



In with the New and Out with the Old? Competition and Electoral Specialisation among Europe's Radical Left. The cases of Portugal, Greece, and France¹

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Abstract: The European radical left is not a homogeneous ideological family. While in most European countries there is a single radical left party with parliamentary representation, in some country's electoral competition between classical communist parties and new radical left parties is common, with both gaining sustained parliamentary representation. However, how voters behave accordingly has not been studied. This article therefore uses data from the ten rounds of the European Social Survey covering thirteen elections held between 2000 and 2020 in Portugal, Greece and France to study the nature of electoral competition between these formations, as well as voter profiles. Our study reaffirms realignment theories, finding that competition occurs on both socio-demographic and socio-cultural axes. We find that parties specialise in attracting their electorates, avoiding cross-pressures. Thus, the communists attract an older, less educated and more union-affiliated electorate, which is also more Eurosceptic, more critical of immigration and ideologically more left-wing.

Keywords: electoral behavior; Radical left; Political parties; Europe.

ES ¿Lo nuevo entra y lo viejo sale? Competición y especialización electoral en la izquierda radical europea. Los casos de Portugal, Grecia y Francia

Resumen: La izquierda radical europea no es una familia ideológica homogénea. Aunque en la mayoría de los países europeos existe un único partido de izquierda radical con representación parlamentaria, en algunos países es habitual la competición electoral entre los clásicos partidos comunistas y los nuevos partidos de izquierda radical, obteniendo ambos representación parlamentaria de forma sostenida. Sin embargo, no se ha estudiado cómo se comportan los votantes en consecuencia. Por ello, este artículo utiliza datos de las diez rondas de la Encuesta Social Europea que abarcan trece elecciones celebradas entre 2000 y 2020 en Portugal, Grecia y Francia para estudiar la naturaleza de la competencia electoral entre estas formaciones, así como los perfiles de los votantes. Nuestro estudio reafirma las teorías del realineamiento, constatando que la competencia se produce tanto en el eje sociodemográfico como en el sociocultural. Constatamos que los partidos se especializan en la atracción de sus electorados, evitando presiones cruzadas. Así, los comunistas atraen a un electorado de más edad, con un nivel educativo más bajo y mayor afiliación sindical, que también es más euroescéptico, más crítico con la inmigración e ideológicamente más de izquierdas.

Palabras clave: comportamiento electoral; izquierda radical; partidos políticos; Europa.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. Electoral competition between communist and new radical left parties. 3. Theory and hypothesis. 4. Data and methods. 5. Results. 6. Conclusions and limitations. 7. Bibliography.

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1. Introduction

The research on Europe's radical-left parties and their voters has been a relatively understudied area within contemporary political science. Forecasts predicting the disappearance of this electoral option following the fall of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe, as well as the secondary position these parties have generally held within Europe's political systems, have diverted academic attention away from this phenomenon (March and Mudde, 2005). However, political upheavals following the Great Recession have brought this family of parties back into the limelight, polling significant successes. In several cases, radical-left parties have even surpassed traditional socialist parties –such as SYRIZA in Greece or France Insoumise in France– or exerted clear influence on national governments, as seen with the Geringonça in Portugal or Unidas Podemos in Spain. Nonetheless, research on the radical left remains far behind studies on other political families, with significant knowledge gaps still remaining.

There is consensus in defining this ideological family. Radical left parties (RLPs) are characterised by their opposition to the socioeconomic structure of capitalism and neoliberal policies, as well as their advocacy of structural transformation, although this issue is not a clearly defined proposal. The discourse primarily focuses on criticising capitalism and advocating state intervention to promote redistribution and reduce inequalities (Gómez *et al.*, 2016; March, 2011).

Nevertheless, Europe's radical left is far from constituting a homogeneous family (March, 2011; Gómez *et al.*, 2016; Backes and Moureau, 2008). During the 20th century, the division within this family was between communist parties, created under the auspices of the Third International, and socialist left parties, which emerged decades later, diverging from Leninist orthodoxy (Gómez *et al.*, 2016). The end of Soviet socialism helped to close this gap, due mainly to the adaptation strategies adopted by most communist parties in the 1980s (Gómez and Ramiro, 2022), abandoning orthodoxy and embracing the demands of the new left.

A handful of communist parties resisted these ideological and organisational changes, remaining committed to traditional Marxist principles in terms of both their agenda and identity, thus creating a new schism within the far left (Gómez *et al.*, 2016). These parties were the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), the Communist Party of Portugal (PCP), and the Communist Party of France (PCF), in this last case following a brief flirtation with Eurocommunism. This political immobility led to the disaffection of grassroots members, eventually forming new parties that competed electorally, with both options consistently gaining parliamentary representation over time. These latter parties are the Greek Coalition of Left and Ecology Movements (SYNAPSISMOS) - later renamed the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), the Portuguese Left Bloc (BE), and the French Left Party, later renamed France Insoumise (FI).

Our research addresses this field because despite recent progress in the study of RLPs, especially following the publication of "Radical left voters in Western Europe" (Gómez and Ramiro, 2022), due attention has yet to be paid to electoral competition between communist parties and new RLPs within the same country. This is pertinent because this competition, sustained over time, implies electoral specialisation regarding the type of social base attracted. The limited research in this area has focused on case studies (Ramiro and Gómez, 2017; Gago, 2023), or has addressed the phenomenon by jointly analysing the electorates of both subfamilies, without considering whether there is local electoral competition (Gómez *et al.*, 2016).

Our findings will thus contribute to the literature on radical left voters, especially those considered by Gómez and Ramiro (2022), who aimed to describe them accordingly. We anticipate that electoral competition and subsequent specialisation will define the social bases of the competing parties, informing two distinct profiles.

The article begins with a theoretical framework based on a review of the literature on the European radical left and electoral competition between communist parties and new RLPs. Following this, we present the main research hypotheses, theoretically framed, leading to a description of the data, methods, and empirical strategy for testing the proposed hypotheses. The analysis is then conducted, and the results are presented, followed by a summary of the findings and the main contributions in the conclusions.

2. Electoral competition between communist and new radical left parties

An explanation of the electoral competition within Europe's radical left requires studying the crisis of its communist parties, which began in the early 1980s. These parties had to confront not only the fall of the Soviet bloc but also the consequences of social modernisation and technological change, which led to the collapse of their main electoral base, the industrial working class (Lazar, 1998; Bull and Heywood, 1994), on the back of the growing complexity of social stratification (Oesch, 2006). These parties also had to contend with cultural change in the West, which shifted the interests of new social sectors away from the material concerns characteristic of communist parties (Inglehart, 1977) and triggered the emergence of new forms of political debate (Kriesi, 2012).

This situation prompted communist parties to deploy new strategies to avoid their disappearance (Gómez *et al.*, 2016). On the one hand, there were parties that distanced themselves from communist identity and its traditional agenda, embracing the values and causes of the new left, becoming red-green parties, such as the communist parties of the Netherlands, Finland, and Sweden, or adopting social democratic positions, as in the case of the Communist Party of Italy (Gómez and Ramiro, 2022). On the other hand, a minority of communist parties resisted these ideological or organisational changes, remaining faithful to Marxist orthodoxy. The clearest examples of immobility were the cases of the Communist Party of Greece and the Communist Party of Portugal, which still maintain their criticism of liberal democracy and advocate revolutionary struggle (March, 2011). In response to this immobility, cadres and activists abandoned these parties, creating new

RLPs with a more innovative outlook and political mandate, addressing the demands of new social movements (Castaño, 2019). These new left formations ended up competing at the polls with the traditional communist parties, although both have gone on to win seats in their respective parliaments.

In the Greek case, the original split involved the Eurocommunist sector of the KKE in 1968, following the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact and the repression of the Prague Spring. The new formation was known as the Interior KKE, later Greek Left. In 1988, the KKE and Greek Left, along with other minority left-wing groups, formed SYNASPISMOS, which left the KKE in 1992 after a tumultuous period in Greek politics, during which SYNASPISMOS formed a coalition government with the conservative New Democracy Party. After the fall of the Soviet bloc, the KKE chose immobility, reaffirming its Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy (Keith and Charalambous, 2016). Following the KKE's withdrawal from SYNASPISMOS, it entered into an alliance with other non-pro-Soviet left forces as an independent party that was eventually named the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), championing new social movements and participatory democracy over KKE's dogmatism (Toloudis, 2015). Since then, the KKE has remained a small opposition party, while SYRIZA has become one of Greece's foremost political players, beating the social democrats at the polls and winning the presidency of the government between 2015 and 2019. After this government, a leftist group called the European Realistic Disobedience Front (MeRA25) split from SYRIZA, but it only gained parliamentary representation in 2019, winning no seats in the two general elections in 2023.

Portugal also has a clear partisan and ideological division within the radical left. Historically, the Communist Party of Portugal (PCP) has been the leading far-left party, playing a significant role during Salazar's dictatorship and the Carnation Revolution (25 April 1974). Like the KKE, the PCP remained faithful to Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy after the fall of the Soviet bloc, still considering itself one of the most orthodox communist parties in Western Europe (Lisi, 2009). It is a classic communist party in terms of organisation, ideology, relations with civil society, and strategy (Gómez and Ramiro, 2022). Its electoral results have recorded a gradual and prolonged decline. In response to the PCP's immobility, the Left Bloc was created in 1999 as a more heterogeneous party resulting from the coalition of several minor anti-capitalist formations that shared their criticism of the Soviet model defended by the PCP (Lisi, 2009). These founding parties gradually merged into a single structure, adopting the programmatic commitments of the new left and democratic socialism, along with populist discourses. Both parties have played a relevant role in recent times, supporting the Socialist Party's government between 2015 and 2022.

The last and most complex case involves France, which has also witnessed electoral competition between a communist party and a new left party. For years, the French far left was represented by the French Communist Party (PCF), one of the largest in Western Europe in the 1970s. Despite its participation in the socialist governments of Mitterrand in the 1980s and Jospin in the late 1990s, the PCF gradually lost influence. It suffered a severe electoral crisis due mainly to the collapse of its traditional social base (Gómez and Ramiro, 2022). Following a brief engagement with Eurocommunism, it remained largely orthodox, eventually becoming a minority party and contributing to the fragmentation of the French radical left. In 2009, however, it joined forces with the Left Party led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon for the European elections. Mélenchon, a former prominent figure within the Socialist Party, played a key role in reshaping the French radical left. This party, later renamed France Insoumise (FI), occupied the new left space and followed a populist discourse (Marlière, 2019), running in the presidential and legislative elections in 2012, 2017, and 2022. In 2012, the PCF supported its candidates in both elections, but in 2017 it stood alone in the general elections, and in 2022 it competed in the presidential elections. In short, although the French case is slightly different to the Greek and Portuguese ones due to the problematic relationship between the PCF and FI, which oscillates between collaboration and competition, it also has major similarities, so we have included it in our analysis.

There is a clear consensus in the literature on how to classify the KKE, PCP, and PCF, defining them as traditional communist parties, given their allegiance, even after the fall of the Soviet Union, to the classical ideological principles of Marxism influenced by the Third International (Botella and Ramiro, 2003) and their affiliation with the International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties (EIPCO). In turn, there is also agreement on classifying the BE, FI, and SYRIZA, from the 1990s onwards, as new RLPs, given their openness to new political issues and their distancing from communist symbolism and identity (March, 2011).

The only academic article that has considered the proposal made here is by Gómez *et al.* (2016), which uses data from the Comparative Manifesto Project and the Chapel Hill Expert Survey to report that divergences between parties do not involve economic matters but instead new political issues. While new RLPs maintain more libertarian positions, communist parties defend more conservative positions, even moving away from progressive standpoints, as in the case of the KKE, which voted against the approval of same-sex marriage, or the PCP, which opposed adoption, although none adopts the authoritarian positions associated with the radical right (Gómez and Ramiro, 2022). This article also focuses on voters, albeit without considering whether there is a single radical-left party in a country or several in competition. Similarly, while Gómez and Ramiro (2022) comment on certain differences among voters, they do not study them statistically. In short, there are no studies on the profiles of the voters attracted by competing communist parties and new RLPs.

3. Theory and hypothesis

There are three main theories for explaining recent changes in political preferences and voting behaviour in Western Europe (Kriesi *et al.*, 2012). The first, dealignment, argues that the social cleavages that structure political conflict in industrial societies have lost their relevance, being replaced by issue-based and short-term dynamics (Dalton *et al.*, 1984). At the other extreme, the second approach argues that these cleavages

still explain political competition in Europe, and that the loss of relevance as an explanatory factor in certain elections is due to party strategies that deactivate these sociodemographic loyalties (Caramani, 2004). The third and final approach that informs our research, realignment, argues that changes in recent decades have reformulated traditional cleavages and introduced new dimensions of political conflict involving both voters and parties: on the one hand, traditional economic cleavage, which has nonetheless been modified by transformations in the occupational system (Oesch, 2008), and on the other, sociocultural cleavage, characterised by attitudes towards cosmopolitanism, minority rights, and liberalism/authoritarianism.

This theory is particularly interesting in our case because RLPs typically face a complex dilemma: they have forged heterogeneous social coalitions, attracting both working-class and middle-class voters (Visser *et al.*, 2014), with different positions on the two axes of political conflict (Kitschelt and Rehm, 2015). Thus, adopting more radical positions on the economy could attract working-class voters but alienate the middle classes, with more pragmatic economic positions, while adopting more libertarian positions in sociocultural issues could attract middle-class voters and promote competition with both social democratic parties and green parties, or even prevent their emergence, yet at the same time disaffect traditional working-class voters (Gómez and Ramiro, 2022).

When two radical-left formations compete against each other in the same country, they could cater to different sectors of the electorate (i.e., electoral specialisation). These parties might therefore maximise their potential electorate by avoiding the dilemma of the two dimensions of competition, minimising cross-presures, and ensuring their survival by attracting differentiated voters. This is the overriding premise here, namely, the existence of electoral specialisation, which we develop in four hypotheses, following a similar scheme proposed by Gómez and Ramiro (2022): sociodemographic and sociocultural differences, non-electoral participation, and political discontent and economic voting.

Sociodemographic profiles

The first step is to detail our expectations regarding traditional cleavages. The radical left's historical and ideological connection with the working classes is evident, and its importance remained unchanged until the 1970s, when its explanatory power in electoral performance began to decline due to the emergence of new axes of competition. Since then, the relationship between social class and electoral behaviour has become more complex, going beyond the left's traditional association with the working classes and the rights with the middle and upper classes (Gómez and Ramiro, 2022).

The evolution of the electoral bases of the radical left reflects the connection between communist parties and the traditional working class (Tannahill, 1978), with the strongest links being forged in times of serious upheaval (Michelat and Simon, 2004). Following the recession in the 1970s and the adoption of libertarian positions in sociocultural affairs, some far-left parties began to attract sectors of the educated middle classes with redistributive preferences (Oesch, 2008). Kitschelt (1989) found that these sectors of the middle classes are more attracted to the libertarian positions of the RLPs.

In view of the immobility of communist parties and their difficulty in adopting more libertarian positions on sociocultural issues, as well as their categorisation as traditional parties (March, 2011), we expect to find greater support for the new left among the middle classes, while the traditional working classes will support communist parties.

H1a: We expect communist parties to be more successful in attracting working-class voters than new radical left parties.

H1b: We expect new radical left parties to be more successful in attracting middle-class voters than communist parties.

We also expect to find differences in the level of education of voters, as higher levels of education are associated with more libertarian and post-materialist positions on the sociocultural axis (Ivarsflaten *et al.*, 2010; Lindskog and Oskarson, 2023). It is therefore reasonable to consider that new RLPs that prioritise this axis (Gómez *et al.*, 2016) will attract more educated profiles than communist parties.

H1c: We expect new radical left parties to be more successful in attracting more educated voters than communist parties.

We also expect to find differences in terms of age, both because of research that has reported that new radical left parties are more attractive to younger voters (Prentoulis, 2021) and because of the high correlation between this variable and cosmopolitan and libertarian attitudes and values, which are prioritised by new RLPs (Gómez *et al.*, 2016) and resisted by parties such as the KKE, PCP, and PCF.

H1d: We expect new radical left parties to be more successful in attracting younger voters than communist parties.

Finally, we need to address two variables that although included in the model are not expected to record any differences. Firstly, the urban-rural cleavage, which is crucial for explaining electoral behaviour (Lipset, 1961; Brown and Metter, 2024; Metter and Brown, 2022). In our case, given the link between the radical left and

urban areas and their limited success in rural habitats, albeit with some exceptions, we do not expect to find differences in this variable. Despite the presence of rural strongholds in the case of the PCP, it receives most of its votes in the suburbs of large cities.

H1e: We do not expect to find differences by habitat between communist party voters and new radical-left voters.

Secondly, gender, which despite its importance in explaining electoral behaviour (Oshri *et al.*, 2021; Dassonneville and Kostelka, 2021), is not expected to play a significant role in our case, as previous research has found no relationship between this variable and the differentiation between the new radical left and the traditional left (Gómez *et al.*, 2016).

H1f: We do not expect to find differences by gender between communist party voters and new radical-left voters.

Values, political attitudes, and ideology

As noted, a new sociocultural cleavage has emerged alongside the traditional economic one, characterised by attitudes towards cosmopolitanism, minority rights, and liberalism/authoritarianism.

Values, political attitudes, and ideology are key components in determining electoral preferences. Numerous studies have pointed to the greater prevalence of conservative, authoritarian, and materialistic values among the traditional working classes (Booth, 2021; Abramson and Inglehart, 1987; Inglehart, 2008). This has also been linked to age and education, with older and less educated individuals being more traditionalist than younger and more educated ones (Kitschelt and Rehm, 2015). This is associated with the programmatic differences between the subfamilies of the radical left (Gómez *et al.*, 2016), given that traditional parties, such as the communists, give less priority to progressive cultural positions. Therefore, in line with H1a and these findings, we expect to find differences in voters' values and political attitudes.

Firstly, we expect to find differences in human values, which precede political orientations and ideology, and are associated with electoral preferences (Schwartz, 1994). Such values refer to the principles that people consider important in their lives and guide their behaviour. Schwartz (1992) identified ten main values, which can be grouped into two dimensions: openness to change vs. conservation and self-enhancement vs. transcendence. While previous research has found that new left voters have values closer to both openness to change and transcendence (Marcos-Marné, 2021), we expect communist party voters to differ from them because of their greater conservatism in sociocultural matters. Conversely, we do not expect differences in the second axis of values.

H2a: We expect new left parties to be more successful in attracting voters with values more open to change than communist party voters.

H2b: We do not expect to find differences in the axis of self-enhancement vs. transcendence values between new left voters and communist voters.

Regarding political attitudes, we do not expect to find differences on the economic axis, as left-wing voters defend redistributive positions regardless of the subfamily to which they belong, and such positions are not a source of conflict.

H2c: We do not expect to find differences in redistributive preferences between new left voters and communist voters.

By contrast, and in line with the findings reported by Gómez *et al.* (2016), we do expect differences on the sociocultural axis regarding cultural liberalism. While most RLPs have adopted progressive positions on issues such as minority rights, communist parties have been more reticent. For example, the KKE opposes same-sex marriage (Eleftheriou, 2023), while the PCP is reluctant on the trans issue. Therefore:

H2d: We expect new left radical parties to be more successful in attracting voters with more culturally liberal positions than communist parties.

Another major topic in this new dimension of political competition involves attitudes towards immigration (Erisen and Vasilopoulou, 2022). It is worth noting that no subfamily in Europe's radical left has condemned migration. In fact, both communist parties and new RLPs defend internationalism. Nevertheless, Gómez and Ramiro (2022) have found that some communist voters are less optimistic about the consequences of immigration. We therefore formulate the following hypothesis:

H2e: We expect new radical left parties to be more successful in attracting voters that are more optimistic about the effects of immigration than communist parties.

It is essential to include the issue of Euroscepticism, as the radical left maintains critical positions regarding European integration (Carrieri and Vittori, 2021). Although this is usually associated with opposition to

supranationalism, this is not the case for RLPs, which, unlike radical right-wing parties do not oppose the EU in terms of identity or its cultural threats, but rather base their criticism on the economy (Wagner, 2021). There are, however, programmatic differences between communist parties and new RLPs; while the former maintain Eurosceptic positions, even in favour of withdrawal, new RLPs, although critical of European institutions, call for reform rather than withdrawal (Nikolakakis, 2017; Vasilopoulou, 2018; Lisi, 2019).

H2f: We expect new radical left parties to be more successful in attracting less Eurosceptic voters than communist party voters.

Finally, we include a hypothesis about self-placement on the ideological scale. While it is evident that both sets of voters will be located on the left, we consider that the link between communist parties and traditional Marxist symbolism and ideology mean their voters will have a more radical profile.

H2g: We expect new radical left parties to be more successful in attracting less ideologically radicalised voters than communist parties.

Associationism and non-electoral political participation

Radical-left voters constitute a highly engaged electorate (Gómez and Ramiro, 2022), and the link to social and trade union organisations often serves to explain the nexus between the parties and civil society.

The communist parties of Greece and Portugal have maintained a close relationship with trade unionism. In Greece, the emergence of the Militant Front of All Workers (PAME) cannot be understood without the impetus of the KKE (Tsatakita and Eleftheriou, 2013). In Portugal, the General Confederation of Portuguese Workers (CGTP) has always been heavily influenced by the PCP, serving as a political transmission belt for the party, with part of its leadership affiliated to the PCP (Lisi, 2013). Likewise, the General Confederation of Labor (CGT) in France has historically been linked to the PCF. In contrast, new RLPs have much weaker ties to traditional trade unionism, while they dominate social movements (Tsatakita and Eleftheriou, 2013).

H3a: We expect new left parties to be less successful in attracting unionised individuals than communist parties.

H3b: We expect new left parties to be more successful in attracting individuals who are part of social movements than communist parties.

Finally, new left voters are expected to have higher levels of non-electoral political participation. Firstly, given the greater traditionalism of communist voters, their forms of collective action are more likely to be linked to the trade union-party binomial. Additionally, some studies associate higher non-electoral political participation with libertarian and post-materialist values (Pirro and Portos, 2021), consistent with our hypothesis on the greater prevalence of these values among new left voters. Therefore:

H3c: We expect new left parties to be more successful in attracting individuals with higher levels of non-electoral political participation than communist parties.

Political discontent and economic vote

We present these hypotheses because of their relevance to research on populist parties. Focusing on political discontent, the radical left often adopts anti-establishment discourses, as the electoral channelling of discontent occurs through formations perceived as outsiders (Droste, 2021; van der Brug *et al.*, 2000). Although we anticipate high levels of political discontent in both electorates, we do not expect to find significant differences.

H4a: We do not expect to find differences in political discontent between new left voters and communist voters.

Regarding economic voting, it is important to differentiate between sociotropic and egotropic. While the former refers to economic evaluation in the context of society, the latter refers to the evaluation of one's own personal economy. Both issues have been related to voting for Europe's radical left (Gómez and Ramiro, 2019; 2022). However, we do not expect differences between the electorates.

H4b: We do not expect to find differences in sociotropic economic voting between new left voters and communist voters.

H4c: We do not expect to find differences in egotropic economic voting between new left voters and communist voters.

4. Data and methods

We used data from the ten rounds of the European Social Survey (ESS) corresponding to Portugal, Greece, and France, from 2000 to 2022, with a total sample of $n = 1740$. These include thirteen elections in which a

communist party competed against a new RLP. We face the inconvenience that the ESS was not conducted in Greece for several years, so we lack data for the elections in 2012 and 2015. Although we attempted to cover those elections with other data, such as the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, we discarded them because of the scarcity of variables suitable for our analytical proposal.

To test our hypotheses, we first present descriptive statistics of the variables for voters of both formations in Annex I to account for their distribution. We then conduct blockwise logistic regression models corresponding to the hypotheses. The dependent variable captures a vote for a communist party as 1 and a vote for an RLP as 0.

All analyses were conducted using the R software environment. In particular, we employed the *glm* function from base R to estimate logistic regression models. For data processing and management of categorical variables, we used packages such as *dplyr*, *questionr*, and *labelled*. Categorical independent variables were either recoded into dummy variables or treated as factors, allowing R to handle their inclusion using reference categories in the regression models. We also used the *margins* package to compute and interpret average marginal effects.

Regarding the independent variables, we first constructed an initial model (M1) by introducing variables corresponding to our first hypothesis, which focused on the radical-left's various sociodemographic and occupational profiles. We introduced gender and age variables as recorded in the ESS. Regarding educational level, we used the ISCED classification with five values available in the first five rounds of the ESS. For the remaining four rounds, we recoded the data to create the same classification. Concerning grouping by social classes, we followed the classification by Oesch (2006) to constitute eight classes, assigning individuals to a social class based on their occupation, measured in the ESS using the International Standard Classification of Occupations 1988 (ISCO-88). We also considered employment status to distinguish between employees and self-employed individuals, and within the category of entrepreneurs we considered the number of employees to distinguish between large and small business owners. Finally, we introduced the place of residence or habitat, recoded into big city, suburbs of a big city, small town, and village.

In relation to the block of values, political attitudes, and ideology, we conducted a second model (M2). We measured positions on the axes of human values through the twenty-one questions included in the ESS and, following the instructions provided by Schwartz (2003), we recoded them through their means to create the ten values, normalised through the respondent's mean across the twenty-one questions. We then performed a principal component analysis (PCA) with oblique rotation (see Annex II), extracting two factors related to the two theoretical dimensions. These factors ranged from -10 (self-enhancement and liberalism) to 10 (transcendence and conservation).

We measured respondents' positions on the economic competition axis through the question about whether the government should reduce income differences, scored on a five-point scale where 5 indicates total disagreement. We measured cultural liberalism using the same proxy as Gómez and Ramiro (2022): the degree of agreement with the statement "gays and lesbians should be able to live their lives as they wish", where 1 indicates complete agreement and 5 indicates complete disagreement. We created a new variable to measure opinions on the effects of immigration by linearly combining questions, scoring from 0 to 10, on the cultural and economic impact of immigration, as well as a question on whether immigrants make the country a better or worse place to live. We added questions, scoring from 1 to 4 and inverted to match the previous ones, on how many immigrants to allow from both the same and different ethnic groups. In this new variable, 0 represents a very negative opinion about the impacts of immigration, and 38 a very positive one. Regarding the euroscepticism of voters, we introduced a variable capturing the opinion on whether European integration has gone too far or should advance further, scoring from 0 to 10, with 0 indicating that it has already gone too far. However, this question is not available in two of the ten rounds, so to avoid missing cases in the regression models, we imputed the values of confidence in the European Parliament as a proxy. Lastly, to measure differences in the ideological position of the electorates, we used the ideological self-placement scale, ranging from 0, extreme left, to 10, extreme right. In this block, and as a control, we introduced, the variable of religiosity, measured on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 indicates non-religious and 10 very religious.

For the third block of hypotheses, related to associationism and non-electoral participation, we constructed another model (M3) by first introducing the dichotomous question capturing whether or not the respondent belongs to, or has belonged to, a trade union. We measured participation in social movements through the dichotomous proxy of belonging to an association or organisation aimed at improving the country's social reality. Lastly, we measured non-electoral political participation by creating a variable through a linear combination of activities carried out over the last year, including wearing political badges or stickers, signing a petition, participating in a demonstration, contacting politicians, and boycotting products for political reasons. This variable ranged from 0 to 5 based on whether the voter performed such actions.

We constructed a final model (M4) by introducing variables related to the hypotheses of political discontent and economic voting. Firstly, we created a variable of institutional trust by aggregating confidence in various institutions, such as the police, the legal system, the national parliament, the European parliament, the United Nations, and politicians. This variable scored from 0 to 60, with 60 indicating maximum trust. We also introduced satisfaction with democracy, measured from 0 to 10, where 0 represents no trust and no satisfaction, and 10 represents maximum satisfaction. Regarding sociotropic economic voting, we used the variable involving satisfaction with the current state of the economy, with 0 indicating not satisfied at all and 10 very satisfied. For egotropic voting, we used the subjective evaluation of the respondent's household economy and how comfortably they live, with 1 indicating very difficult and 5 very comfortable.

Before presenting the results, we should note that the sample has been standardised across all the models based on the variables from M4, which had the most missing values. Regarding the fixed effects of country and round, although they appear in the calculation of all the regressions they are not included in the tables because they do not provide useful information.

5. Results

The results obtained after implementing the logistic regression models are shown in Table 1, which presents the odds ratios, standard errors, and indicators of statistical significance. To facilitate interpretation, the marginal effects are graphically depicted (Graphs 1 and 2) for the last model, as it is the most comprehensive in terms of the number of variables, with its table available in Annex III.

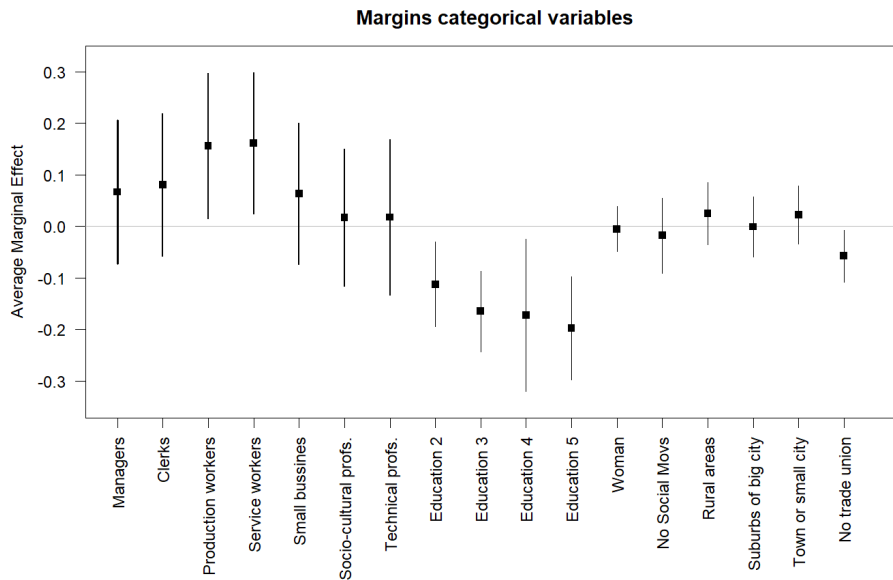
Table 1. Logistic regression models. Vote for communists (1) vs. New Left (0)

Variables	M1	M2	M3	M4
Small business owners	1.594 (0.374)	1.339 (0.389)	1.453 (0.391)	1.415 (0.392)
Technical (semi) professionals	1.221 (0.217)	1.064 (0.433)	1.220 (0.434)	1.104 (0.435)
Production workers	2.522* (0.382)	2.201* (0.396)	2.295* (0.398)	2.326* (0.400)
(Associate) managers	1.596 (0.382)	1.395 (0.396)	1.463 (0.397)	1.444 (0.398)
Clerks	1.670 (0.377)	1.485 (0.391)	1.562 (0.393)	1.559 (0.394)
Sociocultural (semi) professionals	1.301 (0.367)	1.178 (0.380)	1.132 (0.382)	1.099 (0.383)
Service workers	2.475* (0.373)	2.234* (0.387)	2.515* (0.389)	2.397* (0.391)
Education ISCED 2	0.643* (0.175)	0.578* (0.212)	0.585** (0.213)	0.560** (0.214)
Education ISCED 3	0.466*** (0.160)	0.445*** (0.197)	0.442*** (0.198)	0.428*** (0.201)
Education ISCED 4	0.440* (0.332)	0.420* (0.386)	0.430* (0.385)	0.411* (0.386)
Education ISCED 5	0.390*** (0.199)	0.385*** (0.248)	0.389*** (0.249)	0.360*** (0.255)
Age	1.024*** (0.003)	1.020*** (0.004)	1.018*** (0.004)	1.017*** (0.004)
Suburbs of big city	1.005 (0.141)	0.999 (0.165)	1.033 (0.165)	0.994 (0.165)
Town or small city	1.251 (0.133)	1.129 (0.156)	1.167 (0.157)	1.127 (0.157)
Rural areas	1.111 (0.142)	1.150 (0.168)	1.171 (0.169)	1.146 (0.169)
Woman	0.992 (0.101)	0.933 (0.122)	0.971 (0.123)	0.972 (0.124)
Conservation		0.979 (0.029)	0.974 (0.029)	0.975 (0.029)
Transcendence		0.941* (0.029)	0.952° (0.029)	0.945* (0.029)
Redistribution		1.069 (0.075)	1.090 (0.076)	1.065 (0.076)
Cultural liberalism		1.051 (0.063)	1.069 (0.063)	1.055 (0.063)
Immigration		0.984° (0.008)	0.981* (0.008)	0.981* (0.009)
Pro-Europeanism		0.886*** (0.023)	0.893*** (0.023)	0.885*** (0.024)
Ideology		0.768*** (0.035)	0.773*** (0.036)	0.769*** (0.036)
Religiosity		0.975 (0.022)	0.975 (0.022)	0.978 (0.022)
No Trade Union			0.747* (0.138)	0.730* (0.139)
No social movements			0.870 (0.203)	0.906 (0.203)
Non-electoral participation			1.063 (0.057)	1.074 (0.058)

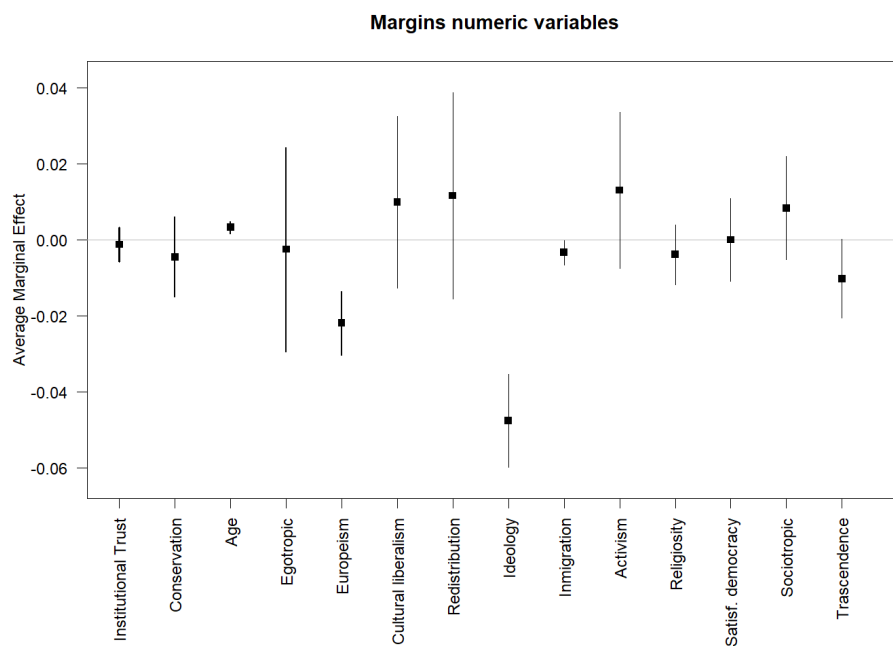
Variables	M1	M2	M3	M4
Satisfaction with democracy				0.999 (0.030)
Institutional trust				0.992 (0.012)
Egotropic				0.985 (0.075)
Sociotropic				1.046 (0.038)
Intercept	0.413 (0.611)	1.983 (0.695)	2.125 (0.744)	2.381 (0.760)
R2 (Nagelkerke)	0.270	0.340	0.345	0.346
AIC	2064.8	1963.3	1960.5	1966.8
Observations	1740	1740	1740	1740

* The country and round variables have been omitted from the table. Principio del formulario
^ap ≤ 0.1; *p ≤ 0.05; **p ≤ 0.01; ***p ≤ 0.001

Graphic 1. Average marginal effects. Categorical variables. M4



Graphic 2. Average marginal effects. Numeric variables. M4.



Regarding the first block of hypotheses on sociodemographic differences as determinants of voting, we obtained satisfactory results, along with an optimal model fit, and all the variables maintain statistical significance in the models. Concerning class-based voting (*H1a*), we found that both old and new working classes, both in production and services, are more than twice as likely to vote for communist parties than for new RLPs. This finding not only reaffirms the historical connection between communist parties and traditional working classes (Tannahill, 1978), but also asserts the stronger connection between the new service working classes and these parties instead of new RLPs. However, contrary to our expectations (*H1b*), we did not find that sociocultural workers are more likely to vote for the new left than for communist parties, although they represent a larger portion of its electorate. Thus, although Kitschelt (1989) has found that middle-class sectors are more attracted to the left's more libertarian formations, this does not seem to be a determinant in the choice between communist parties and new RLPs.

In line with our expectations (*H1c*), there were differences in educational level, as the probability of voting for communist parties decreases as educational level increases. As noted by Ivarsflaten *et al.* (2010), this greater attraction of educated individuals to new RLPs may be due to the greater emphasis on libertarian positions on the sociocultural axis.

We also confirm our expectations regarding age (*H1d*), as the probability of voting for the new left decreases with age. This confirms the greater appeal of new left-wing parties among young voters (Prentoulis, 2021), which might threaten their survival given the ageing of their electoral base. Consistent with expectations, we found no differences by habitat (*H1e*) or gender (*H1f*), confirming previous findings on this issue (Ramiro, 2016; Gómez and Ramiro, 2022).

This block confirms the importance of sociodemographic variables in the choice between communist parties and new RLPs, despite the structural changes in recent decades. Being working class in both production and services, older, and having less education increases the probability of voting for communists rather than for the new left.

We obtained interesting results for the second block of hypotheses concerning values, political attitudes, and ideology, which are related to the emergence of the new axis of sociocultural political competition. The general hypothesis was the greater proximity of communist voters to the libertarian pole of the sociocultural axis, being broken down as follows:

Firstly, concerning Schwartz's human values (1992), which anticipate political attitudes, we did not confirm our hypothesis (*H2a*) that holding more conservative values increases voting for communist parties. Although this result goes against our intuition, it is not overly surprising, as Marcos-Marné (2021) has already found that left-wing voters in general are closer to the openness pole than to the conservation one. The results of the transcendence-personal achievement axis are more surprising, and contrary to our prediction (*H2b*), as high scores imply a lower probability of voting for communist parties. Thus, although the average effect is low, and the statistical significance close to 0.05, this finding refines the literature; while left-wing voters tend to score high on transcendence (benevolence and universalism) (Marcos-Marné, 2021), high scores on personal achievement (power and achievement) increase the probability of choosing communist parties over new RLPs.

Regarding political attitudes, and in line with expectations (*H2c*), there were no differences in redistributive preferences, confirming that this is not a determining factor in the choice between these parties (Gómez *et al.*, 2016), which is not settled around the classic economic axis but instead determined by other issues, such as sociocultural ones.

Our first hypothesis in this regard (*H2d*) proves unfounded, as given the generally more conservative positions on LGBT rights of communist parties, especially the Greek and, to a lesser extent, the Portuguese; positions, we expected this issue to be a determinant of voting, but this is not the case. We did not find that less cultural liberalism, measured according to LGBT rights, implies a greater probability of voting communist. This could well be because this issue is not one of the most transcendent in shaping political debate in these countries, with greater weight given to issues such as immigration or the debate about European integration, especially after the Great Recession.

In this regard, and consistent with our expectations (*H2e*), we found that a more positive view of the consequences of immigration decreases the probability of voting for communist parties compared to the new left, although the size effect is not very high, consistent with the findings of Gómez and Ramiro (2022). Nevertheless, this finding is of great importance as it shows that opinions on immigration, a clear indicator on the sociocultural values axis (Kriesi *et al.*, 2012), do indeed determine the choice between these parties, with communist voters positioned in more nativist and less cosmopolitan coordinates than those of the new radical left.

In line with our hypothesis (*H2f*), we also found that greater Euroscepticism increases the probability of voting for a communist party instead of the new left. This cannot be understood in the same way as the radical right in terms of cultural threats, but rather as fundamentally economic criticism (Wagner, 2021); it is also an indicator of the emerging sociocultural axis. Furthermore, it is consistent with the programmatic proposals of the parties, as communists are more critical than the new left, even advocating withdrawal from the EU (Nikolakakis, 2017; Vasilopoulou, 2018; Lisi, 2019).

Finally, regarding this block, we found that, in line with expectations (*H2g*), moving towards the right on the ideological self-placement axis decreases the probability of voting for communist parties instead of the new RLPs. This effect, which is also of considerable size, can be attributed to communist parties' greater entrenchment in the ideological niche of the far left, given their connection to traditional Marxist ideology and

symbolism (March, 2011). All the variables in the block maintain their statistical significance in the models, although some vary in their level of confidence.

The evidence was mixed for the third block of hypotheses, referring to the high social and political mobilisation of the radical left electorate. Firstly, in line with expectations (*H3a*), we found that despite the relatively high union membership among both electorates, it increases the probability of voting for communist parties compared to the new left. However, we did not confirm the hypothesis (*H3b*) that participating in social movements increases the probability of voting for the new RLPs. Similarly, and also contrary to our intuition (*H3c*), we did not find that individuals with more active political participation favour the new radical left. Nevertheless, these findings on the effect of union activity as a determinant of voting are relevant because they confirm the persistence of communist parties' traditional link between class unionism and their social bases, which have often been the drivers of these organisations (Lisi, 2013; Tsakatika and Eleftheriou, 2013).

Finally, we included a block with hypotheses on political discontent and economic voting because of their explanatory capacity in populist and anti-establishment voting, as the radical left tends to be perceived in this latter category. In line with expectations (*H4a*), although communist voters record less satisfaction with democracy and lower institutional trust, these differences are not significant determinants in the choice between radical-left formations. The same applies to economic voting, both sociotropic (*H4b*) and egotropic (*H4c*), as while communist voters may rate their personal economy better and the country's economy worse than new left voters, these differences are not significant determinants of voting.

6. Conclusions and limitations

The aim of this research was to fill a significant lacuna involving voters of Europe's radical left. This article has examined the differences in the determinants of polling for post-communist and new RLPs when they compete against each other in parliamentary elections, analysing thirteen elections in Portugal, Greece, and France using data from the European Social Survey.

Our findings have important implications for academic debates in electoral behaviour. First, they reaffirm the enduring importance of socio-structural characteristics, challenging theories of dealignment that predict the fading of traditional cleavages. While it is well established that class has declined in predictive power, we find it remains relevant: belonging to the manual or service-based working class significantly increases the likelihood of voting for a communist party. Age and education also play key roles—older voters and those with lower educational attainment are more likely to vote communist. Although this demographic profile may pose risks for the long-term viability of communist parties, the appeal they maintain among segments of the new working class may offer a compensatory advantage in service-based economies. In addition, union membership increases the probability of voting communist, confirming the persistence of historic ties between these parties and organised labour.

Second, our study contributes to debates on realignment along the GAL-TAN axis. We find no significant differences between electorates in terms of economic redistribution, but notable contrasts emerge on socio-cultural issues. Greater Euroscepticism and negative views on immigration increase the likelihood of voting for communist parties, suggesting a less cosmopolitan profile than that of new RLP voters. While rejection of the EU among communist voters stems more from economic critique than cultural threat, these attitudes reflect broader positions within the sociocultural dimension of political competition.

This competition is particularly revealing. In contexts where both party types coexist, the dilemma faced by a single radical left party—whether to adopt more libertarian or more traditional positions—can be avoided through specialisation. Communist parties can reinforce their working-class base with more culturally conservative positions, while new RLPs appeal to younger, more educated, and cosmopolitan voters. This division may explain their mutual survival despite the challenges posed by electoral fragmentation and the presence of other left-wing actors. It also suggests that what might initially appear as political fragmentation may in fact be a functional strategy of differentiation and electoral adaptation—an insight that invites further research into the dynamics of intra-radical left competition in Europe.

Despite the contributions of this study, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The most important refers to the temporal breadth of the data analysed, which spans over two decades. This extended time frame presents challenges in terms of contextualising political attitudes and voter behaviour, given the significant transformations that took place in Europe during this period, such as the 2008 economic crisis or the ongoing crisis of political representation. While the main objective of this research is not to trace the historical evolution of these contexts, but rather to analyse patterns of electoral competition between communist and new radical left parties, we recognise that a more dynamic, longitudinal design could offer additional insights into these changes over time. In this regard, the European Social Survey, which publishes new rounds every two years, is an excellent source of information for further research into electoral competition on the European radical left.

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