituencies. The PVDA doubled its results from 2.8 (2014) to 5.6% (2019). The PVDA also entered the Dutch language group in the federal parliament with 4 seats.



From macro-level views, the causes of their emergence and success originate in the (changes in) political, economic, and/or social structures of our modern society. In particular, over the last two decades, several major shocks (e.g., recent economic or migration crises) have shaken European democracies' socioeconomic structures, political cleavages, and issues, leaving space for the birth and persistence of radical (left and right) parties (Doležalová et al. 2017; Kriesi and Schulte-Cloos 2020). Moreover, the institutional design (e.g., proportionality and electoral thresholds) can open or constrain the representation of radical parties and affect their chances to get seats (March and Rommerskirchen 2015).

Failing to explain why some radical parties perform better than others across countries (despite this common favorable political and social 'climate') or within a country (where the same rules apply), meso-level studies brought back the collective agency into the equation. Some have stressed how the media coverage is central to understand the performances of radical parties (Kriesi 2014; de Jonge 2019), while the rise of the Internet and social media appears particularly suitable for these parties in order to organize (Gerbaudo 2018), improve their image and visibility, or focus the attention on their owed issues (Kalsnes 2019) or on their leaders. Leadership is often described as a factor fueling the success of radical parties on the right (Michel et al. 2020) and on the left (Ramiro and Gomez 2020). Behind the leader, the strength of radical party organizations is also a central argument for their (non) electoral success (Gherghina and Soare 2021) as well as for their diverse fortunes once they got in government (Van Kessel 2013), and so by playing on their credibility and legitimacy. Indeed, the more they organize, the more they might be blamed by their supporters to converge toward a party model they were initially opposed to. Finally, the capacity for moderate, mainstream parties to challenge radical parties on their core themes decreases their chances of winning (March and Rommerskirchen 2015). It is only when established parties are unresponsive that radical parties can really break through (Van Kessel 2013). In addition, when the radical offer is fragmented and many challengers compete, it tends to dilute the vote among them (Rydgren 2007).

The third way to handle the performances and success of radical parties has been to connect this voting behavior with micro-level issues such as the expression of anti-establishment protest, issue, and ideological voting, or still class voting. Besides sociostructural and party-level factors, several individual-level predispositions are demonstrated to affect the radical vote. As far as the sociological roots are concerned, extensive studies have shown that the individual socioeconomic profiles of support for radical left and right are more common than distinct (Akkerman et al. 2017; Rooduijn et al. 2019). They could come from the same social strata (Visser et al. 2014). Citizens with rather low incomes, having certain occupation making them belong to lower classes, or still those enduring degradation of standard of living would have nowadays as many incentives as to vote for the radical left and the radical right in light of current economic and demographic conditions that have provoked hardship and vulnerability for these groups (Burgoon et al. 2019). The final choice between radical left and right would be mediated by how they position themselves ideologically and regarding economic and cultural issues (immigration and ethnic diversity, economic redistribution, European unification or still



law-and-order). In addition, scholars have noticed a huge gender bias among radical right party voters, who are more male, whereas radical left parties might capture more the vote of women—though there is only few empirical evidence for this claim (Spierings & Zaslove 2017). The literature is less clear on the effect of age and education. Radical right voters could be less educated than the average, whereas radical left could be more educated (Rooduijn and Akkerman 2017), but still identifying with the working class (Ramiro 2016; Alexandre et al. 2019). At the same time, the growing unemployment and job insecurity for highly educated young adults might also end up in supporting radical parties because of some general dissatisfaction with the system around them. Although younger citizens appear more inclined to vote for the radical left (Ramiro 2016), the results are inconclusive for the radical right (Stockemer et al. 2018).

In contrast to the mainstream voter, the profile of the radical voter depicted by the literature is thus someone more vulnerable and disadvantaged in several (yet not all) socioeconomic aspects but also who has also grown frustrated with traditional politics and who therefore stand out from mainstream voters in terms of attitudes and traits. Indeed, both radical left and right voters share negative emotions toward politics (Close and Van Haute 2020). They feel a strong anger toward the functioning of the economy and the government and express low trust in politicians and political institutions (Goovaerts et al. 2020). Radical right and left voters share similar stances like nationalism (Halikiopoulou et al. 2012), euroscepticism (Visser et al. 2014), and populism (Rooduijn and Akkerman 2017). They express also preferences for radical changes in democratic processes (Rojon and Rijken 2020). In light of the debates on educational attainment, it is less obvious from existing findings whether they could be less politically competent and/or interested than mainstream voter. Still, low external political efficacy appears strongly connected to political distrust and populist vote (Geurkink et al. 2020). Besides, what remains a major and robust explanatory factor is political dissatisfaction. The electoral breakthrough of radical parties that lean either to the extreme right or to the extreme left of the European spectrum is associated with a significant erosion of citizens' satisfaction regarding representative institutions and elites. A large share of the votes attracted by radical parties are cast by dissatisfied citizens, whose alienation originates from distrust and discontent toward the political elites and institutions (Webb 2013). This link between political dissatisfaction and the radical vote has even reinforced over the last decade (Droste, 2021). In addition, political dissatisfaction increases the likelihood of stable radical vote. Voogd and Dassonneville (2020) showed that voters of radical parties are neither more nor less volatile than mainstream voters.

Why not voting for radical parties while dissatisfied?

The relationship between (growing) dissatisfaction and radical vote is not always so straightforward and univocal. There are for instance some countries which were strongly affected by the last economic crisis in 2008 but which did not face the following upsurge of radical forces, e.g., Portugal (Santana-Pereira and Cancela 2020) or Iceland (Önnudóttir et al. 2021). On the opposite, some were almost not impacted



but still faced a radical breakthrough in the aftermath of the crisis (e.g., Switzerland) (Biard 2019). Moreover, government participation is crucial (Fagerholm 2021). Once radical parties participate to governing coalitions, political dissatisfaction turns overall less predictive of the radical vote. Second, not voting for radical parties while dissatisfied could relate to a programmatic issue. Although radical parties capture the vote of politically dissatisfied citizens, they are not able to fully monopolize the discontent: some voters recognize the problems about current representative elites and processes (and are dissatisfied) but do not opt for a radical solution at the polls. Acknowledging that the party-voter congruence is a strong predictor of radical vote (Goovaerts et al. 2020), the ideological discrepancy between a dissatisfied voter and radical parties might be a major explanation of why they do not vote for such parties. It has been demonstrated for instance that some voters did not choose radical parties because they disagree with the democratic reforms proposed in their programs, despite they were dissatisfied and supportive of alternative forms to representation (Esteban and Stiers 2021). Furthermore, when moderate parties challenge radical parties on their core business, they become capable of capturing or keeping discontent voters too (Van Kessel 2015). Hence, if dissatisfied voters see moderate parties closer ideologically and/or more responsive to the origins of their discontent, they could stay attached to these parties in election. Finally, some dissatisfied citizens may not vote for radical parties because (1) they are strategic voter and perceive low chances of ‘winning’ through these parties (Frèden et al. 2020), (2) they do not vote at all and remain isolated from politics (Kemmers 2017), (3) they do not vote but favor other, protest forms of participation (Pirro and Portos 2021), and (4) they do vote but opt for micro-parties (Paulis 2021) or cast a blank vote (Hooghe et al. 2011) as signal of protest.

Social networks and the (radical) vote

Besides all the drivers discussed before, a less explored explanation of why (not) voting for radical parties relates to voters’ social networks. Social network studies of voting have long put forward the process of social influence and peer pressure as key mechanism of voting habits and choices’ transmission and reinforcement (see Santoro and Beck (2018) for an in-depth literature review ranging from the emergence of the ‘Columbia school’ onto its modern developments in the 2000s). Two mechanisms of network influence on the vote are described: information sharing (perspective to gain added information on politics, parties, and candidates) and social pressure. First, because social networks are important providers of resources of all kind, they function as pool of information for the voters. In that perspective, citizens are influenced by the networks they form with people they closely interact, exchange, discuss, and disagree politics (Pattie and Johnston 2001; Huckfeldt et al. 2004; Eveland and Hively 2009; Mancosu 2016; Butters and Hare 2020). The vote for populist parties in Italy has been consistently driven by informal share of information with close social network contacts (Vezzoni and Mancosu 2016). Campus et al. 2015 showed that interpersonal political discussion increased substantially from 2008 to 2013, especially among those who were critical of the political system and



were embedded in homogeneous social networks with people holding similar disenfranchised views. More specifically to the radical vote, the exposure to negative political attitudes and radical party preferences in family (Coffé and Voorpostel 2010) or online networks (Schumann et al. 2021) is shown to increase the chances to vote for radical parties. Like for fringe candidates and parties in Anglo-saxon two-party systems (Beck 2002; Fredén et al. 2020), it seems that radical parties could benefit from the reinforcing social support that is found in many social networks of their voters in European multi-party systems.

Besides information sharing, social networks exert normative pressure on the voters (Zuckerman 2005). An individual develops political preferences resting on social comparison with other ‘significant’ others (Rolfe 2012). Like for non-political behaviors, individuals do not follow the standards imposed by strangers or the society at large. They rather conform to the norms shared by their friends, relatives, and proximate peers (Blais et al. 2018). The decision to cast a ballot is affected by the social pressure incentives induced by the relationships with these peers (Gerber et al. 2008; Rogers et al. 2017; Fieldhouse et al., 2020), whereas voting choices are contagious among the same household (Nickerson 2008). Regarding the radical vote, there is a social ‘taboo’ or ‘stigma’ associated with these parties (especially on the extreme right), which may constrain their electoral success. Radical politicians and parties breach established social norms. Hence, their supporters may have an incentive to conceal and not express that support in the booth, at least until they enter parliament and become perceived more legitimate in private social circles (Valentim 2021). Similarly, the social stigma associated with radical right parties decrease as long as these parties are fictively depicted to be supported by a majority of other people in the population. However, it is reinforced when only a minority is showed to prefer radical parties, making people less likely to vote for them (Harteveld et al. 2019).

Hypotheses

From that, the first and main hypothesis that we formulate is that the (non-)difference with close social network contacts will play a moderator role in the relationship between the individual-level dissatisfaction and the probability to vote for a radical party (or, if not, to adopt other protest behaviors). On the one hand, the impact of social pressure and information sharing is shown to affect the voter when network peers are similar, like-minded and share the same political attitudes and preferences. Such networks are reinforcing because the information diffuses quickly and comes from like-minded sources, while there is a high social pressure to conformity. This makes the voter likely to converge toward the party preferences that are dominant among network contacts. Moreover, in such an ‘echo chamber’ configuration, opinions are known to be confirmed rather than challenged, which may turn them more extreme and polarized (Sunstein 2007). Given that the radical vote is boosted when network contacts are dissatisfied and/or hold radical preferences (Campus et al. 2015), or still when the population is perceived supportive of these parties (Harteveld et al. 2019), the positive effect of political dissatisfaction on the radical



vote should be moderated positively when the dissatisfied voter believe a majority of their contacts are discontent too. This will provide the necessary confidence and trust to bypass the social stigma and effectively voting for a radical party. On the other hand, the homogeneity and conformity arguments can be challenged by studies showing that voters' networks would tend in a vast majority of cases toward people facing contentious political disagreements and cross-pressures, whose effects on political participation and voting remains less clear (Mutz 2002; Nir 2005; Guidetti et al. 2016). Moreover, the literature has much less explored the leverage that network minority pattern could have on the propensity to vote for certain parties. Yet, a reason for dissatisfied voters not to cast for a radical party may be to believe that most people around them are satisfied. It could be that the beliefs regarding the ability to influence politics and to "win" through selecting a radical party is dampened by perceiving close contacts who do have and share positive views, and probably support institutionalized parties. Hence, the positive effect of the dissatisfaction on the probability to vote for radical parties should be moderated negatively when the voter's perception is that network contacts are different and satisfied.

H1 The positive effect of a voters' political dissatisfaction on the probability to vote for radical parties will be moderated (a) positively the more the close social network contacts are perceived similar (b) negatively the more these contacts are seen different, i.e., satisfied.

Still, a part of the puzzle remains unanswered: if these dissatisfied citizens do not vote for radical parties, what do they do once at the polls? It may be expected that they are protest voters who cast a blank or "useless" vote in favor of microparties to voice their dissatisfaction. We think nonetheless that the same moderation mechanism could apply. As a by-product of social influence and information sharing, dissatisfied voters who believe most of their contacts are satisfied should match less with the profile of protest voters but more with a moderate voter who cast in favor of institutionalized parties, which are probably more largely supported among network contacts.

H2 For a dissatisfied voter who does not cast a ballot for radical parties, the negative effect of political dissatisfaction on the probability to vote for institutionalized parties will be moderated (a) positively the more the close social network contacts are perceived different and satisfied (b) negatively the more these contacts are seen similarly dissatisfied.



Data and methods

Data

Voter survey data used for our analyses come from the *RepResent Belgian Elections Study 2019*.² The survey includes a pre- and a post-election wave. The questionnaires were filled online via Qualtrics. Kantar TNS oversaw providing the respondents from their online panel. Although it is not usual for studying voting choices, we rely here upon data from the pre-election wave held between April 5 and May 5, 2019. It was indeed the largest in scope of respondents and was the longest in terms of time and questions, with a unique opportunity to report on the perceptions of their close social network contacts. Such cognitively demanding task was removed from the post-election wave, which consists in a much shorter questionnaire and was filled by only a third of the initial sample.

Data for the pre-election wave were collected among a representative sample of the Belgian population. They cover 7609 respondents: 3420 in Flanders, 3133 in Wallonia, and 1056 in the Region of Brussels. Yet, with the recoding of our dependent and independent variables (see the next related subsections), we lost more than 2000 respondents, which in turn may have implications on the representativeness of our study. The table in Appendix 1 assesses the quality of our final sample regarding population statistics. It underlines that our final sample is indeed marked by some little biases. However, they can be more largely attributed to non-response in several common sociodemographic groups and especially the difficulty to reach low educated citizens in the *RepResent Belgian Elections Study* (Pilet et al. 2020, pp. 19–20). Therefore, our observations have been pondered using a sociodemographic weight based on age (4 categories), sex, and education (crossed 6 categories).³ Furthermore, the table shows that the voting intentions of our final sample did not much differ from the final election outcomes. Overall, once weighted, the main gap is an overrepresentation of Green voters and an underrepresentation of Christian Democratic voters, which is not directly problematic for the sake of the study. More importantly, radical left and right parties represent together 23% of the (weighted) voting intentions, which is quite close to the final share these parties took in the end (21.6%).

Finally, given that we dropped of a substantial share of the respondents from the raw EOS dataset after treating and recoding our data (see further), the Appendix 2 proposes a table that compares the distribution of the raw and the final sample. From this exercise, we can see that the drop of respondents has only a marginal impact. We have lost mostly among the better educated and slightly among the older and the men, making that our final sample is even more balanced and representative in that regard compared to the original one. As far as our main variables of interest (satisfaction with democracy and voting choices) are concerned, there is no real difference between the raw and the final sample. To conclude, we did not find any

² www.represent-project.be.

³ All the percentages reported directly in the article are weighted.



statistically significant mean differences (except for education: higher among those dropped) between the respondents kept in the final sample and those dropped.

The case: Belgium

As far as the relationship between dissatisfaction and voting for radical parties is concerned, the case of Belgium appears particularly interesting for two reasons. First, the country faced over the last decade an electoral breakthrough of radical parties on the very left and on the very right of the political spectrum. Through the last 2019 election, Belgium constitutes thus an interesting and relevant empirical framework to study radical left and radical right voters simultaneously. If the literature has long considered them separately, there is an increasing interest in analyzing their similarities (and divergences) within and across European countries. Indeed, although radical left and right voters strongly differ in terms of ideological or issue positioning, they share common characteristics as protest voters, which are particularly salient and observable in Belgium: they tend to feel angry about Belgian politics (Van Haute et al. 2020), to be populist (Pauwels 2014; Wauters and Pittoors 2019) or still to be politically dissatisfied and less confident in Belgian political institutions and elites (Goovaerts et al. 2020). Hence, given also the overall common trend of satisfaction we highlighted with ESS data, one may expect that what we observe for the case of Belgium should hold also for other European countries (except perhaps for Central and Eastern Europe, where the Left and Right divide makes less sense). On the other hand, in Belgium, the proportional representation makes parliamentary entry rather low. The electoral threshold is set at 5%. There are therefore lower strategic incentives not to voice for radical parties when people are politically dissatisfied (Hooghe et al. 2011).

Dependent variable: voting for radical parties

To measure our main dependent variable (i.e., the propensity to vote for radical parties), we used the self-reported voting choices' intentions for the 2019 federal-level election in the three Belgian regions: Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels. The answer categories have been recoded as to merge party preferences with the main Belgian party families (Delwit 2021): Christian Democrats (*Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams* and *Centre Démocrate Humaniste*), Social Democrats (*Socialistische Partij Anders*⁴ and *Parti Socialiste*), Liberals (*Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten* and *Mouvement Réformateur*), Greens (*Groen* and *Ecolo*), Regional (*Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* and *Démocrate Fédéraliste Indépendant*), Radical right (*Vlaams Belang* and *Parti Populaire*), and Radical left (*Partij van de Arbeid van België*—*Parti du Travail de Belgique*). These last two-party families encompass Belgian radical parties, which stand out from the others with their populist discourse, their extreme location on the left–right political spectrum, a rather low level of representation in

⁴ The party has since then changed its name to *Vooruit*.



public institutions before the 2019 elections or yet a capacity to catch discontent voters (Pauwels 2014). We created a binary-dependent variable, opposing radical parties to all other, more institutionalized parties. We excluded the respondents who were undecided, intended to cast a blank vote or to voice in favor of other, micro-parties. Our final sample relies on the vote expressed by 5,728 Belgian citizens. 22% intended to vote for a radical party. In addition, to test the second hypothesis, we used the same information but generate another binary dependent variable which distinguishes voters expressing other protest behaviors than voting for radical parties (i.e., blank and micro-party voters, coded as 0) from voters choosing moderate, institutionalized parties (1). Undecided and voters of radical parties are not considered.

Independent variable: political satisfaction

Regarding the first independent variable (*Political Satisfaction*), the *RepResent Belgian Election Study* surveyed voters' satisfaction with democracy. This is probably the most common way of operationalizing political satisfaction (Linde and Ekman 2003), i.e., by measuring a citizen's subjective evaluation of the good functioning of the representative system of democracy. Despite some flaws, it remains a common scale of how much people are content with representative institutions, which is the most widely used across the globe and a good benchmark to gauge how citizens feel toward their institutions, even more in a context of democratic malaise (Foa et al. 2020). The question was worded like in most cross-national surveys (e.g., *European Social Survey*, *International Social Survey Program*): "Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Belgium." A 5-point scale was displayed to the respondents, ranging from very dissatisfied (1) to very satisfied (5). The distribution of the variable indicates that Belgian citizens were overall more dissatisfied than satisfied with the way democracy was functioning in Belgium at the time of the pre-election survey. Two respondents out of five (42.3%) claimed to be (very) dissatisfied. About one third (31.9%) opted for the neutral scale point (neither dissatisfied, nor satisfied). The remaining quarter (25.8%) were (very) satisfied. Yet, the mean is in fact close to the neutral position ($M=2.8$, $SD=1.03$), which is a pattern quite similar to other European countries (e.g., Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, UK) according to the European Social Survey data proposed in Appendix 3. Moreover, ESS data indicate that the mean level of satisfaction with democracy among Belgian citizens is stable over the last decade and very similar to the last election cycle.

Moderator variable: voter-network difference

In the pre-electoral wave of the *2019 RepResent Belgian Elections Study*, two questions aimed at measuring how Belgian voters perceived the political satisfaction of their close social network contacts. The election study relied on a name-generating procedure, which is the most classical way of raising egocentric network data via panel or cross-sectional surveys. The procedure supposes that an "ego" (the respondent) report about his "alters" (named contacts). By naming close social



Table 1 Social network contacts' information

Satisfaction group	% social network contacts	Network mean
Dissatisfied	42.1	1.4
Neutral	28.6	1.8
Satisfied	29.2	2.2
Total	100.0	1.7

network contacts, participants were asked to inform about their network of 'significant others' (Perry et al. 2018). They first nominated at most five close important people in their life and then answered how satisfied was each of these persons with the way democracy works in Belgium, ranging from very dissatisfied (1) to very satisfied (5) and displaying a 'don't know' option. 1343 respondents of the raw *Rep-Resent* dataset have not been considered in our network analyses: 736 declined the naming by providing doubtful names,⁵ plus 607 picked the 'don't know' for all their network contacts.⁶ For the rest of participants, removing the contacts whom satisfaction was unknown made the mean network size decrease slightly (from 3.8 people named on average to 3.6) but not substantially. As reported in Table 1, in the aggregate, 42.1% of the network contacts named by the respondents were associated with negative stances—i.e., (very) dissatisfied, 28.6% with positive stances—i.e., (very) satisfied and 29.2% with the neutral stance (neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied). It follows a relatively similar distribution than the individual-level satisfaction, although there are slightly more dissatisfied 'alters' than 'egos.' The mean satisfaction in our respondents' networks is 1.75 (range 1–3). It emphasized the propensity to see slightly more dissatisfaction than satisfaction among respondents' contacts. The last column in Table 1 displays the mean satisfaction in the network according to the individual stance. Dissatisfied individuals are those who report on average the more dissatisfaction in their network.

The information collected about the social network contacts and the respondents was used to compute the second explanatory variable. *Voter–network difference* measures the difference between a voter and his named contacts' satisfaction. Instead of using a rough 'mean' variable which would not capture the proximity to each single contact, this variable is operationalized as a measure of the Euclidean distance between the voter and each social network contact, thereby following advice in the field of egocentric network data analysis (Perry et al. 2018, pp. 170–171). To ease the comparison between the voter and the network contacts, political satisfaction

⁵ We mean people who skipped the question or provided typos, numbers, names of famous people/characters, or still pseudonyms instead of first names. Respondents were precisely asked to avoid pseudonymization, while an additional letter had to be reported aside people with similar first names.

⁶ Comparisons between the dropped and the analysed sample can be found in Appendix 2. No statistical difference has been found regarding the respondents' satisfaction with democracy, their predisposition to vote for radical parties, and their gender. At the same time, some discrepancy must be highlighted concerning age, education level, and political interest. In this case, the respondents included in the analysis are moderately older, more educated, and slightly less interested in politics.



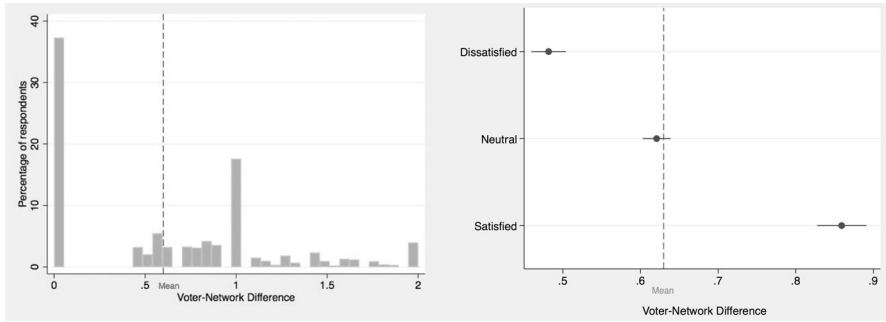


Fig. 1 Distribution of the variable ‘voter–network difference’ (left panel) and mean per satisfaction group (right panel)

was used as a 3-point anchor: dissatisfied, neutral, and satisfied. *Voter–network difference* ranges from 0 (all the network contacts belong to the same group than the respondent) to 2 (all the network contacts belong to another group), allowing to test the two side of the moderation hypothesis with one single term. The mean is 0.6 and the distribution is skewed toward 0 (see Fig. 1): 37% of respondents gave exactly the same score than themselves to all their network contacts, i.e., a fully congruent pattern in which the voter’s stance is perceived to be shared by all network contacts. Yet, it shows also the bias of social projection is quite limited since the other 63% present variations among their social network contacts. Finally, this variable does not allow, alone, to take into consideration whether the respondent and the network contacts converge/diverge about positive or negative views on democracy. It is considered as moderator variable, which will only make sense by interacting with the individual-level group of satisfaction. Looking at the means by satisfaction categories (right-hand panel in Fig. 1), dissatisfied respondents show slightly more homogeneous networks (mean closer to 0) than satisfied respondents.

Modeling strategy

In terms of modeling strategy, given that our main dependent variables are binary, two different logistic regression models in Stata were run for the odds’ estimation. To test the first expectation, the first model used the respondents who did not intend to vote for radical parties as the reference group (0). Are introduced as independent variables the individual-level satisfaction (categorical), the voter–network difference (continuous) and an interaction term between these two variables. This is crucial because it makes possible to interpret the moderation played by the *Voter–network difference* for our group of interest (i.e., dissatisfied voters), which the more the term will increase, the more it will mean that their social network contacts are different and tend to be satisfied. Throughout the analysis, the group of satisfied voters is used as reference in order to clearly differentiate the patterns for dissatisfied voters. The results for the neutral category are reported but not discussed since we had no specific expectation for them. In order to check whether the effects remain significant



Table 2 Logistic regression model predicting the probability to vote for radical parties

DV = radical vote (Ref: No.)	(1) Logit coeff.	(2) Odds ratio	(1) Logit coeff.	(2) Odds ratio
Individual satisfaction (ref = satisfied)				
1. Dissatisfied	2.706*** (0.193)	14.97*** (2.901)	2.249*** (0.218)	9.483*** (2.018)
2. Neutral	1.327*** (0.229)	3.768*** (0.865)	1.418*** (0.245)	4.129*** (1.013)
Voter–network difference	0.282 (0.158)	1.325 (0.209)	0.262 (0.165)	1.300 (0.214)
Individual satisfaction # voter–network diff				
1. Dissatisfied # voter–network difference	– 0.787*** (0.180)	0.455*** (0.082)	– 0.600** (0.192)	0.549** (0.105)
2. Neutral # voter–network difference	– 0.190 (0.242)	0.827 (0.200)	– 0.358 (0.256)	0.699 (0.179)
Control variables				
Constant	– 3.001*** (0.183)	0.0497*** (0.009)	– 0.863 (0.447)	0.422 (0.189)
Pseudo R^2	11.6	11.6	22.4	22.4
Observations	4887	4887	4835	4835

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

afterward, the second step of our model introduces a series of control variables (sociodemographic profile and other political attitudes/behaviors), which all have been shown to affect the probability to vote for radical parties (see Appendix 4 for their operationalization). For the testing of the second hypothesis, we replicated the same model except that we use voters expressing other protest behaviors as category of reference (0) (versus 1 = moderate voters). Voters of radical parties are not considered in the second model given that it seeks to explain the voting behaviors of dissatisfied citizens who do not vote for radical parties.

Analysis and findings

Table 2 reports the outcomes of logistic regressions of the binary decision to vote for radical parties. The model shows that the group of Belgian citizens who were dissatisfied with democracy has higher probability to vote for radical parties, confirming most existing studies on voters of radical parties in Belgium (Goovaerts et al. 2020) and Europe (Droste 2021) and emphasizing the capacity for these parties to attract among citizens who are discontent with the way democracy works.

More interestingly, the interaction between individual satisfaction and the difference with social network contacts is statistically significant, while displaying a



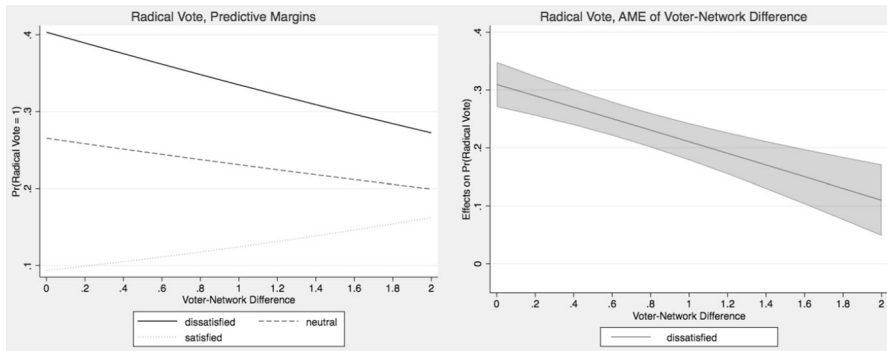


Fig. 2 Predictive margins and average marginal effects of voter–network difference on the probability to vote for radical parties. NB: control variables are included. 95% CI are displayed only on the right-hand graph

negative coefficient for the group of dissatisfied voters.⁷ It means that the more a dissatisfied voter perceives difference in his/her network, the less positive is the effect of his/her own dissatisfaction on the probability to vote for radical parties. These results suggest that when dissatisfied voters tend to perceive their network contacts leaning toward satisfaction, their odds to vote for radical parties decreases substantially. The introduction of control variables did not modify the significance and the signs of the coefficients (slightly lowered their magnitude) and hence increased the robustness of our model and its explanatory power (from 11 to 22% of pseudo R^2).

In order to better interpret the model outcomes, we plotted Fig. 2. The left-hand graph reports the predicted margins for each satisfaction category⁸ whereas the right-hand graph displays the average marginal effects of *voter–network difference* only for the group of dissatisfied voters (95% confidence intervals included). The latter illustrates well the moderation effect. It shows that dissatisfied voters who believe that all their contacts are discontent too (i.e., very left on the second graph) reach the highest chances to vote for radical parties. In other words, the less different are the contacts compared to the dissatisfied voter, the more positive is the impact of his individual dissatisfaction on the probability to vote for radical parties (positive moderation). Then, the graph shows that the odds of voting for a radical party decrease the more dissatisfied voters see their contacts different and converging toward being satisfied (negative moderation). A dissatisfied citizen who believes that all his contacts are satisfied unlike him/her (*voter–network difference* = 2) has more than twice less chances to vote for a radical party than a dissatisfied individual

⁷ The robustness check analyses have shown that the model still remains significant with the original five-category variables. Both main and interaction effects remain significant for both categorical and continuous variables.

⁸ Consistent with the theoretical argument and the expectations, it is worth noting that the moderation effect works also for the group of satisfied voters: as far as the voter–network difference goes up for them (i.e., satisfied voters' network contacts are less satisfied), the probability of voting for radical parties increases.



Table 3 Logistic regression model predicting the probability to protest voting

DV = protest voting (Ref: institutionalized parties)	Logit coefficients	Odds ratio
Individual satisfaction (ref = Satisfied)		
1. Dissatisfied	1.689*** (0.305)	5.413*** (1.650)
2. Neutral	1.204*** (0.334)	3.334*** (1.113)
Voter–network similarity	0.455* (0.213)	1.576* (0.336)
Ind. satisfaction × voter–network difference		
1. Dissatisfied # voter–network difference	− 0.763** (0.260)	0.466** (0.121)
2. Neutral # voter–network difference	− 0.893** (0.331)	0.409** (0.135)
Control variables	Yes	Yes
Constant	− 2.384*** (0.641)	0.107*** (0.068)
Observations	4215	4215
Pseudo R^2 (%)	16.95	16.95

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

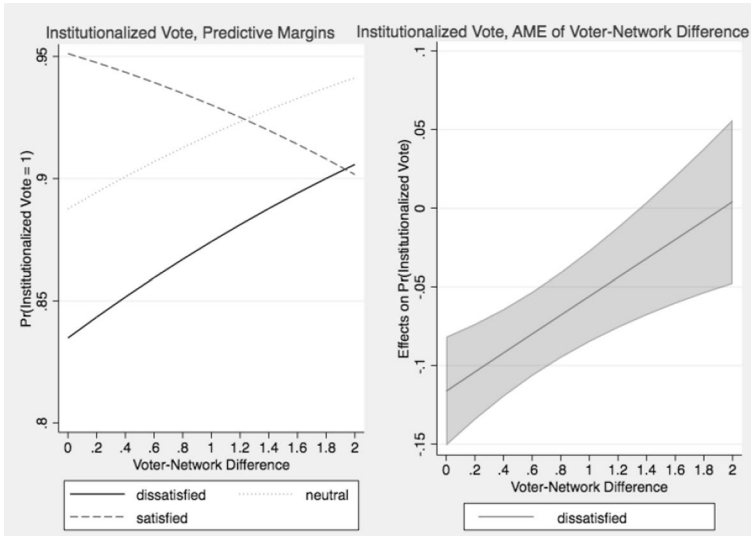


Fig. 3 Predictive margins and average marginal effects of voter–network difference on the probability to vote for institutionalized parties. NB: control variables are included. 95% CI are displayed only on the right-hand graph



who perceives all of them dissatisfied like him/her (*voter–network difference* = 0). This demonstrates that the difference perceived with network contacts in terms of satisfaction plays as moderator: it can foster or lower the propensity to vote for radical parties among dissatisfied voters, depending on the similarity or difference with network contacts.

Yet, one part of the story remains unanswered. If the vote of these dissatisfied citizens is not captured by radical parties, where does it go then? In order to refine the analysis, we discussed hereafter the outcomes of the second model (Table 3), which is run on a subsample excluding voters of radical parties but using blank and micro-party voters.

The results give support to our second hypothesis and more largely to our moderation argument. The model and the related figures presented below (Fig. 3) confirm that dissatisfied voters who do not cast for radical parties are very likely to be protest voters, who express themselves through other protest behaviors like voting blank or for micro-parties. Yet, the results stress that this finding holds only when dissatisfied voters perceive all or a majority of their close network contacts dissatisfied like themselves. In contrast, when they increasingly perceive satisfaction among their network contacts, the probability to turn toward institutionalized parties, which are probably favored by network contacts, increases. In other words, the voter–network difference moderates negatively the chances for a dissatisfied citizen to be protest voter but positively the odds of being moderate voter. Overall, this suggests that the perceptions of social network contacts, at least regarding their political satisfaction, are crucial to understand why people (do not) turn more largely into being protest voters.

Discussion

We think that the two theoretical network mechanisms underpinned in our theoretical review can help to better interpret the findings yielded so far. On one side of the moderation, our results could support the ‘echo chamber’ thesis and the fact that the radical/protest voting behaviors are very likely to form when citizens are embedded in like-minded networks, in which the share of political information occurs between people dissatisfied with political system. Moreover, since voters of radical parties tend also to hold populist attitudes (as supported by the positive effect of the populist scale in our model), our results seem in line with studies emphasizing the homogeneous features of the interpersonal networks of populist voters and their tendency to evolve in a reinforcing social environment that holds negative attitude toward representative democracy (Campus et al. 2015). Besides sharing information negative toward the political system and the elites, an ‘echo chamber’ configuration implies high normative pressure to conformity. Therefore, when dissatisfaction is the perceived majority norm in the network, the dissatisfied voter is probably brought to think that most social network contacts will vote for radical parties or protest in the booth via other channels (blank vote, micro-parties). The negative perceptions of these close contacts provide thus with the social support and acceptance necessary to legitimize and reinforce the voter’s trustworthiness in voting for radical parties



(or, if not, in adopting other protest voting behaviors). Similarly, when social networks function as echo chambers, voters are known to overestimate small/underdog parties' chances of winning, what in turn increases the likelihood to vote for these parties (Fredén et al. 2020). Since radical parties in Belgium remain challenger and low institutionalized parties, perceiving social network contacts mostly discontent could send signals to a dissatisfied voter that these 'underdog' radical parties have greater chances to be voted, what in turn reinforces his own intention.

On the other side of the moderation, our results more crucially point out that being in contact with positive views on democracy is a factor that can impede radical/protest behaviors among dissatisfied voters. When the sources and the messages are less challenging toward the political system and the elites, this seems to make dissatisfied people more reflexive about casting a radical vote. In such a minority configuration, dissatisfied voters are brought to learn and ponder political information, which is disseminated by people who have positive views and probably hold moderate party preferences. From that, dissatisfied voters become probably more aware and tolerant with alternative options and turn toward institutionalized parties. Our findings could thus echo those studies stressing the importance of interpersonal deliberation, political disagreement, or still network heterogeneity made of cross-cutting views (Mutz 2002), and so by making people more open-minded and less tempted by extreme choices. Not casting a radical/protest can be also interpreted as a way to avoid political conflict with socially important contacts, which occurrence could jeopardize the equilibrium and the harmony of the network. Furthermore, our results could mean that perceived satisfaction exerts a normative cross-pressure as not to vote for radical parties or not to adopt other protest choices among dissatisfied voters (social stigma). If they hold minority view compared to their network contacts, it could be that the social taboo remains as they are pushed to believe that voting radical and protest voting behaviors is not socially accepted, most people with whom they socially conform adopting more institutionalized voting choices. Hence, perceiving satisfaction among network contacts sends signals to a dissatisfied voter that radical parties have very low chances to be voted (or that other protest behaviors are "useless"), what in turn seem to increase their odds of voting for institutionalized parties. This kind of strategic decision-making mechanism has been somehow confirmed through natural experiments. Zou et al. (2015) established for instance that strategic voting decision rests on the approval of popular opinions inside a group, people converging toward the majority choice.

Conclusion

In the last election, Belgian voters have increasingly expressed their preferences for radical parties. Like in many other European democracies, one trait of Belgian citizens voting for radical parties is to be dissatisfied with the way democracy works, whatever they locate on the left or on the right side of the ideological spectrum. However, radical parties are not attracting the vote of all politically dissatisfied citizens. To explain why dissatisfied voters may opt or not for radical parties, the article explored their social networks and the perceived similarity/



difference with their close contacts in terms of satisfaction. Based on an analysis of the data gathered by the 2019s *RepResent Belgian Elections Study*, the subjective evaluations of these contacts are shown to moderate the relationship between the individual dissatisfaction and the probability to vote for a radical party (or, if not, to adopt other protest voting behaviors). We demonstrate that when dissatisfied voters perceive their network contacts dissatisfied like themselves, their probability to vote for a radical party is moderated positively and reinforced. Yet, their chances to vote for radical parties are moderated negatively the more the difference and the satisfaction increase in their network, stressing a dissuasion effect. Furthermore, our study demonstrates that dissatisfied citizens who do not vote for radical parties are very likely to be protest voters who voice via other behaviors (voting blank or for micro-parties), but only when they perceive their social network contacts politically dissatisfied like themselves. This probability decreases if the perceived difference (and hence the satisfaction) increases in the network, turning these dissatisfied voters toward moderate, institutionalized parties.

In order to further interpret the moderation induced by the perceived difference between the voter and the close network contacts, we discussed two potential explanatory mechanisms occurring within social networks: information sharing and normative pressure. A major limitation of our study is not to properly test each of these network mechanisms. This calls for further research that we think should be rooted into more elaborated experimental survey design. Experimental manipulations might be particularly useful also to disentangle the causality issue inherent to network-based research and to empirically distinguish social influence from social selection effects (VanderWeele and An 2013). Indeed, the other way around regarding the present study, it might be that someone's willingness to vote for radical parties affects their self-reported satisfaction with democracy but also their thinking about the satisfaction levels of their network contacts. Furthermore, given the high degree of digital activity of radical parties, especially in Belgium (Paulis et al. 2021), as well as the 'bubble' it generates among their supporters on social media (Schumann et al. 2021), another path might be to enquire more closely citizens' online social networks as sources of information and pressure, and how they impact the vote for radical parties. Finally, other potential theoretical explanations of why dissatisfied citizens do not vote for radical parties would be worth a particular attention (e.g., ideological discrepancy).

Overall, the main originality of our study is to show that majority/minority perceptions affect the chances for a dissatisfied voter (not) to cast a ballot in favor of radical parties (or more largely to express a protest vote), and we might expect to observe the same pattern beyond the Belgian framework. Yet, only comparative studies considering voters and their network could give the final say on the generalization of our findings and their applicability to other contexts. By and large, we think that our findings contribute to demonstrate that voters should be studied also through their social networks, which exert a role in defining the acceptability of voting preferences. What matters is not only how one perceives politics but also how he believes his close contacts perceive politics too.



Appendix 1: Representativeness of our final sample (in %)

	Flanders			Wallonia			Brussels		
	(1)	(2)	Pop	(1)	(2)	Pop	(1)	(2)	Pop
Gender									
Male	55.4	49.5	49.5	48.4	48.8	48.8	49.4	48.9	48.9
Female	44.6	50.5	50.5	51.6	51.2	51.2	50.6	51.1	51.1
Age									
18–29	16.1	17.7	17.7	16.5	19.3	19.3	21.9	23.5	23.5
30–44	21.1	24.2	24.2	25.5	24.7	24.7	26.1	33.0	33.0
45–64	36.4	34.5	34.5	39.3	34.2	34.2	32.3	31.2	31.2
65+	26.4	23.6	23.6	18.7	21.8	21.8	19.7	12.3	12.3
Education									
Basic	13.0	27.0	27.0	15.6	33.1	33.1	10.2	24.3	24.3
Middle	40.0	41.6	41.6	34.7	39.5	39.5	25.8	36.5	36.5
High	47.0	31.4	31.4	49.7	27.4	27.4	64.0	39.2	39.2
Vote				Belgium (federal level)			Population		
				(1)	(2)				
Radical right (VB + PP)				9.9	11.3		13.0		
Social Democrats (SP.a + PS)				14.0	14.8		16.2		
Regionalists (N-VA + DéFI)				19.0	18.4		18.2		
Greens (Groen + Ecolo)				18.7	17.5		12.2		
Christian Dem. (CD&V + CDH)				8.8	8.2		12.6		
Liberals (Open VLD + MR)				15.7	15.1		16.1		
Radical left (PVDA + PTB)				10.9	11.7		8.6		
Other				2.9	3.0		3.1		

(1) = Unweighted final sample; (2) = Weighted final sample. Official Belgian Population Statistics for 2019 were accessed via statbel.fgov.be

Appendix 2: Comparison between the raw and the final sample

	Raw EOS sample	Final sample	Δ
Gender			
Male	51.7	51.0	- 0.7
Female	48.3	49.0	+ 0.7
Age			
18–29	16.5	19.2	- + 2.7
30–44	22.8	24.1	+ 1,3
45–64	35.7	34.4	- 1.3



	Raw EOS sample	Final sample	Δ
65+	25.0	22.3	- 2.7
Education			
Basic	12.7	28.1	+ 15.4
Middle	37.1	40.4	+ 3.3
High	50.1	31.5	- 18.6
SWD			
Dissatisfied	40.1	42.3	+ 2.2
Neutral	32.1	31.9	- 0.2
Satisfied	27.8	25.8	- 2.0
Political interest			
Not interested	30.7	31.5	+ 0.8
Neutral	13.7	13.2	- 0.5
Interested	55.7	55.4	- 0.3
Vote			
Radical right (VB + PP)	10.2	9.9	- 0.3
Social democrats (SP.a + PS)	13.2	14.0	+ 0.8
Regionalists (N-VA + DéFI)	19.7	19.0	- 0.7
Greens (Groen + Ecolo)	19.0	18.7	- 0.3
Christian Dem. (CD&V + CDH)	9.0	8.8	- 0.2
Liberals (Open VLD + MR)	15.7	15.7	=
Radical left (PVDA + PTB)	10.2	10.9	+ 0.7
Other	3.0	2.9	+ 0.1

Appendix 3: Comparison of satisfaction with democracy across European countries (RepResent and ESS data)

ESS data	Mean (2018)	Cumulative mean (2002–2018)
Belgium	5.4	5.4
Austria	6.4	5.9
Denmark	7.3	7.2
Finland	6.4	6.4
France	4.4	4.6
Germany	5.8	5.6
Italy	5.1	4.6
Netherlands	6.4	6.1
Spain	4.8	5.1
Sweden	6.4	6.5
UK	5.1	5.1



Source European Social Survey Cumulative File, ESS 1–9 (2020). Data file edition 1.0. NSD—Norwegian Centre for Research Data, Norway—Data Archive and distributor of ESS data for ESS ERIC. <https://doi.org/10.21338/NSD-ESS-CUMULATIVE>

Appendix 4: Control variables' operationalization and descriptive statistics

- **Satisfaction toward income** Respondents were provided a Likert-scale ranging from 0 (very dissatisfied) to 10 (very satisfied). A higher score indicates a higher satisfaction toward the general income level of their household ($M=6.20$, $SD=2.19$).
- **Political interest** Respondents were asked to what extent they were interested in politics. Responses are provided using a scale ranging from 0 (not at all interested) to 10 (very interested). A higher score indicates a higher interest in politics ($M=5.64$, $SD=2.85$).
- **Left–right self-placement and left–right curvilinear** A classical question of ideological self-positioning asked respondents to place themselves on the left–right scale, ranging 0 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right). However, since the main category of the dependent variable in our model (Voting for radical parties) combine both left and right voters, this left–right scale turned inappropriate as a measure of ideological voting. This is why we included also the left–right curvilinear variable (squaring the left–right main value), in order to capture the likelihood for the extreme position (in both the left and right spectrum) to vote for radical parties compared to the moderate positions.
- **Populist attitude** In the *RepResent Belgian Elections Study*, respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the following statements: « Politicians must follow the people's opinion», « Political opposition is greater between citizens and elite than among citizens», « I prefer being represented by ordinary citizen than professional politician» and « Rich citizens have bigger influence on policies than poor citizens». A Likert-scale ranging from 1 (Totally disagree), 2 (Partially disagree), 3 (neither disagree or disagree), 4 (Partially agree) and 5 (Totally agree) was displayed to the respondents. Cronbach's alpha for this scale measuring populist attitude is 0.73 ($M=3.68$, $SD=0.72$) A higher score indicates a stronger populist attitude. This variable controls thus for anti-elitist attitude, which is one defining characteristics of radical parties' voters in Europe.
- **Issue voting** In order to account for issue voting, we took into the account the most important issue which drove the vote. Respondents were asked “*If you could vote for the elections today, what would be the most important issue in determining your vote?*”. They could choose from a list of 10 different issues (by order of importance in the sample): Immigration (17.5%), Environment (16.8%), Employment (15.2%), Social Security (13.4%), Taxation (11.9%), Economy (10.7%), Crime (6.79), Functioning of Democracy (4.5%), State Reforms (2.5%) and Defense (0.38%) Immigration was used as reference issue in our model since previous research found that attitudes toward migrants are strong markers of radical right (anti) and left (pro) voters.



- Political participation** Respondents were asked to what frequency they engaged in different kind of political behavior. We then conceived two different scales of political participation. *Conventional Participation* is composed of five items representing different forms of institutionalized, party-based participation, varying from: « Actively participated in a political party», « Displayed a poster of a political party or politician», « Contacted a political by post or email», « Being active in a social movement or interest group», and « Expressing opinion on politics on social media». A Likert-scale ranging from 1 (never), 2 (rarely), 3 (sometimes) and 4 (often) was displayed ($M=1.44$, $SD=0.61$). Cronbach's alpha for the conventional participation scale was 0.83. *Unconventional participation* scale groups less institutionalized actions vary from: « Bought or refused to buy products for political ethical, environmental reasons», « Signing a petition online or offline», « Participated in an action of protest, a protest march or demonstration», and « Breaking the rules for political reasons». The same Likert-scale ranging from 1 (never), 2 (rarely), 3 (sometimes) and 4 (often) was displayed ($M=1.67$, $SD=0.69$). Cronbach's alpha for the unconventional participation scale was 0.78. In both scales, higher scores indicate a stronger participation.
- Sociodemographic profile** Basic demographic characteristics of respondents are also included in the model: gender, age, education and region residence. Their distributions and representativeness are described in Appendix 1.

Appendix 5: Full model outcomes—with control variables displayed (and weighted)

Model 1

DV = radical vote (ref: no.)	(1) Logit coeff	(2) Odds ratio	(1) Logit coeff	(2) Odds ratio
Political satisfaction (ref = Satisfied)				
1. Dissatisfied	2.583*** (0.228)	13.25*** (3.031)	2.139*** (0.254)	8.489*** (2.157)
2. Neutral	1.172*** (0.269)	3.229*** (0.871)	1.218*** (0.290)	3.316*** (0.981)
Voter–network difference	0.159 (0.191)	1.172 (0.224)	0.119 (0.200)	1.127 (0.224)
Political satisfaction#voter–network diff				
1. Dissatisfied#voter–network difference	– 0.692** (0.217)	0.501** (0.109)	– 0.514** (0.234)	0.598** (0.142)
2. Neutral#voter–network difference	– 0.115 (0.288)	0.891 (0.256)	– 0.251 (0.302)	0.778 (0.235)
Gender (ref = female)			0.345*** (0.100)	1.412*** (0.141)



Satisfied unlike me? How the perceived difference with close...

DV = radical vote (ref: no.)	(1) Logit coeff	(2) Odds ratio	(1) Logit coeff	(2) Odds ratio
Age			- 0.025*** (0.003)	0.975*** (0.003)
Education			- 0.215*** (0.051)	0.806*** (0.041)
Satisfaction with income			- 0.065** (0.022)	0.937** (0.021)
Political_Interest			- 0.041* (0.021)	0.960* (0.020)
Left-right self-placement			- 0.514*** (0.067)	0.598*** (0.040)
Left-right curvilinear			0.053*** (0.006)	1.055*** (0.007)
Conventional participation			- 0.154 (0.094)	0.857 (0.081)
Unconventional participation			0.310*** (0.087)	1.363*** (0.119)
Populist attitude			0.460*** (0.084)	1.584*** (0.133)
Region of residence (ref=Flanders)				
Brussels			- 0.669*** (0.161)	0.512*** (0.082)
Wallonia			0.088 (0.107)	1.091 (0.117)
Issue importance (ref = migration)				
1. Crime			- 0.591** (0.211)	0.554** (0.117)
2. Defense			- 0.813 (0.701)	0.443 (0.311)
3. Economy			- 1.026*** (0.187)	0.358*** (0.067)
4. Employment			- 0.947*** (0.171)	0.388*** (0.066)
5. Environment			- 1.445*** (0.182)	0.235*** (0.043)
6. Functioning of democracy			- 1.274*** (0.262)	0.280*** (0.073)
7. Social security			- 0.446** (0.163)	0.640** (0.104)
8. State reforms			- 0.726** (0.261)	0.484** (0.126)
9. Taxation			- 0.691*** (0.164)	0.501*** (0.082)



DV = radical vote (ref: no.)	(1) Logit coeff	(2) Odds ratio	(1) Logit coeff	(2) Odds ratio
Constant	- 2.747*** (0.217)	0.064*** (0.013)	- 0.726 (0.559)	0.484 (0.271)
Pseudo R^2	11.6	11.6	21.8	21.8
Observations	4850	4850	4804	4804

Robust standard errors in parentheses. NB: data are weighted

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Model 2 (Subsample with voters of radical parties excluded)

DV = Institutionalized vote (Ref: protest vote, i.e., voting blank or for micro-parties)	(1) logit coeff	(2) Odds ratio
Political satisfaction (ref = satisfied)		
1. Dissatisfied	1.483*** (0.976)	4.405*** (1.577)
2. Neutral	0.980* (0.394)	2.663** (0.118)
Voter–network difference	- 0.407 (0.249)	1.502 (0.373)
Political satisfaction#voter–network difference		
1. Dissatisfied#voter–network difference	- 0.767* (0.300)	0.464* (0.139)
2. Neutral#voter–network difference	- 0.793* (0.395)	0.452* (0.179)
Gender (ref = female)	- 0.016 (0.142)	0.984 (0.140)
Age	0.007 (0.004)	0.993 (0.004)
Education	- 0.180* (0.070)	0.836* (0.059)
Region of residence (ref = Flanders)		
Brussels	0.475* (0.217)	1.608* (0.349)
Wallonia	0.801*** (0.159)	2.229*** (0.355)
Satisfaction with income	- 0.099** (0.031)	0.905** (0.028)
Political_interest	- 0.218*** (0.027)	0.804*** (0.022)
Left–right self-placement	0.155 (0.118)	1.168 (0.138)
Left–right extremity	- 0.007 (0.010)	0.993 (0.010)



Satisfied unlike me? How the perceived difference with close...

DV = Institutionalized vote (Ref: protest vote, i.e., voting blank or for micro-parties)	(1) logit coeff	(2) Odds ratio
Conventional participation	– 0.212 (0.153)	0.819 (0.124)
Unconventional participation	0.016 (0.129)	1.016 (0.132)
Populist attitude	0.121 (0.109)	1.128 (0.123)
Issue importance (ref = migration)		
Crime	0.152 (0.279)	1.164 (0.325)
Defense	– 0.268 (0.884)	0.765 (0.677)
Economy	– 0.459 (0.284)	0.632 (0.180)
Employment	– 0.284 (0.239)	0.753 (0.180)
Environment	– 0.492 (0.257)	0.612 (0.157)
Functioning of democracy	0.459 (0.297)	1.582 (0.469)
Social security	– 0.075 (0.255)	0.928 (0.237)
State reforms	– 0.149 (0.485)	0.861 (0.418)
Taxation	0.198 (0.240)	1.219 (0.293)
Constant	– 1.571 (0.811)	0.209 (0.169)
Observations	4188	4188
Pseudo R^2 (%)	16.85	16.85

Robust standard errors in parentheses. NB: data are weighted

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Declarations

Conflict of Interest The author declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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